

How to cite this article:

Alias, N. F., Abdul-Malik, N. I., Sulaiman, N., Wan Din, W. Z., & Shaik-Abdullah, S. (2020). Characteristics and factors of resilience: Multiple accounts of adult conflicts. *Practitioner Research*, 2, 121-136.

CHARACTERISTICS AND FACTORS OF RESILIENCE: MULTIPLE ACCOUNTS OF ADULT CONFLICTS

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Received: 24/08/2020 **Revised:** 27/08/2020 **Accepted:** 31/08/2020 **Published:** 6/9/2020

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the characteristics that are possessed by resilient people, guided by two main research questions that were asked to understand further about the situation which are (i) characteristics of resilience, and (ii) factors that contribute to resilience. Data was collected through face-to-face interview and written response. A total of three people were involved as participants by using convenient sampling. Interview transcripts and written responses were coded, analysed, and the emerging key themes were discussed. The analysis suggested that resilient people possessed characteristics such as having a positive outlook, endurance, determination, resourcefulness, and spiritual belief in overcoming problems or obstacles in life. Having these characteristics allows individuals to persevere and contribute to their resilience. In addition, the results found that factors that contributed towards resilience are early experience, better life, goals, mindfulness and social support. This study provides an insight on how resilient people act and carry themselves to overcome adversities. It is hoped that the qualitative outcome of this study will help people, especially educators and parents to gradually build these characteristics in young people to help them to become a resilience person, despite all the struggles in life.

Keywords—*resilience characteristics, resilience factors, perseverance, positive psychology, qualitative research*

INTRODUCTION

Resilience has been studied in the psychology area (especially positive psychology) to be able to see how people generally cope with difficult and life-changing situations. Resilient individuals potentially can avoid unpleasant psychological conditions, for instance, severe depression due to their ability to cope, which allows them to control stressful situations and challenges in a more effective way (Aroian & Norris, 2000). Although people may recover from an unpleasant situation over time, substantial effort and strategy are required before individuals can be back to their normal situation or to accomplish success.

Martin, Macdonald, Margrett, & Poon (2010) postulate that there are various types of resilience which are personal resilience, cognitive resilience, and social and economic resilience. Meanwhile, Bonanno (2012) explained that resilience is a construct with meanings which include a global process in relation to the development and maintenance of healthy adjustment, a positive outcome following adversity, an aspect of personality, and, an extensive range of capacities, characteristics and resources (Pruchno, Heid, & Genderson, 2015). Apart from that, resilience also can be linked to the lack of post-traumatic stress illness, chronic grief, and depression. Assessment of adaptive functioning of those aspects would be useful from simultaneous consideration of both psychological and physiological, as well as positive and negative well-being result (Ryff, Friedman, Morozink, & Tsenkova, 2012).

Nevertheless, (Kern & Friedman, 2010) highlighted that resilience is essentially related to early stages in human life because it will affect how individuals react to adversities and life challenges. It is believed that internal stress, conscientiousness, social affairs, coping responses, as well as health behaviours possibly contribute to whether or not an individual will remain strong and thrive on overcoming challenges or surrenders. Thus, individuals should be exposed and supported by people around them since young, so they know how to avoid a situation that leads to depression.

According to Azam et al. (2013) in his study on ‘Loneliness and depression among the elderly in an agricultural settlement: Mediating effects of social support’, resilience played a role in connecting loneliness and depression which suggest that resilience can act as a barrier towards depression. Similarly, Arnup & Bowles (2016) found that resilience can guard individuals from emotional exhaustion in relation to stress. The study suggests that individuals with high resilience will be able to cope with stress and poor working environment better as compared to those with low resilience, which resulted in perseverance to stay in a job. A study proved that intervention on improving the level of resilience is definitely effective in reducing individual stress level and at the same time allowing for quicker recovery of unpleasant events, to be more confident as well as improving satisfaction in the workplace (Lantieri, Kyse, Harnett, & Malkmus, 2011).

