

# (Mainly) Qualitative Approaches to Resilience in Later Life: Examples from Widowhood, Poverty and Caregiving

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# How I came to resilience studies

- Widowhood in later life and coping Bennett et al., (2005)
- Resilient Widowers (Moore & Stratton, 2003)
- The case of Alvin
  - At the GSA 2006 they presented case of Alvin
  - An unhappy widower desperate to repartner
  - Once repartnered he was happy
- They asked was he or wasn't he resilient?
  - They suggested he wasn't
  - I thought he was

- Why did I think so?
  - He had found what he needed, a woman. Needing a woman was not, necessarily, a sign of weakness. Rather it was a rational choice for this widower
- I began to think about my widowers, and in particular, Mr E

- With being a diabetic I shouldn't do what I did do and consequently I ended up in hospital but that's beside the point. But then I used to go out at lunch time. Which I'd never done. Drink at lunchtime. Go out every night which I never used to do. This was immediately afterwards....it was actually started on the Sunday when I had this heartache over it and I just thought, fuck it I went straight round to the pub. Then I came back, then I got my dinner prepared... I was drinkin' there one night, bang, I was on the deck. Donald from St S\* he called round 1 day and he sort of, like I'd got meself into, and I couldn't care less if I died tomorrow you know but he got a grip of it and then me friends who were on the community side said leave Brown Road, and erh, I don't know what strings were pulled but when I did ring up the housing place over here and asked them about if I could move erhm, they said well I'll call you back, or she said, I'll call you back. And within an hour she sent me down here the same, the same woman to look at this place.

# Outline

- Resilient widowers
- Poverty in Colombia
- Resilient caregivers
- Resilience in face of health challenges
  - A taste of things to come

# How to achieve resilience as an older widower: turning points or gradual change?

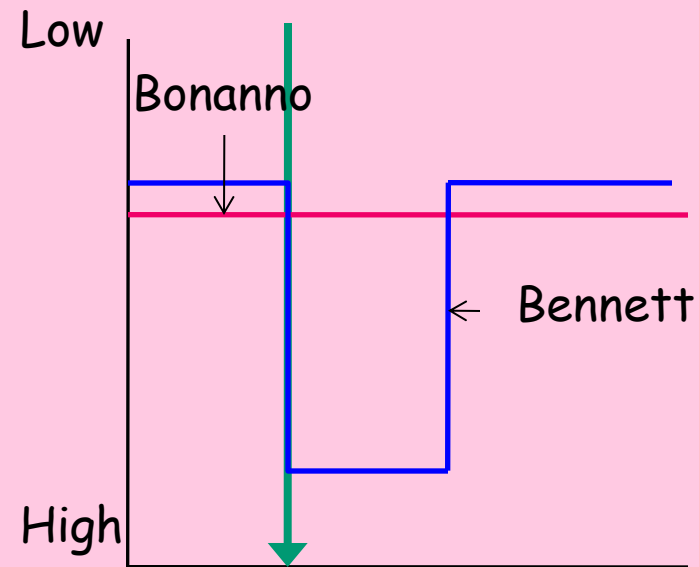
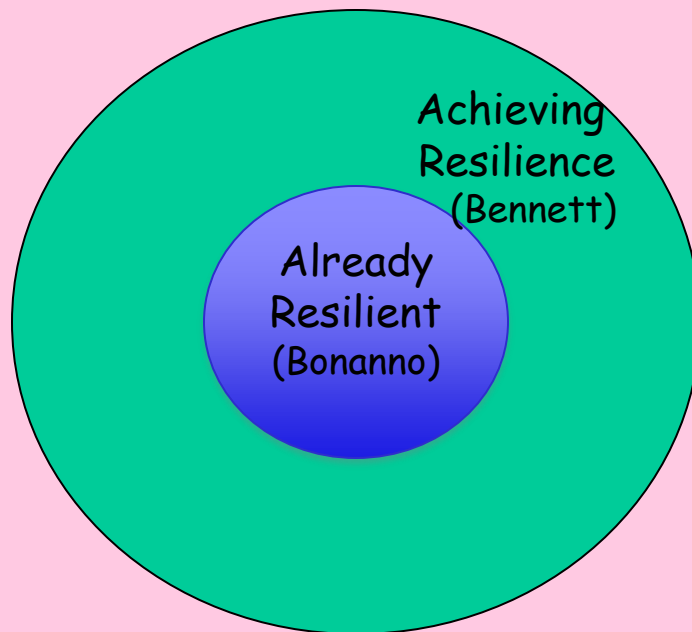
(Bennett, 2010, Ageing & Society)

