

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESILIENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH IN  
ADOLESCENTS IN NON-WESTERN CULTURES :  
A SHORT NARRATIVE REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

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**Abstract**

Resilience has been a significant topic in modern research, strengthening adolescents and promoting positive mental health outcomes. This narrative review aims to understand the relationship between resilience and adolescent mental health in non-western cultures, since most related research has been done in western, developed countries. A narrative literature format was conducted involving systematic searches of electronic databases. Forty peer reviewed research articles were analyzed to identify factors related to resilience and adolescent mental health in non-western cultures. Four themes were identified as factors of resilience in non-western cultures. They were family support, physical activity, cultural beliefs and values, gratitude and prosocial behaviours Resilience is crucial for mental health and well-being of an adolescent. Lot of past literature shows positive relationship among resilience and adolescent mental health. The resilience factors like family support, physical activity, cultures beliefs, gratitude and pro social behaviors are important for fostering resilience among adolescents in non-western cultures. It is important to focus on interventions to strengthen these factors to support adolescent mental health at the research, clinical and policy level.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Coping, Mental health, Non-Western Cultures, Resilience

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## **Introduction**

Adolescence is often described as a period of storm and stress which has turmoil and discontinuity. The period is marked by hormonal, emotional and psychological changes. Mental health problems during the adolescence period will affect the education, family relationships, friendships and overall well-being, which is also crucial for a healthy transition into adulthood. Current research on adolescent development has differed a lot. A great deal of research on western adolescent focus on adjustment, family relations, puberty and its effects. As there are lot of changes during adolescence, effective coping is needed to respond to challenges in life (Petersen, Silbereisen & Sorensen, 1996). The cultural values and beliefs are transmitted by the family to the developing child and later by other institutions like schools or religious institutions. The culture the adolescent belongs to play a crucial role in developing their identity. And as they grow, they will contribute to society, enhancing and changing the culture they live in. The degree of support and opportunities available will also vary from culture to culture to the adolescent population of country (Bagshaw,2009).

Mental health among adolescents in non-western cultures is influenced by a complex interplay of cultural, social, economic, and environmental factors. Non-western culture includes East Asia, Southeast Asia, Indian subcontinent, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. The methods adolescents develop and use to cope with stress vary according to cultural scripts and values. Understanding and addressing mental health issues among adolescents in non-western cultures require culturally competent approaches that respect and integrate local beliefs, practices and social structures.

Past research has identified that interventions aimed at building resilience through strengthening protective factors can address mental health problems in children and adolescents, especially during the times of increased risk or adversity. Childhood and adolescence are critical periods of development and there is a need for resilience focused interventions (Dray, 2021). Children and adolescents face daily stressors, where they might recover or remain distressed. Those who cannot recover to acute daily stressors might turn to chronic, mental negative health outcomes.

Resilience is crucial to promote overall development of children and adolescents who are at risk of developing a psychiatric disorder. Resilience refers to positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity (Herrman et al., 2011). Resilience and well-being have become common terms in child and adolescent psychiatric literature. In the early 2000s, resilience was explained as resistance to disease or as a capacity to cope with adversity. Now, resilience is a part of personal factors, a promoter of mental health and as a fundamental element of well-being of every individual (Lutter, Schimmelmänn & Schmidt, 2016).

Nurturing resilience in the adolescent will prevent distress turning into a mental health disorder. Resilience is a protective mechanism that helps youth maintain balance through promoting positive mental health to face any adversity, to bounce back after an adversity and bounce back to their original state. This will help the adolescent respond to difficult life situations while making the health of the youth optimized (Martinez & Opalinski, 2019).

Research highlights the importance of positive parenting in prevention of child abuse and neglect, fostering resilience in children, youth and families to cope with stress produced by economic downturn (APA, 2023). The World Health Organization's Atlas project revealed that 20% of children and adolescents suffer from a disabling mental illness, and suicide is the third leading cause of death among adolescents. The project also noted that that low-income countries had low capacity to provide social

services and emphasized the importance of defining the degree of which impairment of specific disorders in different cultures (Belfer,2008).

