

## **Personality profile of the invulnerable children**

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### **ABSTRACT**

“Disadvantaged, but competent children are called “invulnerable”, for whom disadvantaged are “boon” than “curse” or in other words, they turn their disadvantages in to advantages for them. Present paper attempts to study the personality characteristics of invulnerable children selected from the normal population by taking in to consideration of their disadvantaged environment as well as psychosocial competence from the total population of about 2000 children in the age group of 10 to 13 years. The peer nomination, peer checked and teacher rating scales were used to select and validate the selection of invulnerable and vulnerable comparable groups of children. Cattle’s High School Personality Questionnaire was administered to yield personality characteristics of invulnerable children. The study revealed that the invulnerable children in spite of their disadvantages were persistent, moralistic, disciplined, consistently ordered, concerned about moral standards and rules, relatively more flexible, self-possessed and socially bold. They were found to be the product of all types of adversities, deprivations and disadvantages, still because of their positive self esteem and feeling of self-worth, they maintain the spirit of acting, while interacting with the environmental adversities, instead of succumbing to the conditions”.

**Key Words :** Invulnerable, Personality, Disadvantages, Environmental adversities

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Who is invulnerable? :**

An “Invulnerable Child” is like a “lotus in the mud”. In spite of being reared in disadvantaged home and socio-cultural and economic environment, he/she excels in life. Anthony (1974), a pioneer of invulnerability research wrote: “there are many inequalities into which children are born in this unfairly constituted world -inequalities of rank, of riches, of opportunities, of basic endowment-all of which have been with us for so long a time that they are more or less taken for granted. One of the most significant inequalities for the future well being of the individual is the inequality, of risk, that is, the uneven distribution of stress through the population of children. This means that for some the world is secure, stable, and predictable: they are born into acceptance, concern and care; they are planned for, hoped for, and welcomes. For other the reverse is true. Life for them is short, sharp and brutish. They have parents who hate them from conception, reject them from birth, batter them as infants, neglect them as toddlers, and institutionalized them or have them fostered at the drop of a hat. Nevertheless, two children from the same stock, the same womb, the same propitious or unpropitious environment may end quite differently with one falling psychologically ill

and the other apparently blossoming. A super child may come out of the ghetto and a sad and sorry child from the well- to- do suburbs.

These children who withstand and survive the disadvantages, deprivations, disturbances, and adversities of life; can well be compared to the “Golden-Lotus” (Swarna-Kamal); which means synthesizing in them the essences of gold (e.g. withstanding cutting, piercing burning, hammering, and still glittering) and lotus (e.g. Sobriety, purity, fragrance, etc.); and who remain healthy in unhealthy settings- have been termed as the “invulnerable”. Researches have regarded invulnerability as “high competence amidst high-risk” (Anthony, 1974), as “competence amidst disadvantage” (Garmezy, 1974), as stress resistance” (Rulter, 1978) and as “Vulnerable but invincible” (Werner and Smith, 1982). The mythological literature in India, like other great cultures, provides quite a few examples of invulnerable. Ekalavya, Karna, etc. are the examples from the “Mahabharata”. Rishi Valmiki, the writer of the “Ramayana”, was the hated bandit Ratnakar in his earlier life. The history of human kind records the deeds of many famous individuals who have displayed considerable amount of invulnerable behavior. Abraham Lincoln, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Bhima Bhoi (the famous saint-poet of Orissa), B.R. Ambedkar (the architect of Indian constitution), Lalbahadur Shastri (the late Prime Minister of India, Pele (one of the greatest soccer stars of all times) had one thing in common – their childhood was spent in poverty and deprivations. But the successful lives they lived prompt one to brand them as “invulnerable”.

According to Garmezy (1982), “Vulnerable have long been the province of our mental health disciplines; but prolonged neglect of the invulnerable child- the healthy child in an unhealthy setting has provided us with a false sense of security in erecting prevention models that are founded more on values than on facts”. The study of invulnerability can equip us with better knowledge for primary prevention. According to Werner (1984), the invulnerable children have recently become the focus of attention of a few researchers who have asked “what is right with these children, and by implication, how can we help other to become less vulnerable in the face of life’s adversities?” These researchers, instead of looking at risk or troubled children and asking, “what were wrong”, are studying the healthy kids who have beaten the odds and asking, “what made right”- truly a positive approach in studying the negative environment. Further, Dash and Hariharan (1988) stated that, “the whole area of the study of invulnerable children is quite unexplored, *i.e.* the positive influences of environmental disadvantages, stresses are risks on psychological development and mental health to understand the self correcting strengths of human beings”.