- Deprivation Models
  - Resilience as a response to abnormal stress (Rutter, 1999)
- Resilience as a steady state
  - Without fluctuating levels of distress following bereavement (Bonanno, 2004)
- Resilience as a long-term outcome
  - Initial painful awareness of loss; integrated belief and value system; optimistic and positive personality (Moore & Stratton, 2003)
- Are these latter two approaches compatible?

# Older Widowers

- Two studies of older widowed people
  - East Midlands
  - NW England
- Participants
  - 60 widowers
    - 55 -98 years old (mean 79), widowed .5-25 years (mean = 7)
- Two Qualitative Questions:
  - What did you do?
  - How did you feel?

- Distinguish between bereavement and widowhood: potentially 3 types of widowed person
  - A Bonanno type - resilient in bereavement
  - A Bennett type - not resilient in bereavement but resilient in widowhood
  - A reverse type - resilient in only in bereavement





- A working definition of resilience in widowhood:
  - A resilient widow(er) is considered to be *particularly well* adjusted to life following their loss.
    - Good adjustment;
    - Positive view of life;
    - No mention of current distress;
    - Participating in life;
    - Returned to life with meaning and satisfaction.
- How is resilience achieved?
  - Gradual or turning point
  - Active or passive

- Not coping and therefore not resilient(23: 38%)
- Not meeting criteria for resilience (21: 35%)
- Resilient Widowers (23: 38%)
  - Bonanno's (3: 13%)
  - Gradual (9: 39%)
  - Turning point (8: 35%)
  - Both Gradual and Turning point (3: 13%)

## Bonanno's Men

- *Grief comes out and all that, that didn't happen for six weeks ... all of a sudden I just cried. And then it just stopped [Mr H's emphasis].*
- You've got to get cracking and live your life. Man 14

# Gradual Change

- Each day has been made a bit easier by something unseen. Mr I
- There's no use crying over spilled milk. Man 23
- I just lived. How did I do it? I had a microwave. Mr Q
- [with the] children, I hadn't time to sort of mope about. Man 11
- It came naturally - Mr L

