

**BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY**

**Protective & Resilient Determinants of Mental  
and Functional Well-Being among Israeli Youth**

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## Abstract

**Scientific Background:** Higher education and good academic achievements among teenagers are a central tool for social mobility and are important means to become acclimatized in society. They are key factors in forming individual potential as well as guarantee a better future, and therefore are used to measure positive behavior (Planty et al., 2007). On the other hand, it has been found, that teenagers who drop out from school, display disturbances such as social solitude and high levels of anxiety and depression. Hence, it can be assumed that a sense of belonging and attendance in school can influence the level of healthy functioning of children and youth (Janosz et al., 2000). It can be inferred that, instead of researching negative behavior from risk factors and victimhood, it is better to focus on researching the resilience attitude. This will allow to focus on studying causes for healthy adaptation, as opposed to the feeling of victimization as a result of negative life events (Sabina & Banyard, 2015).

When one looks at the topic of 'Healthy life functioning', he could find a research related to psycho-social resilience factors which aid juvenile to develop and be in the 'healthy' mode.

This research is based on positive models from the discipline of health promotion research that also deal with the effect of healthy functioning on the individual life. One central idea is the "*salutogenic model*", which states that the suspense factors in one's life are a sole part of his existence and are likely to be solved by using coping skills that one forms for himself. (Antonovsky, 1987). Another model is "The juvenile resilience", which states that empowering the well-being of the youth would cause a decrease in the pattern of risk behaviors and would improve his functioning in school and the other areas of maturity.

The aim of the model is that the environment of the child will bring him to a state of positive social, somatic and mental well-being, enabling healthy functioning in this environment of instilled with dignity and protection. All this establishes personal responsibility

with supportive confined behavior. The term “resilience” refers to effective coping with risk factors and traumatic experience, avoiding negative outcome and direct risk involved paths (Harel-Fish, 2014). These models strengthen the claim that understanding the causes of resilience and healthy functioning factors, can assist the guidance of how to live life better. This research focuses on the correlations between the two different behaviors.

**Research Objective:** The goal of this research is to examine and determine what are the resilience and empowering factors that predict high level functioning and mental well-being among youth, by observing five social domains- family, school, community, friends and social-networking. Higher level of function would include the absence of risk behaviors patterns and better functioning in academic school achievements. In other words, this research focuses on finding the factors which enable teenagers to be healthy functioning and choose correct and healthy choices of behavior pattern, by the aspect of conceptual models dealing with empowerment and resilience.

**Research population:** This research population was composed of students from grades 6, 8, 10-12 (ages of 11-18) under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. This sample included 16,145 students from 348 schools across the country of Israel.

**Research Method:** This study is a cross-sectional quantitative study, based on secondary quantitative analysis of data from the National Survey HBSC-WHO-2014 (Health Behaviors in School-Aged children: A World Health Organization Cross-National Study). This survey was conducted based on a valid and reliable self-report questionnaire that was handed to the students during class hours.

The variables of this research include: The dependent variable is healthy functioning, which is comprised of: 1. Educational achievements and lack of hidden School disengagement 2. Patterns of avoiding risk behaviors. The mediator variable is the aspect of well-being, which built of: 1. Life Satisfaction and happiness. 2. Lack of mental and physical symptoms. The

independent variables are the social domains which include: Family, School, Community, friends and social networking.

The assumptions of this research state that positive/ empowerment experiences in every one of the five social domains would predict the well-being of youth and their level of healthy functioning.

In order to test the research assumptions, we ran a series of hierarchical logistic regression models using SPSS software. These models allow to predict dichotomous dependent variables, using the Odds Ratio measure.

**Main findings:** The research findings indicate significant relationships between the five social domains and healthy functioning. Family, School and friends were found to be more significant in promoting healthy functioning than the community and social networking domains. These factors were found more important because students which their parents and teachers are involved in their life and school and don't have a sense of social loneliness. Furthermore, it was found that they had a direct influence on the sense of well-being and healthy functioning. It must be noted, that the social domains of community and social networking aren't used as predictors accordingly to the assumption of the research.

Additionally, this finding shows an unbalanced state among the students who come from the state-religious schools, compared to the state and Arabic schools. The states religious schools are found in the worst condition of healthy functioning, well-being and the existence of resilience factors in juvenile youth.

The state of healthy functioning was reported higher among girls, compared to boys. In contrast, the state of well-being and lack of dropping out was found higher among boys, compared to girls. The overall relationship of healthy functioning and well-being decreases over the years, so long the student is present in school.

In addition, the socio-economic situation in a student's family, plays a role in his rate of healthy functioning, well-being and the existence of resilience factors. The highest rating is among students whose families are in a medium socio-economic situation, after that is the families from the high socio-economic situation. The lowest rate is among the low socio-economic situation.

**Main Findings:** One can conclude from this research that there is a significant influence of the five social domains, on the healthy functioning of the youth in Israel, also impacting on their level of happiness and positive mental health, which effects their condition of functioning. This research puts a mark on the contribution of resilience and well-being and improving educational achievements on decreasing risk behaviors and lack of dropping among the different population in Israel. These findings support the 'positive psychology' model, which also copes with nurturing resilience and healthy growth among people. It is used as a mean to avoid illness, decrease risk behaviors and contribute to improving lifestyle and mental well-being of human-beings.