

Constructing Educational Resilience: The Developmental Trajectory of Vulnerable Taiwanese Youth

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, family researchers have paid attention to the developmental trajectory of adolescents growing up in disadvantaged families. Research reports have brought encouraging implication in that among different outcomes investigated, the majority of high risk children actually demonstrate respectable resilience (Werner and Smith, 2001). Resilience in its conventional definition can be stated as a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation to various life adversities. Implicit within this notion are two critical components: (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (2) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process (Luthar et al., 2000). In the contemporary society, to increase the likelihood of resilience has become a vital subject due to insufficient social resources in the face of diversified family situation. Hence, efforts to delineate mechanisms that may buffer the hardship or harmful effects from family risks are considered viable solution to the increasingly various family problems.

This paper explores how family practices and relationships contribute to educational resilience among youth. We use Taiwan as the example with rapid social change to illustrate the interplay of cultural values and familial circumstances in the process of developmental trajectory among youth. With a cultural heritage of Confucianism, academic achievement has been the dominant value shared by all (Yi, et al., 2009). However, whether these structural and cultural backgrounds produce protective outcome or bring detrimental consequence to the adolescent development remains to be studied.

We use the retrospective data from Taiwan Youth Project (TYP) to analyze the growth trajectory of adolescents with a focus on the resilience revealed in the process. Adolescents and their parents are interviewed to memorize the experiences and effects of family economic stress as well as how family relations and family strategies contribute to the resilience. In order to highlight the cultural perspective, academic achievement among Taiwanese adolescents is used as the target of analyses, and families with lower income represent vulnerable families because of their less likelihood to make adequate contribution. Furthermore, comparison between parents and youth in terms of memories about resilient adaptation is made whenever possible so as to ascertain similarities as well as differences

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between generations in the family memory. It is expected that both cultural and familial mechanisms interact in the construction of resilience which result in significant long-term outcome among Taiwanese youth.

SOCIO ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGES

Research on family socioeconomic disadvantage suggests that because of lack of resources or ineffective parenting, economic strain may devastate children's development such as physical health, mental health as well as academic and school achievement (Conger et al., 2010; Edin and Kissane, 2010; Seccombe, 2000). In general, children born in impoverished circumstances are more likely to be low weight at birth; have higher risk of infant mortality; suffer from malnutrition and chronic or acute illness; exhibit lower cognitive functioning (Seccombe, 2000). Children with economic disadvantages also have higher risk of emotional and behavioral problems such as depression, lower self-esteem, poor peer relationships, delinquency, and antisocial behaviors (McLoyd, 1998; Seccombe, 2000). Nevertheless poor parents may help and protect their children. If mothers provide care and concern, and if medical support is available, the risk of adversity can be significantly decreased (Garmezy, 1991). However, poor parents tend to take dangerous jobs in order to make a living and are less likely to receive medical care in illness (Seccombe, 2000). The economic strain may lead parents to psychological stress and depression, which in turn relate to the decline in levels of marital happiness and quality of married life (Conger et al., 1999) as well as the harsh, uninvolved, and inconsistent parenting (Conger et al., 2010; Edin and Kissane, 2010; Masten, 1994).

With regard to the impact of economic hardship on academic and school achievement, numerous studies document consistent findings in that children with poor family income achieve lower scores on tests; have high school dropout rate; and are less likely to attend or graduate from college (McLoyd, 1998; Schoon et al., 2004; Seccombe, 2000). In other words, children who grow up in lower socioeconomic families are less likely to have educational opportunity for higher education, nor adequate financial resources for necessary schooling expenses. Furthermore, socioeconomic disadvantaged children's school achievement may be affected by poor relations between parents and children, lower parental expectation for academic achievement, as well as inappropriate parental discipline and control strategies (McLoyd, 1998).

EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Luthar et al., (2000) suggested that it was necessary to consider the multidimensional nature of resilience. They argued that "The multidimensional nature of resilience, exemplified by findings that some high-risk children manifest competence in some domains but exhibit problems in other areas, has led some scientists to question the veridicality of the construct" (p. 548). Resilient children may be successful in receiving high grades at school, but they do not necessarily perform as well in peer interaction or social competence. Thus, it is necessary to clarify the chosen dimension of resilience in the study (Luthar et al., 2000).