# Turning Point

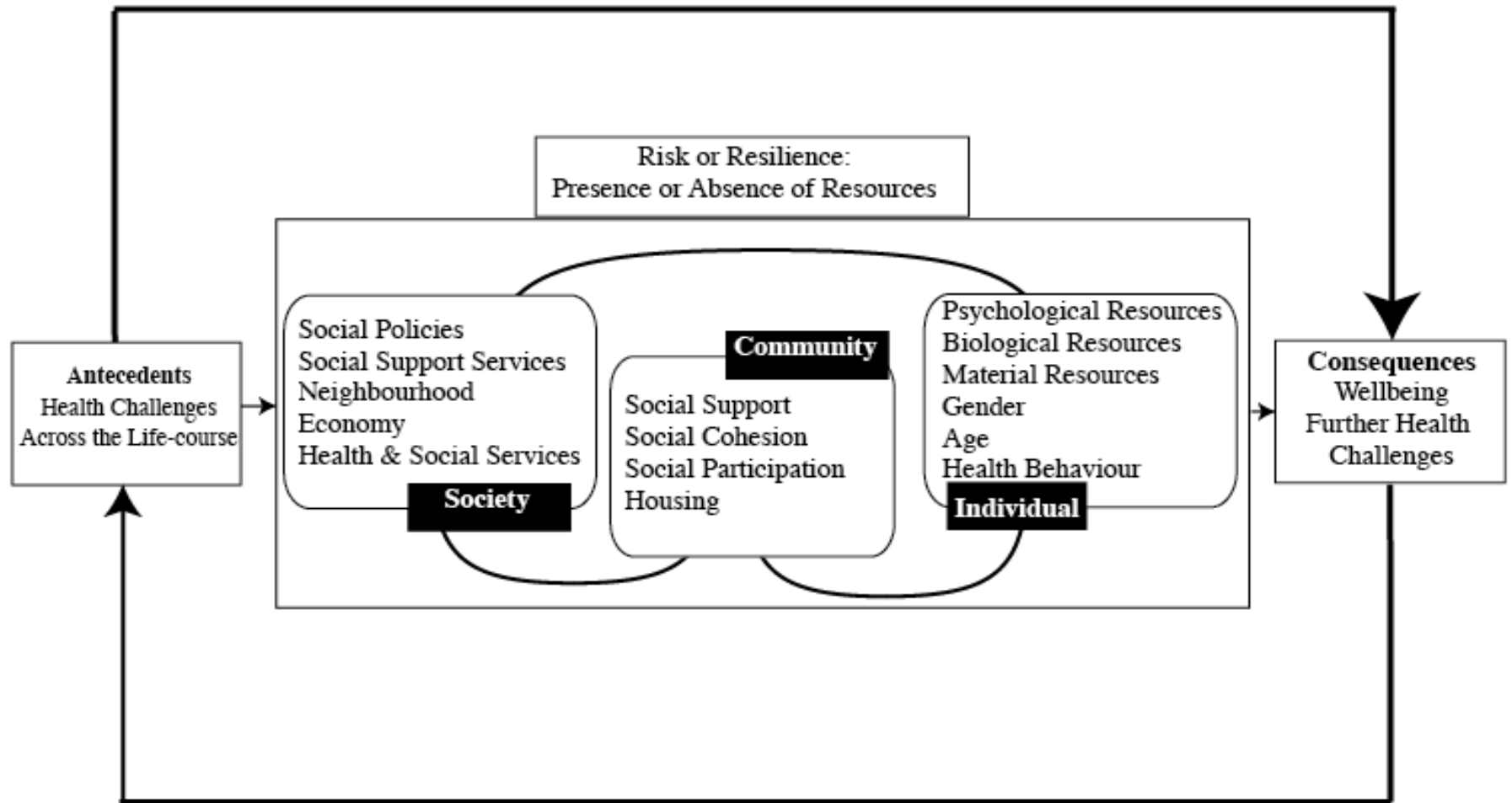
- Remember Mr E
- It's like in a sense you've got a big job to do. Man 41
- I got a phone call to make an arrangement and when Mr Anderson came he was absolutely brilliant. Man 1
- I realised that was therapy for me. Man 10

# Pathways and Components of Resilience

- Pathways
  - Practicalities
  - Families & social support
  - Joining - social participation
  - Personal characteristics
- Time:
  - Gradual change
  - Turning point
  - Timing is crucial
- Agency
  - Widowers as active agents
  - Widowers as passive, requiring external agency

## An interlude: MRC Resilience Network: ResNet

- Unite and build upon existing evidence undertaken on resilience, and strengthen with new perspectives & collaborations.
- Definition (Windle, 2011)
  - Resilience is the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and 'bouncing back' in the face of adversity. Across the life course, the experience of resilience will vary.





# Resilience Amongst Older Colombians Living in Poverty: An Ecological Approach

Kate M Bennett, Maria-Fernanda Reyes-Rodriguez,  
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## Context in Colombia

- Little work on resilience amongst older adults in developing world (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2009; Ong & Berkman, 2004).
- 46% of Colombian population were living in poverty
- 40% of those aged 65+ are living in poverty (Altamar 2006; SDIS 2009).
- Poverty threatens autonomy and personal development & exercise of social and civil rights and disrupts social belonging (Corredor, 2004; Garay, 2002).



## Our data



- 16 older adults
- The participants were recruited from a project of the city government of Bogotá
  - Aimed to improve the quality of life of people by providing social services to older people who were not receiving a pension and who did not have sufficient income to provide the basic necessities of life (SDIS, 2008).

## Individual Level: Psychological Resources

Very important (the allowance), because I don't have to depend on what my daughter is going to cook for lunch, because I know what I have and what I can do today, what I have to cook for tomorrow. (Mrs. H, Resilient)

A horrible thing, the sadness is killing me, because I used to live where I lead, where I decide everything... because what had happened is that I have to wait till 1 or 2 p.m. to drink a cup of coffee, or chocolate, I have to wait for people's good will. (Mr. L, Non-resilient)

## Material Resources



...then he (ex-boss) gave us a small house where to live, therefore, in that house there is like a small flat on the ground floor that is being rent out. We use that money to pay the food and bills ( Mrs. AM, Resilient).

