



Youth Engagement and Resilience

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ABSTRACT

Resilience is widely recognized as a critical factor in the psychological well-being and positive development of young individuals. Consequently, research examining variables that contribute to the enhancement of resilience has garnered substantial attention. The present study investigates the correlation between youth engagement and resilience, as well as differences in each construct across various socio-demographic variables. The sample comprised 200 participants aged 19 to 29 years. Results indicated that the overall level of engagement among participants was moderate. No statistically significant differences in youth engagement were observed with respect to gender, financial status, or other examined socio-demographic characteristics. With regard to youth resilience, statistically significant differences were found in relation to gender, perceived financial situation, and employment status. A significant moderate positive correlation was found between youth engagement and resilience, suggesting that increased engagement is associated with higher resilience among young people. The implications of this study point to the value of designing comprehensive, activity-based interventions that enhance resilience and promote overall well-being among youth. It also highlights the importance of multi-level support systems—spanning family, school, and community involvement—in fostering youth resilience.

Keywords: engagement, physical engagement, social engagement, resilience, youth

Introduction

Certain authors define resilience as an individual trait, highlighting one's ability to adapt in the face of risks and to recover after adversity (Zimmerman, 2013). In contrast, other researchers view resilience as a relational or social process (Afifi et al., 2016) and

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underscore the importance of the broader socio-ecological environment in shaping resilient outcomes (Ungar, 2011). Youth resilience is the ability to effectively cope with and rise above difficulties and stressful circumstances, which is vital for healthy growth and overall well-being. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines resilience as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors" (APA, 2014). This idea entails an individual's capability to "bounce back" from trauma and stress by drawing upon both internal and external resources. For adolescents, cultivating resilience is essential for preventing mental health issues and attaining positive life outcomes (Lee, 2012; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020). Research highlights a range of elements that foster resilience in young people, including: *Internal factors*: attributes such as self-confidence, emotional regulation, self-esteem, and problem-solving skills are crucial for helping young individuals manage stress and adversity (Zimmerman, 2013). *Family factors*: supportive and nurturing relationships with parents or guardians offer emotional stability and security, which are vital for building resilience (Werner & Smith, 1982). *Educational and social factors*: engagement in structured activities, through school-based extracurricular programs and other leisure activities outside the formal school context, and involvement in structured activities, like education and extracurricular programs, allows youth to develop skills, acquire new experiences, and create social connections, thus boosting their resilience (Eccles et al., 2003).

In relation to young people, engagement includes all types of movement and participation that are part of everyday life, which encompasses both structured activities like organized sports and unstructured activities such as walking, recreation, and a variety of social interactions within their environment and community. This wide-ranging activity illustrates the different ways in which young people engage in physical and social activities across different everyday settings. Depending on how frequently and in what ways young people are engaged in these activities, they may contribute to their resilience (Martin et al., 2015). For example, physical activity can increase resilience indirectly by enhancing social interactions and raising self-esteem. Engaging in team sports or any group social activities can foster a sense of community and social support, which can improve emotional resilience, coping skills, and overall life satisfaction. As such, participation and sustained engagement may influence resilience through multiple pathways — physical, psychological, and social.

Physical and Social Engagement of Youth and Resilience

Regular engagement in physical activity is essential for the physical growth of young people. The World Health Organization suggests that children and teenagers should partake in a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic exercise each day to support their health and development (World Health Organization, 2010). Taking part in physical activities also provides considerable mental health advantages. It can help alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety, boost mood, and improve overall psychological health. Furthermore, participating in physical activities—especially in group environments—promotes social skills, teamwork, and a feeling of community. These experiences are crucial for individual growth and can foster greater self-esteem and better relationships with others. Early involvement in physical engagement is linked to maintaining active lifestyles later in life, thus encouraging long-term health and well-being (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2013).

Many adolescents do not reach the recommended levels of physical engagement despite the well-known advantages. Increased screen time, academic demands, and restricted access to safe recreational areas are all contributing factors. Tackling these obstacles necessitates a comprehensive strategy that includes families, communities, and schools in order to foster supportive atmospheres that encourage active lifestyles (World Health Organization, 2020).

