

**HOW TO PROMOTE POSITIVE YOUTH  
DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ENHANCING  
THE DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS OF  
COMMUNITIES:**

**CURRENT FINDINGS FROM THE 4-H STUDY OF  
POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

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**Historically  
Unprecedented  
Challenges to the  
Healthy Development of the  
World's Youth**

- **Over the next decade, one billion (1,000,000,000) new children will be born**
- **Most of these newborns will be children of color**
- **Most of these newborns will be born in developing nations**

# No One Living Today Knows How We Will:

- **Feed these newborns across their childhood and adolescence**
- **Handle the waste created by these youth**
- **Generate the energy needed to fuel the lives of these youth**
- **Create jobs for these youth, especially productive and fulfilling jobs that afford a living wage**

# No One Living Today Knows How We Will (Continued):

- Deal with social justice and with the widening gap between rich and poor, “north and south,” and developed and non-developed
- Treat tens of millions of youth across Africa who will live their lives as “AIDS orphans”
- Diminish the marginalization, alienation, and demonization of youth

# The Sample Case of the United States

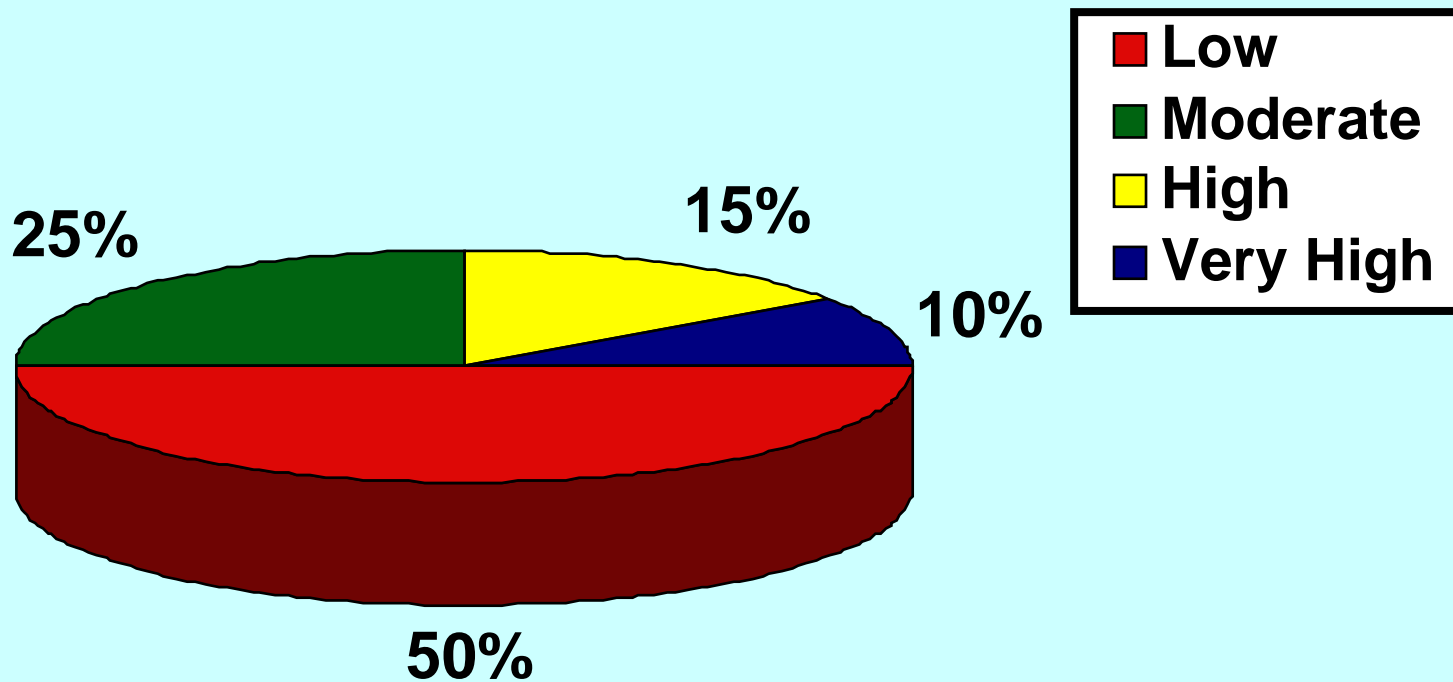
**40.3 Million Youth  
Between  
the Ages of  
10 and 19 Years**

Source: Yax, L.K. U.S. Census Bureau, 2003.

# Major Categories of Youth Risk Behaviors:

- **Unsafe sex, teenage pregnancy, and teenage parenting**
- **School failure, underachievement, and dropout**
- **Delinquency, crime, and violence**
- **Drug and alcohol use and abuse**

## Percent of Youth Population According to Risk Status



Adapted from Dryfoos, 1990

# Poverty

- **Beginning with the 1980s about 20% of America's children and youth have been poor.**
- **Child poverty occurs in all geographic regions of America. The rates of child poverty in rural areas of the United States are as high as those in the inner cities.**

Houston (1992); Jensen (1988); Simmons, Finlay, and Yang (1991)

# Poverty (Continued)

- **Poverty among female-headed families with children is 7 to 8 times higher than among married-couple families with children.**
- **Across America, 44% of African American children are poor. The corresponding rates of Latino and White, non-Hispanic American children are 38% and 11%, respectively.**

Houston (1992); Jensen (1988); Simmons, Finlay, and Yang (1991)

**Addressing the  
Challenges Facing  
Contemporary  
Youth Around the World:**

**Deficit vs. Strength  
Models**

**Youth as Problems To  
Be Managed**

**VERSUS**

**Youth as Resources To  
Be Developed**

## DEFICIT MODEL

- **Ameliorate Problems**
- **Prevent Problems**

## STRENGTH MODEL

- **Promote Positive Youth Development (PYD)**
- **Develop the resources (the “developmental assets” ) of families, schools, and communities to enhance the characteristics of PYD**

# THE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

- 1. All youth have the potential to change, and this is a fundamental strength of human development**
- 2. All contexts have strengths as well. These strengths are resources that may be used to promote positive youth development**
- 3. These resources are termed “developmental assets:” They are the “social nutrients” needed for healthy development**

