

## Research Article

# INFLUENCE OF PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN SCHOOL ADAPTATION IN POST WAR CONTEXT- MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF -REGULATION

LeunitaMakutsaMakila

Kibabii University, Kenya.

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### ABSTRACT

Self-regulation is among the resiliency factors identified by most studies that act as a buffer and regulatory mechanisms through which children mediate their interpersonal relations and self-esteem. The ability to self-regulate behaviour is one of the most important protective factors in relation with resilience and should be fostered especially in at-risk children. Previous research has characterized these children as having behaviours indicating lack of foresight. As an internal characteristic it combines with external environmental context and person-environmental transactional processes to manipulate trauma occurrence. The aim of the present study was to test the hypothetical relationship between these personal variables. It was hypothesized that self-regulation would be associated with and would be a good predictor of resilience, and that low-medium-high levels of self-regulation would lead to similar levels of resilience. Self-regulation Questionnaire (SRQ) was used to collect data. The sample consisted of 100 children aged 9 to 17 years, who were in school. The data revealed that self-regulation was low hence the children seemed to have a deficiency in this protective factor. More significantly, evidence from this study shows that the depleted personal resources (self-regulation skills) as a result of experiencing traumatic events early in life (such as war) can pose a tremendous challenge in school adaptation. This renders children vulnerable and helpless in navigating through school to attain academic achievement. As a result, children continue to struggle to cope with traumatic experiences of bad situations as well as adapting to the school environment.

**Keywords:** Self-regulation, Resilience, School Adaptation, Trauma.

### INTRODUCTION

There are increasing concerns over escalation of conflicts in many parts of the world. These conflicts are globally manifested through wars, civilian deaths, and kidnappings, overthrow of regimes, violent protests and crackdowns, mass shootings, robberies among other things (Crawford, 2008; Blagojevic, 2012). The impact of these conflicts on the world populations is immense. In conflicts where terrorizing civilians has become a routine means to political and military ends, women and children are deliberately targeted for torture and death. Children exposed to war go through adverse experiences that are traumatizing which are likely to affect their development hence adaptation to school. Additionally, children exposed to the effects of war have been found to develop more socio-emotional and behavioral problems, struggle academically and eventually drop out from school more often than children not in war zones (Shonkoff&Garner, 2012 ; Joshi, &Lewin, 2004)). This exposure to war conflicts may pose considerable threat to the optimal development of a child thus likely to affect school adaptation. Optimal development in children is partly manifested in good cognitive abilities, problem solving skills, effective emotional and behavioral regulation, positive self-concept (Masten,&Obradovic, 2006). Conflict advertently interferes with development of this construct that are important in school adaptation (Joseph, 2004). War exposure can lead to disturbances in cognitive functioning, emotional difficulties such as depression and anxiety, and behavior and peer problems which has both direct and indirect effects to school adaptation (Broekman,2011) Cognitive problems associated with exposure to war violence comprise trauma which is one of the most direct threats to the developmental task of school adaptation and affect academic achievement. The concept of trauma has its roots in the medical term

for wound, and mental trauma is symbolization for bodily injuries and is defined as an event that overwhelms the individual's coping resources. It is generally used for a variety of overwhelming events in life, but also includes natural catastrophes, such as earthquakes and man-made violence such as war. Trauma is exemplified by violent shock, the idea of a wound and the idea of consequences affecting the whole organism" (Janoff-Bulman, 2002). Traumatic exposure involves a confrontation with actual or threatened death, serious injury, or other threat to physical integrity. The probability of trauma is high among the children who are exposed to war atrocities. Trauma from wars not only impairs competencies in cognitive functioning such as emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships but also denies children the environment that can foster cognitive development. Trauma affects the developing brain in that the brain structures that regulate emotion, memory, and behavior can be smaller in size thereby affecting learning and development. The spiral effects of developmental delays are manifested in aspects of academic competence such as poor reading ability and poor social skills such as self-regulation which have a bearing on school performance. Consequently, studies link exposure to war adversity with lower IQ scores, poorer language skills, decrements in visual-motor integration skills and problems with attention and memory (Acknicar, 2013; Chukwuorji&Chukwuedozie 2010). Moreover, research shows that the cognitive effects of war exposure affect more than children's academic performance (Kaminer, Hardy, Heath, Mosdell, &Bawa, 2013) For example, children who have disturbed emotions are likely not to be sensitive to important social cues and expectations . Besides they may find themselves struggling with school rules, how to relate with peers, and how to submit to classroom instructions. For instance, a child who struggles with school rules may find him/herself on the wrong side thus spend most of the time doing punishments, which may not only affect their performance but also lead to a negative attitude towards school. Similarly, poor peer relationships may lead to apathy that may influence school adaptation negatively. Healthy adaptation to school

