

# Refining the Ecological Model of Resilience for Older Widowed Men and Women

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## Background

- Spousal bereavement is a high probability stressful life event (Bennett & Soulsby, 2012)
- Individual differences in experience of bereavement/ widowhood, and trajectory (Bennett, 2010; Galatzer-Levy & Bonanno, 2012)
- Different patterns of adaptation (Spahni et al., 2015)
- Some widows are able to deal with their bereavement with relative equanimity (Bennett, 2010; Bonanno et al., 2004)
- These widowed people can be termed resilient

- Resilience is commonly examined from a psychological perspective (Windle et al., 2010)
- Qualitative work has emphasised the link between psychological resilience and community and social aspects of resilience (Wiles et al., 2012)
- Individuals may fail to become resilient if the community does not facilitate opportunities to adapt (Ungar, 2011)

# Widowhood and Resilience

- Resilience as a steady state
  - Without fluctuating levels of distress following bereavement (Bonanno, 2004)
- Resilience as a long-term outcome
  - Initial painful awareness of loss; integrated belief and value system; optimistic and positive personality (Moore & Stratton, 2003)
- Are these latter two approaches compatible?

# Early Qualitative work on Resilience amongst Widowers

Bennett (2010) *Ageing and Society*, 30, 369-382

- Resilience as either a steady state or a long-term outcome
- N = 60 widowers
  - Not coping and therefore not resilient (23: 38%)
  - Not meeting criteria for resilience (21: 35%)
  - Resilient Widowers (23: 38%)
    - Bonanno's (3: 13%)
    - Gradual (9: 39%)
    - Turning point (8: 35%)
    - Both Gradual and Turning point (3: 13%)

# Pathways to Resilience

- Pathways
  - Practicalities
  - Families & social support
  - Joining - social participation
  - Personal characteristics
- Time:
  - Gradual change
  - Turning point
  - Timing is crucial
- Agency
  - Widowers as active Agents
  - Widowers as passive, requiring external Agency

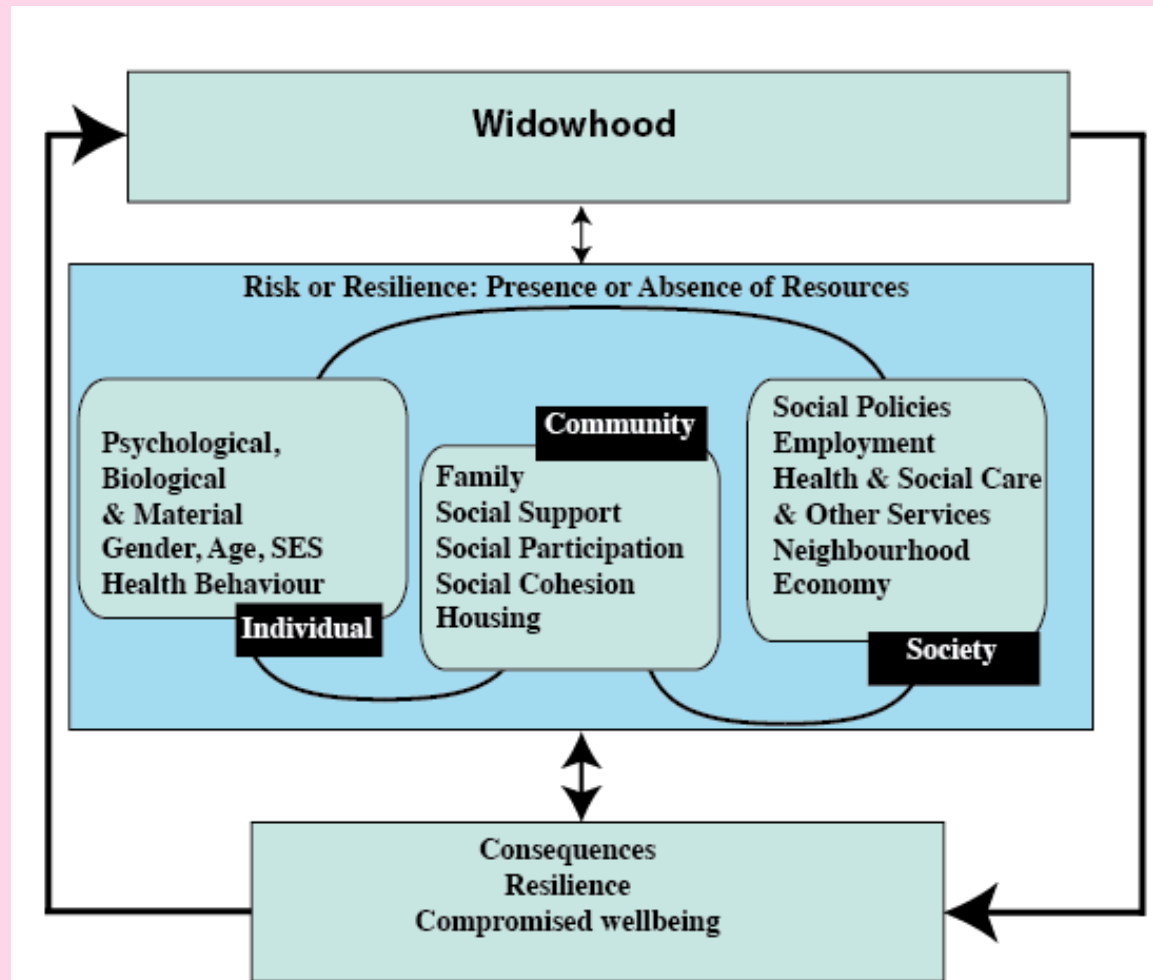
## Following on: Our definition of Resilience