## THE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

- 4. These assets are found in families, schools, faith institutions, youth serving organizations, and the community more generally**
- 5. If the strengths of youth are combined with developmental assets, then positive, healthy development will occur: Youth will THRIVE!**

# Attributes of Positive Youth Development:

- **Competence**
- **Confidence**
- **Connection**
- **Character**
- **Caring/Compassion**



**Contribution**

# How Can Positive Youth Development Be Promoted?

## Characteristics of Effective Youth Development Programs

## **Programs That Are Effective In Promoting Positive Youth Development**

### **THE “BIG THREE”**

- \*1. Promote positive and sustained adult-youth relations.**
- \*2. Promote the development of life skills.**
- \*3. Promote youth participation in and leadership of community programs: Youth Civic Engagement**

## **Programs That Are Effective In Promoting Positive Youth Development (Continued)**

**4. Have clear goals.**

**5. Pay attention to the diversity of youth and of their family, community, and culture.**

**6. Assure that the program represents a safe and accessible space.**

## **Programs That Are Effective In Promoting Positive Youth Development (Continued)**

- 7. Integrate the assets within the community. Collaborate with all youth-serving organizations.**
- 8. Provide “seamless” social support across the community.**
- 9. Engage in program evaluation.**
- 10. Advocate for youth.**

**Effective Youth Programs  
Inculcate in Youth the Personal  
("Internal") Resources, and  
Provide Them with the Community  
("External") Supports,  
Requisite for Positive Development:**

**These are the  
"Developmental Assets"  
for Positive Youth Development**

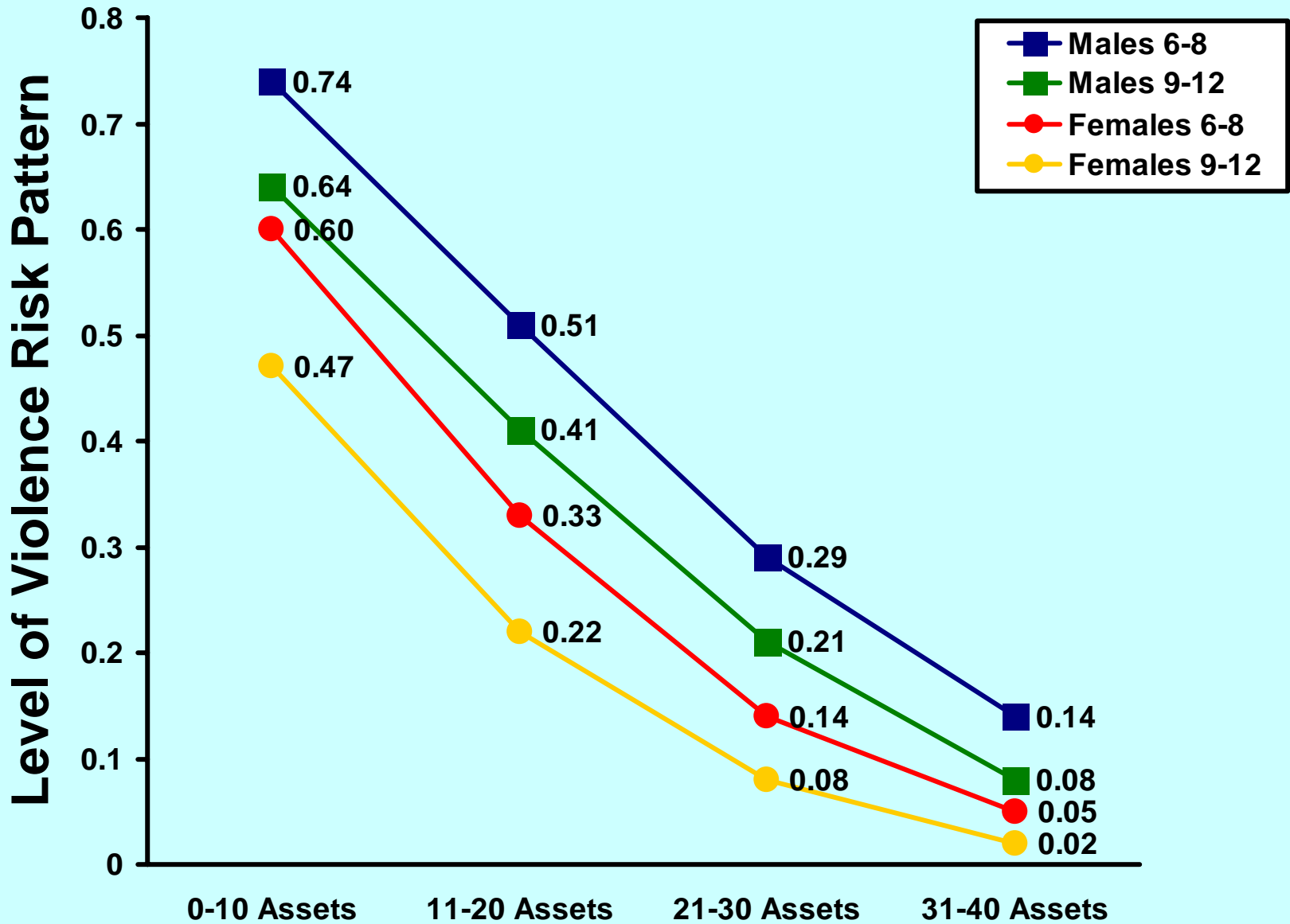
# Search Institute's Categories of 40 Developmental Assets

