ABSTRACT

This research investigated the salient risk factors and protective processes for young people living in rural Atlantic Canadian contexts exhibiting the adverse socioeconomic and environmental impacts associated with rural restructuring. Nineteen participants (10 males and 9 females) aged 18 to 23 years in Shore Central Hants County took part in a qualitative study that used a unique combination of narrative, visual, and observational methods, including photo-elicitation, videotaping a ‘day in the life’ of participants, field notes, life-space mapping, and in-depth interviews.

Drawing on development-in-context and social constructionist perspectives, social constructionist grounded theory was generated to explain when, how, and why varying resilience processes were used by different kinds of young people to cope with the challenges produced by deterioration in the rural economic base. Conceptual links were drawn between youths’ alternate wellbeing constructions; their place-relationships; the ways in which youth contribute to their own resilience; the structures and agencies that shape their capacities to draw upon certain resources, supports and resilience processes; and their decisions about whether to stay in their rural communities or out-migrate. Resilience was found to involve a responsive and supportive relationship between youth and the social, structural, environmental and spatial aspects of their rural places. Resilience-fostering environments enabled youth to respond to developmental risks through processes of: positive adjustment that improved youth-place compatibility; processes of negotiation or transformation that resolved incompatibility between self and place; and the maintenance of systems considered compatible.

Suggestions were provided for ways in which policy makers and community members can create resilience-promoting rural environments for youth, their families and communities.