- Definition (Windle, 2011)

Resilience is the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and ‘bouncing back’ in the face of adversity. Across the life course, the experience of resilience will vary.

# Ecological Model of Resilience: Widowhood

(adapted from Windle, G. & Bennett, K. M. (2011). *Resilience and caring relationships*. In M. Ungar (Ed.), *Social Ecology of Resilience*. New York: Springer.)



**Figure 1: The Resilience Framework Applied to Older Widow(er)s**



# Current Study: Refining the Ecological Model of Resilience for Older Widowed Men and Women

- Utilising a corpus of 120 interviews with older widowed men and women (n= 115 with complete data)
  - 87 did not ask specifically about resilience
    - Two Qualitative Questions:
      - What did you do?
      - How did you feel?
  - 18 asked about resilience
    - People say that time heals - how would you respond?
    - Did you adjust gradually to being a widow(er)?
    - Was there an occasion which was a 'turning point'?
    - Would you describe yourself as resilient

# Participants

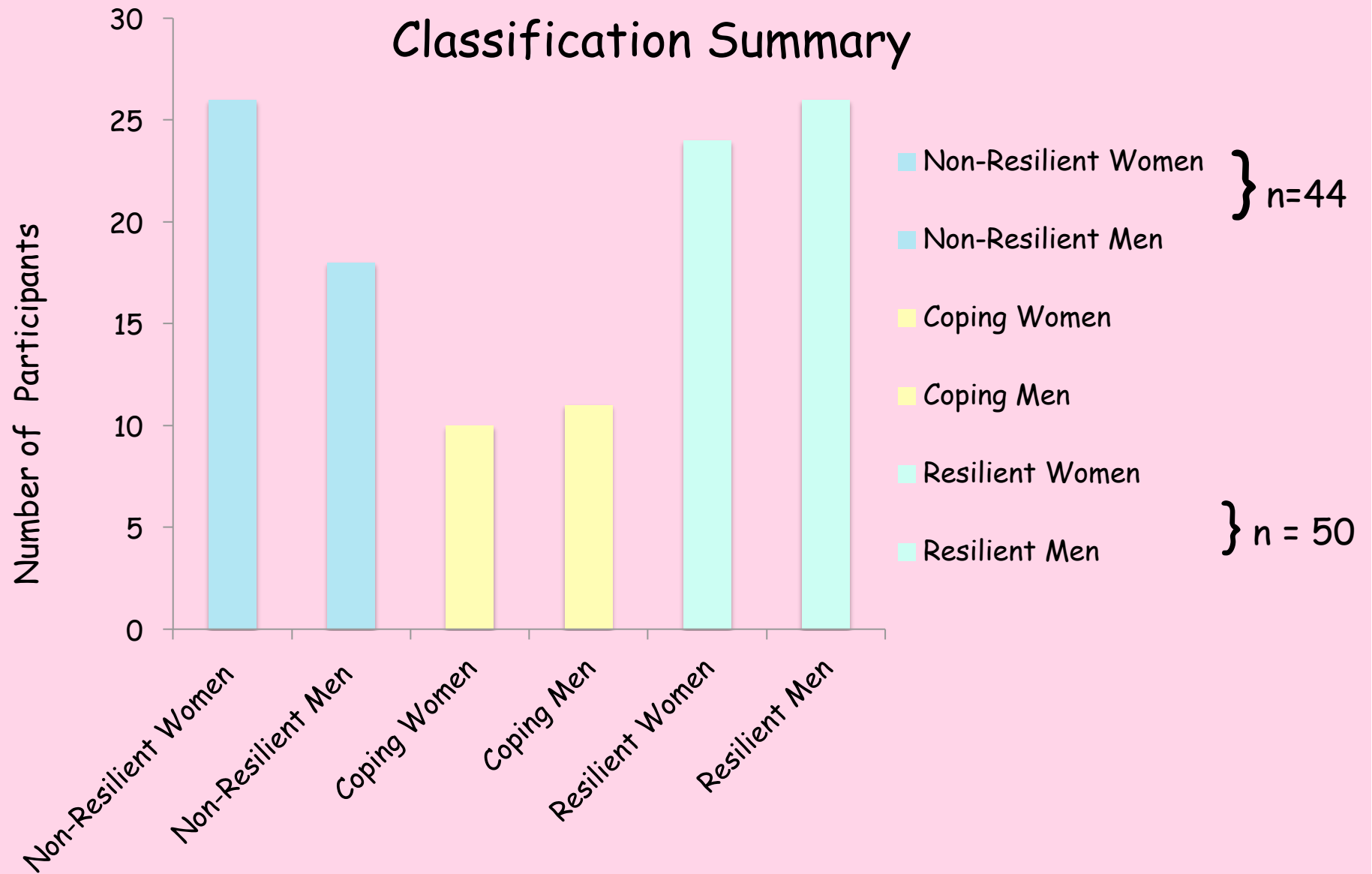
- N = 115; 55 men and 60 women

	Mean	Range
Age	75	52-96
Widowed	10	.3-37
Married	38	2-66

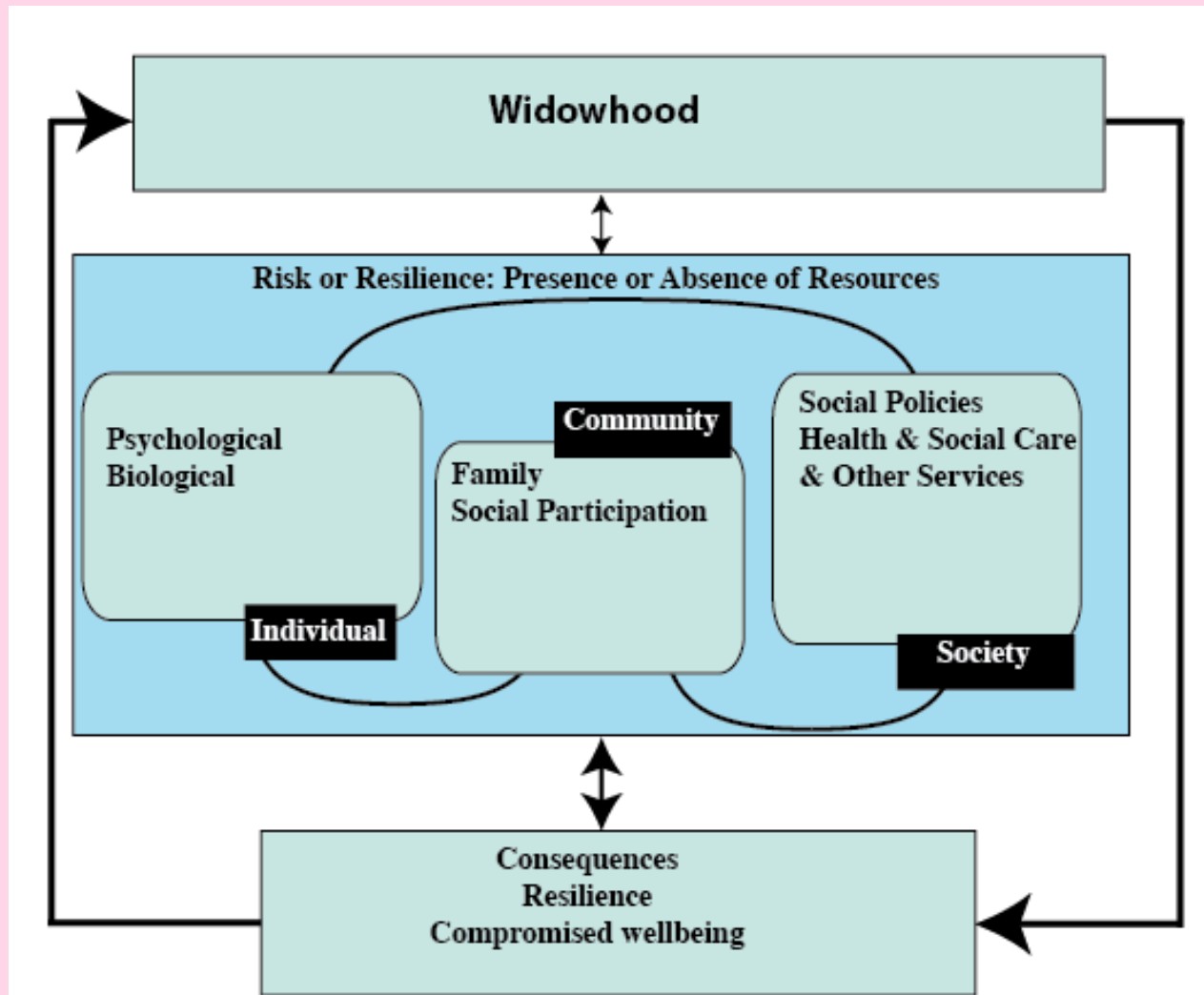
# Analysis

- We used a three-stage hybrid method in our analysis
  - Grounded theory
  - Classification: resilient or not
    - Significant challenge (i.e. spousal bereavement)\*
    - No sign of current di(stress)\*
    - Maintain a life of meaning and satisfaction (bouncing back)
      - Actively participate in life (managing)
      - Current life seen as positive (adaptation)
  - Mapping themes onto resilience framework
  - \* necessary criteria for resilience and coping

# Classification Summary



# Focus Today



**Figure 1: The Resilience Framework Applied to Older Widow(er)s**

## Individual Level: Psychological Resources

It may not be the right advice but I'd say live each day for what it's worth and try not to get into a blue funk about it.