therefore includes both cognitive and social adaptation. For example, children should have the ability to control their impulsive behaviors, to cope with problems with peers and adults as well as being able to understand the routine of the classroom (Heaton, 2013). Successful adaptation to school can be built on healthy cognitive and socio-behavioral development (Taha, 2012). This requires an environment that is conducive to support development of cognition. According to Perez (2009), social environment influences human behavior through psychological mechanisms of self-system. Therefore, although exposure to war may not directly influence the development of cognitive abilities, it influences the degree to which people may develop personal factors that are important in functioning. Perez (2009) argues that self-efficacy beliefs and other self-regulatory influences are affected by the social environment. The social environment, which was the focus of this study, had been affected by protracted conflict. However although all children in a war zone experience war effects personal factors such as self-regulation skills mediate the on the outcome of school adaptation resilience expected that personal factors will mediate to some find new strength to transcend adversity and their limits, while others remain resilient.

### Models of Resilience

Resilience theory proposed by Masten and Coatsworth (cited in Goldstein and Brooks, 2005, p.11), Bronfenbrenner and Grouter (cited in Kumper, 1999) is enshrined in the three models referred to as single-faceted models as they epitomize resilient developments and response in children namely: compensation, challenge and protection. Compensatory factor is a variable that does not eliminate risk but neutralizes exposure to risk (Bender and Castro, 2004). The compensatory factor focuses on individual attributes, for example, methods individual's use to decipher problems they face daily or how social support systems such as family neutralize stressful events. Risk factor refers to a factor that is likely to restrict or hamper successful development in children. Hence, compensatory factors do not interrelate with risk factors, but rather have a direct and self-regulating influence on the aftermath of interest and do immensely contribute on the expected outcome (Bender and Castro, 2004). Challenge model treat stressors as potential enhancers of successful adaptation. In the challenge model, previously stressful events can potentially enhance competence (Bender and Castro, 2004). This implies that if a child successfully overcomes any challenge or trial, it helps equip him/her to confront the next difficulty. Failure to surmount the challenge success full, exposes the individual to risk. The challenge model describes a curvilinear relationship between stress and adjustment. In this model, stressors are defined as potential competence enhancers. The protective factors model (also called promotive) describes an interactive relation between stress and personal attributes that accounts for an individual's level of adjustment; that is, personal attributes either dampen or amplify the impact of stress as a variable. Personal attributes that are positive and protective factors act as immunity against stress. Conversely, personal vulnerabilities serve to pronounce the effects of stress. An individual's level of adjustment is affected by the interaction of protective processes and vulnerability factors with risk variables, rather than having direct effects on their own. Hence, a protective factor interacts with a risk factor to minimize the impact of exposure to risk, thereby reducing likelihood of a negative outcome (Troy and Mauss, 2011). In relation to this study, protective factor models test how protective factors moderate the effect of risk on the predicted outcome, and alter or modify the child's response to the risk factors. Garnezy (2001) described three models of resilience versus vulnerability, which explain the contribution of personal characteristics and stress on adjustment. In the compensatory model, stressors and personal attributes combine additively to predict competence. For

instance, when attributes (for example self-regulation) are held constant, competence co-varies negatively with stress level. Conversely, holding stress constant, competence co-varies positively with strength of adaptive attributes. The compensatory model suggests that individuals can be protected from stress by personal qualities or strength. Therefore, according to the resiliency model, if individuals experience disruption to their lives, they rely on internal protective factors, such as self-regulation as well as external protective factors, such as social networks, to restore balance in their lives. Applied to this study, there was an association between traumatic experiences (risk factor) and selected personal attribute; self-regulation (compensatory factors) in the prediction of adaptation to school (outcome). Thus, when one of the personal attributes such as self-regulation remains constant, it will co-vary positively with school adaptation thereby promoting academic performance. The selected personal attribute was hypothesized to influence the children's adaptation to school.

