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Unveiling Resilience: Narratives of Senior High School Students from Broken Families in a Private School in Manila

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Abstract

This study explores the resilience of individuals from broken families, a topic of significance given the potential impact of family structure on personal development. The study aimed to determine the resilience characteristics of senior high school students from broken families. Utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this research employed a purposive sampling method to select ten participants from a pool of one hundred students across two sections. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews to explore life events and experiences. Collected data were then interpreted and grouped into themes. The study revealed that participants identified independency, optimism, and a strong personality as key factors contributing to their resilience. Experiencing a broken family fostered optimism, happiness amidst adversity, and strength to overcome challenges. The participants demonstrated resilience through independence, optimism, and a strong personality developed in response to their family circumstances. It is suggested that fostering closer relationships with family members and open communication may further support these students.

Keywords: *resilience, broken family, senior high school students, adversity*

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INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, the Family Code (Executive Order Number 209) provides limited avenues for marital dissolution, namely nullity, annulment, and legal separation. Unlike divorce, nullity and annulment require grounds that existed prior to or during the marriage ceremony, while legal separation allows spouses to live apart without fully severing marital ties. Despite persistent advocacy from various sectors, including the church and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), against the legalization of divorce, many individuals remain in unfulfilling marriages. Such circumstances can significantly impede personal development, particularly for young adults from disrupted family backgrounds.

This study posits that resilience—the capacity to "bounce back" after adversity—is a critical factor for well-being in these individuals. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the significance of mental health and well-being (SDG 3) and quality education (SDG 4) in fostering resilient communities. Research by Babic et al. (2020) indicates a correlation between increased resilience and lower susceptibility to stress and illness. Resilient individuals often exhibit optimism, transforming challenges into valuable learning experiences while leveraging their strengths and fostering meaningful relationships. Key indicators of resilience in youth include high aspirations, a sense of purpose, clear goals, personal agency, and strong interpersonal problem-solving skills. By investigating the experiences of college students from disrupted family backgrounds, this research aims to illuminate how resilience emerges from adversity and its profound implications for personal growth, mental health, and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals.

While resilience is often understood as a broad and multifaceted concept, this study defines it specifically as a dynamic process that enables individuals to respond and adapt effectively in the face of adversity. Children exposed to protective factors throughout their upbringing are significantly more likely to cultivate resilience, which exists to varying degrees within everyone (Stumblingbear-Riddle, 2012). According to Walsh (2015), everyone's strengths, vulnerabilities, and resources in crisis situations are unique, underscoring the personalized nature of resilience. Adversity can serve as a catalyst for resilience, allowing individuals to discover and develop latent strengths within themselves while seeking support from others.

Research by Kelifa et al. (2020) highlights that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have both direct and indirect impacts on mental health, particularly concerning depression. Their findings indicate a negative correlation between psychological resilience and depressive symptoms and ACEs scores, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of ACEs or current stressful events (CSEs) also report increased depressive symptoms. Resilience encompasses various psychological processes that facilitate effective coping strategies under stress, such as the ability to resist maladaptive behaviors and maintain emotional equilibrium in challenging situations.

Moreover, Bacikova-Sleskova, Benka, and Orosova (2014) demonstrate that infants of mothers suffering from postnatal depression carry an elevated risk for developing depression by the age of 16. This increased vulnerability can be attributed to the child's heightened sensitivity during infancy and early childhood, as well as exposure to family trauma. Thus, implementing regular screening for postnatal depression and providing comprehensive parenting support for mothers experiencing such challenges is crucial. This proactive approach can foster resilience not only in mothers but also in their children, paving the way for healthier familial and developmental

outcomes.

The exploration of resilience during adolescence is particularly significant due to the myriad challenges teens encounter, including physical, emotional, and social issues. Research indicates that resilient adolescents are more likely to mature into competent adults characterized by high self-efficacy, self-regulation, and the capacity to navigate risks effectively, all while exhibiting a reduced likelihood of experiencing depression (Azmi et al., 2013). Resilience is not merely the capacity to bounce back from adversity—such as traumatic experiences, bereavement, violence, poverty, and family conflict—but also serves as a protective factor against a range of stress-related outcomes, including mental health issues and overall well-being (Ong, Bergeman, & Bisconti, 2004; Windle, 2010).