For this study, educational resilience is chosen to exemplify the positive growth outcome due to its salience in the social context. Taiwanese youth, embedded in the traditional Chinese

culture with dominant value of educational success inherited from Confucianism, experience tremendous social pressure of doing well in school (Yi and Wu, 2004). Academic achievement has been a common shared goal for parents and youth alike. Therefore, academic resilience is a suitable indicator to reflect positive adjustment for children with socioeconomic deficiencies. Wang et al., (1994) defined "educational resilience" as "the heightened likelihood of success in school and in other life accomplishment, despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences" (p. 46). It is clear that educational resilience measured by academic success is able to capture the resilient performance demonstrated among youth.

Resilience has been documented to lead disadvantaged children to overcome the adversity (Werner and Smith, 2001). According to a series of longitudinal research on children born into poor families in Hawaii, one out of three with high risks grew up as competent and autonomous young adults (Werner and Smith, 1982, 2001). An attempt is thus made by Werner and her colleagues to seek mechanisms between high risk and positive outcome. Werner (2005) elaborated family support contributing to poor children's successful development in their study as follows:

...among the protective factors that made it possible for many children and young people to overcome adversity in their lives...(and)...the role model of a competent mother who was sensitive to the needs of her child; affectionate bonds with alternate caregivers...and an external support system in the neighborhood, church, youth groups or school that rewarded competence. (p. 5)

As can be seen, family support is an important factor accounted for children's high motivation, and it enhances their ability to overcome adversity. Within the family context, it has been repeatedly shown that parents play an important role in the academic achievement of children (Lareau, 2002; McLeod and Fettes, 2007). Maternal competence, such as years of schooling, positive interaction with their children and the emotional support available are related to the positive adaptation of children with high risks (Werner and Smith, 2001). Studies point out that mothers' mentoring and motivational support, including information provision about environmental risks and encouraging children to keep on the track, significantly help children with high risk to educational progress (Smokowski et al., 1999). In general, researches concur that supportive parenting and affectionate relations between parents and children may buffer the negative effects of risk on children (Masten, 1994).

Abelev (2009) applied Bourdieu's habitus to explain how and why protective factors operated in the lives of academic resilient adolescents, and showed that children with socioeconomic disadvantages achieved higher academic attainment if they had mentors from middle class who helped them gain access to middle-class habitus, such as attending high-performing schools, getting scholarships and to customize education plans. Other reports indicated that parents with lower socioeconomic status might adopt the middle-class habitus to cultivate their children. For example, parents may form family culture and process to cultivate children's early learning experiences (Clark, 1983) and to reinforce work ethic and skill (Garmezy, 1991). It will be interesting to see whether vulnerable youth with educational resilience benefits from parents who endorse mainstream social values and practices.

It is well documented that parental involvement and aspiration for children are associated with the educational resilience of disadvantaged children. In particular, parents' educational aspirations for their children are shown to produce more significant effects for children with adversity (Schoon et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2007). Parental involvement in schooling enhances children's school performances in various aspects: increase school attendance, decrease dropout, decrease delinquency, reduce pregnancy rate and improve achievement (Clark, 1983; Wang et al., 1994). Parents actively engage in children's schooling also enhance children's educational and career aspiration and the effect is especially salient among children with lower educated parents (Hill et al., 2004). Hence, parents' educational aspirations, their conformity to the middle-class parenting as well as the involvement in schooling are presumed to contribute to the construction of resilience among vulnerable youth.

METHOD

Sample Recruitment and Data Collection

Data were drawn from the Taiwan Youth Project (TYP) which is a nine-wave longitudinal panel survey research of adolescents in the northern area of Taiwan from 2000 to 2009. The project consists of two-cohort adolescents: 2696 first graders of the junior high (seventh graders) and 2890 third graders of the junior high (ninth graders) in the year of 2000. In addition, one of their parents and the designated teacher of the class during junior high years were interviewed. This longitudinal research focuses on three major social mechanisms accounting for the adolescent development: Family, school and community as well as the interplay among them.

In order to capture mechanisms affecting the growth trajectory of youth in the transitional stage to young adulthood, the research team conducted the first in-depth interviews of 60 adolescents (with an average age of 17-18) and one of their parents during 2004-2005, and carried out the second in-depth interviews of youth from 2006 to 2008 (with an average age of 19-23). These 60 family dyads represent the subsample of research participants in Taiwan Youth Project.