Moreover, Pruchno et al. (2015) mentioned that resilience generally has been studied on children or adults, hence enlightened the reason why individuals achieve success despite challenges and hardship in life. Conversely, Bonanno (2012) indicated that it is important to measure resilience in terms of the psychological aspect over a certain period to fully understand the whole process and different kind of adversities in life. This includes temporary distressing situation that is most likely remote, yet maybe has caused a terrible impact on individuals especially due to loss of resources. Therefore, the current study aims to explain the characteristics of resilience and factors that contributed to resilience. This study was guided by the following research questions: What are the characteristics of resilience? And, what are the factors that contribute to resilience?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study was initiated as part of a coursework fulfilment, which required students to conduct investigations on the concept of resilience. Each student was required to identify a resilient person in his/her lives and explore qualitatively via verbal and written responses about the characteristics and factors of resilience. Participants were identified

through convenience sampling, which involved those known to the students to be resilient according to the following criteria: willingness to participate in the study, had experienced adversities or witnessed someone with such experience and were able to overcome adversities. Upon completion of data collection, students were required to work in groups to comparatively analyse the data collected from different participants in order to generate themes about characteristics of resilience and factors that contribute to resilience. This report is based on the analysis of interviews and written responses of three participants to generate themes relating to the characteristics and factors that determined individuals as a resilience person. Table 1 presents some demographic information about the participants. All names are pseudonyms. In seeking the participants' consent to be interviewed, it was discovered that only Mariam and Nurita were willing to share their narratives about being resilient. Omar was not comfortable to talk about himself and had therefore chosen to talk about a close friend who he identified as resilient.

Data Collection

This study implemented a qualitative research design in identifying characteristics of resilience and resilience factors through interpretive case study approach. This approach was chosen because it is suitable in finding out participants' in-depth opinion on the research questions which are characteristics and factors on resilience, as well as allowing them to take the time to further explain their personal thoughts and life experiences on the matter.

Data were collected from participants for over three weeks and took place either at the participants' home or office. This is to ensure that they are comfortable to talk and express themselves regarding the topic. Initially, the participants were involved in the first interview session, then followed by the second interview to gain a deeper understanding about their experiences, thoughts and factors that they think contribute to their resilience or other individual's resilience. All of the interview sessions were recorded for transcription purposes. Each of the interview session took about 30 minutes to one-hour time based on participants' willingness to talk further on the research questions.

However, participants who preferred to express their opinions in writing were allowed to provide a written response as a second data source in order to gain more information. This is because some of the participants were not satisfied with the interview sessions itself and wanted to ensure that they provided adequate data for the study. Table 2 shows the questions asked during the interview sessions to accommodate the research questions. Nevertheless, some interview questions were altered accordingly to accommodate and encourage participants' responses for more data.

Ethical Consideration

Verbal informed consent was gained from the participants to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality. The researchers explained to the participants about the topic, the aim of the study, and data collection methods, which were through audio-recording and written response. Apart from that, participants' personal information has been kept confidential as anonymous by using a pseudonym. Participants also were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point or retract any information that they did not want to use within the specified time frame.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was an ongoing procedure. After data was collected, which included the first and second interview as well as participants' written response, it was carefully and individually transcribed as quickly as possible. Initially, all of the data were read and re-read carefully in order to achieve an overall understanding of its contents (Denzin, 2005) and analysed using thematic analysis procedure. Next, it was categorised with codes that have been marked using different colours based on the meaning and similarities between them, which later merged into subthemes and lastly reduced to five major themes for characteristics and factors of resilience, respectively. The themes for characteristics of resilience are positive outlook, endurance, determination, resourcefulness, and have faith. Meanwhile, factors of resilience are early experience, better life, goals, mindfulness and social support as stated in Table 3 All of the data gained from the participants were triangulated to validate and support the findings and address the research questions.