Mental health issues can be perceived differently across cultures. In many non-Western societies, stigma or misconceptions surrounding mental health disorders may lead to underreporting or reluctance to seek professional help (Ahad, Sanchez-Gonzalez & Junquera, 2023). Additionally, Traditional healing practices or religious beliefs often shape how mental health is understood and treated. Inequities in access to resources and opportunities may further contribute to heightened stress and anxiety among adolescents in these cultures. The availability, affordability and cultural appropriateness of mental health services vary widely, with barriers such as stigma, language difficulties, and a lack of trained professionals often hindering access to effective care.

Despite these challenges, many adolescents in non-Western cultures exhibit resilience and adaptive coping strategies. Cultural strengths, traditions, and community support systems can enhance resilience and promote positive mental health outcomes. This paper aims to review past literature to identify factors associated with resilience among adolescents in non-Western cultures. The narrative review will be particularly useful in the Sri Lankan context, where children and adolescents have faced significant stressors over the past decade, including the Easter Attack, COVID -19 pandemic, and the economic crisis. Recent research has shown that the prevalence of mental health problems such as anxiety, loneliness and suicidal ideation among the Sri Lankan adolescents is higher than the global average (Rasalingam et. al, 2022). Therefore, this review will address the research question: What factors are associated with resilience in adolescents in non-Western cultures is essential for developing culturally sensitive interventions that address the unique challenges these adolescents face. Resilience, shaped by cultural strengths, family dynamics, community support, and traditional practices, may differ significantly from Western contexts. Understanding these specific factors is vital for creating effective strategies that enhance mental well-being, especially in societies where formal mental health services are limited or stigmatized. Additionally, exploring resilience in non-Western cultures contributes to a more global understanding of adolescent mental health, helping to build inclusive, adaptable interventions that can be applied across diverse cultural settings.

### **Methodology**

The aim of this paper is to review research on what factors of resilience are associated with adolescents in non-western cultures. The paper explored 40 research articles on resilience studies mainly focusing on non-western cultures such as East Asian, Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern and African. This article is a narrative literature review. Narrative review style is best for topics which require meaningful synthesis just like resilience which needs research evidence in a broad, detailed descriptive manner with interpretation (Sukhera, 2022). The search was conducted using data bases like APA Psych net, Wiley Online Library, Research Gate, Psych INFO, Google Scholar and PubMed using the terms such as resilience, adolescents, non-western cultures, positive factors, mental health and well-being. No limits were set regarding date or involved in the study. The age category from 10 years to 17 years was considered as the research is on adolescents. The research articles quantitative and qualitative which are peer reviewed and in English are included. The publications used in the paper ranged from years ranged from 2005- 2024. The resilience studies on adults and children were excluded. The research on mental illness and resilience was excluded and even resilience studies in western cultures. The reviewed papers data was analyzed thematically to identify themes future explorations.

## **Results**

The results of this narrative review reveal key factors associated with resilience among adolescents in non-western cultures. Through a comprehensive analysis of the literature, several key themes emerged, highlighting the multifaceted nature of resilience in these contexts. These factors include influence of family support, cultural beliefs and values, physical activity, gratitude and prosocial behaviors. The findings highlight the importance of understanding these factors within specific cultural and social frameworks of non-western settings. Also, they play a critical role in shaping resilience and mental health outcomes among adolescents. The following sections will explore the identified themes.

### ***Family support***

Family support emerges as a significant factor contributing to adolescent resilience. Positive family relationships, characterized by open communication and emotional support, enhance adolescents' ability to cope with stressors and maintain mental well-being. Secure attachments within the family context provide a foundation of stability and emotional security, buffering against the negative effects of adversity. Research on resilience level among adolescent children: a school-based study in Kolkata, India found out that quality family time will increase resilience and coping skills (Banerjee et.al, 2018).

