



Universität
Zürich^{UZH}

Psychopathology and Clinical Intervention

Successful aging in former indentured child laborers

A qualitative study on
the „steeling effect“



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ADVERSITY



Particular sensitive periods for the biopsychosocial development

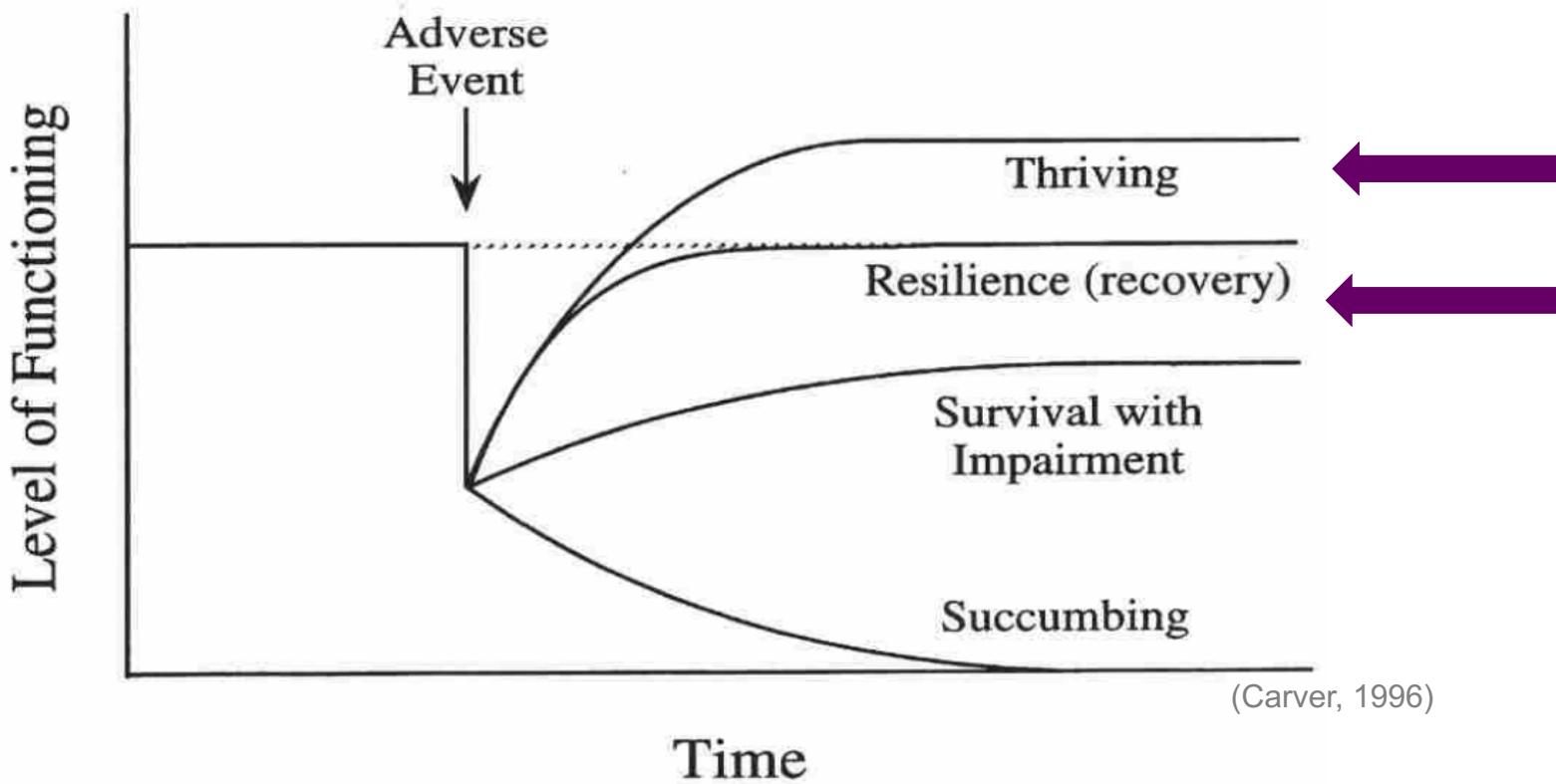
(Danese & McEwen, 2012;
Friedman, Montez, Sheehan, Guenewald, & Seeman, 2015)