### Risk and Protective Factors

Risk factors are all stressful life events, such as poverty, family breakdown, experience of some form of violence, emotional loss, disease, unemployment, wars, disasters, or other factors that theoretically increase the likelihood of the onset of a problem or maintain the problem (Rutter, 1985). However, research has shown that mere exposure to risk factors, even in substantial number, does not necessarily translate into risk behaviors (Dillon *et al.*, 2007), given that most people are able to deal with risk quite satisfactorily (Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarelli & Vlahov, 2007). In fact, several studies actually tend to focus on the effects of the promotion of protective factors, shifting the attention from risks to actions and strategies that are effective in the promotion of positive psycho-logical adjustment and development (Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1985, 2012; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Protective factors are the individual characteristics or contextual/external conditions that works dynamic mechanisms that help children and young people to resist or to balance the risks to which they are exposed to (Rutter, 1985, 2012). Personality traits, perseverance, determination, self-efficacy, creativity, coherence, and self-awareness are some internal attributes that are positively related to resilience (e.g., Affi & Macmillan, 2011; Smokowski, Reynolds, & Bezrucco, 1999). Family support, positive appraisals, and quality interaction with parents (Affi & Macmillan, 2011; Carbonell *et al.*, 2002; Smokowski *et al.*, 1999; Vanderbilt-Adriance & Shaw, 2008), good interpersonal relations (Carbonell *et al.*, 2002; Sameroff & Rosenblum, 2006), teacher and school support (Brooks, 2006; Smokowski *et al.*, 1999), as well as community relationships and resources (Davies, Thind, Chandler, & Tucker, 2011; Sameroff & Rosenblum, 2006) are some of the most studied external protective factors.

### Self-regulation as a protective factor in children

A personal competence that looks particularly relevant to the resilience levels of individuals is their self-regulation ability (Dishion & Connell, 2006; Gardner, Dishion, & Connell, 2008). Self-regulation is defined as the capacity of the individual to delay or suppress behavior, tendencies and desires, abide by social rules, control and regulate emotions, focus on goal directed stimuli and maintain attention (Baumeister, 2007). Developmental theorists define self-regulation as ability to activate, monitor, and inhibit behavior, attention, emotions or cognitive processes in a flexible and adjustable way as a response to internal or external stimuli, for the achievement of desired outcomes (Joormann, Carver, Johnson, 2012). Although different definitions of self-regulation exist in the literature (for a review, see Martin & McLellan, 2008), most of them seem to share the idea that this is an ability that involves the capacity to maintain

effort and orientation toward a desired objective, while controlling the immediate impulses that arise (Martin & McLellan, 2008; Neal & Carey, 2005).

### Development and Role Self- Regulation

Self-regulation is an important set of skills that children develop from infancy through adolescence. These skills are internalizing, organizing functions that filter, coordinate, and temporarily organizes experiences. They include attention controls, strategic planning, regulation of goal-directed behaviors, self and social monitoring, abstract reasoning and emotional regulation (Bauer and Baumeister, 2011; Mcewan, 2012). Self-regulation (the motivation and ability to control one's emotions and behaviors in potentially stressful situations) affects children's ability to adapt to and learn in formal school settings. Self-regulation develops through early experiences and social interactions, where caregivers and other significant individuals structure and shape children's trajectories (Trentacosta, & Shaw, 2009). Development of this self-regulatory skills is gradual over the course of childhood and into adolescence with self-regulatory competence initially developing from social sources and subsequently shifting to self-sources in a manner that is reminiscent of a traditional apprenticeship ((Trentacosta, & Shaw, 2009). In other words development of self-regulation is a product of reciprocal determinism as argued by Bandura (1986). For example, Effeney, & Bahr (2013) suggest a three stage developmental sequence in which learners move from being regulated by others (e.g., instruction and guidance from a teacher) to being able to perform the task with limited guidance (e.g., hints) before reaching a level of internalization or mastery. This has the implication that social environment as well as personal factors and behavior of individuals as they develop through stages are important about development of self-regulation. Through live experiences and vicarious learning children develop self-regulatory skills (Schunk, 2001) Adaptive development depends upon children's ability to manage their reactions and specifically, their task-related behaviors in the school context. Remembering and using information, attending to and understanding what others are saying, directing motor actions, and persisting toward goals are all indicators of adaptive behavioral regulation (Effeney, Carroll & Bahr, 2013; Murray, Rosanbalm, Christopoulos & Hamoud, 2015). Research has revealed that self-regulation is a marker of adaptive development (Obradović, and Masten, 2006). As a result, significant differences in behavior regulation exist among children when they enter formal schooling among other things (Matuga, 2009). Deficits in behavior regulation may cause social and academic adjustment difficulties in school (Mcewan, 2012). Many researchers (e.g., Judge, Erez, Bono & Theresa, 2002; Hamil, 2003; Sautelle, Hattie, 2015); Zimmerman, (2007); have found self-regulation to be one of the factors that influence resilience to school adaptation. Effective self-regulated learners actively set goals, decide on appropriate strategies, plan their time, organize and prioritize materials and information, shift approaches flexibly, monitor their learning by seeking feedback on their performance and make appropriate adjustments for future learning activities (Effeney & Bahr, 2013; Splan, Brooks & BrooLyes, 2011; Murray, 2015). Therefore self-regulation is an important aspect of learning and the extent to which school students become self-regulators of their own learning influences school adaptation and their academic success (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2007). Positive outcomes of a self-regulated child include: higher academic achievement, school engagement, peer social acceptance and avoidance of negative behaviors (Whitesell, Mitchell, & VITPT, 2009; Taha, Graham, Kumwenda, 2012). A research with young children has shown that early developing executive functioning and self-regulatory abilities in pre-school children predict positive adaptation to school' and the development of early academic abilities