Great efforts focusing on family, rather than individuals, will help create the optimal close relationship attachment condition for young adults which will benefit their mental health (Alavi et.al, 2020). Research shows the impact family environment on emotional, cognitive and behavioral development of an adolescent. There is a gap in research to show the impact of parental style and involvement on adolescent resilience and further exploration is needed. Research conducted on 2069 primary school students reported resilience of those students with more stable environment, positive relationships with caregivers and family discipline. This research shows why interventions are important to raise family dynamics on children's life satisfaction and resilience through family level enhanced parent-child relationships (Wyman et.al,1992)

A study on the impact of parenting style on the psychological resilience of Adolescents in China found out emotional warmth and family support are factors that positively correlate with psychological resilience. Negative correlation was found between refusal and emotional control with adolescent psychological resilience (Feng et. al, 2024). Above literature shows how important it is for parents to adopt positive parenting methods while avoiding excessive control, punishment and rejection which will increase psychological resilience of adolescents. Family resilience has been helpful in dealing with adolescent with depression to overcome challenges. But research on this area is lacking. A study conducted with 299 parents of children with major depression found out that family communication positively impacts family resilience of depressed adolescents. And vice versa high social support, psychological resilience will improve family resilience which paves future pathways to family interventions targeting depressed adolescents (Zhang, Hu & Yang, 2024). Family support and family protective factors are the central features of resilience construct. Family recovery factors in combination with family protective factors assist families in bouncing back from catastrophes. Key characteristics of resilient families include warmth, affection, cohesion, commitment, and emotional support for one another. Resilient families generally have reasonable and clear-cut expectations for their children. They participate in family celebrations, share spiritual connections, have specific traditions, and predictable routines which increases resilience in adolescents.

Child and adolescent adversity are a major predictor of mental health problems in adolescence. Not every adolescent who faces adversity develops a mental illness but they are called resilient. But the economic inequalities and development may strain community bonds decreasing supportive systems

and make humans vulnerable to mental health issues. Therefore, it is essential to raise community resilience and encourage positive mental health outcomes in any society.

However wide application of a family resilience framework in clinical and community-based intervention and prevention need to be researched and explored in non-western cultures. The family is shaped by social, technological and cultural changes. The family functions in a broad spectrum of social, economic and with cultural practices which focuses on the relationship between the individual and collective community in different geographic and urban spaces.

### ***Cultural values and beliefs***

Non-western cultures include Asia, Africa, India, Latin America, and the Middle East. Cultural beliefs are views that are learned and shared across groups of people. Culture is experiences, expressions, symbols, materials, customs, behaviours, morals, values, attitudes and beliefs created among people and passed from generation to generation as traditions. Cultural values and societal systems may affect the adolescent development by mediating effects proximal social contexts such as family and friends. The relationship between social and environmental factors may moderate adolescent outcomes (Anon, 2014).

Children and adolescents develop in society when there is structure, rules and opportunity with senior members of the society. Still in some traditional societies of the world such as North Queensland, Australia and other indigenous societies share much knowledge, respect and love between generations. The research on psychosocial resilience and vulnerability in Western Australian aboriginal youth which was conducted among Aboriginal youth aged between 12-17 years using the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) between 2000-2002, survey of 5289 Aboriginal children (0–17 years) living in 1999 families. In that resilience was found in cultural identity and stable and supportive family environments. In this study it was recognized that Aboriginal children have greater challenges and strength because of their cultural identity (Hopkins, Taylor & Zubrick, 2018). The development of Strong Souls measurement scale, which was developed to measure the social and emotional well-being of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. The tool identified factors such as strong social connections to peers, family and friends as factors of resilience (Thomas, Cairney, Gunthorpe, Paradies, & Sayers, 2010).

Adaptive coping strategies rooted in cultural practices facilitate resilience among adolescents in non-Western cultures. The rituals, spiritual practices, and storytelling serve as coping mechanisms that foster resilience and encourage emotional well-being. These practices provide a sense of continuousness and sense amid adversity, enhancing adaptive responses. However, globalization and societal changes will cause new stressors and interrupt traditional coping mechanisms. But it is important to have culturally related interventions which includes traditional rituals which will enhance mental health, resilience, well-being in children, adolescents and adults. Future research must focus how resilience vary across cultures and in adverse living conditions such as war, migration, maltreatment, adverse living or home conditions. These research findings will help to create resilience enhanced interventions to promote mental health and well-being. Even though there is research on how family support, culture raise resilience in adolescence, the emerging issue in cross cultural adolescent research is the effects of social change and globalization. Many Asian countries faced major social changes where the traditional cultural beliefs and values were challenged with modern technology and internet. Research is needed to help us understand how social changes influence adolescent physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development (Chen, & Farruggia, 2002).