Increased risk for physical illness & mental disorder throughout whole lifespan

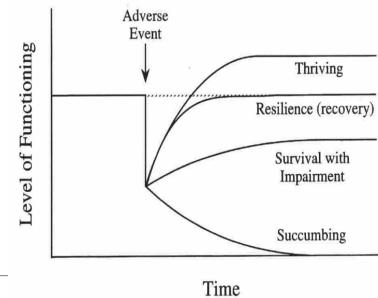
(e.g. Heim & Nemeroff, 2001; Kessler et al., 2010; Johnson, Riley, Granger, & Riis, 2013; Schafer & Ferraro, 2012)



THRIVING AFTER ADVERSITY



Resilience = interactive concept – relatively good outcomes despite risk exposure
(e.g. Rutter, 2012)



THRIVING AFTER ADVERSITY

NON-TRAUMA

„Steeling“ (Liu, 2015; Rutter, 2006, 2012; Seery et al., 2010a, 2010b, 2013, Lyons & Parker, 2007)

- „**Inoculation**“ (McGuire, 1961, 1964; Meichenbaum, 2007)
- „**Immunization**“ (Basoglu et al., 1997)
- „**Toughness**“ (Dienstbier, 1989)

TRAUMA

„Growth“ (Posttraumatic Growth, Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996)

- „**Benefit finding**“ (Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006)
- „**Stress-related growth**“ (Park, Cohen, Murch, 1996)
- „**Positive Change**“ (Joseph & Butler, 2010)

Thriving

(Carver, 1996)

or

**Adversarial
growth**

(Linley & Joseph,
2004)

or

**Aversity
activated
development**

(e.g. Papadopolus,
2007)



THRIVING AFTER ADVERSITY NOT A RARE OUTCOME...

Systematic Review (Linley & Joseph, 2004)

$N = 39$ studies „*Positive change following trauma and adversity*“

Different traumatic events (e.g. plane crash, combat, sexual abuse ..)

→ 30-70% report positive change through the traumatic event

Study by Perkonigg *et al.* (2010)

$N = 3021$ (14 – 24 years)

26% / 17.7% reported at least 1 traumatic experience → 1% / 2.2% PTSD



ADVERSITY IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE ...

- **buffers negative effects** of stressors in adolescence (Gunnar, Frenn, Wewerka, Ryzin, 2009; Shapero, Hamilton, Stange, Liu, Abramson, & Alloy, 2015)
- **decreases anxiety & increases coping and volition** in early adulthood (Sudbrack, Manfro, Kuhn, de Carvalho, & Lara, 2015)

→ Short and medium term **beneficial effect of adversity** on various outcomes

→ Long term effects **adversity?**





AGING PROCESS →

LARGE INTERINDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:



- Absence of chronic illness and infirmity
- High physiological and cognitive functioning
- Active (social) lifestyle (Rowe & Kahn, 1987, 1997)

BUT → less than 20% match this definition (McLaughlin, Connell, Herringa, Li, & Roberts, 2010;

VERDINGKINDER

Indentured child laborers

Switzerland 1850 - 1981



- Were taken away from parents
- Work for food and accommodation without pay
- Hard, child inadequate work
- Child slaves (Leuenberger & Seglias, 2008)



- Harsh living experiences



- **Abuse, maltreatment, neglect** (Kuhlman, Maercker, Bachem, Simmen, & Burri, 2013)