(Blair & Razza, 2007; Maginness ;2007). In another study early emotion regulation ability, specifically, have been implicated in young children's capacity to follow instructions, focus attention and cooperate with teachers and peers (Howes, Phillipsen, & Peisner-Feinberg, (2000). At the same time, a growing number of studies have demonstrated that metacognitive and self-regulatory abilities are learnt and are highly teachable. Morrison, Claire Cameron, Ponitz & Megan M. McClelland (2012) provided a meta-analysis of a range of studies across the primary school age-range, for example, and revealed impressive effect sizes for interventions teaching self-regulation strategies to children in this age-range. Self-regulated learning has been linked to engagement in many tasks (Whitebread & Basilio, 2012; Stephanie, Freia, & Rainer, 2014), effective study habits, effort, and pro-social behavior in the classroom (Credé & Kuncel, 2008); and course grades (Duckworth & Seligman (2005). Muhammad, Naeemullah & Nadeem, 2010; Morrison, Claire Cameron, Ponitz & Megan, 2012; Matuga, 2009). On the other hand poor self-regulation has been linked to high rates of expulsion, most dramatically in pre-school classrooms (Mcewan, 2012; Whitebread & Basilio, 2012). Studies also reveal that adolescents who do not regulate their emotions and behavior are more likely to engage in risk-taking and unhealthy behaviors, such as drug use, antisocial behavior, abnormal eating habits and obesity (Smith & Beggs, 2016; Shonkoff, & Garner, 2012). As children and youth develop the capacity to regulate their emotions and behavior represents a shift from vulnerability to resilience. The ability to self-regulate is the foundation for compliance with accepted standards of conduct at home, school, and later, in the workplace. Self-regulation is often thought of as a dual process —cognitive and social-emotional (Blair, & Razza, 2007; Zimmerman, 2007). Cognitive self-regulation is the degree to which children can be self-reflective, and can plan and think ahead. Children with these strengths are in control of their thoughts, and are able to monitor their behavior, evaluate their abilities, and are able to adjust their behavior, if necessary (Trentacosta, & Shaw, 2009). For example, if a self-regulated child knows there is an upcoming test, he or she chooses to study to be ready for the test, instead of hanging out with friends. Social-emotional self-regulation is the ability to inhibit negative responses and delay gratification (see Zimmerman, 2007). An individual with this ability is able to control his or her emotional reactions to positive and negative situations, as in the case of a child who can resist his immediate inclination to erupt into anger when a peer skips in front of him in the lunch line. This agrees with studies by Morrison, Ponitz, & McClelland (2012) citing Eisenberg, Smith, Sadovsky, & Spinrad (2004); Howse *et al.*, (2003) which link children's effective management of their emotions to positive behavioral and academic outcomes. Successful adaptation to challenges appears then to depend on how individuals manage their emotions, think constructively, regulate and direct their behavior, control automatic impulses, and act on the environment to change or decrease the sources of stress (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Harding Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001). Therefore, the study of self-regulation can be particularly relevant to understanding the resilience levels of the individuals, if we take into account the necessity of managing these personal challenges to construct an adjusted life pathway (Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardslee, 2009; Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008; Lengua, 2002). There-fore, self-regulation exerts an effect in the adaptation to adversity, given that it is a process in which individuals take an active role in the activation, monitoring, inhibition, and/or adaptation of their behavior, emotions, and cognitive strategies to achieve the desired goals (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008; Moilanen, 2007). Some individual and environmental factors, either related with family, peers, or community, are also positively related to self-regulation. Despite the consensus about self-regulation as a stable characteristic throughout age (Buckner *et al.*, 2009; Shoda,