Physical engagement is essential for adolescents' psychological resilience and mental health development. Many studies have demonstrated that engaging in physical activities on a regular basis can enhance young people's emotional stability, stress management skills, and ability to face life's obstacles. Improved self-regulation is one of the main ways that physical engagement boosts resilience. The prefrontal cortex, which is involved in decision-making, impulse control, and emotional regulation, is strengthened by regular aerobic exercise. This neurobiological change allows adolescents to handle stress and adverse feelings better, which is crucial for developing resilience (Belcher et al., 2021). Moreover, according to a study on university students in Hong Kong, there is a strong positive relationship between resilience and physical engagement levels, implying that increased physical engagement may lead to improved psychological resilience (Zhang et al., 2022).

Regular participation in physical exercise is a simple and efficient way for young people to improve their mental health and build resilience. Long-term benefits for the emotional and psychological well-being of children can be achieved through sustained efforts to promote physical activity.

Research suggests that students' psychological resilience is influenced by both their active engagement in community-based social environments and the subjective sense of belonging that may emerge from such engagement. While community engagement involves direct participation in activities such as volunteering, campus events, or group projects, this involvement can foster a psychological sense of community (SOC)—a feeling of connectedness, mutual support, and shared purpose. McCarthy and Hatcher (1990) found that a stronger SOC is associated with fewer stress-related psychological symptoms, suggesting that this sense of belonging may serve as a buffer against academic and emotional challenges. Similarly, social support—often developed through interactions with peers, faculty, and mentors in community settings—has been shown to enhance students' life satisfaction, which in turn contributes to greater academic engagement (Chen et al., 2023). Taken together, these findings suggest that both the experience of community participation and the internalized feeling of belonging play complementary roles in promoting students' resilience within academic environments.

Engagement helps adolescents develop social skills, boost their self-esteem, and lessen depressive symptoms. For example, participation in sports and volunteering improves adolescent self-esteem and helps reduce depressive symptoms. Participating in self-directed, community-serving volunteer activities can also help students build psychological resilience (Taliaferro et al., 2010). Such engagement helps students build social and personal skills, which enhances their ability to handle stress and deal with obstacles successfully (Delamere, 2009).

In general, student participation in the community's social fabric has a complexly beneficial effect on both academic and personal growth. Students develop their interpersonal skills and academic performance through social engagement, as well as psychological resilience, which helps them deal with stressors they encounter during their studies and in more general life situations (Chiu & Chai, 2021; Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

Sociodemographic Correlates of Youth Engagement and Resilience

Youth physical engagement varies significantly by gender, academic achievement, and socioeconomic status. According to research, one important factor influencing young people's physical engagement levels is gender. For example, a study conducted in Texas among elementary and middle school students discovered that boys were considerably more likely than girls to meet the recommended aerobic fitness standards. In schools with a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students, these disparities were even more noticeable (Walker et al., 2020). In a similar way, research conducted in South Korea found that while only moderate physical engagement (such as walking or light exercise) was

associated with improved academic performance among girls, strenuous activities (such as strength training) were negatively correlated with academic achievement (Byun et al., 2012). Among boys, there was a positive relationship between physical engagement and academic success. The link between physical engagement and academic performance is complex. In general, students who consistently participate in physical activity demonstrate better cognitive performance, greater attention, and better scores on standardized tests (Singh et al., 2012). International studies have repeatedly demonstrated that adolescents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more prone to lead sedentary lifestyles and are less physically active, which has a direct impact on their physical and mental well-being (Inchley et al., 2020).