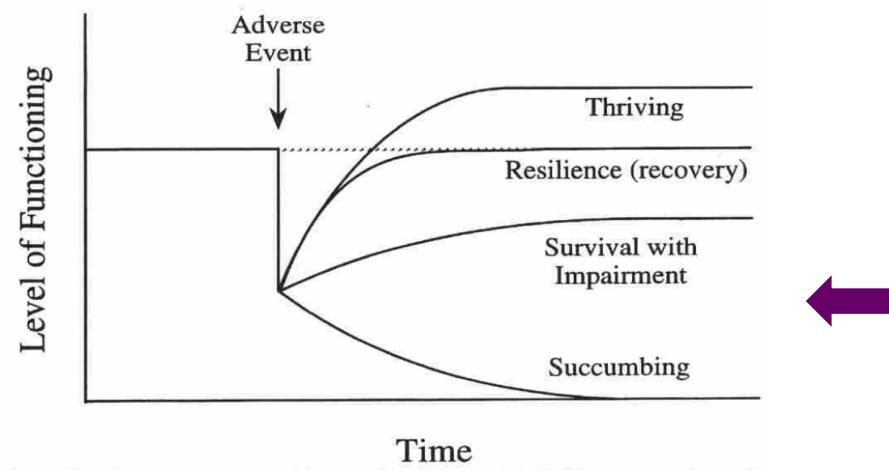




FORMER VERDINGKINDER PSYCHOPATHOLOGY IN OLD AGE

$N = 141$ ($M_{AGE} = 77$ years) (Burri, Maercker, Krammer, & Simmen-Janevska, 2013; Kuhlman et al., 2013)

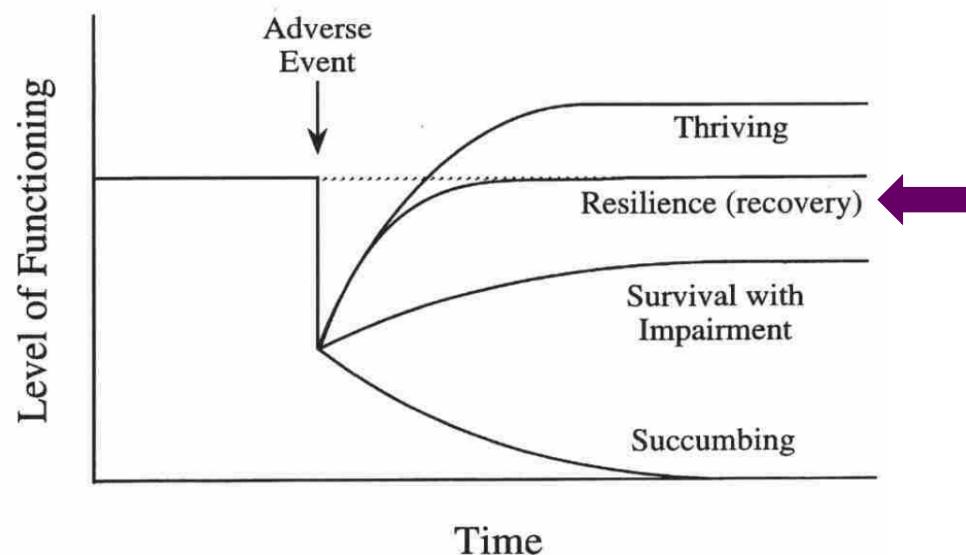
- PTSD: 25%
- Depression: 23%
- Subclinical depression: 15 %





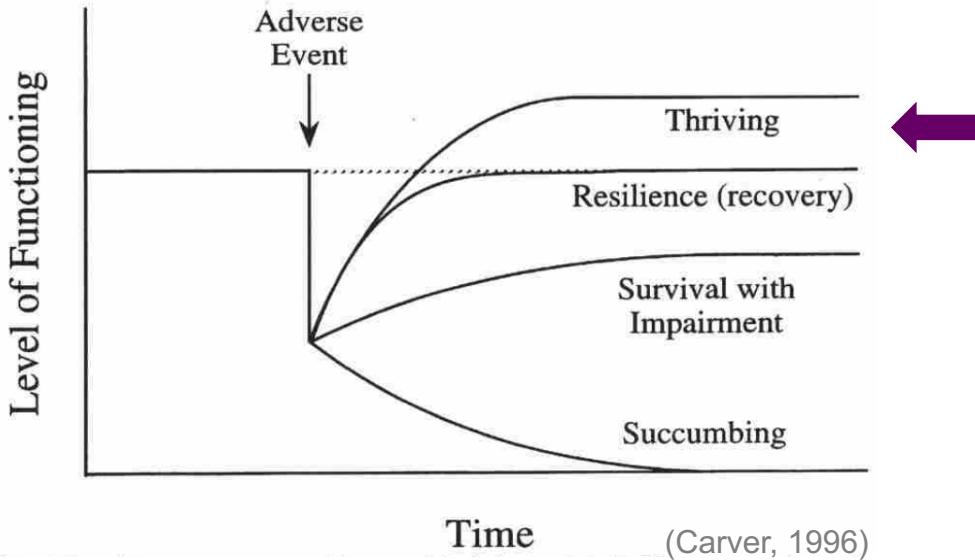
FORMER VERDINGKINDER RESILIENCE IN OLD AGE