Mishel,&Peake, 1990), research has shown that it tends to be higher in girls (Buckner *et al.*, 2009; García del Castillo & Dias, 2009; McCabe& Brooks-Gunn, 2007).Family environment–family structural conditions, but especially affect, parental responsiveness, and control strategies and the expos. Exposure to traumatic incidents such as war affects children's 'self-regulation. Studies by Ndeti *et al.*, 2007; Papadopoulos, 2007; Rothe, 2005 Rutta, 2012) revealed that there exists positive relations among war experiences and children's development of behavioral regulation. A study by Shonkoff& Garner (2012 found that stressful situations interfere with attention span of learners while experiencing a traumatic event early in life can have detrimental effects on children's affective, cognitive, behavioral, physiological, relational, sensory-motor and social regulation abilities. Shonkoff, (2012) commenting on stressful early environments suggests how they may shape particular patterns of brain activation and behavior. This has the implication that environment that is characterized by violence may adversely affect development .of self-regulation in children. Studies on post-traumatic stress disorders demonstrate deficits in abstract reasoning, problem solving, and flexibility in thought process and frustration tolerance and link this with poor regulation skills (Garnezy, 2001; Gartrell, 2011). Taha, Graham, Kumwenda *et al.*,(2012) found out that war-related experiences expose children to unacceptably high levels of stressors, including higher rates of learning difficulties, and high school drop-out, among children from war tone areas families (Ying, Lin and Jiang; 2014; Zolkoski, S& Bullock;2012). Understanding how children navigate in such situation in order to adapt to school is crucial. From the above run down, we can observe that here area number of factors at the personal level that are strongly correlated with the development of resilience (Dillon *et al.* (2007). These factors include the ability to: (a) operate a scheme to acknowledge, interpret, and predict potentially dangerous situations that occur in the social context; (b) develop a set of goals and regulate his/her behaviour in order to pursue these goals over time and in different contexts; and (c) promote positive beliefs about his/her self-regulatory capacity, to put his/her decisions into practice by using adequate skills and solve functional problems. Most of these abilities are essentially self-regulation abilities, a process in which individuals take an active role shaping their own destiny even in contexts characterized by a high psycho-social risk (Dishion& Connell, 2006; Masten&Coatsworth, 1998).Despite this evidence, few studies explore the mediating role of self-regulation in the relationship between protective factors and resilience. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the existence of this mediating effect in a sample of adolescents, in order to contribute to a broader perspective about the relationship between protective factors and resilience, considering family-, peer-, school-, and community-related factors.

The study was an embedded design mainly a correlational model. Embedded design is a mixed method design in which one data set provides a supportive, secondary role in a study based primarily on the other data type (Creswell, 2006). In this research qualitative data mainly from phenomenological approach was used to support correlational data. Resilienceis subjective and it is only through expressing personal views as experienced as children interact in the school system and their personal attributes (self-regulatory skills) and resilience in school that one could begin to understand the resilience level. Aphenomenological approach aims at in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern it which cannot be arrived at by use of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Mitchell &Jolley, 2007). At the same time there was needed to quantify the relationship between the selected attributes to be able gauge the strength. For this reason, embedded design was found to be most appropriate

### Sample

The study utilized a sample of 100 participants (children) and eight teachers. To choose the study respondents, purposive, and stratified random techniques were adopted. Mt.Elgon sub county in Kenya has four Districts. Two Districts out of the four were purposively sampled taking into consideration the impact of ethnic war on each of them. Further, four schools, two primary and two secondary within this geographical clusters were purposively sampled taking into consideration age, gender and the population density. Illustrated below are the sample distribution of the questionnaires and the FGD's respondents according to age and gender.

### METHODOLOGY

For this study, participants were given five items answered on a 5-point Likert scale Respondents were rated how true each item is for them, ranging from 1 (*not at all true forme*) to 4 (*really true for me*). A sum or average of the items was calculated. Higher scores indicated ability to self-regulate Quantitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)) software, version 23. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted on the collected data. Logistic regression was run to find out the correlation between self-regulation and resilience levels. Qualitative data from interviews and FGD's was transcribed verbatim, coded on item – by –item and analyzed thematically as per research objectives and according to the emerging themes. This involved examination of common emerging themes from the in depth information generated by the respondents. Presentations were

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Relationship between Self-regulation and Resilience levels of children Influencing school adaptation

Logistic regression was run to find out the correlation between self-regulation and resilience levels in school adaptation. In logistic regression the independent variables predict the values of dependent variables. The test was used because of the dichotomous nature of dependent variable. It was also used because there was no inter-correlation among the predictors. The results of regression test are shown in the table below.