The selection of family dyads was first based on father's occupation which includes seven categories: Administrative directors, technicians and associate professional, service laborers, farmers and fishers, skilled and unskilled laborers, soldiers, and the unemployed. In addition, a special effort is made to recruit disadvantaged families such as families with mental problem, aboriginal families, and lower SES families. The reason is to explore potential mechanisms explaining the differential growth outcomes observed. Participants from each category were randomly chosen and the criterion of equal representativeness of different geographic strata was applied. The interviews lasted from 90 to 120 minutes each time. Research questions are incorporated in the face-to-face interview, such as family memories regarding stressful life events as well as the eventual solution adopted to overcome life difficulties. Adding qualitative accounts enable us to provide a fuller profile of individual adolescent in various developmental processes. It also allows us to analyze the growth trajectory from an intergenerational perspective.

Current Study

The current study aims at investigating the family resilience indicated by academic achievement. In order to unravel the dynamics embedded in the cultural environment, the educational performance of the youth is chosen as the outcome variable. As shown above, families with lower socioeconomic status have been documented to lead to less satisfactory educational achievement of their children. Hence, the economic condition of the family becomes the criterion to enter into the current analysis. We select five families of lower socioeconomic background with children all attending college or graduate school. Table 1 presents the basic profile of participants. As can be seen, all five respondents exceed parents' educational level and thus, represent vulnerable youth with educational resilience. It should be pointed out that adolescents in the current study not only achieve the academic goals, they also demonstrated good social competence, psychological well-being, and an optimistic view of future development.

In analyzing the interviews, we focus on participants' memories (adolescents and their parents) on their family economy, the strategy adopted to overcome the economic difficulties, and the processes of academic resilience. In particular, we examine how adolescents and their parents construct memories about resilience, and whether memories between generations differ. It should be noted that this study does not intend to discuss in depth the individual attributes such as personal educational motivation, job aspirations, and behavioral adjustment that may contribute to adolescent educational resilience. Although aspects such as educational incentives will be incorporated in the following analyses, future jobs as well as life plan are not analyzed due to the space constraint. Despite these limitations, the current study is the first attempt to delineate how vulnerable youth and their parents construct their educational resilience in an East Asian context.

SOCIOECONOMIC DISADVANTAGES IN THIS STUDY

Chia-Hao, a shy and quiet graduate student, lived with his parents and grandmother in Taipei city. His father, an elementary school graduate, took several jobs like in cleaning or cooking to make ends meet. His mother with junior high school education assisted her husband in his work. In order to maintain the livelihood, they had to work hard every day. During the interview, Chia-Hao's mother frequently mentioned their financial difficulties. Besides the financial stress, Chia-Hao's parents also had to take care of the ill grandmother. Chia-Hao was fully aware of the family economic situation and helped his parents to take care of grandmother. However, unlike his mother, Chia-hao did not seem to recall the experiences of economic stress and was less willing to talk about their difficulties.

Kuan-Yu, an independent undergraduate student, grew up in the countryside of Yilan. Kuan-Yu's father had a heart attack ten years ago and had to quit the construction laborer job. However, because of serious financial shortages, his father started to be a construction laborer again in 2005. At that time, his father was already 60 years old. Kuan-Yu's mother sewed clothes at home for a clothing factory and also worked in her sister's breakfast restaurant. Because Kuan-Yu's parents can not afford his college tuition fees, he had to apply for student loans.

Table 1.

Characteristics of Participants

Name	Chia-Hao	Kuan-Yu	Shih-Han	Pei-Shan	Yi-Chun
<i>Gender</i>	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female
<i>Education attainment</i>	Graduate school (2010)	College graduate (2009)	Graduate school (2010)	Graduate school (2010)	Medical school (2012)
<i>Parent's education</i>					
Father	Elementary school	Elementary school	(deceased)	Junior high school	2-year junior college
Mother	Junior high school	Elementary school	2-year junior college	Junior high school	Senior high school
<i>Parent's work</i>					
Father	Unskilled laborer	Skilled laborer		Farmer	Skilled laborer
Mother	Unskilled laborer	Service laborer	Clerical laborer	Hairdresser	Housewife
<i>Parent interviewed</i>	Mother	Father	Mother	Mother	Father and mother

Note: All names are pseudonyms.