FINDINGS

The findings revealed that five themes emerged from the data for both characteristics and factors of resilience. These are essential characteristics or components that are possessed by a resilient person, particularly in overcoming adversities and challenges in a particular situation specifically, and their life generally. The first theme for characteristics of resilience is related to the person's positive outlook. The second theme is concerned with endurance, and the third theme is determination. The fourth one is resourcefulness, meanwhile, the fifth component is associated with spiritual belief. Next, factors that contributed towards individuals' resilience, and the first theme revealed is early experience. The second theme is related to a better life, thirdly is goals, fourthly is mindfulness and the last one is social support.

Characteristics of Resilience

1. Positive outlook

The interview and a written response from the participants revealed that the main important characteristic of resilience is to have a positive mindset in solving and managing challenges in life. They indicated that if someone believes in themselves, then they will be able to keep on learning and trying in achieving their goals, although they might have encountered many failures over and over again. Furthermore, participants identified that a positive mindset would lead to good behaviour and right action as they work hand in hand towards success. One participant also stressed that people's opinion is unnecessary and not important as long as their goals are met.

Everyone has their own stories and don't compare yourself with others. Some people might have a smooth sailing journey, and your experience might not be the same. For him, one's journey is different from others, so he kept doing his job. (Omar)

I take the attitude of always staying positive in managing my emotions and to learn from zero and understand the meaning of adversities before I could see what success is. (Nurita)

By being brave, I can manage to handle the pressures. When I'm not afraid of pressure from others and do what I need to do, regardless of others reaction or perception. I just want to make this effort a success even though other people may criticise my decision or underestimate my doings. (Mariam)

2. Endurance

Participants mentioned that their ability to endure through hardships was contributed by people around them who are always there to help, to guide and to carry the burden together with them. They emphasised that a positive environment makes them stronger to push themselves harder, physically and emotionally, keep on pursuing and not to give up easily.

He did not keep the problem himself, but he looked for someone that could teach him until he understood. He believed that every problem has its own solution, and he knew he could overcome them to ask others over and over again. (Omar)

Dealings with my children need high endurance and a strong mentality to help them learn and become more independent. They need my guidance as a parent to help them survive. (Mariam)

I had to always be strong and patient in dealing with life tests, no matter how big they are. I must give high-quality work and stay firm in solving all kinds of problems. (Nurita)

3. Determination

Participants said that they never give up in life and overcoming hardships because they realised that success needs consistency and patience. However, one should gain knowledge and have realistic expectations before being persistent about it. By doing that, individuals will have the courage and determination to pursue their intention without having a second thought because all aspects have been looked into and taken care of.

He did not really know how to solve some analytical problems that he encountered during the study, but still, he was determined to pursue

and finish it. He did not keep the problem himself, but he looked for someone that could teach him until he understood. He believed that every problem has its own solution, and he knew that he could overcome this by asking over and over again. (Omar)

4. Resourcefulness

The interview and a written response from the participants revealed that individuals should be wise in terms of help-seeking by finding the right person, the right way and the pros and cons of the issue before making any decision. Omar, for example, mentioned that there is no point in trying out many ways to solve a problem without any research done because it would be wasted. Instead, individuals should occupy themselves with valuable knowledge in regards to the problem before taking the next step.

He resourced himself with a way... how to save himself from getting worse financially. He has a good knowledge of how to tackle this problem. There are about three or four of his colleagues who did not know this kind of trick and eventually being charged double on the fees, of which sadly because of the charge, some of them gave up their studies. (Omar)

Mariam also spoke about the right step to take, which is by making sure that goals are achievable so that individuals don't get disappointed when it comes to failure.

The dream needs to be realistic and not some unapproachable goals so that we won't be discouraged when it doesn't work. I also learn that from every mistake I make. (Mariam)

5. Spiritual Belief

Participants attributed their success or the success of others for being resilient, particularly for having faith in God as this characteristic has made them feel like they have something to hold to throughout all sorts of difficulties. Also, they emphasised that apart from an effort in doing and achieving something, they persevere because they know that they have been through unpleasant experience because

God knows that they are able to cope with the test. Apart from that, participants highlighted that because they have encountered many difficult times in life, they just feel grateful about it. Challenges in life have gradually transitioned people into a better and stronger person over time.