→ Over 50% no clinically relevant
mental disorders (Maercker, et al., 2016)

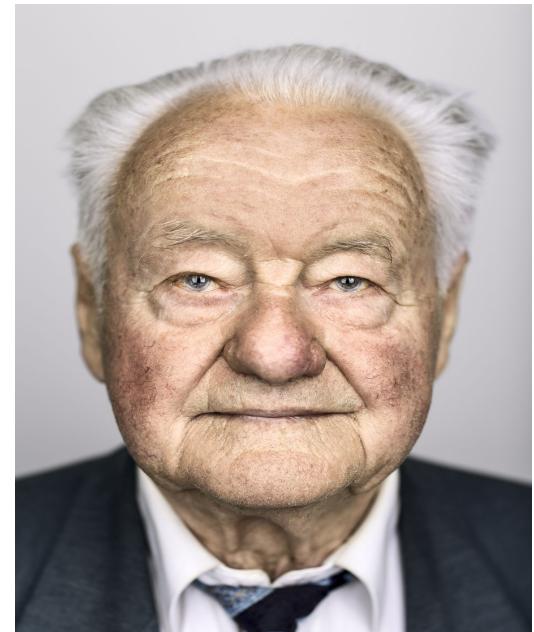




CURRENT STUDY



FORMER VERDINGKINDER



= successful aging

→ MECHANISMS BEHIND SUCCESSFUL AGING IN HIGH RISK INDIVIDUALS (= STEELING EFFECT)



QUALITATIVE STUDY

- **12 former Verdingkinder** (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006)
 - Fulfilled criteria for successful aging
 - 6 Men & 6 Women
 - Age: 59 - 88 years ($M_{age} = 71$ years)
- **Method**
 - Half-standardized interviews
 - Subjective theory
 - Analysis: Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1996)



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Auswirkungen der Erlebnisse als Verdingkind auf die Gesundheit im Alter

Prägende Ereignisse in der Vergangenheit, u.a. auch speziell in der Kindheit und Jugend, können **vielfältige und tiefgreifende Auswirkungen** auf das spätere Leben bis ins hohe Alter haben. Wir möchten in unserer Studie untersuchen, ob und wie sich solche Erfahrungen auf die **Gesundheit im Alter** auswirken können.



Wir möchten Sie gerne zu unseren Studien einladen!

Wurden Sie während ihrer Kindheit und/oder Jugend für mindestens 1 Jahr verdingt?
Sind Sie mindestens 50 Jahre alt und ist Deutsch Ihre Muttersprache?

Dann fragen wir Sie gerne für ein persönliches Interview an.
Dieses wird ca. 2 Stunden dauern und kann am Psychologischen Institut der Universität Zürich oder bei Ihnen zu Hause stattfinden. Bei der Wahl des Ortes richten wir uns gerne nach Ihnen. Reisekosten werden Ihnen zurückerstattet.

Weiterhin können Sie auch an einer Umfrage teilnehmen. Im Abstand von einem Jahr werden wir Ihnen zwei Fragebögen zukommen lassen. Die Fragebögen schicken wir Ihnen entweder per Post oder E-Mail zu. Sie können diese auch unter <http://www3.unipark.de/uc/gesundaltern/> direkt aufrufen.