## External

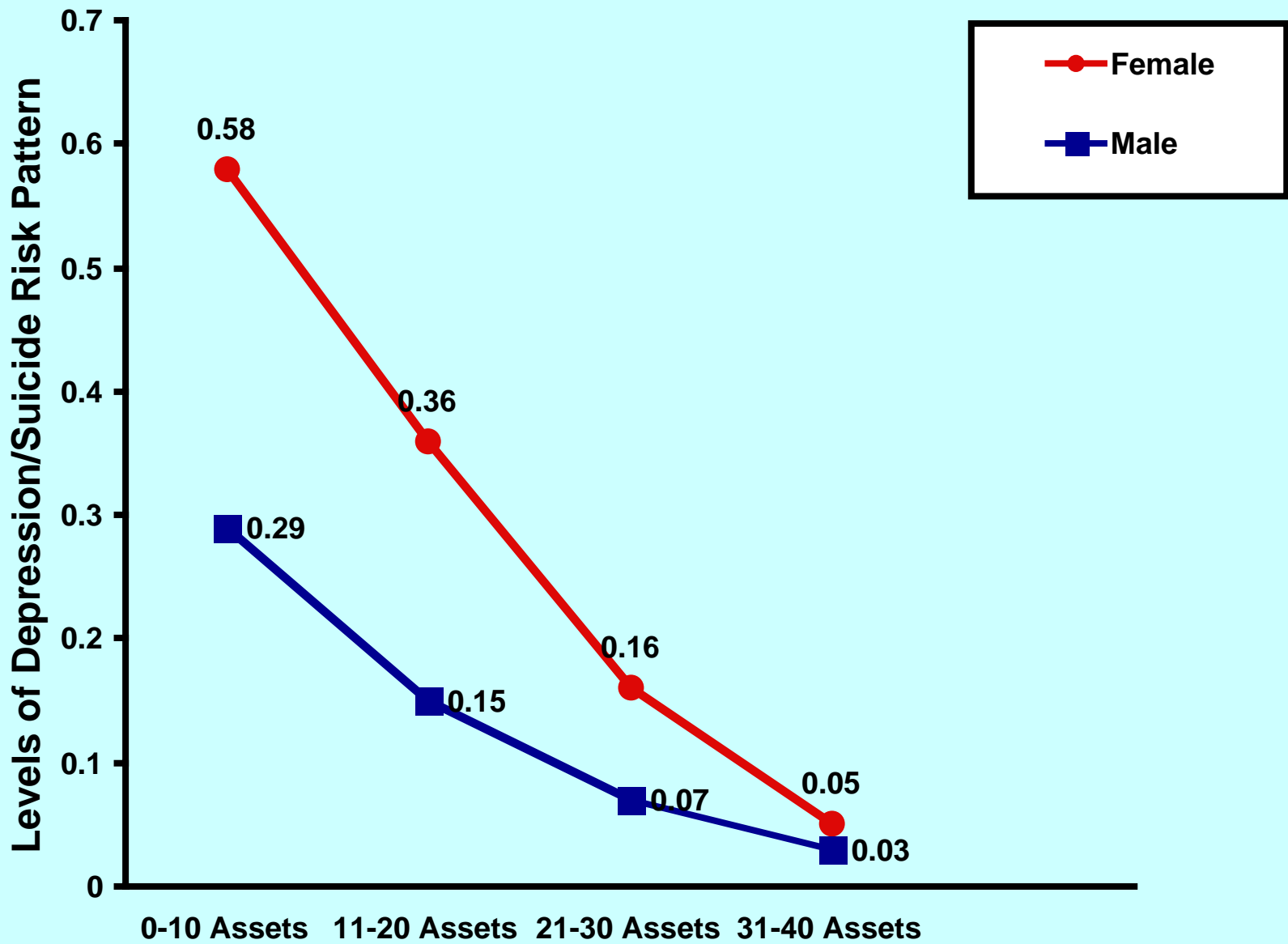
- **Support**
- **Empowerment**
- **Boundaries and expectations**
- **Constructive use of time**

## Internal

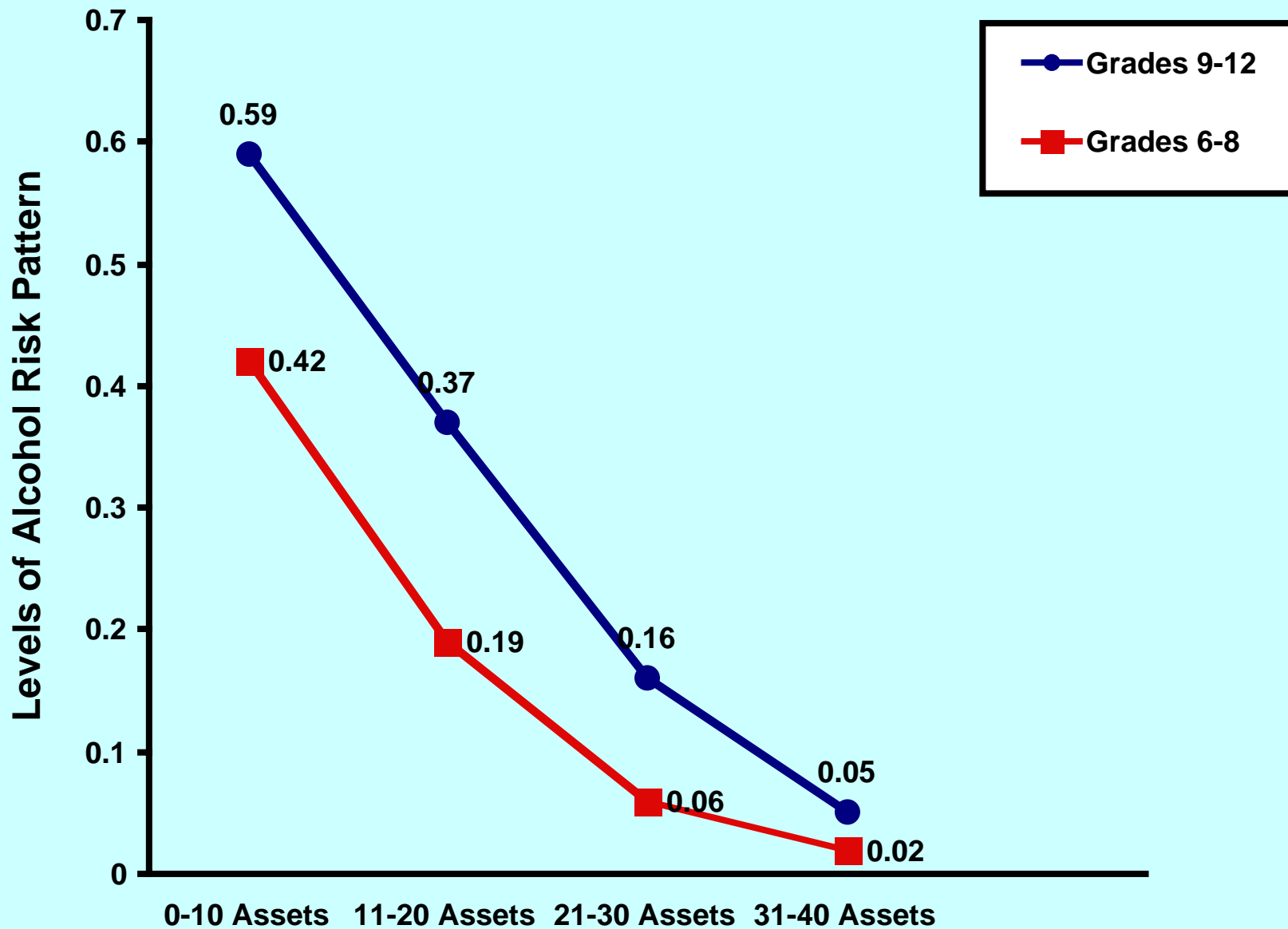
- **Commitment to learning**
- **Positive values**
- **Social competencies**
- **Positive identity**