**Table 4.8 Logistic model for resilience on self-regulation predictors**

Variable Name	Parameter Estimates	Std. Error	Wald $\chi^2$	DF	p-value	Odds Ratio	95 % CI	
Intercept	3.9324	1.4829	7.0322	1	0.008**	-	-	-
Stuck with activity till done	-0.3171	0.2088	2.3066	1	0.128	0.728	0.484	1.096
Concentrate on one activity at a time	-0.3255	0.2007	2.6303	1	0.100†	0.722	0.487	1.070
Talk calmly without losing control	0.1077	0.1856	0.3372	1	0.562	1.114	0.774	1.602

tested were found to be significant. There was no correlation between self-regulation and resilience levels with  $X^2=9.8796$   $df=7$   $p=0.100$ . All indicators of self-regulation had no significant effect on resilience on school adaptation. This is against the background of understanding that many researchers (e.g., Maureen & Kamloop (2015); Kinniburgh, Blaustein & Spinnazola (2005); Mcewan (2012); Dias, José, Castillo, & Moilanen, (2014); Zimmerman, (2008); Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011) have found self-regulation to be one of the factors that influence resilience to school adaptation. Effective self-regulated learners actively set goals, decide on appropriate strategies, plan their time, organize and prioritize materials and information, shift approaches flexibly, monitor their learning by seeking feedback on their performance and make appropriate adjustments for future learning activities (Saverimuthu, 2015; Shehu J. & Mokgwathi, 2008; Jaffee & Gallop, 2010). Self-regulation is an important aspect of learning and the extent to which school students become self-regulators of their own learning influences school adaptation and their academic success (Effeney, 2013; Morrison *et al.*, 2012; Matuga, 2009; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Effeney, (2013) citing, Pintrich, (2000); Svinicki, (2010); Zimmerman, (2008); Zimmerman & Schunk, (2011) observed that effective self-regulated learners actively set goals, decide on appropriate strategies, plan their time, organize and prioritize materials and information, shift approaches flexibly, monitor their learning by seeking feedback on their performance and make appropriate adjustments for future learning activities. Similarly, the social cognitive theory that informed this study posits that individuals self-organizing and self-regulating rather than reactive organs shaped by the environment or driven by concealed inner impulses (Bandura, 2006). As a result application self-control practices demonstrate that people are able to regulate themselves. The findings to the contrary seem to agree with prior research by Bellamy, (2004). Baummeister & Vohs, (2007); Betancourt & Tanveer, (2008); Campbell, (2014) who found that children experiencing risk due to neighborhood violence have poorer self-regulation and academic achievement than those not experiencing such risks. The findings seem to suggest the power of environmental determinism in which the self-regulation of individuals can be inhibited by opportunities within the environment. The current study has shown that the children had low self-regulation in relation the activities that would build resilience to school adaptation. They are limited in concentrating on an activity at a time, could not set their plans and goals, could not stick to an activity' and yet these are tasks that promote resilience in children. However, reflecting on the environment and targeted population of this study, it is possible that the development of self-regulation was strangled at an early age of development of children. Stressful situations have been known to affect development of self-regulation negatively. Stressful situations require constant attention to and maintenance of intense emotional information, leaving little opportunity for the intellectual exploration and learning that astimuli-rich environment affords (Copeland, *et al.*, 2007; Ebling, 2002; Gartrell, 2011). Therefore, experiencing a traumatic event early in life can have detrimental effects on children's affective, cognitive, behavioral, physiological, relational, sensory-motor and social regulation abilities (Bellamy, 2004; Burstow, 2010). For example, Taha, Graham, Kumwenda *et al.*, (2012) observe that war-related experiences expose children to unacceptably high levels of stressors during a critical time in their psychological development. In their study they found out that stressors such as loss of secure environment impede on the growth and development of children. Children are also likely to develop behavioral disorders due to negative emotions experienced such as pain, anger, and bitterness. In addition, (Blair, 2007) notes that stronger negative emotional reactions (e.g. anger and anxiety) may impede children's ability to regulate their behavior in school settings where they need to deploy attention and persist in their work. Further, Maureen *et al.*, (2015) observed that variability in emotion regulation is