I: "Who will help you for paying off student loans?"

K: "...[I] count on myself." (Kuan-Yu, 2006 I: interviewer, K: Kuan-Yu)

Shih-Han, a considerate undergraduate student, lived with her mother in Taipei city. Her father died from a car accident when she was an infant. Shih-Han's mother felt great sorrow at her husband's death and suffered from depression. Through the help of her sisters-in-law and friends, Shih-Han's mother finally moved out of her parents-in-law's house and found an accountant job. Her mother told us that her salary was not high, but it was enough for their expenses. But Shih-Han was constantly worried about money:

"Every month, [my uncles] transfer some money to me [for cram class[1] fees]. Then...I worry about family economy very much. When I went to cram classes, [my mom] had to pay a lot of money every semester. Then [I] would ask my mom [about family income]. Then, when we withdrew money from the bank's account, I had to print out the receipt and check the bank balance. I feel insecure. But my mom always tells me there is some money and don't worry." (Shih-Han, 2004)

When we interviewed Shih-Han again in 2006, she told us that her uncles stopped providing regular financial support for them, because Shih-Han had become an undergraduate student. She still expressed her worry:

"I feel so nervous every time...Every time when I and my mom withdraw money [from our bank account], I must print out the receipt. Then, [I] snatch it and check. [I] am so afraid that there is no money in the bank account." (Shih-Han, 2006)

Pei-Shan, an active and lively undergraduate student, migrated between Taipei city and Yilan. She lived with her mother and a younger brother in Yilan. Pei-Shan's father was a farmer and worked in the high mountain. Since the income of planting vegetables was not stable, the whole family depended on her mother's income as a hairdresser. The high economic burden resulted in frequent marital conflicts in the family:

I: "Why did you have quarrel with your husband?"

M: "I tend to be less patient. Maybe he has his worries, and I have my own worries. When [we] talk about money, [we] often have a fight."

I: "What are you worried about?"

M: "I have to take care of children and have to work. [I] carry a heavy load of family economy."

I: "Do you still feel the economic pressure?"

M: "Yes. [I] need to pay children's cram class fees, loans, and insurance. I have to pay most of the costs, because the income [of planting vegetable] from the mountain is unstable." (Pei-Shan's mother, 2004, I: interviewer, M: mother)

Yi-Chun, a sanguine medical school student, grew up in a blue-collar family in Taipei County. Yi-Chun lived with both parents and two younger sisters. Her father had worked as a technician in the same factory for nearly twenty years, and her mother stayed at home to take care of the children. Yi-Chun's father told us about the family income and their life style:

I: "Is the whole family dependent on your salary?"

F: "Yes. [We] have to live in a modest way. Currently, two kids are studying in the senior high schools. They are all grown ups...[We] have to be frugal. [We] can't waste money." (Yi-Chun's father, 2004, I: interviewer, F: father)

Compared to other families, Yi-Chun's family economy is relatively stable. However, when Yi-Chun made the decision to choose a medical school for her study, the economic factor became decisive.

"I was told that private medical school was not so good for me... And the private medical school tuition fees are too expensive. And I have to move there [living expenses]. If I go home, I need transportation fees... Yes, too expensive, so [I] decided to study at the (tuition) free military medical school." (Yi-Chun, 2006)

RESILIENCE PROCESS

In this study, we regard resilience as a dynamic process in which parents provide warm and supportive parenting to help their children, exhibit high educational aspirations as well as adopt effective educational strategies. From our interview accounts, three domains of factors: Supportive parenting, parents' high educational expectation and educational strategies stand out as salient buffers for the life obstacles or adversity occurred in the youth's growth trajectory. Based on our respondents' retrospective memories, we shall discuss protective factors contributive to the construction of resilience within the family context.

Supportive Parenting

Close bonds and open communication in the family provide adolescent with support and resources needed to cope with academic and interpersonal demands at this stage of life. Shih-Han has close relationship with her mother. They often talk about school life and the pressure from the upcoming college entrance examination:

"My daughter often said: "Mom, do you think I don't have dinner with you for a long time? I have dinner with the boss of the restaurant near our school more frequently than with you." She thought she was very pathetic. She also said: "Mom, our home is a hotel. Home is a hotel." I told her not to think that way and [she] would pass this exam, and next year she would be a college student. She replied maybe I couldn't hold on until then. I am so afraid of these words." (Shih-Han's mother, 2004)

In our first interview, the mother recalled her worry about Shih-Han's tremendous pressure from the college entrance examination and asked us how to encourage Shih-Han. She decided to continue the daily loving expression (e.g., hugs) and to remain a faithful listener. This supportive parenting helped Shih-Han pass the most difficult educational stage in life successfully and acquire the necessary resilience to enter college.