Spiritual relationship with God is also important, and we have to seek His help in going through whatever challenges. Sometimes during hardship, we need this strong faith cause we know where to turn to. (Omar)

I also believe that being faithful to God helps give inner strength when I have problems, and I know that God will test those who are strong enough to face challenges. (Mariam)

Factors of Resilience

1. Early experience

Participants said that they have faced many hardships in life, especially in terms of financial, and it has taught them to be resilient, from time to time. They believed that previous experience helps them in becoming who they are right now because they have learned from past mistakes, so they know how to handle stress and solve problems. My past hardship also makes me become resilient where I use to take multiple jobs to make ends meet and send my children to school. I will try to contribute half of the expenses together with my husband so that our children can have a good education and help them get better life in their future. I also learn that from every mistake I make. (Mariam)

2. Better life

Participants revealed that they are becoming resilient because they did not want the life they had before, repeated to their offspring; thus they work hard to improve everything they could so that their family are able to live comfortably.

Apart from that, one respondent mentioned that financial is undoubtedly important, but individuals can improve their life in many

other aspects such as education, beliefs and qualities they hold as a person. That should be the main reason why individuals should persist because, in the end, we always want to be better than yesterday.

I think my children were the drive to make me become stronger and always want to move forward. I always said to myself that I don't want my children and upcoming generation to experience these difficulties I went through before. (Mariam)

He knew that once it's over, the pressure would disappear. Happiness. Even with huge debts, gradually, he will be able to pay up. Everyone wants money, but learning is not just about monetary gain. We become knowledgeable to help others. What is most important is the reward for the self. (Omar)

3. Goals

Having goals was reported to be an important factor to resilience as it guides individuals to reach what they have planned ahead. Participants indicated that goal-setting leads individuals to endure to achieve what they want, although it might not be smooth sailing as compared to others. They said that any discouragement from people should be set aside if individuals wish to keep their motivation high consistently.

We have to control our heart, not to think too much about other people. Think about ourselves. Like Noah, he doesn't entertain, does his own work. There is no need to worry about others. Even if we finish late, struggle and hang on till we are done. (Omar)

Nowadays, I was busy making the small scale of frozen food production, and I just want to make this effort a success even though other people may criticise my decision or underestimate my doings. I'll be brave to face all the reaction and making this effort a success. (Mariam)

Always set goals, and reward myself, and this attitude has given me strength to keep going. (Nurita)

4. Mindfulness

Most participants talked about the importance of letting go of difficult situations to God and accepted everything that had been thrown their way with an open heart. By doing that, they felt stronger and also thankful with what they currently had, felt adequate and believed that the test would be over when the time comes.

We must believe that God is there to help us. Seek God's help. May be He is testing us this way because He knows we can handle it compared to others. We feel what we are facing is hard, but may be there are those facing more difficult situations. Easier said than done, but if we can't think this way, we will give up on living. This is the way to calm the heart, we have to believe that God will help. (Omar)

Having a peaceful mind helps me to see things clearer and able to seek for a better solution in managing my problems. For example, when my state of mind is peaceful, I am able to think clearly when dealing with my family's financial problem. I also believe that being faithful to God helps give inner strength when I have problems, and I know that God will test those who are strong enough to face challenges. (Mariam)

5. Social support

The participants explained that the role of family and friends' understandings was essential, or else they might lose control in facing adversities in life. They figured that they became resilient and persevered because and for the people that really cared about them. However, one of the participants said that individuals should know to whom they are sharing their problem with in order to get positive encouragement and wise advice.