Adapted from Leffert et al., 1998



Adapted from Leffert et al., 1998

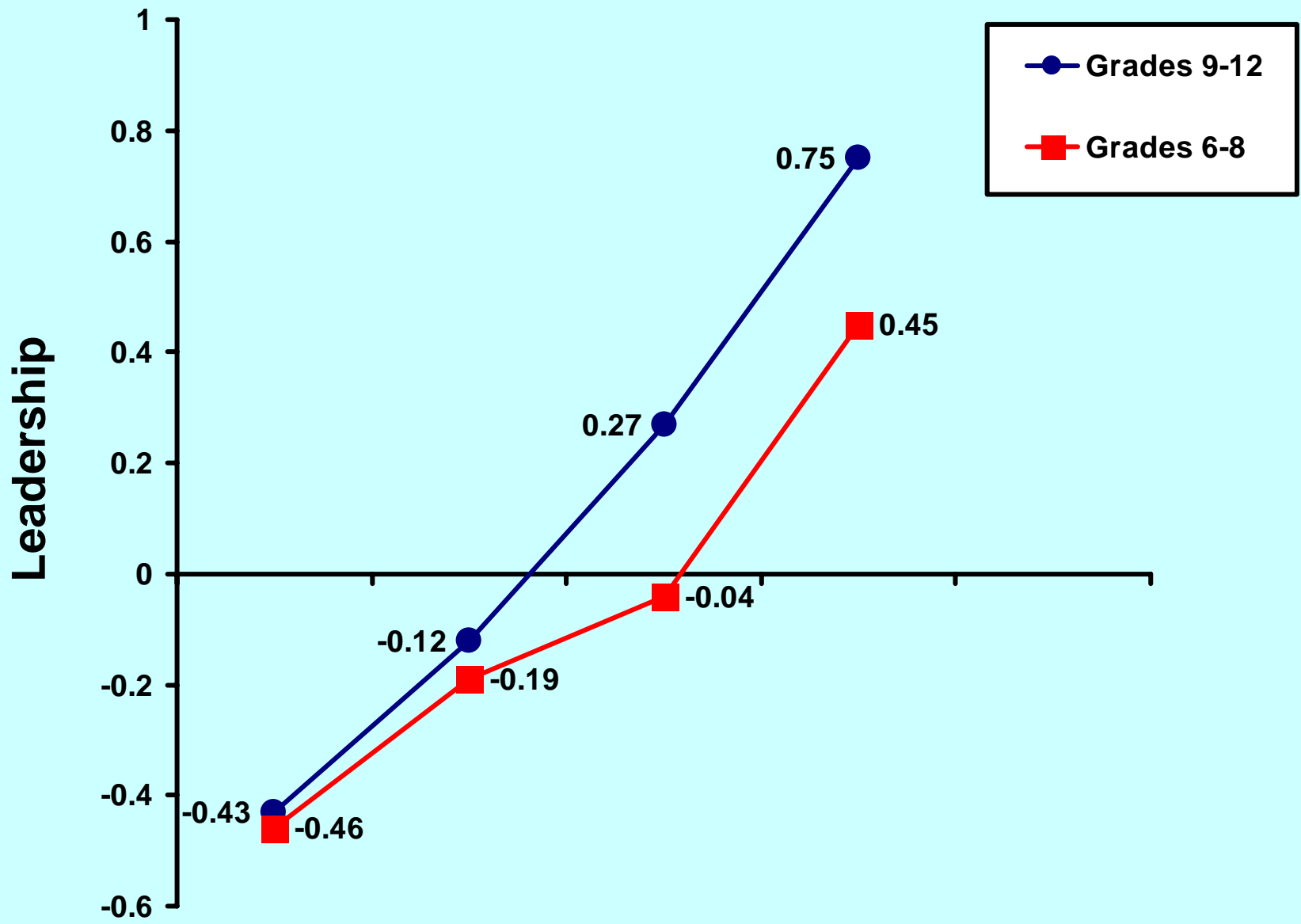


Adapted from Leffert et al., 1998

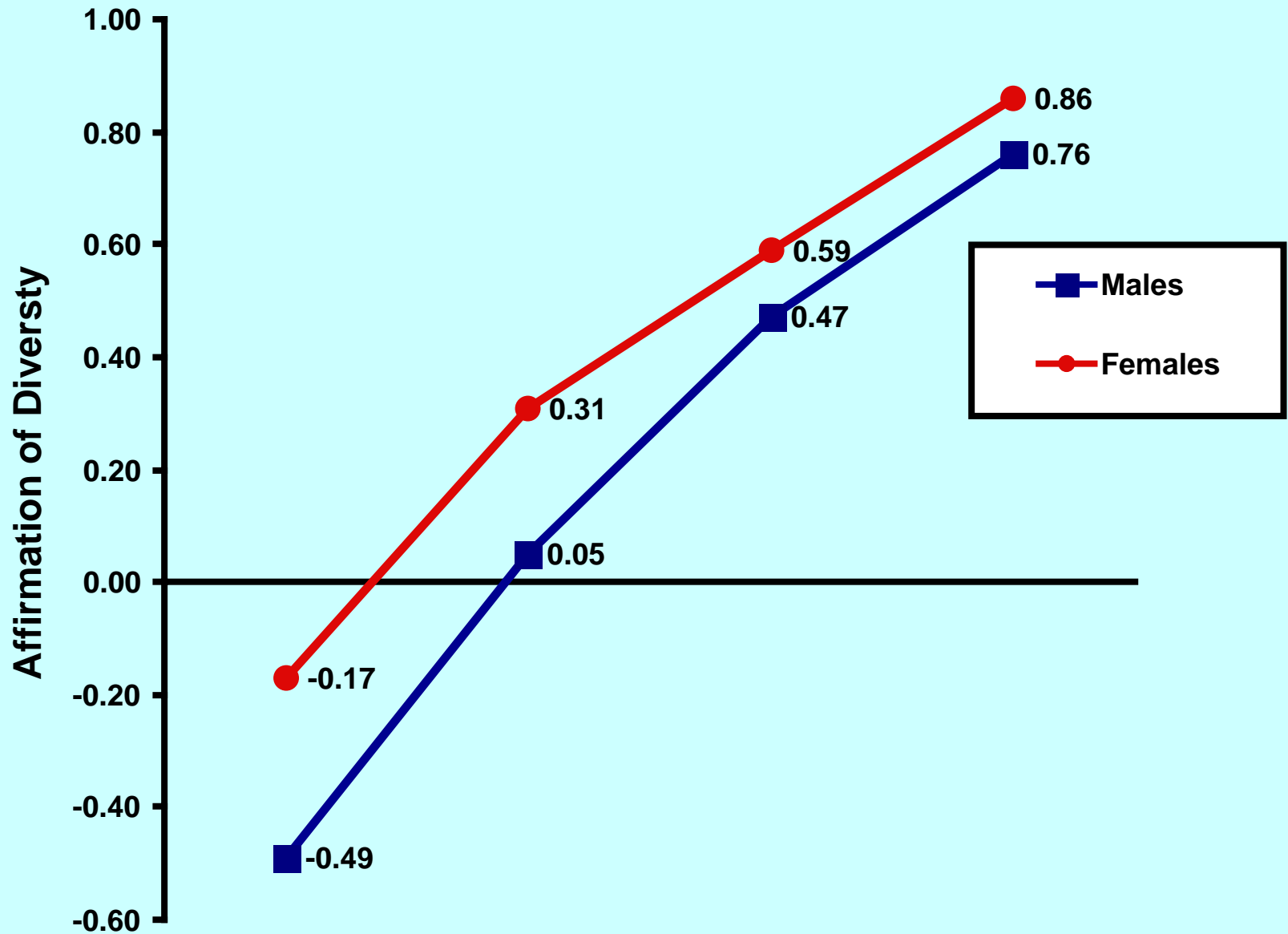
## Single-Item Indices of Developmental Thriving Used By Search Institute

- **School grades**