Research on gender differences in resilience has yielded conflicting results. For instance, there was no discernible difference in resilience between male and female students, according to a Ghanaian study (Amoadu et al., 2024). However, studies conducted in Ethiopia revealed that male students were more resilient than female students (Bizuneh, 2021). In contrast, a study of 500 international students in India revealed that female students were more resilient in the classroom than male students. These results imply that women may, as a result of their social and cultural experiences, acquire more robust coping strategies for academic difficulties (Kaur & Kaur, 2019). These findings suggest that gender disparities in resilience are situational and could be influenced by social and cultural variables. Student resilience is also significantly shaped by socioeconomic position. According to a Brazilian study, pupils who did not face a decrease in family income or who had a higher household income per capita demonstrated higher levels of resilience (de Andrade et al., 2024). Similarly, another research revealed that reduced monthly income adversely impacts academic achievement, leading to heightened anxiety and feelings of loneliness among students (Keles et al., 2025). Resilience has also been linked positively to academic success. A study involving students in Belgium found that resilience was the only significant factor predicting academic performance, as well as both the intention to drop out and actual dropout rates (Van Hoek, 2019). Furthermore, research conducted in India indicated that students with higher levels of resilience, even those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, attained superior academic outcomes (Sandoval-Hernández & Białowolski, 2016; Sungoh et al., 2024).

While results may differ, current evidence typically indicates that factors such as gender, economic status, and academic performance are linked to student resilience. Gaining insight into these connections can help in creating focused strategies to assist students—especially those from at-risk backgrounds—in enhancing their ability to handle academic and life challenges.

Even though current evidence suggests the importance of personal traits, there is an increasing tendency among authors to highlight that resilience cannot be reduced to intrapersonal traits alone, and that it's, rather, shaped through interpersonal processes and embedded in the wider socio-ecological context, encompassing influences at the family, community, and cultural levels (Waller, 2001; Ungar, 2011). Ungar (2011) in particular argues that resilience is best understood as an interpersonal process in which access to external resources—such as supportive relationships, educational opportunities, and community services—interacts with individual strengths to promote positive adaptation. Social support is one such interpersonal resource, defined as an individual's perception of available assistance from members of their social network, which has been shown to be associated with improved mental health outcomes and protection from adverse effects (Lakey & Orehek, 2011; Lee et al., 2013). This dual focus on internal capacities and external supports resonates with the broader resilience literature, which stresses the balance between risk factors (e.g., poverty, chronic illness, or family conflict) and protective or promotive factors (e.g., self-regulation, supportive peers, or community resources). Resilience, therefore, can be seen not as a static trait but as a dynamic process emerging from the interaction between intrapersonal resources and interpersonal supports across the lifespan (Masten, 2014). The development of resilience varies among individuals, with some maintaining or strengthening resources in the face of adversity while others struggle to do so (Windle, 2011). Bearing this in mind, recognizing and nurturing resilience in youth is essential for improving their ability to navigate life's challenges and attain positive outcomes. A mix of personal characteristics, family support, and community resources serves as the basis for resilience, and initiatives that promote social and emotional learning can further strengthen this capability.

Community resources serve as the basis for resilience, and initiatives that promote social and emotional learning can further strengthen this capability. As a result, numerous intervention and support initiatives have been developed to strengthen youth resilience by fostering social and emotional skills. For example, it has been demonstrated that the FRIENDS program, created by Paula Barrett, effectively prevents anxiety and depression by teaching stress and worry management techniques (Barrett, 2004).

Method

The goal and tasks of the research

The goal of the research was to determine the correlation between youth engagement and resilience, as well as to explore how each of these constructs varies across socio-demographic variables. Based on the formulated goal, the following research tasks were set:

1. Examine youth engagement and whether there are differences in relation to the measured socio-demographic characteristics;
2. Examine youth resilience and whether there are differences in relation to the measured socio-demographic characteristics;
3. Examine the correlation between youth engagement and resilience.

Research instruments

The following instruments were used for the purposes of examining the set goal and tasks of the research:

A custom questionnaire was developed for this study to gather information on the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. It included items on gender, living situation, assessment of financial status, student status, employment, field of study, and academic performance.

The General Level of Activity Questionnaire (Proyer et al., 2018) was used in the research in order to measure youth engagement. This instrument consists of four single items for the comparison; all items are answered on a 7-point scale (1 = "not at all" to 7 = "to a very large extent"). Negatively formulated items were reverse-coded prior to computing the total score on this instrument. Considering the number of items, this instrument has shown adequate reliability on our research sample (Cronbach alpha .79).