### ***Physical activity***

When family support and cultural beliefs contribute as positive factors in resilience, it is still crucial to the other factors that increases resilience and well-being in adolescents. Adolescents are exposed to the harmful effects of interpersonal tension, intense academic pressure, negative events which increases anxiety, depression, stress levels and loneliness. However, the reactions to the adverse challenges varies from adolescent to another. It is interesting to research factors affecting one adolescent to face challenges, cope and recover while another to develop a mental illness and their relationship with resilience. Resilience is not a fixed trait but a dynamic process which can be strengthened using various coping practices and protective factors. Physical activity is an important factor to build resilience. The more physical activity the higher the level of resilience (Li et. al, 2024).

This cross-sectional survey conducted in China with adolescents showed how basic psychological needs and self-efficacy successively mediate the direct relationship between physical activity and resilience. Adolescents will benefit from interventions which promotes physical activity which caters to psychological needs of the adolescent. An environment which promotes autonomy, relatedness and competence will make adolescents to willingly engage in physical activities which will enhance resilience. Mental Health professionals must include physical activity into therapeutic interventions to improve physical fitness and to boost resilience and well-being by (Li et.al, 2024).

A research conducted on resilience among Turkish adolescents focused to search for components that contribute to psychological resilience such as physical exercise, emotion control and self-efficacy as effective predictors of resilience. This was conducted among 505 adolescents. The results reported a positive correlation between physical activity and resilience, re appraisal and resilience and self-efficacy and resilience (Cakir et. al, 2024). Another study conducted aimed to explore the effect of physical activity on adolescent resilience via self-efficacy and basic psychological needs through a cross sectional survey with 1732 high school students. Direct relationship was found between physical activity and resilience and with the effect of self-efficacy through basic psychological needs. This remarked an importance of sports psychology and physical education in the education system in schools (Li et. al,2024) The literature above highlights the importance of interventions fulfilling basic psychological needs, enhancing self-efficacy, skill development, resilience through mastering physical activity and sports which raises mental well-being.

### ***Gratitude and Prosocial Behaviours***

Gratitude is a foundation to well-being and mental health throughout life. Gratitude can give psychological, physical and relational benefits from any person from childhood to old age. This increases happiness, health and other positive life outcomes and decreases negative effects and problematic functioning (Emmons, Froh & Rose, 2019). Prosocial behaviours has a range of actions intended to benefit others. It includes cooperation, sharing, helping, charitable giving and volunteering. It has concern for rights, feelings, and welfare of others which also includes empathy and concern for others (Manesi, Van Doesum & Van Lange,2020). It is interesting to capture the research conducted on Adolescent resilience in Northern Uganda on the role of social support and prosocial behaviours in reducing mental health problems found that prosocial behaviours were associated with resilience ([Haroz](#), [Murray](#), [Bolton](#) & [Betancourt](#),2013).

Children and adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa face challenges due to poverty, serious health issues like HIV and Malaria, armed conflicts and weakened environmental sustainability. Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the world according to the United Nation's Human Development Index (World Bank, 2016). The research had a universal school-based intervention to enhance resilience in 183

children aged from Grade 4- 6. The resilience in children were evaluated using social difficulties, hyperactivity, somatization, level of anxiety, prosocial behaviors and school functioning. A positive link was identified between prosocial behaviours and resilience (Brerger et.al, 2018).

Another descriptive cross-sectional research conducted on prosocial behaviors and emotional intelligence as factors associated with healthy lifestyles and violence in adolescents showed, correlation between adolescents with greater emotional repair and respect and their lower involvement in school violence and substance use ([Moreno & Jurado, 2024](#)). Research highlighted the motivations, development, and impact of prosocial behavior on individuals and societies, and its role in fostering social bonds, enhancing community resilience, and promoting collective well-being. Gratitude is a powerful tool which will impact prosocial tendency. Gratitude strengthens individual well-being and social bonds which will lead to an increase in prosocial tendencies which shows kindness and compassion. Scholarly literature states that people who express gratitude has high levels of resilience and remains in psychological equilibrium. Resilient people shows greater commitment to engage in altruistic actions even in challenging times ([Ozbay et. al, 2007](#)).