(M7, R)

But it's a question of what has happened to you - you've got to get on with it. I mean it's no good sitting back and saying well somebody'll come and do it for me because they won't. You've got to do it yourself. I know it's hard (W15, R)

I would think, look at the life that I've lived, and pick out of that life the best parts and use those best parts, not to think of all the bad things that have happened, but the good things , and build on them, I think that's the only thing I can think of.' (AG15W, NR)

People think that you are getting on alright because you put a brave face on don't you, you know you don't it show it kind of thing you know and you try to (W42, NR)

## Biological

Thank god I've not got any health problems because I imagine that can make things really difficult but I'm able to get out and about and get on buses and that sort of thing so that's helped..... (AG3W, R)

Well I think it helps yes and I think as well fortunately I have good health and I don't have any financial worries so I suppose for some people it must be terribly difficult (W41, R)



## Biology as a Hinderance

I don't play much because unfortunately I've got angina now which has only just come on. I'm hoping to get - as I told you I'm going to have a bypass - I hope to and I'll be able to play again (M11, R)

Well I had too many people to look after really. The doctor said the other week, do you not think you should let up a bit. I said if I let up I'm going to be old. I mean at the moment - apparently I've got high blood pressure which is a nuisance.  
(W19, NR)

## Community Level: Family

If you've got children and you've got grandchildren they keep you up-to-date with things and encourage you to do things. You know why don't you do this and why don't you do that and I think it is helpful (AG2W, R)

He was so funny and somebody will say do you remember when Dad did so and so and the other one will say something and we finish off laughing, we always laugh because he was the one that made you laugh, so when we talk about it it's always with laughter it's never with tears (AG11W, R)

I rang her up with the intention of asking her to come round because I wanted to talk. Come round for a cup of tea. So she said, oh she said I'm rather busy at the moment, she said, er you'll have to get on with it Mum, because she said after all he did have his three score and ten. So I said P\* that's no comfort to me. So it's still a very sore point with me (W5, NR)

And um the family there - they don't neglect me um but they've got their own life to lead but they're on the phone and I go down and my daughter insisted I had a mobile which is in the car but they keep in touch and she's a very good woman the older one (M21, NR)

## Participation

I went to the theatre a lot. I went to the -  
in the first 12 months - I went to the Royalty, the Empire Theatre,  
the Neptune, sometimes Philharmonic - er - certain types of shows you  
know, they had a cracking - my intrigue you know. I think I've had a  
good life. I really have had a good life since she died. I'm not saying it  
was because of her (M7, R)

Well I just got into my life again and er just went dancing and carrying  
on like normal but you know I did miss her like. I still miss her now  
even. Wish she was still living (M14, NR)

## Society: Services

That's the time when you've got them coming regular to these clubs, you can have the likes of you observing - and seeing when people require your attention, and without just get them aside just nicely and do it in a subconscious way for them that they - to anticipate their next need. Work out how you're going to cope with those next needs. Don't leave it till it's disaster and you've got to try and sort the disaster out.

That's the wrong way (M20, R)

Cos I knew for a long time, for a few years, it wasn't Eric and I'd had him in the home here well that was quite easy then.

(AG13W, R)

So I was kind of I was angry I suppose with the whole medical profession, that I thought he been let down really, okay?'

(AG14W, NR)

Yes. I was caring for him at home.

Unfortunately the Royal lost his papers. The Macmillan nurses were supposed to be coming here to give me help and they didn't. Nobody

came (W10, NR)

## Social Policy

I mean I'll be quite frank with you I'm not a pauper by any means. I mean I was an Air force Officer and a middle rank civil servant so I have a couple of reasonable pensions quite frankly so it helps of course (AG10M, R)

They could provide more, tell the people tell the bereaved what's there, what's out there, tell them what, things like clubs and where to go and where to get help. Help groups or, this can tell them help and what things to do, would sit down with somebody, sit down with people and tell them what is there and what the government is offering there (M39, NR)

## Summary

- Ecological Model
  - Strong facilitators
    - Individual- positive approach, getting on with life, good health
    - Community - family (both R & NR), participation
    - Society - services, money (for R)
  - Hindrances
    - Biology, poor services
    - Rather absences - fewer quotes
  - Availability and Accessibility - R have both; NR access less
  - Fewer quotes for NR



## Questions/Limitations

- Asking people about resilience?
  - Disadvantages
    - People do not always understand what resilience means even in simple terms
    - Positive response bias - resilience may be seen as a good thing
    - Reflection - some people said yes, they were and then reflected and said no they weren't

Thank You

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