The Youth Resilience Scale, originally developed by Jefferies et al. (2019), was validated through confirmatory factor analysis using a Serbian sample as part of Đorđić's doctoral dissertation (as cited, Stojadinović & Pavlović, 2024). The most fitting model included 17 items (5-point Likert-type scale) grouped into two factors—family resilience and intra/interpersonal resilience. The model demonstrated good fit indices (RMSEA = .046, SRMR = .038, CFI = .936, TLI = .924, AIC = 64895.132, BIC = 65193.561; Đorđić, 2020, as cited, Stojadinović & Pavlović, 2024). On our sample, the scale demonstrated good reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .85.

Sample

The research included a sample of 200 respondents, selected through convenience sampling. Data collection was conducted via Google Forms. The sample structure is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Sample structure

		%
Gender	Male	17
	Female	83
	Extremely unificatory	0.5
Assessment of financial situation	Unsatisfactory	15.5
	Satisfactory	72
	Very satisfactory	12
Living situation	With parents	50.5
	In a rented apartment	32.5
	In a student dorm	17
Student status	Yes	96.5
	No	3.5
Employment status	Yes	3.5
	No	73.5
	Working and studying	23
Field of studies	Social - humanistic	74
	Natura - mathematical	12.5
	Technical - technological	2
	Medical	6.5
	Art	1.5
	I'm not studying	3.5
Academic achievement	6.50 - 7.49	74
	7.50 - 8.49	12.5
	8.50 - 9.49	6.5
	9.50 - 10.00	2
	I'm studying, but I haven't taken the exams yet	1.5
	I'm not studying	3.5

Statistical Procedures

The statistical package used for analysis is IBM SPSS Statistics 27. The procedures employed included tests of normality, assessment of scale reliability, independent samples *t*-tests, one-way ANOVA with post hoc Tukey HSD comparisons, and Pearson correlation analysis.

Results

The first task of research was to examine youth engagement measured with The General Level of Activity Questionnaire (Proyer et al., 2018) and whether there are differences in relation to the measured socio-demographic characteristics. Table 2 shows descriptive indicators of the General Level of Activity Questionnaire and its items.

Table 2
Descriptive indicators of youth engagement

	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I would consider myself a not very active person.	1	7	3.54	1.97
Compared to other persons of my age and gender, I would consider myself a not very active person.	1	7	3.46	2.00
Some people are very active. They try to be active whenever possible and are looking for ways to complete tasks in a way that involves movement and physical activity. To what extent does this describe you?	1	7	4.68	1.52
Some people are not very active. Although they are not lazy, they are never as active as they could be. To what extent does this describe you?	1	7	3.87	1.91
Total	4	7	3.87	5.88

Concerning measured socio-demographic characteristics, no statistically significant differences were found in youth engagement.

The second research task was focused on the examination of youth resilience and whether there are differences in relation to the measured socio-demographic characteristics. Descriptive indicators of the scale measuring youth resilience are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Descriptive indicators of the scale of youth resilience

	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Intra and Interpersonal Resilience</i>	29	50	43.99	4.70
I cooperate with people around me.	2	5	4.45	0.74
Getting an education is important for me.	1	5	4.78	0.63
I know how to behave in different social situations.	2	5	4.57	0.70
People think I am fun to be with.	1	5	4.24	0.84
I feel supported by my friends.	1	5	4.46	0.84
I feel I belong at my school/university/work.	1	5	4.36	0.91
My friends stand by me during difficult times.	1	5	4.42	0.91
I am treated fairly by the people around me.	2	5	4.26	0.81
I have opportunities to develop skills which will be useful in my future life (e.g. job skills).	1	5	4.39	0.81
I am given opportunities to show others that I'm becoming an adult and that I know how to behave responsibly.	2	5	4.08	0.75
<i>Family Resilience</i>	10	35	30.68	5.31
My parents watch me closely.	1	5	4.60	0.80
My parents know a lot about me.	1	5	4.10	1.12
When I'm hungry, I have enough to eat.	1	5	4.78	0.60
I talk to my family members about how I feel.	1	5	3.84	1.22
My family stands by me during difficult times.	1	5	4.45	0.99
I feel safe when I am with my family.	1	5	4.67	0.82
I enjoy family gatherings and celebrations.	1	5	4.23	1.16
Total	47	85	74.67	8.22

In relation to socio-demographic characteristics of the sample, statistically significant differences in youth resilience were found concerning: gender (Table 4), financial situation (Table 5), and employment status (Table 6).