Yi-Chun had been an outstanding student and frequently received her teachers' open praise. However, memory of the educational process was not positive. Both mother and daughter mentioned unhappy school life in junior high school:

- M: "She studied in the public junior high school in our neighborhood. From the first grade to the third grade [of junior high school], she was always ranked first in her class. Then, some classmates were jealous of her and didn't want to be friends with her... She was unhappy especially in the third grade. I and her father worried about her...at that time. "
- I: "What did you do?"
- M: "We discussed with her teacher."
- I: "Did the teacher know about it?"
- M: "Yes, he did, but the teacher didn't know what to do. Because he is a male teacher, he couldn't figure out what happened between girls."
- I: "So what did you do then?"
- M: "When she came home from school, I and her father talked with her and tried to understand her thoughts. [We] told her that it was the turning point in your life. When she entered the senior high school, since everyone had to pass the same entrance examination, the academic abilities would be equal. It wouldn't happen again." (Yi-Chun's mother, 2004, M: mother, I: interviewer)

Clearly, positive parenting before the entrance examination resulted in perceived support among adolescents. Finally, Yi-Chun entered Taipei Municipal First Girls' Senior High School. Since the priority on children's education reflects dominant social practice often observed in the middle-class, the concept of proper parenting may be shared across different social classes. In other words, supportive parenting exercised by various forms contributes to the educational resilience and successful performance among vulnerable youth from poor families in Taiwan. Memories from both parents and adolescents confirm our basic argument in this respect.

Parents' High Educational Expectation

In Taiwan, most parents encourage their children to obtain higher academic achievement. Parents endorse high value on education and hold high educational expectation on children. This is perhaps the most significant dimension contributing to educational resilience among Taiwanese youth. In this section, we will draw from both parents' and youth's accounts to unravel how educational expectation from parents lead to adolescent's educational success.

Parents' Strong Will

When Chia-Hao participated in the second in-depth interview in 2010, he was a graduate student in computer science in a national university. We asked him about his motivation to continue studying at the graduate school:

"After [my] application to attend graduate school was turned down, I didn't want to take another exam again. I would like to register for military service...But my mother encouraged me to study...[My mother] asked me to study...Anyway, [she] just told me I 'must' study." (Chia-Hao, 2010)

It is clear that Chia-Hao's mother, a junior high graduate and an unskilled laborer, imposes her high educational expectation on her son. Having to comply with mother's will, as Chia-Hao

recalled the resilience process, he fulfilled the son's duty by entering the graduate program and make a successful outcome.

It is not unusual for parents with economic disadvantages to aspire children's upward social mobility. For Taiwanese parent, higher educational attainment is perhaps the most important channel to achieve this goal. As stated by Kuan-Yu:

"My father expects me to study harder. Otherwise, [I] will become a construction worker like him. That is hard and exhaustive work, so he doesn't want me to be like him." (Kuan-Yu, 2006)

The Intergenerational Difference

However, high educational expectation may also represent an innovation among vulnerable or financially inadequate families. Yi-Chun's parents pointed out the difference between their own parents and the next generation:

"I expect my children to be better than me, because we don't have any special expertise. When I graduated from the vocational senior high school, [I] didn't know anything about cram classes. I totally depended on myself. For my parents, if children like to study, then you study. [If children] don't like to study, it does not matter. If my children have abilities, then I will let them study. Although I need to work harder, [I] will help them receive better education. I will do my best to help them study." (Yi-Chun's father, 2004)

When we asked them to recall if there was spousal dispute on the high educational expectation on their children, Yi-Chun's mother replied:

"He [husband] never told me. Maybe, he has high expectation too...I always tell my children: Mom didn't study hard, so [I] feel regretful about it now. If I could make a fresh start in my life, I would have studied harder." (Yi-Chun's mother, 2004)

The answer implies that although spousal communication about educational expectation may be scarce, a strong spousal agreement undoubtedly exists in having high expectation for Yi-Chun to do well in school. Both parents holding the same expectation is beneficial to the process of educational resilience. Again, memories from both generations concur in the effectiveness of having high educational expectation.