It has been said “prevention is better than cure”. One of the major goals of prevention in the area of mental health is the promotion of competence in its broadest sense (Dash and Hariharan, 1988). Patterns of resiliency may reveal how and when to facilitate competence in children at risk. By fostering healthy adaptation, effective coping, and needed competence in people and simultaneously by making sincere efforts to reduce mal-adaptation and helplessness in the face of adversities, a competent society can be created. As Werner and Smith (1982) have rightly stated, the invulnerable children still remain the keepers of our dream. Invulnerable children and adolescents are disadvantaged, but because of their cognitive, personality, motivational and /or social competence, and unique coping styles, they turn their disadvantages into advantages and emerge as successful and competent individuals in the society (Garmezy, 1982).

Potential moderating factors are identified from the literature on the basis of evidence that the variables like individual characteristics, family and extra family support network were significant risk or protective factors with respect to adaptation in children and adolescents. Protective factors that have been observed repeatedly in resilient children include temperamental characteristics,

such as activity level and sociability, and intelligent –dispositions that have strong genetic base (Scarr and McCartney, 1983); Dash (1987, 1988, 1992) and his colleagues in India have been investigating the dimensions of invulnerable children and adolescents with reference to normal and disadvantaged (tribal and lower cast children from poverty backgrounds) children. The stress resistant studies revealed that there are invulnerable with acquired resilience, who are exposed to cumulative traumas, but “bounce back” after each stress that they experience with successful rebound, then become increasingly resilient. They are interpersonally skilful, popular with peers and adults well regarded by themselves and other, active on their own behalf characterized by a strong sense of personal control, responsible for their own actions and self regulatory. They are reflective rather than impulsive and keep a good hold on their emotions.

According to Werner and Smith (1982), among the personality characteristics that differentiated the high-risk youth of Kauai from their peers with serious delinquencies and mental health problems, were a more internal locus of control, a more positive self-concept, and higher scores on the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) scales for responsibility, socialization, achievement via Conformance, and Femininity for both sexes. Further, resilient youth have been shown to be more responsible and achievement-oriented than their age-mates. They attain a greater degree of social maturity by the time they graduate from high school. They prefer structure in their lives and have internalized a positive set of values. They also share a great interest in matters labeled feminizes by conventional wisdom. They are more appreciative, gentle, nurturing, and socially perceptive than their peers who have difficulty coping with adversity (Werner, 1985). Moreover, they retain a belief, even in the face of great adversity, that they can exert considerable control over their fate.

Invulnerable/ resilient children appear to have increased levels of sensory neural integration, which help them to resist the effects of adversity; they show reflective rather than impulsive cognitive styles (Kagan, 1966) using extended trial action on thought (Rapaport, 1951). In addition, most resilient children demonstrate higher intelligence; more divergent or creative thinking in approaching problems; increased capacity to select out the particular aspects of adversity required to be overcome; and use of goal oriented strategies in order to plan means for taking these steps without becoming lost in the helplessness of the situation. They also maintain good control over feelings, with capacity to plan ahead and to think rather than to act. They show increased persistence and greater sense of mastery over their own lines. Murphy and Moriarty (1976) explained that the resilient child is an active, humorous, confident and competent child who is prepared to take risks, although not unrealistically can attend his approach flexibly, and as a result of repeated successful coping experiences has reason to feel confident of both inner and outer resources.

From the paper of Allred and Smith (1989) “The handy personality: cognitive and physiological responses to evaluate threat”, it was clearly evident that, hardy persons are hypothesized to be resistant to stress induced illness, because of their adoptive cognitive style and a subsequent reduced level of physiological arousal. As predictive, hardy subjects endorsed more positive self-statements as did less hardy subjects in the high threat situation. Moreover, handy persons are hypothesized to display commitment or involvement in daily activities, perceived control over life events, and a tendency to view unexpected change or potential threat as a positive challenge rather than as an aversive event. On the other hand no handy person in contrast is hypothesized to display alienation (*i.e.* lack of commitment), an external locus of control, and a tendency to view change as desirable. With regard to the personality type, the invulnerable children and adolescents may turn out to be “handy persons”. On the basis of these backdrops, present paper attempts to identify the invulnerable children from the normal population and study their personality profile in comparison to

the vulnerable children, in order to find the differences (if any). Further, it tries to identify the positive personality traits with invulnerable children, so the vulnerable children can be helped in developing these traits through training and interventions at school and family levels.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample:

The samples for this study were chosen from the four schools of an urban area *i.e.* Berhampur Town of Ganjam, the southern-most coastal district of the state of Orissa, India. In the initial stage a total of about 2000 students of grades 7 and 9 from four different schools took part in the peer-nomination technique. So a total of 48 adolescents (24 =Invulnerable and 24 = vulnerable were selected finally for the main study.