Specially after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, adverse outcomes on adolescent well-being was observed. But less attention had given to adolescent mental health during the pandemic. The adolescent daily routine faced an imbalance with screen addictions and life stressors ([Alamolhoda et.al, 2022](#)). As any human is prone for challenges with no age barrier, adaptation and effective functioning under stress is crucial. The persons' prior functioning, current resources and sociocultural context will affect coping. The same event will impact people differently due to their available resources and support systems. As above findings reported that resilience has significant association with pro social behaviours, family and social bonds, physical activity and cultural rituals to strengthen an adolescent in any adverse situation in life. Despite whether the research is in western or non-western culture, most existing literature stated resilience as a complicated combination of protective and risk factors such as interpersonal skills, family and community. The resilience is positively affected by feeling connected, supported through family and other social bonds (Masten, 2009). The results show the importance of raising awareness among adolescents on strengthening care giving relationships. Family bonds to uplift the mental well-being.

## **Discussion**

This review aimed to identify factors associated with resilience in adolescents in non-western cultures. Based on the narrative literature of multiple studies, family support, cultural values and beliefs, physical activity, gratitude and prosocial behavior were identified as key factors promoting resilience in adolescents from non-Western cultures. These findings highlighted the multifaceted nature of resilience and underscore its importance in promoting positive mental health outcomes among adolescents in diverse cultural contexts. Exploring these factors can help address the unique challenges faced by adolescents in non-Western settings. This discussion will explore the implications of these findings, their relevance to current practices, and potential areas for future research. While the concept of resilience growing, there is a deficit of research focused on cultural and contextual factors leading to children's healthy growth and development under adversity. There is a greater need to understand resilience with cultural and contextual sensitivity.

Based on the narrative literature of multiple reviews, and in par with several authors it was identified how family support and relationships, cultural values and beliefs, physical activity and gratitude and prosocial behaviours function as factors of resilience and the relationship towards mental health of the adolescents in non-western cultures. However, they function the same in western cultures too. But the

cultural values and beliefs are more in non-western cultures. Even in western cultures research highlights how child parent relationships important to improve and sustain well-being in children and adolescents. Education systems, parents, teachers must create safe environments to nurture social bonds, family attachments.

Interventions should be designed integrating all the identified four elements because programs are designed to enhance family involvement, emphasize cultural values, and encourage physical activity and prosocial behavior could be particularly effective in strengthening resilience among adolescents in non-Western cultures. Interventions that are grounded in cultural contexts with an understanding of local cultural values and beliefs is important. It is also important for mental health practitioners to develop cultural competence. Further it is crucial to develop community-based initiatives that promote physical activity and prosocial behaviours which can foster a supportive environment that enhances resilience. Policy makers should consider these factors when developing youth mental health policies and programs. Incorporating elements like family support systems and community engagement can create a more supportive environment for adolescents, potentially improving mental health outcomes on a broader scale.

### **Limitations of the Review**

This short review is based on the studies from non-western cultures. But there is a great deal of adversity among these cultures across the globe. Variations in cultural contexts and practices within these cultures may limit the generalizability of the results to specific regions and populations. Review included studies with varying methodologies and quality levels, which may affect the consistency and reliability of the findings. Many studies included are cross-sectional studies, not longitudinal. This affects the ability to assess how resilience factors influence mental health outcomes overtime.

### **Conclusions & Recommendations**

This Narrative review highlights key factors associated with resilience among adolescents in non-western cultures, including family support, cultural values and beliefs, physical activity, gratitude and prosocial behaviours. These findings emphasize the multifaceted nature of resilience and its critical role in promoting positive mental health outcomes. By integrating these factors into interventions and policies, stakeholders can better address the unique challenges faced by adolescents in non-Western settings.

Future research should aim to address these limitations by employing longitudinal studies, expanding sample sizes, and considering context-specific factors. Additionally, further exploration of how these resilience factors interact and their impact across different non-Western cultures will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of resilience. Overall, fostering resilience through culturally relevant strategies has the potential to improve the mental health and well-being of adolescents, ultimately contributing to their long-term development and success.

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