- **Leadership**
- **Helping others**
- **Maintenance of physical health**
- **Delay of gratification**
- **Valuing diversity**
- **Overcoming adversity**

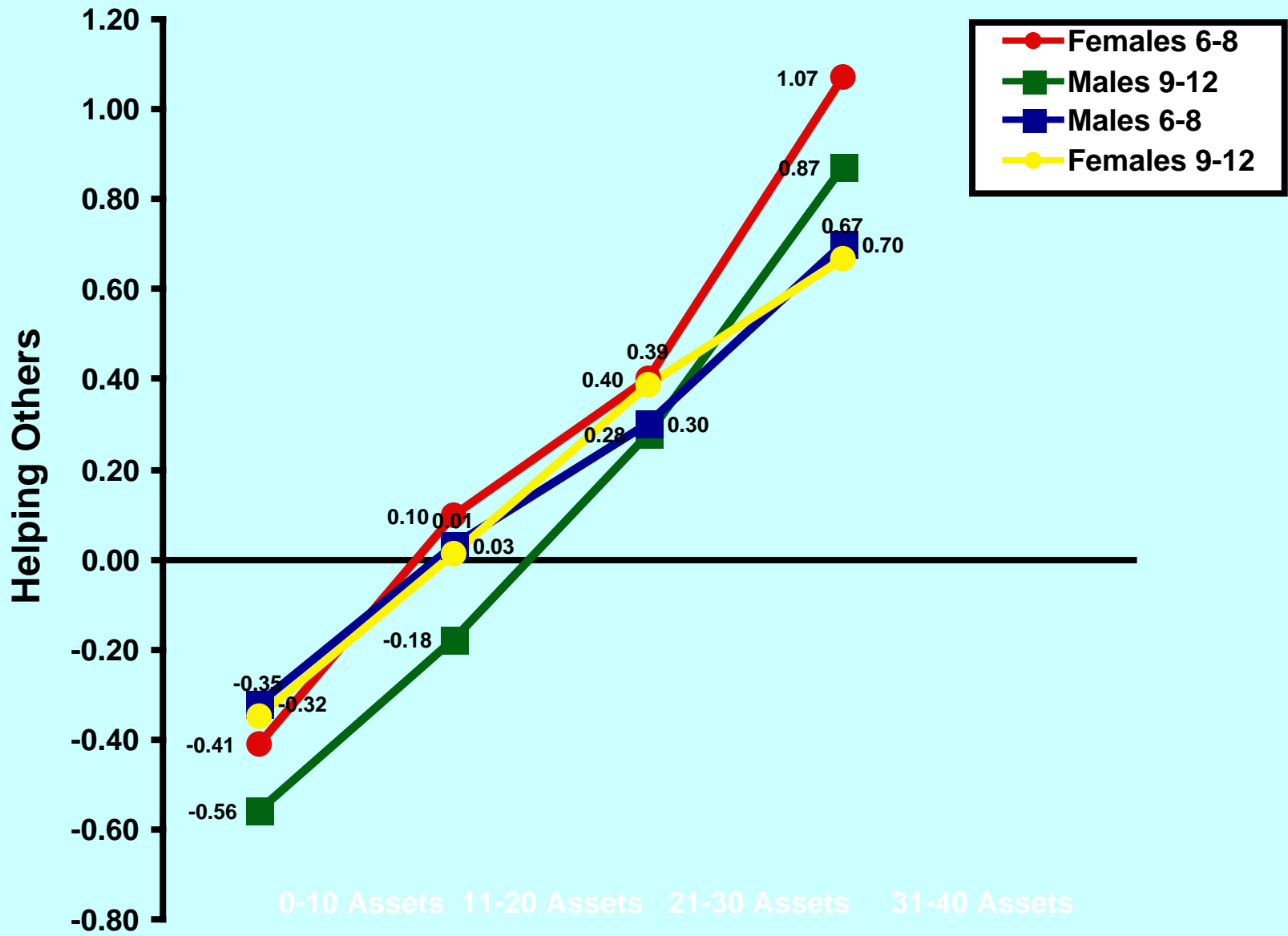
Source: Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth, *Applied Developmental Science*, 2000.