### Measures and tools used:

#### *Identifying the invulnerable children:*

To find out the invulnerable (disadvantaged competent) children nomination inventory was administered on all children in the classroom. The front page of the pupil nomination and evaluation inventory contained instructions for nominating peer to different group / cells representing the two specific groups. Cell-1 described the disadvantaged incompetent (Vulnerable) Cell-2 described the disadvantaged competent (Invulnerable). The children were asked to nominate to Cell-1 who have come from disadvantaged environmental backgrounds, *i.e.* lower socio-economic status and lower social class /caste and have showed lower academic and other behavioral competence. The children to be nominated to Cell-2 must have come from disadvantaged environmental backgrounds like the children of Cell-1, but have manifested /showed higher academic and behavioral competence.

All the subjects were instructed to select and nominate a peer from their respective classes for each of the two cells and write his /her name in the appropriate cell. The subjects were asked to give their own personal opinion based on their day to day contacts and experiences with their peers. To select the individual child belonging to each of the two cells /groups, (vulnerable and invulnerable) separate sociometry type sheets were prepared for all the children belonging to one class. For each class three children per cell/group were selected by considering the total number of nominations / frequencies. For example, in the name of X was written by maximum number of children (peers) against a particular cell, he / she was selected for that cell. Like this, names of children were found out for the two different cells in terms of highest number of frequencies.

#### *Assessment of personality development:*

To study the personality factors of the two groups, Cattell's HSPQ (High School Personality Questionnaire) (junior and senior) of Oriya version was used. The HSPQ (junior and senior) scale consisted of 142 questions of multiple choice types. This scale was administered in group setting in the class room situations. A hand-scorable answer sheet was used for recording responses. First the subjects were allowed to read carefully the instructions written on the first page. Then they were instructed to answer the questions by choosing the correct alternative given under each question as (a) / (b)/ (c). The subjects answered the responses by putting cross marks (x) in the square given in the answer sheet for each item. For example if the subject choose 'C' as the answer for the first question, then he /she had to put cross mark (x) in Q.No.1,c.e.g.1. (a) (b) (c) In this way subjects were asked the complete all the answers and hand over the answer sheet to the

tester.

The HSPQ was scored according to the Manual (Cattell and Cattell, 1975) in the following way. The completed answer sheet was primary record from which the personality factor scores

**Table 1 : Title and symbols for designating the fourteen (14) dimensions of personality**

	Low score description	Alphabetic designation of factor	High score description
Professional	Sizothymia	A	Affectothymia
Popular	Reserved, detached, critical, aloof, stiff,		Warm-hearted, outgoing, easygoing participating
Professional	Low Intelligence (Crystallised, power measure	B	High intelligence (Crystallised, power measure )
Popular	Dull		Bright
Professional	Low ego strength	C	Higher ego strength
Popular	Affected by feelings, emotionally less stable, easily upset, changeable		
Professional	Phlegmatic temperament	D	Excitability
Popular	Un-demonstrative, deliberate, inactive, stodgy		Excitable, impatient, demanding overactive, unrestrained.
Professional	Submissiveness	E	Dominance
Popular	Obedient, mild, easily led docile, accommodating		Assertive, aggressive, competitive, stubborn
Professional	De-urgency	F	Urgency
Popular	Sober, taciturn, serious		Enthusiastic, needless, happy-go-lucky.
Professional	Weaker superego strength	G	Stronger superego strength
Popular	Disregards rules, expedient		Conscientious, persistent, moralistic, staid.
Professional	Threctia	H	Parmia
Popular	Shy, timid, threat-sensitive		Adventurous, "thick-skinned", socially bold
Professional	Harria	I	Premia
Popular	Tough-minded, rejects illusions		Tender-minded, sensitive, dependent, overprotected
Professional	Zeppia	J	Coasthenia
Popular	Zestful, liking group action		Circumspect individualism, reflective, internally restrained
Professional	Untroubled adequacy	O	Guilt proneness
Popular	Self-assured, placid, secure, complacent, serene		Apprehensive, self-reproaching, insecure, worrying troubled.
Professional	Group dependency	Q2	Self-sufficiency
Popular	Sociably group dependent, a "junior" and sound follower		Self-sufficient, resourceful, prefers own decisions.
Professional	Low self-sentiment integration	Q3	High strength of self-sentiment
Popular	Uncontrolled, lax, follows own urges, careless of social rules		Controlled, exacting will power, socially precise, compulsive, following self-image
Professional	Low ergic tension	Q4	High ergic tension
Popular	Relaxed, tranquil, torpid un-frustrated, composed		Tense, driven, overwrought, fretful

