

Sport for Resilience: Addressing Rural Youth Wellbeing Needs

Exploring how youth in equine based physical activity experience resilience.

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Working Research Question: Do youth in the rural positive youth development program, 4-H, participating in the physical activity option using horses have an experience of resilience? Do they make connections between resilience and challenge, and program participation?

Canadian Youth Wellbeing Facts:

Wellbeing is not limited to targeted 'at risk' populations. It is a broad based public issue of lack of supportive systems for healthy development.

Canada ranks 25th out of 30 OECD countries for child and youth wellbeing:

- 75-85% of 15yr olds suffer critically low self-esteem
- 80%+ youth insufficiently active
- 30-40% children and youth experience risk factors
- 60% youth have insufficient adult mentorship

Rural Areas: rurality = more adversity

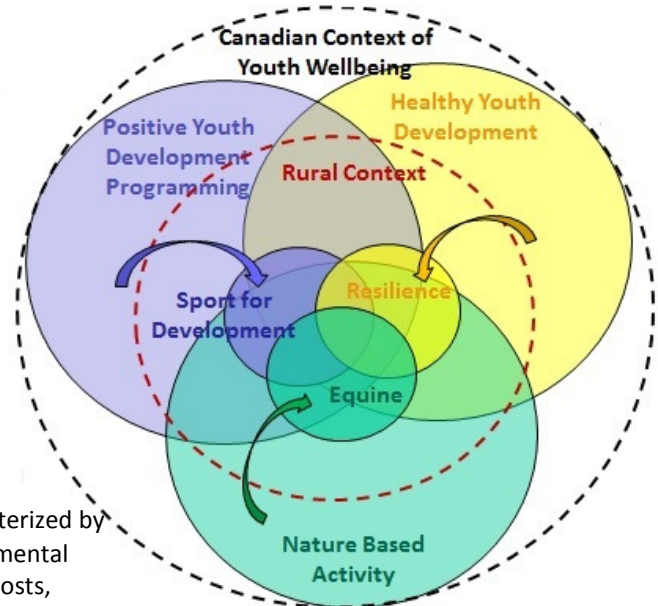
- Higher % of population are children & youth
- More impacted by socio-economic determinants of health & system barriers: 25% higher obesity; up to 140% higher youth incidence of excessive alcohol
- Cycle perpetuates: fewer achieve skills for thriving (lower numbers post-secondary or job skill training)

Applied Social Problem: Canada is facing a crisis of youth wellbeing characterized by the epidemic of obesity and sedentariness, creating population physical and mental wellbeing issues resulting in unsustainable projections for future healthcare costs, population morbidity and negative impact on economic productivity.

Heightened Rural Risk: The impact of crisis to wellbeing for rural and other vulnerable populations is worse due to multiplier effects, elevating need for resilience. Changing demographics, reduced budgets and services, and changing rural economies create heightened need for social cohesion and self-efficacy. Brain drain and youth outmigration due to inability to retain and sustain heightens disparity.

Study Logic: Need for resilience research lens applied to physical recreation in rural areas.

- Public health shifts to health promotion recognizing health not solely individual choice, but promoted by systems promoting physical activity
- Sport for development (S4D) combines physical and psychosocial development, and accessibility needs (an efficient approach, emerging field)
- Rural areas have sustainable contextual recreation assets, though they may lack the urban recreation infrastructure that has created the physical activity engagement problem, and which S4D typically studies
- Therapy and experiential learning supports expectation rural activities can be S4D; and specifically foster resilience
- Equine-based activity outcomes parallel protective factors for resilience
- "Black-box Effect" of S4D & equine-assisted research



Research Method:

Phase 1: Invite 4-H Ontario members in horse programs to complete a survey including the CYRM-28 and some qualitative questions

Phase 2: Select sample based on demographics, and distributed across resilience scores. Conduct 20-30 image elicitation interviews on participant experience of resilience or challenge, and their perceptions of connection to their program involvement

Analysis: Use Phase 1 to profile participant resilience scores for 4-H, and compare with Phase 2 data. Code qualitative data from both phases, inductively (informed by theory on positive youth development life skill acquisition, S4D and the 7 tensions or protective factors for resilience) and deductively (remain open to emerging themes, especially related to participant identification of programming elements and their connection to the resilience experience).

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