It is not easy to do things if the family doesn't understand what actually is happening. Having to explain things is not easy. You just have to ignore and go on with the plan, because people just tend to compare. We have to be selective of whom we can share our problems with, hoping that this person will suggest ideas, look for a way out (Omar)

Moral support is important to develop healthier mental health, and people with good support also can be resilient. (Mariam)

DISCUSSION

The present study highlighted the characteristics and factors of resilience people. Individuals that possessed these characteristics can be identified as successful people because they have gone through a lot of challenges or difficult situations, and yet are able to have a positive outlook, endurance, determination, resourcefulness, and spiritual belief in unravelling any issues throughout their life. Furthermore, this is also due to the way resilient people perceived stress which influences them to manage and deal with problems, and this will be more effective with strong social support (Moore et al., 2015). Moreover, participants emphasised that factors that contributed towards resilience are early experience, better life, goals, mindfulness and social support.

The results clearly show that resilience is an ongoing process and individuals will use their early experience throughout their life as a guide to overcoming forthcoming adversities. Individuals also are resilient because they want to have a better life than before, and in order to do this, they basically set their mind to achieve certain things and perform persistently. The environment and networks play a huge impact in keeping individuals motivated because these are sources that help individuals to be resilient, apart from they themselves believe in what should and should not be done for their own good. It is necessary for people to have a good foundation in building these characters since a young age because having positive and supportive people around them will keep their motivation up and not easily quit despite all difficulties. Family and friends' involvement in the time of hardship appeared to be a factor that contributes towards resilience which has shed light on the importance of positive environment and meaningful resources in a person life (Li, 2017). Most importantly, results from this study should be used and lead towards characters building and guide individuals to be resilient, despite hardships.

REFLECTION

In a nutshell, it can be concluded that a person that own characteristics including positive outlook, endurance, determination, resourceful, and spiritual belief in dealing with obstacles in life can be considered as a resilience person. Factors that influence individuals to be resilience is due to their early experience, to get a better life, achieving goals, the state of mindfulness and social support. For that reason, we must know what we are lacking in terms of personal traits and start to build and strengthen them in ourselves so that we can be resilience in whatever circumstances that may come in life. Additionally, we have to realise that everyone should be resilience in order to be a successful person because they have tried over and over again but never feel frustrated or given up when it comes to failure, and as a consequence succeed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was supported by the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS), Ministry of Higher Education (S/O Code 13041) in 2014, with the amount of MYR 62,000.

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Appendix A: Participants' Demographic Information

| Participant Pseudonym | Occupation | Age | Narrative of self or others | Narrative context |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Omar | Lecturer | 36 | Other | Close friend's PhD experience |
| Mariam | Housewife/ small business | 55 | Self | Family and poverty |
| Nurita | Own business | 36 | Self | Career development |

Appendix B: Research Question and Interview Questions

| Research Questions | Interview Questions |
|---------------------------|---|
| RQ 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the characteristics of a resilient person? • What is your opinion about resilience? • How does a resilient person act during hardship? • How does a resilient person overcome difficulties? |
| RQ 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the factors that make someone resilient? • What have you experienced in life that makes you resilient? • Why are you resilient? |

Appendix C: Research Questions and Themes

| Research Questions | Themes | Subthemes |
|--|---------------------|--|
| What are the characteristics of a resilience person? | 1. Positive outlook | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to bounce back · Positive attitude · Self-sufficient · Willing to learn · Confident |
| | 2. Endurance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptive environment • Mental, physical, emotional • Brave |
| | 3. Determination | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience · Never give up · Consistent |
| | 4. Resourcefulness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experimental work · Risk-taking |
| | 5. Spiritual belief | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith · Thankful · Grateful · Sincerity |
| What are the factors for resilience? | 1. Early experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial situation · Unfortunate life |
| | 2. Better life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial · Work stress · Studies |
| | 3. Goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine · Achievement |
| | 4. Mindfulness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forget pass experience · Acceptance · Don't compare with others |
| | 5. Social support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and friends' encouragement · Positive environment |