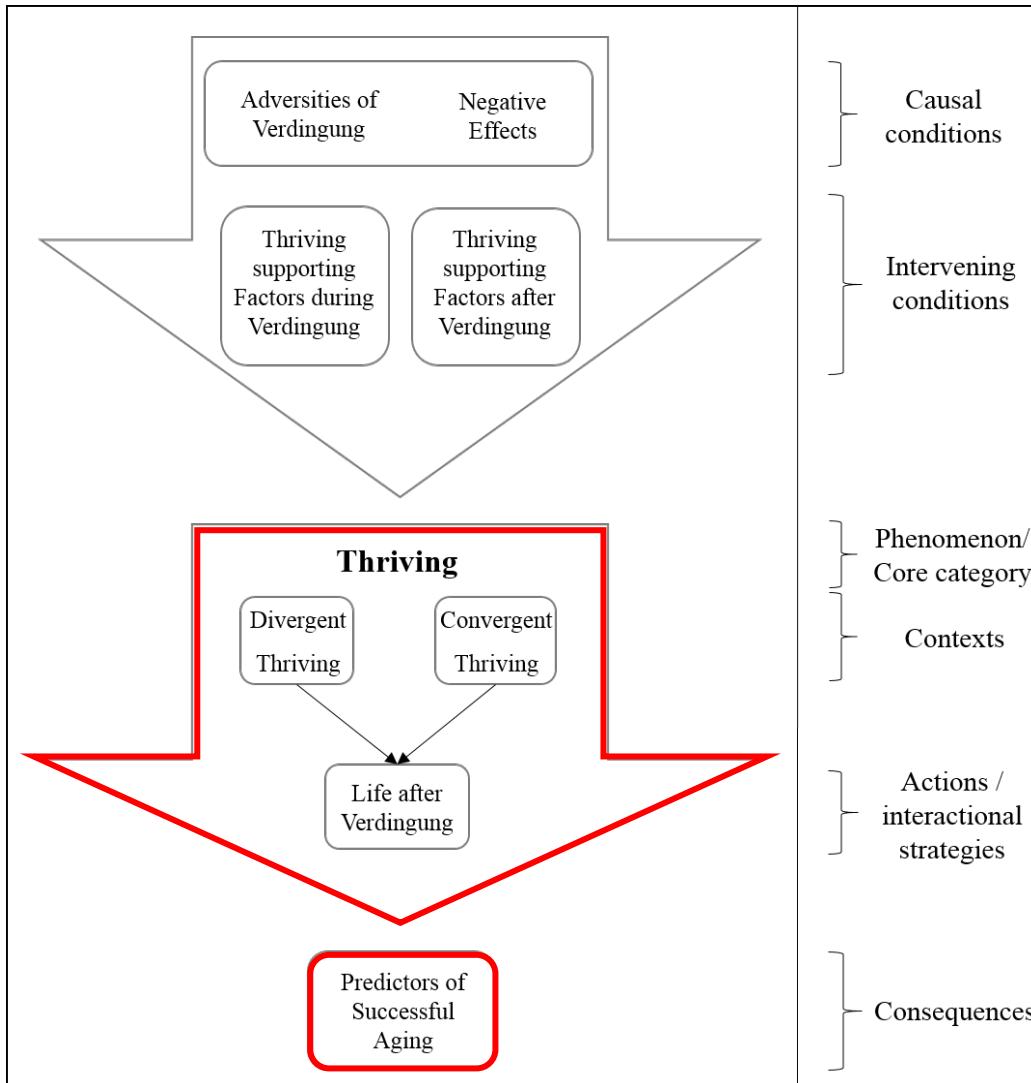
Sie erhalten individuelle Rückmeldungen und generelle Ergebnisse nach Studienabschluss.
Ihre Daten werden vertraulich behandelt.

Haben Sie Interesse an unseren Studien teilzunehmen? Bei Interesse senden Sie uns bitte eine Email oder rufen Sie uns an:

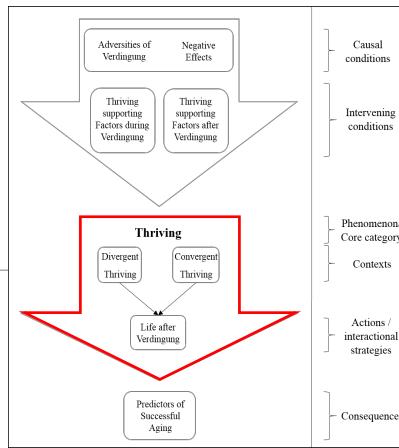
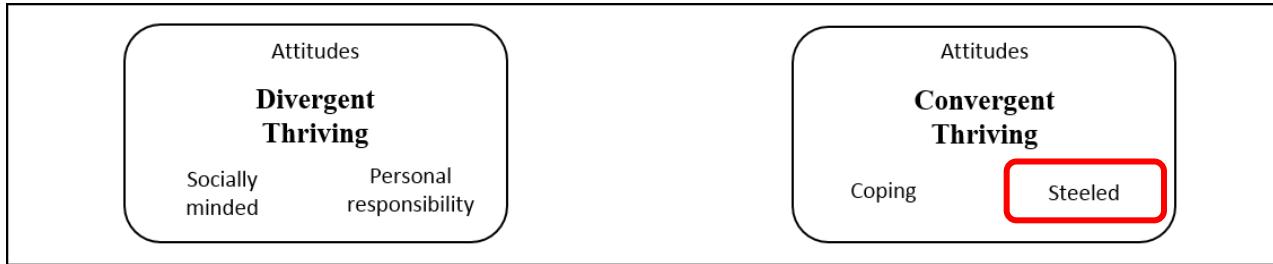
Telefon: 044 635 73 13 (Wochentags von 09:00 – 17:00 Uhr)
E-Mail: gesund.altern@psychologie.uzh.ch

Studienleitung: Prof. Dr. Dr. Andreas Maercker, Dr. Myriam V. Thoma, Mag. Jan Höltge

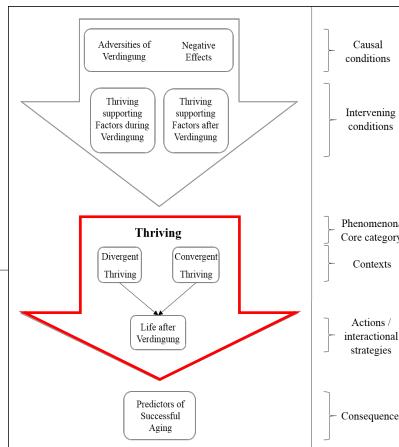
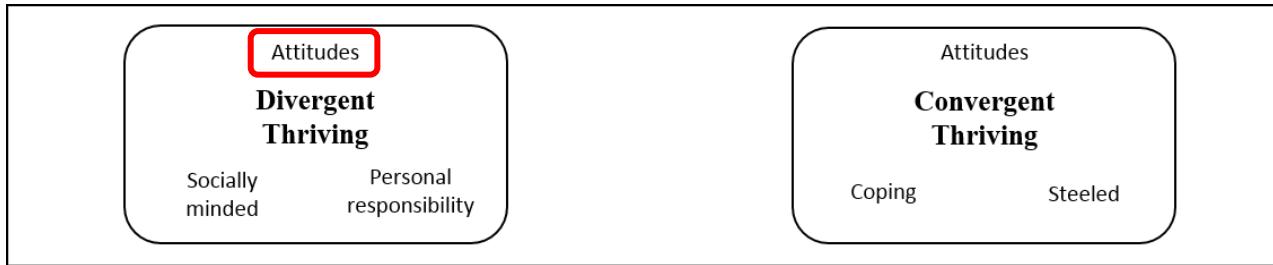




Structure and
relationship of the
main categories (left
side) according to
the parts of the
paradigm model
(right side)

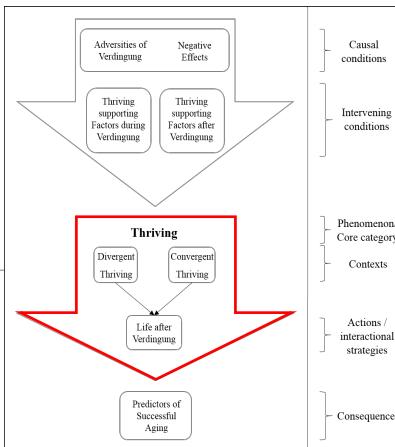
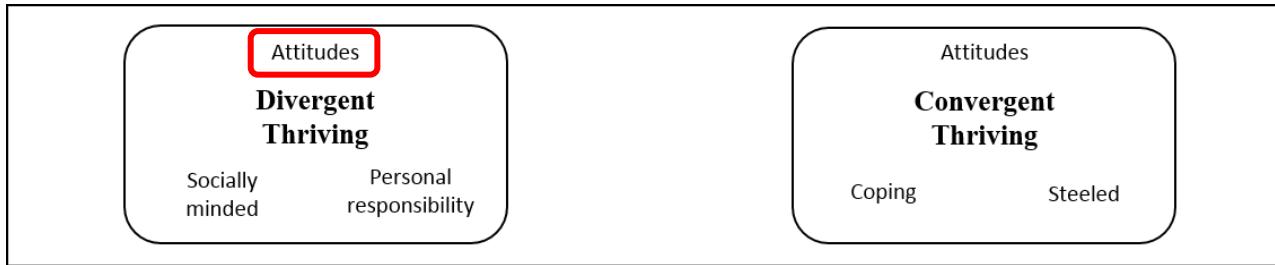