were obtained. The answer sheet was scored by using two card board stencil keys; developed in the Institute for Personality and Ability Testing (IPAT), within a very short time. The first one of the two card board stencil keys was to be aligned with the left hand side of the answer sheet, adjusting it to position by means of the “Check holes”. Then “1’s” or “2’s” above those holes the through which the subjects cross mark (x) were visible were to be added from left to right and get a total score for a factor and was written in the space on the right side of the answer sheet in the raw score column. Similarly, same process was repeated to get 14 raw score (such as A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,O,Q2,Q3,Q4,) mentioned in the answer sheet by using these two card board stencil keys. Further, mean and standard deviation was carried out for the statistical analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Personality profile of invulnerable and vulnerable children :

The two selected groups of adolescents were administered the Cattell’s High School personality Questionnaire (HSPQ) to measure their personality factors. The mean values of each factor along with variability indices of two groups are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2 : Mean and Standard Deviations (SD) of personality factors of the vulnerable and invulnerable children**

Sr. No	Variables	Vulnerable children		Invulnerable children	
		M	SD	M	SD
1.	A	9.96	1.83	10.37	1.21
2.	B	3.75	1.72	4.70	1.39
3.	C	9.58	2.69	10.37	2.34
4.	D	9.54	3.22	9.33	2.66
5.	E	8.58	2.75	8.87	2.92
6.	F	10.75	3.11	10.00	3.79
7.	G	11.25	3.31	13.00	3.10
8.	H	10.83	3.02	12.16	2.90
9.	I	10.70	2.99	10.50	2.36
10.	J	8.58	2.36	9.41	2.37
11.	O	9.96	3.51	8.96	3.43
12.	Q2	10.62	2.18	10.87	2.44
13.	Q3	11.05	2.55	13.47	0.72
14.	Q4	8.62	2.67	9.12	3.39

Note: Higher Score indicates better personality. Lower Score indicates poor personality.

The mean values revealed that the invulnerable children scored higher in personality traits than the vulnerable children. The invulnerable children in most of the personality factors found to be better and the competence level coming out as the powerful deciding factor rather than environment. This finding was expected and it supports earlier findings (Dash and Das, 1984, Dash and Hariharan, 1988, Anthony and Dash, 1991, Arora and Dash, 1995, Choudhury, and Dash, 1995, Sahoo and Dash, 1995 and Tripathy and Dash, 1995) relating to competence and invulnerability. The most interesting findings in this context is that the competent children were relatively better than the incompetent children in the intellectual factor of the HSPQ (Factor B).

The results of the present study indicate that the invulnerable children were having certain

unique ways of coping and experiencing the negative environment. These children seemed to be more persistent, moralist, conscientious, emotionally disciplined, and responsible, consistently ordered and concerned about moral standards and rules (Panda, Dash, 1995; Tripathy and Dash 1986; Choudhury, 1991 and Chaunan and Dash, 1988). Further the data indicated that invulnerable children were found to be more worrying / brooding / self reproaching / lonely / depressed than the vulnerable children. Moreover, the invulnerable children were found to be relatively controlled, socially precise and compulsive, having somewhat exacting willpower. In case of competent children, positive personality characteristics are responsible for eliciting and making effective use of social support and the negative characteristics prevent or inhibit the individual from exploiting the social resources to get the best support.

### **Conclusion :**

Present investigation found out that the invulnerable (disadvantaged - competent) were persistent, moralistic, disciplined, and responsible, consistently organized and concerned about moral standards and rules. Moreover, they were self-reproaching, exhibit more wideness, depressed, lonely and relatively unresponsive. They were also found to be socially timid, less friendly and spent sometime in brooding well. Further, it was found out that invulnerable adolescents possessed better self-control, socially precise and compulsive and having exciting will power. At the same time they were relative more anxious restless overactive and as well as introvert.

Thus, it can be concluded that, the invulnerable adolescents posses both positive as well as negative personality traits. However, in contrast to the vulnerable group they were found to poses more of positive personality traits than the negative. Every human being posses a mixture of positive and negative traits but the expression of these traits depends on individual's critical life situation and exposure to it. Depending on individual's overt expression (positive or negative) the individual is regarded as having good or bad personality and accordingly being accepted or rejected by the society.

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