



Resilience from early to middle childhood in children known to child protection services

What is the study about?

The study **Profiles of resilience from early to middle childhood among children known to child protection services** (Green et al. 2021) examined factors which determine resilience among children known to child protection services prior to age 13 years.

This peer-reviewed study led by the University of New South Wales was completed using data from the New South Wales Child Development Study (NSW-CDS). The NSW-CDS is a longitudinal population study of the mental health and wellbeing of more than 90,000 children born in NSW between 2000 and 2006. It links administrative records from multiple NSW agencies spanning health, education, child protection and criminal justice, with cross-sectional assessments collected in early and middle childhood.

What measures were used by the researchers?

The study analysed data from a subset of 4,716 children known to child protection services to examine profiles of resilience across early and middle childhood. Resilience was measured using five domains of *socio-emotional* health (social competence; prosocial and helping behaviour; anxious and fearful behaviour; aggressive behaviour; and hyperactivity and inattention) and two domains of *cognitive skills* (literacy and numeracy). Socio-emotional functioning was assessed using the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) at age 5-6 years and the Middle Childhood Survey (MCS) at age 10-11 years. Cognitive functioning (Literacy and Numeracy) was assessed with the AEDC at age 5-6 years and NAPLAN at age 10-11 years.

'Vulnerability' and 'resilience' were determined by children's patterns of scores on these domains across early and middle childhood. Two profiles of resilience were the focus of this study:

- '*stress-resistant*' - children who were 'typically developing' at both time points
- '*emergent resilient*' - children who transitioned from being 'vulnerable' in early childhood to 'typically developing' in middle childhood.

What did the study find?

- At early childhood (age 5 years), 76.2% of children known to child protection services did not show any socio-economic or cognitive vulnerabilities and were identified as 'typically developing'. 12.5% were identified as 'emotionally vulnerable' and 11.3% 'cognitively vulnerable'.
- The vast majority (71%) of children who were 'typically developing' in early childhood remained 'typically developing' in middle childhood (stress-resistant).
- Just over half of children who were 'emotionally vulnerable' in early childhood (56%), or 'cognitively vulnerable' in early childhood (58%), showed resilience to be 'typically developing' in middle childhood (emergent-resilient).
- Children who belonged to the *stress-resistant* profile were more likely to have a high socio-economic status, be from a non-Aboriginal background, and to have had a non-Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) report as their highest level of assessment by child protection services. These children also report higher perceived

home and school support at age 11 years and are more likely to have parents without a criminal history. The results for Aboriginal children in the *stress-resistant* cohort likely represent both the effects of intergenerational trauma and structurally embedded disadvantage.

- Children who belonged to the *emergent-resilient* profile were more likely to have no substantiated ROSH reports after the age of 5 years and to report having community supports.

Both profiles of resilience (stress-resistant and emergent-resilient) were associated with:



Children who were categorised as emergent-resilient more likely to:



Children who were categorised as stress-resistant were more likely to have:



What do these findings mean?

The study shows that a vast majority of children exposed to early life difficulties and child protection services show resilience, evident in varied patterns of socio-emotional and cognitive functioning across early and middle childhood. Particular patterns of resilience evident in this population highlight services that might be strengthened to promote resilience in vulnerable children. These findings about resilience should be considered by agencies responding to child maltreatment.

About the NSW Child Development Study

The NSW-CDS is a longitudinal study of the mental health and wellbeing of a cohort of children who started kindergarten in NSW in 2009. It aims to understand the development of these children to map patterns of resilience and vulnerability for later mental health, education, work, and other outcomes. The NSW-CDS will follow these children from birth into early adulthood via successive waves of record linkage. Find out more about the [NSW-CDS](#).

The original research paper is:

Green, MJ, Piotrowska, PJ, Tzoumakis, S, Whitten, T, Laurens, KR, Butler, M, Katz, I, Harris, F & Carr, VJ 2021, 'Profiles of resilience from early to middle childhood among children known to child protection services', *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology: The Official Journal for the Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, DOI 10.1080/15374416.2021.1969652.



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