Voices from the field: interview with a local researcher studying resilience and gang violence in Honduras

The Resilience Rapid School Assessment (RES-School) was conducted by a research team at the Francisco Morazán Pedagogical University in Honduras, with training and technical assistance from The World Bank’s ERA Program. The study focuses on education resilience of students facing social risks generated by the violent soccer fan clubs.

Uncovering indicators of resilience

The research was an extremely interesting line of inquiry, especially the narrative perspective. As for the topic of resilience, it was my first time. The schools or institutes that were selected for the sample had very specific characteristics—one of the public system’s largest schools, and one located in a rural area. One thing we learned is that there are [both] risk indicators and resilience indicators we can use … taking the angle of young people’s immersion in youth gangs to support [name of youth soccer team], this was a very unique element in the research process … We discovered it’s actually at school where young people gather as a group to strengthen that sense of belonging to youth gangs … We found risks, but in the same school we found elements of resilience.

We found very particular elements. For example, the support among peers, the family, the desire to belong to a team whether it’s for self-defense, safety, friendship. There are always elements like the drive to overcome, related to this the desire to
get ahead, the eagerness to stay in school, to go to university, belong to a community, the support of family, and even religious questions. These are indicators of resilience.

“[Students live in] this environment of ‘I need to belong to [name of gang] because only by being part of that group am I sure that I won’t be pressured to join another group’.”

But they also emerge because of the other perspective [of risk]. The condition of risk, what they face, having to experience the [violent] reality in their own school, even among their friends. It creates this environment of “I need to belong to [name of gang] because only by being part of that group am I sure I won’t be pressured to join another group”. A series of elements emerged that truly surprised us, traumatic stories, interesting stories, very particular ones, about family...

Tapping into multiple perspectives

During the process of conducting focus groups with parents [we discovered] what they experience as the parents of young people exposed to particular dangers. [Sometimes they were] a bit fearful to say that “it is my son”, or “the place where my son goes to school”. The teachers’ perspective is also interesting, though teachers sometimes aren’t free to share … [However], they are all side by side, teachers, students, the administration, the people who clean, who sell, they are all together in one environment …

Building research skills

While we work through this research, a learning process is also happening. The World Bank really brought a lot in terms of the ethics that went into this process. [The Bank] truly strengthened this ethics management part of the data, because of the topic, because of the vulnerability of the people who are in these [dangerous situations].

The researchers gained a lot from this process and the teachers as well, because they are actually teacher-investigators. One of the researchers works [at the same school] where the research was carried out.

Young researchers at our university … received capacity building during the research process … Including them in the process had advantages: they are young and can speak the same language as the youth. Having the young peoples’ perspective helped to gain entry into [the schools], and also in the data collection.

Working with the community

Being familiar with the environment [in the schools] really helped to open doors, because there are schools where you are not freely invited, and you have to find an ally to enter… On the other hand, with the other [rural] school we had to approach the community. We were able to go inside the school, that was another issue… an achievement. I think up to now we are very pleased with the analysis that’s been done.

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Students fill out the resilience research questionnaire