related to, and may challenge or enhance, children's ability to manage their task-related behavior hence reducing resilience in school adaptation. Therefore, though not expected the findings of the study were not surprising given the background of the children who took part in this study. The children who took part in this study have lived in a protracted conflict war zone and are direct or indirect victims of war violence and or witness to various horrors associated with war and are thus called war-affected children This early exposure to conflicts could have affected development of their self-capacity and thus adaptation to school system. From applied developmental perspective Murray *et al.*, (2015) observe that self-regulation enactment is influenced by a combination of individual and external factors including biology, skills, motivation, caregiver support, and environmental context. Accordingly, these factors interact with one another to support self-regulation development. Reflecting on the targeted population for this study where the sample was drawn from, it is possible to argue that the participants were deprived in many aspects that appear to have compromised both International biological and external support system thus affecting their self-regulation development. For proper development children need parents to give them love, they have basic needs which must be provided for, they need role models to emulate and more importantly security that could provide the learning environment to shape their response to different situations. However, to a larger extent these are compromised in war times. Protracted war environment are marked by high, poverty, insecurity and uncertainties that challenge one's capacity to regulate them, rather it is the situations at hand that dictate how people behavior. For instance children could be playing but all of a sudden they here gunshot. Common sense would dictate that they will run away for survival. This could be a reflex action due to of fear of being gunned down. An environment riddled with conflict as it were in Mt. Elgon sub-county, Kenya, the children may not find a safer place to shield themselves hence conditioned to be hyper vigilant. This negates the construction of self-regulation which is only possible when individuals have some degree of control of their lives. The behaviorist further argues for both classical and operant conditioning to attain self-regulation. Through positive and negative reinforcement children learn how to control themselves. Uncertainties of war complicate the shaping process as children may lack people who could monitor and shape their behavior to facilitate developmental of self-regulation as they grow. For example parents are assumed to be proximal forces of development for young people. However, children in war zone may grow up without reliable care givers. According to Vygotsky's (1978) view on socio cultural account, higher psychological functions are a product of social interaction and not merely a result of maturation or a construction through the child's experience alone. Thus, caregivers play a fundamental role in the development of children's cognition and self-regulation. They first have the full responsibility over the task regulating children's actions through language and other tools (Perry, 2001; Persson, 2009) Whitebread & Basilio (2012) observed that self-regulation develops through early experiences and social interactions, where caregivers and other significant individuals structure and shape children's trajectories. War events are disturbing and in most cases they rupture the social structures that act as safety nets for children thus interfering with development of self-regulation skills. Moreover, successfully self-regulating depends upon environmental influences and interactions with others as well as child factors and predispositions. In essence, relationships are important for development of self-regulation. Heaton (2013) observe that self-regulation is motivated by desire to control self to fit in a desired group. This he describes as the social brain which develops pro-social attributes that facilitate interaction. The implication is that the society in which the children grow up from has a significant role to play in development of self-regulation. The society in Mt Elgon region

of Kenya then was riddled with violence and could not offer such a possibility. The wars ruptured the social structures such as the family, the church and the peer group that offer a sense of belonging to the children. Hence the children lacked the environment that could facilitate optimal growth hence limiting the development of self-regulation. Joormann, Carver & Johnson (2012) arguing from a bio-behavioral perspective, observe that self-regulation is associated with better health and relationship among other factors. Accordingly, self-regulation unfolds within the bodily organism which requires effective nourishment for successful development. Although this study did not examine the health issues of the children sampled, evidence from war-torn regions suggests that such environments are prone to high poverty that may compromise the nutritional needs. In other words, it is unlikely that the children in the area of study grew up in an environment with resources that would facilitate self-regulation development. From a psychodynamic perspective the theorist Adler (1870) observed that social interest was key to a motivator of behavior. Accordingly, social identity is one of the key aspects in development of self-regulation. This is influenced by feelings that one's life is consistent and is headed for meaningful direction, social inner solidarity with ideals and values of some groups, feeling of social support and validation. This requires that the inner sense of sameness and continuity be meaningful to significant others and corresponds to their perceptions and expectations. However, social solidarity including the values that bound the society to give children direction in development is all violated in the war experiences. Continuity in development is shrouded with uncertainty; hence children are likely to remain stunted in their emotional and cognitive growth. This will in turn interfere with the development of self-regulation skills that play a significant role in school adaptation. Reflecting on the population of this study, the social environment appears to have been harsh and unpredictable to the extent that the growing children appeared to have lacked any motivation for self-regulation. For example, the children in the study did not find a way of sticking to goals and plans, social standards that serve as a guide line to development of self-regulation appear to have been largely missing as people struggled for survival. Hence it's not surprising that the children in Mt. Elgon measured low on self-regulation skill. Based on the results of this study and the discussion of the findings, children are only able to regulate themselves in a secure and predictable environment that will enable them to engage in goal-directed behavior such as organizing behavior, controlling impulses and solving problems constructively. Children in Mt. Elgon seem not to have had a secure environment that could foster this self-regulation. The implication is that the children may lack some characteristics that foster school adaptation. From the findings, children were not 'aware of feelings before letting them out', and that they could not 'talk calmly without losing control'. This implies that many of the children in Mt. Elgon were unable to manage emotions. Interviews with teachers revealed some of these characteristics as exemplified by the following excerpt:

*...Apollo often fights with the other children. They would hit each other. She describes his behavior as "wild." He is jealous, aggressive and fights with the younger children. His performance is wanting...*