“It made me strong. Because of the autonomy I’ve reached I was able to get better along throughout my later life. This even holds on until today... Precisely because of the Verdingung I actually became stronger”

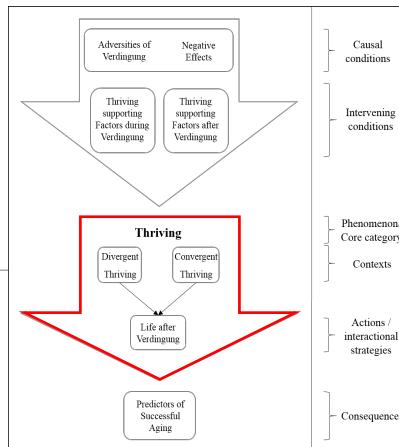


“...It is *fun for me* to, yes, *learn and to educate*, that is
something for myself...“

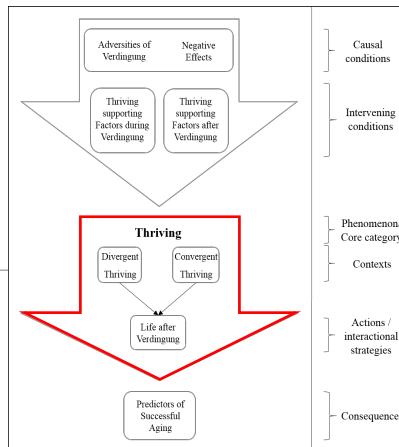
“... because of what I had to experience during my
adolescence, *I had the drive to achieve something* in my life”



“...I’m *thankful for the strength I have that I can always see life positively... I learned to live consciously and having fun and every day”*



“I developed a social consciousness in that time... the Verdingung influenced my humanity for my further life. Because again derived from that, I wanted to pass on what I missed”



“So I *believe it formed me in a way* [the Verdingung].

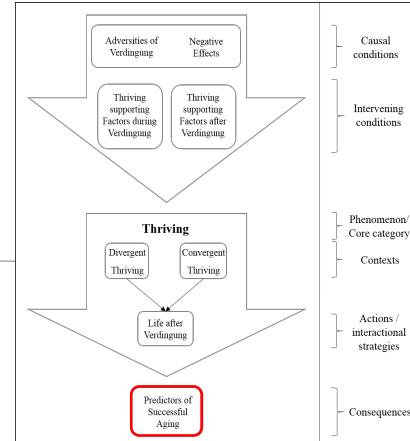
That I looked out for myself and looked out and fought.

*What I want for me... So to look for myself, if no one else
is doing it then, this is an imprinting throughout my
whole life”*



PREDICTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL AGING

- *Steeling*
 - Nothing frightens and stresses them – decreased stress response
- *Lightheartedness*:
 - Seeing life from the bright side – positive affect
- *Social engagement*
 - Dedication to voluntarily help & enrich other peoples life – social network
- *Self-enhancement*
 - Constant horizon-broadening & psychosocial activity – cognitive reserve
- *Personal responsibility*
 - Conscious awareness - maintenance of one's own well-being





CONCLUSION

- *Verdingkinder* show thriving related processes → successful aging
- **Steeling** crucial mechanisms translating adversity into thriving
- But also **lightheartedness & social engagement**
- **Adversity** in childhood and adolescence (under certain circumstances) **trigger crucial mechanisms that may play an important role for successful aging**