

**“Youth Resiliency” - An evidence-based positive social psychology framework
to reduce adolescent risk behaviors by enhancing well-being:
Implications for research, policy and programs**

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Findings of the regional youth health behavior surveys carried out during the past decade in the middle east have clearly identified **four main modifiable determinants** of adolescent risk behaviors, bullying, injuries, low mental states, truancy and school-failure. The effects of these determinants are consistent across all negative behavioral and health outcomes and across all sub-populations. The surprise, however, was that all four determinants are not the usual "risk factors" targeted in most traditional prevention programs, but rather, four protective (resilience) factors that in their absence, the children are at higher risk. In other words, the major behavioral, health and social negative outcomes are not merely consequences of exposure to negative risk factors in the social environment, but rather, they are caused by the absence of vital protective and resilience factors that ought to be there for a child to be able to grow healthy and develop constructive patterns of behavior and conduct.

The four highest-priority determinants of well-being on which “Youth Resiliency” is focused are:

(1) Significant Adults:

- Daily involvement of significant adults in the child's life in a way that creates the experience of unconditional love, acceptance, support, guidance and setting clear boundaries – parents, teachers, mentors, instructors and youth counselors.

(2) Positive school experience (school climate):

- Experiences creating feelings of belongingness, safety, growth, interest, capability, joy of creation, success and appreciation.
- Establishment of a "safe-zone" in which behavioral boundaries, mutual respect and caring become internalized and kept.
- Implementation of effective tools to treat children with challenging patterns of problem behaviors or conduct – focusing of identification and harnessing of their respective strengths or talents and abilities.
- Improvement of nurturing and effective leadership of teachers creating daily positive experiences in class.

(3) A sense of self worth:

- Experiences that create a feeling of significantly contributing, appreciated, needed, expressing talents, successfulness – by volunteering or carrying out tasks in the community or at school.

(4) Social connectedness:

- Experiencing close, meaningful and supportive friendships, accepted by peers, and not feeling lonely or socially rejected.
- Maintaining a balanced social life with relationships that are positive and constructive while avoiding negative social influences.

On the bases of the empirical findings and insights, and with use of conceptual frameworks such as positive social psychology, social capital, and socialization theories, we have developed "Youth Resiliency" as a new innovative evidence-based and scientifically sound approach aimed at reducing youth violence, injuries, risk behaviors and truancy, by focusing primarily on the enhancement of the highest priority determinants of well-being. During the past 6 years we have implemented this model in over 55 Arab and Jewish schools in Israel as a long-term intervention program using a built-in scientific monitoring and evaluation system. Findings of the evaluation indicate significant improvements on all behavioral and mental outcomes.

From a conceptual point of view, a relatively new framework is emerging. One that is bringing together models used in psychology (i.e., positive psychology), social welfare (i.e., social-economic indicators of childhood well-being), sociology (i.e., social capital and social support) and public health (i.e. positive indicators of health and the asset approach). The emerging framework is a **positive social psychology approach to the field of psychosocial factors in health**. A framework that is proving to be vital for the continuous development of the field of childhood and adolescent health promotion.