Adapted from Scales et al., 2000



Adapted from Scales et al., 2000

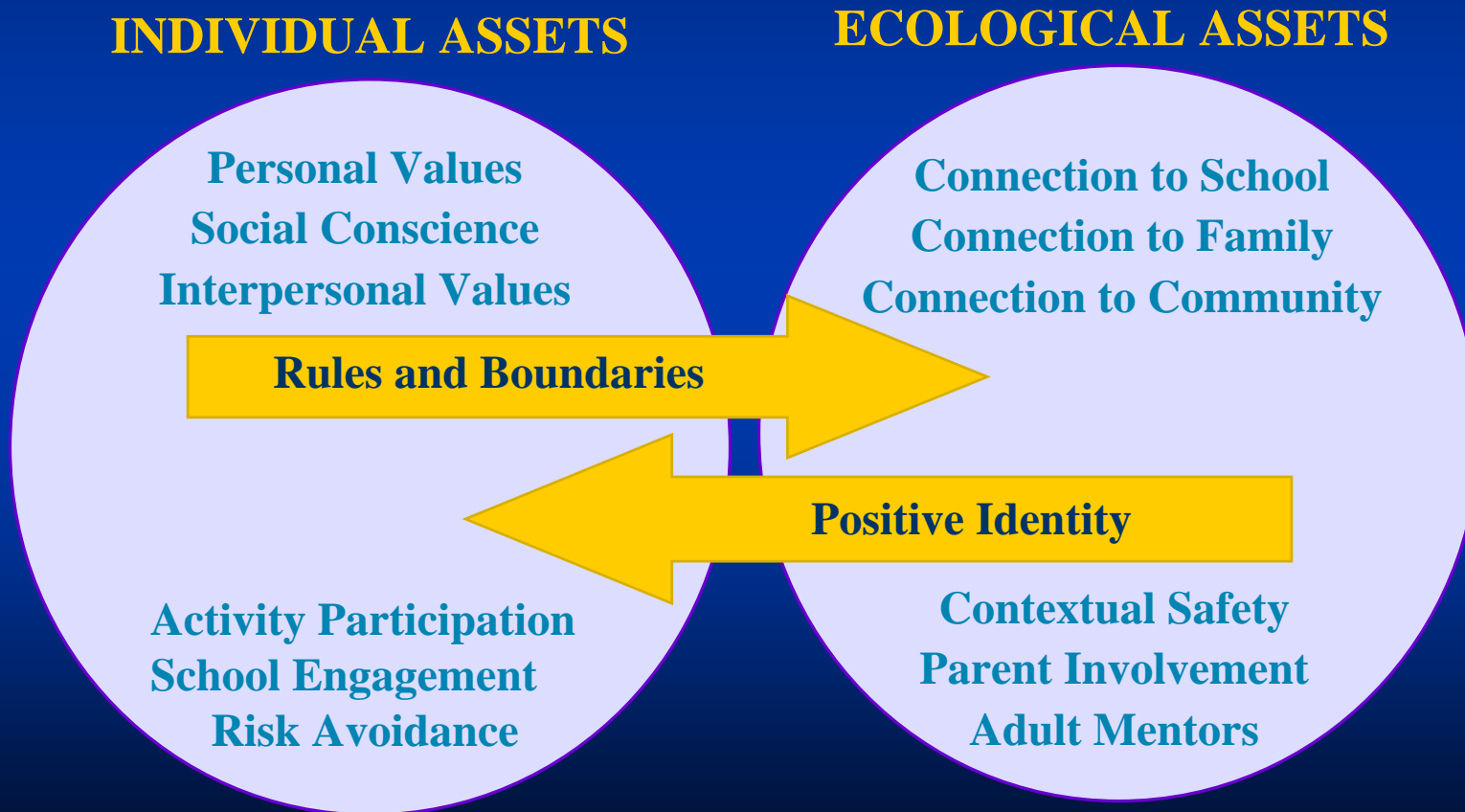


Adapted from Scales et al., 2000

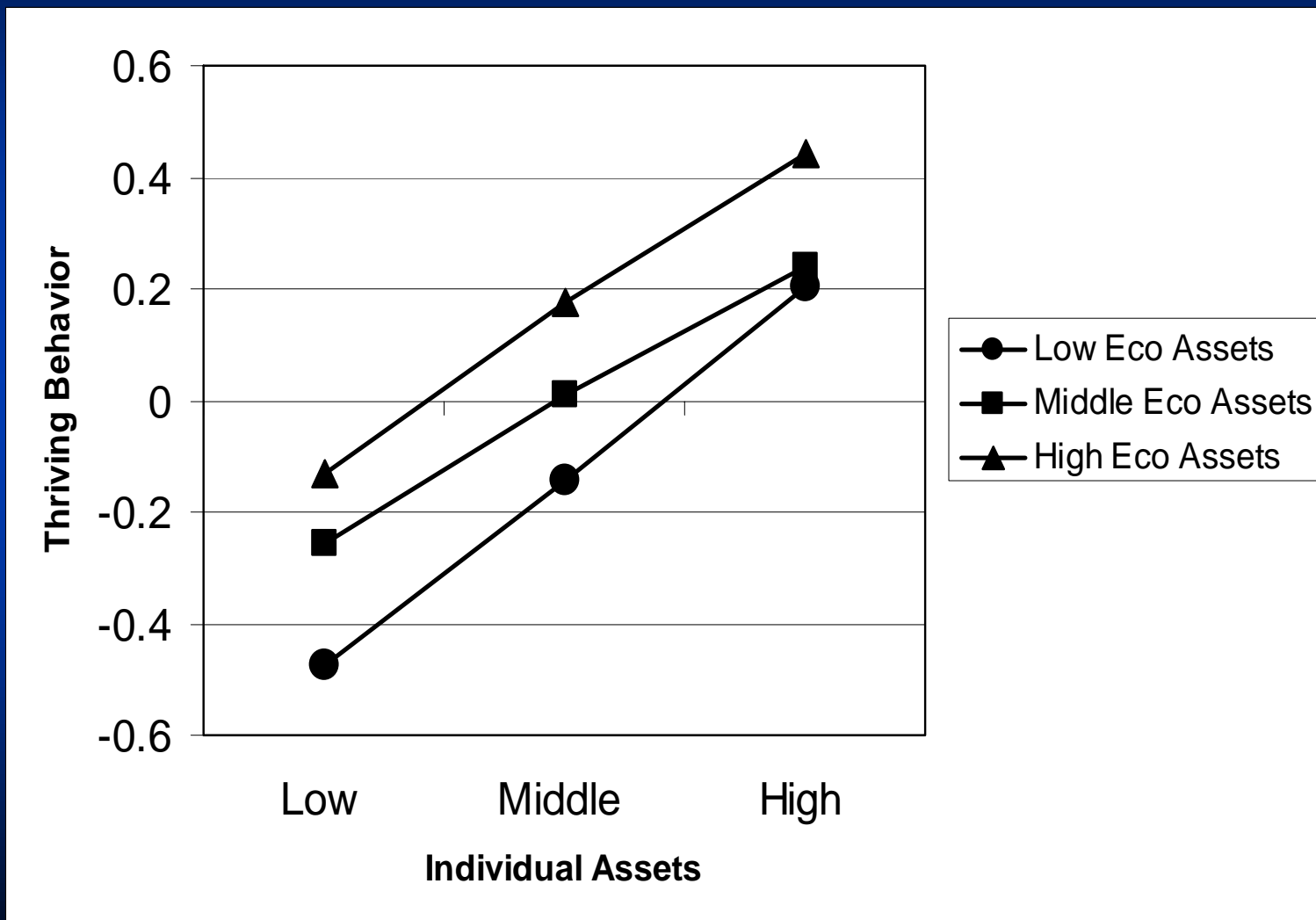
# **CAN THE 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS BE REDUCED IN NUMBER?**

**A Collaboration between**  
*Search Institute*  
**and the**  
*Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development*

## Relationship Between Individual and Ecological Assets (Theokas, et al., 2005)



## Relationship between Levels of Individual and Ecological Assets and the Thriving Behaviors Composite Score (Theokas, et al., 2005)



# WHAT IS CURRENTLY THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO BUILD THESE ASSETS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

## REVISITING THE “BIG THREE:”

- **Positive & Sustained Adult-Youth Relations**
- **Youth Skill Building Opportunities**
- **Youth Participation in & Leadership of Community Activities**