...I feel desperate, yes. That is making me sick, not having money; for example, soon I have to pay the rent and I don't have money, then ... I don't sleep, because I keep thinking. (Mr. JC, Non-resilient)

## Community Level

I am the head, while you'll exist, you are the head of the family. (Mr. S, Resilient)

At this age, we have just each other. (Mr. R, Resilient)

It is pretty bad, because I'm unprotected and all alone. Dr., my daughters, one is married and is in Tolima, but I don't get along with my sons-in-law, ...how I will be there? How I'll go to live where the son-in-law don't like me? ... the help of nobody, I'm how it is said living with my son where I'm not welcome. (Mr. L, Non-resilient)



## Societal Level

- Very important (the allowance), because I don't have to depend on what my daughter is going to cook for lunch, because I know what I have and what I can do today, what I have to cook for tomorrow. (Mrs. H, Resilience)
- Being without money is sorrow, you feel bad when you don't have any money in your pocket, to say I'm going to buy something...(Mr. S, Resilient)

# Conclusions

- Older Colombians living in poverty are often resilient
- Poverty is a global health issue
- Factors that facilitate or hinder that resilience
  - Individual Characteristics
  - Material resources: finance; housing; access to food
  - Impact of displacement
  - Family and friendship
- There is evidence for resilience in the ecological framework
- Resilience may be promoted in older people who are not yet resilient
  - Project
  - Finance, food and housing security



What are the factors that facilitate or hinder resilience in older spousal carers of people with dementia? A qualitative study

Donnellan-Smith, Bennett & Soulsby (Aging & Mental Health, in press)

## Spousal carers

- N = 20.
- 7 men and 13 women.

Demographics	Range	Mean (SD)
Age (years)	62-86	75.95 ( $\pm 7.47$ )
Marriage duration (years)	28-61	50.35 ( $\pm 7.36$ )
Care duration (years)	2-10	5.62 ( $\pm 2.73$ )

Note: Two already widowed and another had institutionalised.

# Methods

- We used a three-stage hybrid method in our analysis
  - Grounded theory.
  - Classification: resilient or not.
    - Significant challenge (i.e. caregiving)
    - No sign of di(stress)
    - Maintain a life of meaning and satisfaction (bouncing back)
    - Actively participate in life (managing).
    - Current life seen as positive (adaptation).
  - Mapping themes onto resilience framework.
  - 8 participants are resilient, 12 are not resilient.

## Examples of Individual level: Psychological assets

- Staying positive:

I'm positive. I laugh and I sing and she laughs and I act soft in the house. I've even said to one of the neighbours about my singing and she says [Mr Go.] it's a good job we've got a detached house. I sing at the top of my voice. (Mr Go., P17, L17; resilient)

## Community level

### Family relations

- Intimacy at a distance:

We said you've got your own children now all in school, your husbands with jobs. We will get help from other people. We will find help as and when we need it. (Mrs C., P13, L5; resilient)

## Societal level: Health and social care

- Respite

I'm getting respite on a weekend. I really do know the meaning of recharging my batteries now. I feel more, you know, on the Monday morning right let's get on with the day. (Mrs C., P13, L22; resilient)

## Discussion

- Some factors are only facilitating up until a point, after which they may become hindering.
- Individual level: a sense of freedom and access to disposable income may be limited by the demands of dementia.
- Community level: family support that is perceived as over-intensive may create feelings of dependence.
- Societal level: respite care is valuable but some participants feel that they are not ready for it or are unaware of its availability.
- Access to resources is not always sufficient; carers must wish to use them.

# Resilience in face of health challenges: a taste of things to come (Windle, Bennett, Macleod)

- Using CFAS Wales to quantitatively sample resilient older adults
  - Functional disability  
and
  - Chronic health  
but
  - High Life satisfaction
- Qualitative Interviews
  - Life course perspective
- Tentative findings: early formative experiences, sense of belonging and relationships, outlook on life and character



# Overall Conclusions

- Qualitative studies give depth to understanding resilience
- Resilience as an outcome
- Not necessarily requiring active agency, can be passive
- Timing importance
- Ecological framework
  - Individual, community and societal resources
  - Availability of resources is important, but so is the willingness/ability to access those resources
- Commonalities across challenges
  - Suggesting resilience can be a fundamental outcome in later life

Thank you

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