The Educational Strategy

Educational achievement has been the dominant social value in Chinese societies. As a result, although parents encounter financial difficulties, they adopt the middle-class habitus and employ various educational strategies to "cultivate" their children.

The Cultivation of Habitus

The strategy of monitoring children's school work remains as a vivid memory for both adolescents and parents. The following quotes point out different strategies adopted owing

to various resource constraints at home. But the care and support expressed contribute to the educational resilience revealed in the process:

“When I was in the elementary school, my mom used to sew clothes at home and asked us to study near her... She would take a look in-between. If we were playing, she would scold us.” (Kuan-Yu, 2006)

F: “[The strategy of] teaching children is to provide a quiet studying environment... [We] will ask them to do something. That is to develop their reading habits in childhood.”

I: “How did you develop their reading habits?”

F: “When they were studying, we would sit beside them. [We] watched them doing homework and studying extra-curriculum readings.”

I: “At that time, did you buy books for them or did they buy for themselves?”

F: “I helped them buy some books, and subscribed the Mandarin Daily News” (Yi-Chun’s father, 2004, F: father, I: interviewer)

Educational strategies in developing children’s reading habits and talents as well as acquiring different skills are echoed in other families:

“My mom brought many books for me. When I was small, she read stories for me... I read a lot of books during childhood. At that time, my mom wanted me to play piano, but I gave up learning piano half a year later.” (Shih-Han’s, 2004)

I: “Did Pei-Shan receive any artistic or musical training?”

M: “Yes. I think that I am very generous when paying for educational expenses. I am frugal for myself, but I am generous for children’s educational expenses.”

I: “At that time, did she ask to learn or did you arrange it?”

M: “I arranged it. I think [children] they don’t know their interest. Adults [have to] make the arrangement. [I] told her what she should learn.” (Pei-Shan’s mother, 2004, M: mother, I: interview)

These families all suffer from economic deficiency. Yet, they share the middle-class value of educational achievement and invest in children’s educational expenses to cultivate their children despite financial constraints. Through the cultivation, children are encouraged to attain higher educational achievement, and thus internalize the middle-class habitus. Our interview accounts suggest that these strategies successfully contribute to children’s educational resilience.

Better Educational Resources

To effectuate high educational expectation for their children, parents need to allocate their limited resources to cover educational costs. When asked to tell us family memories on this aspect, different stories were presented. Pei-Shan’s family migrated to Taipei city from rural Yilan when she was a second grader because of the better educational opportunity in the capital. When they had to move back to Yilan during junior high, Pei-Shan’s mother tried hard to find a good school for her. According to mother’s memory, the early educational

trajectory of Pei-Shan was not smooth:

“She was a first grader in a class with five students only. She was ranked second or third. I thought it was not good [for her]...but her grandmother disagreed. When she was in the second grade, I decided I had to bring her to Taipei...I think [that studying in a rural school] cannot compete with others. I like the competition. [The competition] makes progress... From the smallest school to the biggest one, at the beginning, she didn't adapt well [in the new circumstance].” (Pei-Shan's mother, 2004)

From the parental side, all efforts laid upon the educational plan have a concrete outcome: to enter a better senior high school or a better college. However, it is difficult for lower SES parents to understand the complicated school system. Although relatively unfamiliar with the specific educational competition, parents still try hard to comply with the school demand. As one father recalled:

“Yes, I went to the parents' information meetings [for application and entrance examinations of senior high schools and universities], but I couldn't understand, ha ha...It is impossible...I couldn't understand it well. Children have to figure it out by themselves.” (Kuan-Yu's father, 2005)

In addition, to register for various cram classes after the regular school day has been described as a typical lifestyle of Taiwanese teenagers which is presumed to improve students' grades (Yi and Wu, 2004). In order to pass the college entrance examinations, it is common for high school students to attend the cram class. A mother remembered how she persuaded her daughter to attend it:

“Her mathematics is poor...Her score is only 20 or 30...[I think that] she can't compete with others. Parents always worry about it...I asked her to attend the cram class for enhancing mathematics. She didn't want to...But I told her that her score was not good enough for entering college. If you give up, what would you do?” (Pei-Shan's mother, 2004)

Pei-Shan, now a graduate student, majored in Chinese Literature in a national university. With father working in the farm and mother working in a hair salon, she is considered a successful example of acquiring the educational resilience after her parents had made proper investment in her cram classes.