**“Time spent in youth programs was the developmental asset that appeared to have the most pervasive positive influence...predicting...thriving outcomes...Good youth programs provide young people with access to caring adults and responsible peers, as well as skill-building activities that can reinforce the values and skills that are associated with doing well in school and maintaining good physical health.”**

*Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth, Applied Developmental Science, 2000*

**The 4-H STUDY OF  
POSITIVE YOUTH  
DEVELOPMENT:**

**A Longitudinal Study of PYD from  
Grades 5 to 10**

# Study Participants

■ **Current participants of the 4-H Study are a diverse group of about 1,700 5<sup>th</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup> grade adolescents and approximately 1,200 of their parents.**

■ **The sample varies in socioeconomic status, family structure, rural-urban location, and geographic region of the United States.**

■ **Gender: About Males: 48%, Females: 52%**

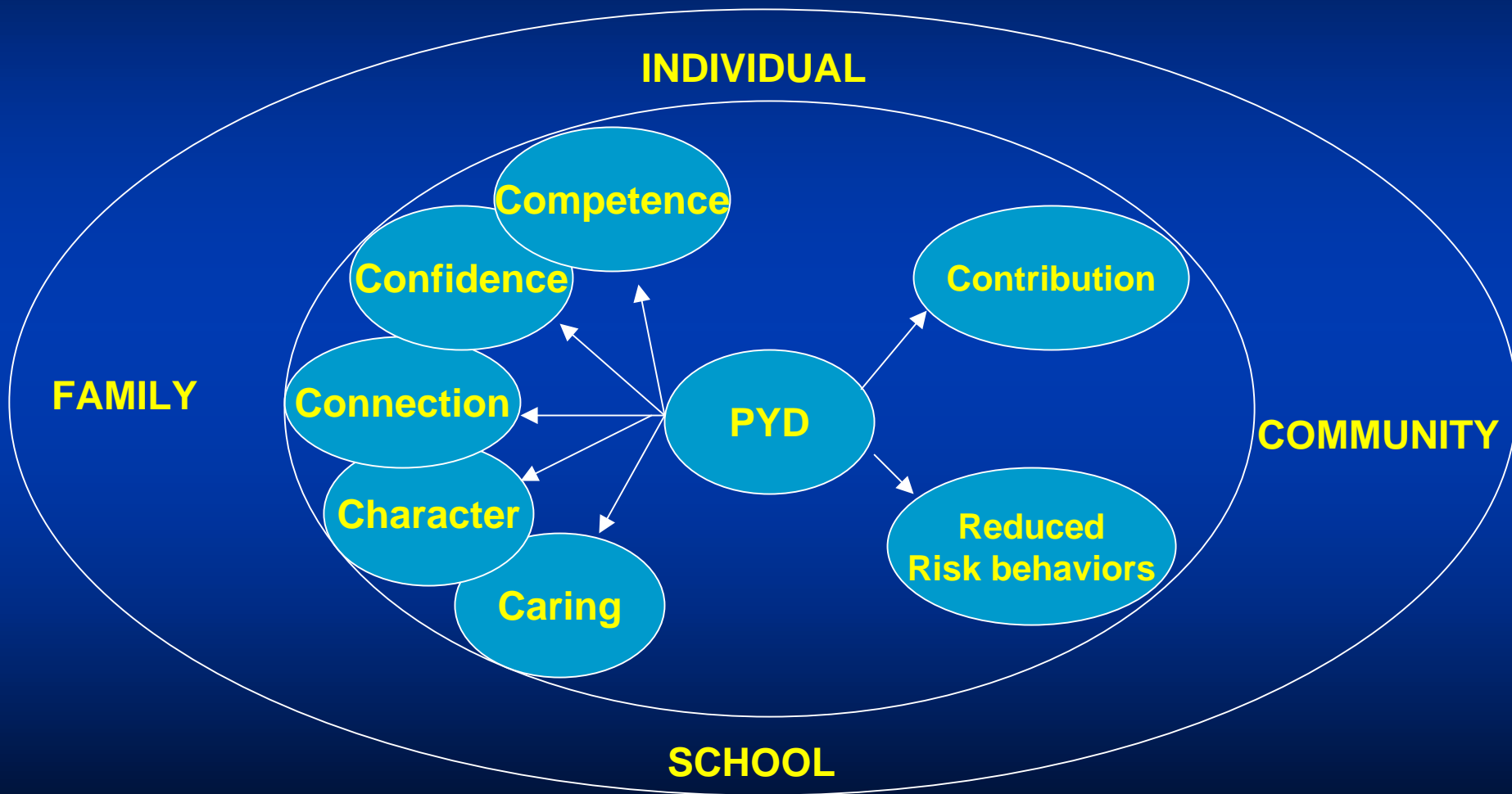
■ **Approximate Race/Ethnicity Distribution:**

