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Context, Identity and Connection: An Examination of Resilience in New Zealand Foster
Children

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine resilience in New Zealand foster children, with a focus on the relationships foster children form with the foster parents who care for them and the ways that resilience is built and displayed within foster care. While there is a range of international research examining resilience in children in state care, research into relational aspects of resilience is rare, particularly in a New Zealand context. This investigation involves one-on-one interviews and small focus groups with foster carers, asking open-ended questions about resilience, attachment and relationships to elicit their opinions and experiences with the children they have fostered. Using the process of thematic analysis, four major themes were developed, entitled (1) Participant understandings of resilience, (2) Identity, (3) Connection, and (4) Outcomes. These themes are compared to existing research, and new theories are proposed relating to the contextuality of resilience and the connection between a sense of identity and the building of supportive relationships with others. Two models are proposed to reconceptualise resilience in foster children, suggesting that behaviours typically seen as problematic may be resilient behaviours that have failed to adapt to a new environment, and that a strong sense of self and the ability to form meaningful connections with others are mutually reinforcing. The limitations of this research are discussed, in addition to implications for further research and suggestions for application in the foster care system.

Keywords: Resilience, fostering, children in care, foster children, foster carers, caregivers, relationship, connection, Aotearoa, New Zealand