*Teacher (Male)*

As can be seen from the quote above, some children have anger that is difficult to control. Apollo does not seem to be sensitive about others, an indication of poor social skills. What is described as wild behavior could mean disruptive behavior that does not augur well with school adaptation. Such a pupil could be disruptive to the others making learning not only difficult for him but the rest of his classmates. Many researchers such as Bennett (2015), Sautelle *et al.*, (2015), Richard *et al.*, (2004), and Kinniburgh, Blaustein,

& Spinnazola (2005), argue that self-regulation to a larger extent is the ability to manage emotions. Similarly, Buckner *et al.* (2003) observes that individuals who manage their emotions well also display positive behavioral and academic outcomes. In contrast, children who cannot control their emotions are disruptive in school (Mcewan, 2012; Kain, 2010). For example, children who are easily angered will have more difficulty concentrating on school work than those who can effectively modulate their emotional reactions as exemplified in the quote below;

A teacher had this to say;

*...a number of these children still have issues...they are naughty, when you leave class they jump out, some will not mix easily, most are trouble makers, you find them in fights, in coarse jokinings, like form two class has many issues, even their class mean grade is down, give them assignments they will not finish on time....*

*Teacher, female*

In another excerpt a participant had this to say:

*...some of friends' characters are not good. but I have always told them not to drink alcohol. In fact some even smoke. There are those who like being absent from school. I don't think I need a girl-friend ...just because others have, no, I need to learn hard and help my mother.*

*Donald, 15*

In FGDs Trevor, 16 had the following to say;

*...we saw these things happen, those ones we don't talk about it. When I remember how my brother disappeared and my father was killed I cannot play with someone from that community, how? Can I really allow them to join our discussion groups? I just go away, but...anyway... I don't see why I should talk to them.*

*Trevor 16 (female), FGDs*

Some children had been suspended from school as indicated in the quote below;

*...Michael and Jonah are a nuisance. They spunk others, make a lot of noise, I have talked to them severally. Even the deputy has punished them hoping they change don't know how to live with others well. They fight, steal and snatch bread, pens... from others...about once or twice they have been on suspension ...*

*Teacher, female*

From the above quotes, some children display aggressive characters that are known to interfere with the learning environment. They are engaged in truancy, are naughty and they don't value studying. They seem to be defiant to school authority. For example, Michael and Jonah were not keen on maintaining healthy relationships with the peers. Others were abusing drugs and still some had lives that were riddled with hate and unforgiveness (FGDs). Such kind of behaviors not only affect the children's academic performance, but it also disrupts the normal learning environment and are a pointer to a child who lacks self-regulation skills. Self-regulated learners will engage in many tasks required of a student to earn high course grades such as; concentrating on difficult new concepts, attending to the teacher rather than joking with classmates, practicing skills repeatedly to the point of fluency, working on homework alone rather than socializing with friends (Troy, 2011; Blair and Razza, 2007; Kinniburgh *et al.*, 2005). From the aforementioned, it is clear that exposure to traumatic events such as war affects the emergence and development of self-regulation skills in children. The narratives of the affected children, teachers and from FGDs as evidenced by the excerpts above appear



to demonstrate how they were not able to regulate themselves. Arguably, the exposure to war had de-capacitated them thereby making it difficult to influence resilience and adjustment to school. Interventions should therefore focus on promoting the development of self-regulation.

### Summary

Self-regulation is an important aspect in school adaptation and it has also been credited to play a promotive role in resilience. Self-regulation skill was found not to be significant in relation to resilience in school adaptation. Self-regulation is a key variable for healthy functioning but could be adversely affected by social environment that is unpredictable. Therefore these results were not surprising though not expected given the background of the children who took part in this study. As discussed in the study experiencing a traumatic event early in life can have detrimental effects on children's effective, cognitive and behavioral, physiological, relational, sensory-motor and social regulation abilities. Therefore the study observed that there is great need to focus on promoting the development of self-regulation in early childhood since it is critical as it has a key role in learning, development and socialization.

### CONCLUSION

Evidence from this study shows that the depleted personal resources (self-regulation skills) as a result of experiencing traumatic events early in life (such as war) can pose a tremendous challenge in school adaptation. This renders children vulnerable and helpless in navigating through school to attain academic achievement. As a result, children continue to struggle to cope with traumatic experiences of bad situations as well as adapting to the school environment. Therefore interventions should focus on strengthening institutions that enhance resilience in children such as the family, school, and community. This may serve as a compensatory factor that could counter-balance the negative effects of growing up in a protracted war environment marked poverty, insecurity and uncertainties that challenge children's capacity to regulate them hence affecting development of their self-capacity and thus adaptation to school system.

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