Native American:	4%	Asian American:	3%
African American:	8%	Hispanic:	18%
European American:	58%	Multi-ethnic/Multi-racial:	6%
		Other:	3%

■ **Youth and parents come from 20 states in the following regions:**

- **Northeast: MA, NY, RI**
- **Mid-Atlantic: MD, DE**
- **Southeast: AL, FL, NC, KY, MS**
- **Mid-West: WI, TN, MO, MN, KS, IL**
- **Northwest: WA, MT**
- **Southwest: AZ, TX**

# Positive Youth Development Happens in Context



# Indexing Actual Assets in the Ecology

Christina Theokas

Ph.D. Dissertation, Tufts University

December, 2004

# Indexing Actual Assets in the Ecology

**Three contexts were investigated:**

- Families
- Schools
- Communities

# Indexing Actual Assets in the Ecology

Four kinds of assets were measured for each context:

- **Human Resources**: Strengths, skills, talents, and roles of individuals available to youth
- **Physical/Institutional Resources**: Community opportunities for learning, recreation, and engagement with others and the physical world
- **Collective Activity**: Opportunities for engagement between community members, youth, and institutions of society
- **Accessibility**: Ability of youth to use resources (e.g., safety, adult/youth ratios, hours of operation)

# Indexing Actual Assets in the Ecology

## Collecting data about actual assets:

- Collected information from four (4) communities: Missoula, MT; Worcester, MA; Dade County, FL; and Tucson, AZ
- Collected objective measures (e.g., National Center for Education Statistics and town websites)

# Indexing Actual Assets in the Ecology

## RESULTS:

- **Ecological assets were stronger predictors of PYD than were demographic variables (gender, mother's education, socioeconomic status)**
- **Assets in each of the three contexts made independent contributions to the prediction of PYD outcomes**

# Indexing Actual Assets in the Ecology

## RESULTS:

- **Family assets accounted for larger portions of the variance than did school or community assets**
- **Within each context, the following dimensions had the greatest influence on PYD:**
  - **Collective Activity in the Family (eating dinner together)**
  - **Accessibility in School (small teacher: student ratios)**
  - **Human Resources in the Neighborhood (adult mentors)**

## EVIDENCE for Action from the 4-H Study So Far

- We now have evidence that we can speak of PYD and that we don't need to use the language of deficits to talk about adolescence
- We now have longitudinal evidence that the 4-H model of youth development has advantages for youth during the early (lowest risk) period of adolescence
- We now have evidence that youth development programs are linked to higher levels of PYD and to lower levels of problem behaviors
- Policy makers and practitioners can use our evidence to support their advocacy efforts to promote PYD

## Ideas for Action :

# MOVING BEYOND “PROGRAMS” AND TOWARDS A COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY

## CREATING CARING COMMUNITIES BY MAKING MEMBERS OF ALL GENERATIONS “ASSET BUILDERS”

## What Can YOU Do to Build for Youth Stronger:

- **Connections to Schools, Families, and the Community?**
- **Contextual Safety?**
- **Parental Involvement & Adult Mentors?**
- **Positive Identity and Values?**
- **Rules & Boundaries?**
- **Youth Voice, Participation, and Leadership?**

## Possible Action Agenda Items

- **Asset Mapping**
- **Asset Integration and Asset Building**
  - **Family Centered Community Building (FCCB) for Youth**
  - **The Annual Family Re-Union Conferences moderated by Former Vice President Al Gore and Tipper Gore**

# IDEAS FOR ADVOCACY

**YOUNG PEOPLE DESERVE RESOURCES THAT GIVE THEM:**

- A healthy start;
- A safe environment;
- An education for marketable skills;
- An opportunity to participate in community life;
- Freedom from prejudice and discrimination

**Policies**

Policies and programs aimed at providing youth, families, and communities with developmental assets

**Programs**

**DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS:**

- Boundaries and expectations
- Health promotion
- Climate of love and caring (provision of hope)
- Inculcation of self-esteem
- Encouragement and support of growth
- Constructive use of time
- Modeling of positive values
- Provision of positive links to the community
- Provision of a safe environment
- Provision of freedom from prejudice and discrimination

**Intergenerational transmission**

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY**

**AND**

**OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH:**

Competence  
Connection  
Confidence  
Character  
Caring

**“BIG THREE” PROGRAM DESIGN ELEMENTS SUPPORTING PYD:**

Positive and sustained adult-youth relationships  
Skill building  
Youth participation