Table 4
Youth resilience and gender

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Female	166	75.50	9.91	5.76	.01
Male	34	70.64	7.62		

Statistically significant differences were found in favor of female respondents, indicating that they exhibit greater resilience compared to male respondents.

Table 5
Youth resilience and financial situation

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Extremely unsatisfactory	1	-	-	8.125	<.001
Unsatisfactory	31	69.32	10.40		
Satisfactory	144	75.31	7.63		
Very satisfactory	24	78.37	4.18		

To conduct further analysis using Tukey's HSD test, one respondent who rated their financial situation as "extremely unsatisfactory" was excluded due to their status as a statistical outlier. The subsequent Tukey HSD analysis revealed statistically significant differences between respondents who assessed their financial situation as "unsatisfactory" and those who assessed it as either "satisfactory" ($p < .001$) or "very satisfactory" ($p < .001$).

Table 6
Youth resilience and employment status

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Working	17	79.64	4.48	3.95	.02
Not working	147	73.99	8.34		
Working and studying	35	75.54	8.26		

Further analysis using Tukey's HSD test revealed statistically significant differences in youth resilience between respondents who are working and those who are not, $p = .019$.

The third task of the research was to examine the correlation between youth engagement and resilience; the results of the correlation are shown in Table 7. Correlation analysis concluded a moderate positive relationship between youth engagement and resilience.

Table 7
Correlation between youth engagement and resilience

	General activity level	Youth resilience	<i>p</i>
General activity level	-	.345**	<.001
Youth resilience		-	

Discussion and Implications

The presented research aimed to examine the correlation between youth engagement and resilience. The first task of this research was to examine youth engagement and whether there are statistically significant differences among them concerning socio-demographic characteristics. Findings indicate that, on average, participants showed moderate levels of engagement. However, no statistically significant differences were observed in youth engagement based on gender, financial situation, or other socio-demographic factors that were examined. This does not align well with previous literature, which highlights complex patterns in how socio-demographic factors impact engagement in physical activity. For instance, Inchley et al. (2020) and Walker et al. (2020) emphasized disparities in physical activity based on gender and socioeconomic status. Despite such disparities being presented in previous research, our sample may reflect a more homogeneous student population or varying cultural norms, possibly reducing variability in youth engagement. The lack of significant gender differences in youth engagement could also be influenced by contextual and cultural variables, as highlighted by Byun et al. (2012), who reported different patterns of engagement in physical activity and academic performance by gender. Additionally, the fact that most of our respondents were students in social-humanistic fields may contribute to a shared lifestyle and activity pattern, reducing group differences, which altogether implicates the need to conduct further research on a more heterologous sample of respondents.

The second task of research was focused on examining youth resilience and possible statistically significant differences between respondents concerning socio-demographic characteristics. In our sample, participants reported high levels of resilience overall, particularly in the intra/interpersonal dimension. Consistent with the definition by Masten (2001), these findings suggest that the youth in our sample exhibits strong adaptive capacities and access to both internal and external resources. Statistically significant differences in resilience were observed with regard to gender, financial situation, and employment status. Female participants reported higher resilience scores, contrasting with findings from Ethiopia (Bizuneh, 2021), yet aligning with Kaur and Kaur (2019), who found that female students manifest greater academic resilience. These differences may be