Needless to say, it is not always affordable for families with inadequate economic resources to pay for the cram class tuition. Kuan-Yu met a generous teacher who helped him receive a three-year free tutoring classes:

“The cram class during senior high was free...Because our teacher told us if [our families] had difficulties, it was ok to let him know...His wife called my mother and my mother told her that our family was not affluent...the wife of my teacher was a nice person. She replied it was ok (not to pay).” (Kuan-Yu, 2006)

In the midst of financial difficulties, parents respond to high educational expectation with all

possible means, including secure external resources. Chia-Hao joined "The Voluntary Program for Assisting Continuing Education of Junior High School Graduates" and successfully entered a higher ranking senior high school. Chia-Hao's mother delineated her memories at that time:

"...I thought he didn't know how to study, because he got poor grades in elementary school and failed...but [he] wanted to enter a senior high school. It was better to use the Voluntary Program...At that time [his] grades in the junior high school had improved and were good. He could apply to a higher ranking school." (Chia-Hao's mother, 2004)

According to family memories supportive parents along with caring teachers become the basis for constructing educational resilience for Taiwanese youth. Overall, high educational expectation is perceived by parents and children alike, and both parties respond accordingly. For parents, high expectation prompts them to cover educational expenses and to develop strategies in order to create better educational opportunity for their children. The positive outcome of the educational trajectory of five youth from vulnerable families illustrates the significant effect of high educational expectation in the Taiwanese context.

CONCLUSION

The growth trajectory of disadvantaged youth does not always conform to expected vulnerability. This paper presents evidence from the Taiwanese context. By following a panel sample from early adolescence to young adulthood, we argue that resilience is the key to alter the developmental course. Using educational resilience, defined as successful educational achievement, as the target of analysis, supportive parenting, parent's high educational expectation as well as educational strategies are shown to produce salient effects on the positive outcome for vulnerable youth. We draw on retrospective accounts to delineate the process of educational resilience from both parents' and youth's memories. The five family dyads selected, demonstrate that growing up in an economically deprived family does not hinder these vulnerable youth to achieve higher educational success.

However, the present study has limitations and will benefit from future analyses. Firstly, only five families with successful educational achievement were selected. Youth who fail in the academic competition are not delineated or compared and need to be investigated in subsequent studies. In addition, the interplay between positive macro-environment and personal insufficient situations among vulnerable Taiwanese youth remains to be explored.

It should be emphasized that high educational expectation has been the dominant social value shared by different social classes in the Chinese history. An advantage of our study is to provide first hand document to delineate how parental endorsement of educational value results in children's successful performance among economically vulnerable families in Taiwan. Furthermore, the intergenerational differences of educational aspiration imply that changing structural forces may result in parents holding convergent attitudes toward children's growth trajectory.

Regarding all important mechanisms examined, our analyses show that parents' educational aspiration and expectation have perhaps the most pronounced effect on building educational

resilience. From family memories reported, the hidden messages revealed by parents working extra-hard as well as their persistent attitudes in supporting children at difficult times (i.e., the entrance examination) are well perceived by these resilient youth. It seems clear that owing to high educational expectation, parents utilize various educational strategies to contribute to children's personal competence and academic success in compliance with the middle-class cultural habitus. Our findings are in principle consistent with previous studies in the West (Schoon et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2007). Our selective dyads clearly reveal the positive outcome of educational resilience in the growth trajectory.

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NOTES

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1. Regarding the cram class, in response to the competitive entrance examination, as high as 64% of junior high students and 70% of senior high students in Taiwan have taken extracurriculum classes (i.e., the cram class) after school hours. The cost of cram class varies by subjects and by regions. To take an English cram class in Taipei city costs approximately US\$330 per semester. Adding different subjects altogether may thus become a financial burden for economically disadvantaged families (average monthly living expense per household is about US\$ 2000). Another type of extracurriculum class is called the "after-school class." This free class takes place in the school after the regular hour and is often implemented during the last year before the high school entrance examination. Nearly 60% of samples reported attending the after-school class.

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