attributed to the specific social or educational context of our sample, as gender differences in resilience are known to vary across cultures and are influenced by culturally reinforced gender roles (Amoadu et al., 2024; Kaur & Kaur, 2010; Mlouki et al., 2024). Financial status was also significantly associated with resilience, with those reporting higher financial satisfaction demonstrating greater resilience. This finding supports previous studies indicating that economic stability facilitates psychological well-being and resilience (de Andrade et al., 2024; Keles et al., 2025). Youth with better financial conditions may experience less chronic stress, have greater access to resources, and benefit from more stable family environments—all of which enhance resilience. Similarly, the difference was found between the students who are working and those who are not, which aligns with the idea that employed students exhibit higher resilience levels than their non-working peers. This may be due to the sense of independence, responsibility, and competence gained through work experience, which reinforces internal resilience traits, consistent with the idea that community engagement and real-world participation strengthen youth development (Delamere, 2009; Taliaferro et al., 2010).

A significant, moderate positive correlation was found between youth engagement and resilience. This relationship confirms earlier studies suggesting that engaging in physical activity supports emotional regulation, self-confidence, and stress management—all critical components of resilience (Belcher et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Engaging in physical activity may also promote social bonding and a sense of purpose, particularly when such activities are performed in group settings, reinforcing the findings of Barrett (2004) and Martin et al. (2015). As described by the World Health Organization (2010, 2020) and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2013), engaging in physical activity and general activity is not only crucial for physical development but also contributes significantly to psychological resilience and long-term well-being. Adding to this, youth engagement also includes involvement in self-initiated, community-oriented volunteer work and participation, which is shown to contribute to the development of psychological resilience (Taliaferro et al., 2010). These forms of active participation foster the acquisition of social and personal competencies, which in turn strengthen individuals' capacity to manage stress and effectively navigate challenges (Delamere, 2009). Results of this and previous research implicate the importance of promoting engaging youth in physically and socially active lifestyles as part of broader resilience and well-being interventions aimed at them.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that youth resilience is influenced by a complex interplay of internal characteristics, socio-economic conditions, and lifestyle factors. Consistent with previous research, our findings underscore the significance of youth engagement in fostering resilience among young people, bearing in mind that youth engagement may take various forms, including physical exercise, engagement in structured and unstructured leisure pursuits, and participation in school-related or volunteer activities (Chen et al., 2023; Chiu & Chai, 2021, Eccles et al., 2003; McCarthy & Hatcher, 1990).

By integrating theoretical insights with empirical findings, this study underscores the need for developing and implementing targeted interventions that enhance resilience and promote overall well-being among youth. It also highlights the importance of multi-level support systems - spanning family, school, and community involvement—in fostering resilience.

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Angažovanje mladih i rezilijentnost

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APSTRAKT

Rezilijentnost je prepoznata kao ključni faktor psihološke dobrobiti i pozitivnog razvoja mladih. Shodno tome, istraživanje varijabli koje doprinose poboljšanju rezilijentnosti privlači značajnu pažnju. Ovo istraživanje ispituje korelaciju između nivoa angažovanja mladih i rezilijentnosti, kao i razlike u svakom od konstrukata u odnosu na ispitivane socio-demografske karakteristike. Uzorak je obuhvatio 200 ispitanika starosti 19 do 29 godina. Rezultati su pokazali da je ukupni nivo angažovanja među ispitanicima bio umeren. Nisu primećene statistički značajne razlike u angažovanju mladih u odnosu na pol, finansijski status ili druge ispitivane socio-demografske karakteristike. Kada je u pitanju rezilijentnosti mladih, utvrđene su statistički značajne razlike u odnosu na pol, procenjenu finansijsku situaciju i status zaposlenja. Utvrđena je značajna umerena pozitivna korelacija između angažovanja mladih i rezilijentnosti, što sugeriše da je povećano angažovanje povezano sa većom rezilijentnošću među mladima. Implikacije ovog istraživanja ukazuju na značaj osmišljavanja sveobuhvatnih intervencija zasnovanih na aktivnostima koje poboljšavaju rezilijentnost i promovišu opšte blagostanje mladih. Takođe ističe važnost sistema podrške na više nivoa koji obuhvataju porodicu, školu i učešće zajednice u negovanju rezilijentnosti mladih.

Ključne reči: angažovanje, fizičko angažovanje, društveno angažovanje, rezilijentnost, mladi