Furthermore, resilience is intricately connected to various dimensions of life, including maladjustment, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), health outcomes, academic performance, and overall quality of life (Miller-Lewis, Searle, Sawyer, Baghurst & Hedley, 2013). The ability to cultivate resilience not only supports individual growth but also enhances one's capacity to effectively cope with life's inherent challenges. This emphasizes its vital role in facilitating healthy developmental trajectories, particularly during the tumultuous adolescent years. By understanding and nurturing resilience in adolescents, it can foster more favorable long-term outcomes, equipping them with essential tools to flourish in the face of adversity.

Philosophical View

This study is rooted in Carl Rogers' Humanistic Theory, a perspective significantly shaped by Abraham Maslow's pioneering work. Humanistic theory emphasizes the inherent capacity for growth and resilience within every individual, asserting that people not only overcome adversity but also possess an innate drive to thrive in the face of challenges. This view posits that central to psychological well-being and the realization of personal goals and ambitions, including self-actualization, are an individual's thoughts about themselves and their feelings of self-worth (McLeod, 2025). This aligns with the concept of resilience, which involves not just recovering from difficulties but also growing stronger as a result. Instead of focusing solely on deficits, Humanistic theory highlights the development of strengths, positive attributes, and personal resources that enable individuals to cope effectively and flourish. For senior high school students from broken families, this means acknowledging and valuing their intrinsic abilities to navigate the unique hardships they face. Rogers' emphasis on the actualizing tendency—the fundamental drive toward growth and fulfillment—becomes particularly salient here. Despite the potential for trauma or instability associated with broken families, a humanistic lens allows to explore how these students, through their subjective experiences, actively engage in a process of self-discovery and adaptation. Applying this humanistic lens to resilience in this study means emphasizing the students' personal strengths, coping mechanisms, and pathways toward positive adaptation. The researchers are interested in understanding how their internal resources and self-perceptions contribute to their ability to navigate family challenges. This perspective views resilience not merely as survival, but as a dynamic process of growth, self-discovery, and self-actualization, fostering hope, motivation, and a sense of purpose—all essential components of positive psychological functioning that contribute to overall well-being. Furthermore, Humanism offers a strengths-based, optimistic framework for understanding resilience within this specific demographic. It stresses the importance of individual agency, recognizing that even amidst challenging family structures, students possess the capacity to make choices that promote their well-being. It emphasizes the pursuit of

personal growth and the quest for meaning as students construct narratives around their experiences. By focusing on these elements, this study aims to unveil how senior high school students from broken families in a private school in Manila develop resilience, identify their unique strategies for coping, and ultimately thrive despite adverse circumstances, moving towards their full potential.

Objectives

This study attempts to determine the resilience of senior high school students from broken family in a private school in Manila, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What does resilience mean to you, particularly in the context of your life experiences?
2. How have you demonstrated resilience in your life?
3. How did you cope with moments when you felt like giving up?
4. How do you perceive the role of resilience in a person's life, and what makes it significant?
5. How do you share or express your resilience to others, or in your interactions with others?
6. What life lessons have you gained from your experiences as a member of a family that experienced a separation or change in structure?

METHODS

Participants

Ten students (5 males, 5 females, 16-17 years of age) from Senior High School in a private school in Manila.

Design and Procedure

This research delves into the life events and experiences of senior high school students from broken families, exploring their phenomenological, subjective, and personal perspectives. Data collected were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative approach specifically chosen to understand participants' lived experiences and to describe what resilience is like for them within the particular context of a broken family. IPA facilitated an in-depth examination of their personal worlds and allowed for thematic grouping of the interpreted data. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, relying on the researchers' judgment to identify individuals possessing characteristics relevant to the study of resilience in this population. This ensured that the focus remained on those who could best provide insights into the research questions. The interview guide, consisting of six (6) semi-structured questions, was meticulously developed and subsequently validated by experts in qualitative research to ensure clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. This validation process enhanced the rigor of data collection and the credibility of findings. Furthermore, ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to any data collection, ensuring participant confidentiality, informed consent, and adherence to ethical research practices."

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Question 1. What does resilience mean to you, particularly in the context of your life experiences?

Themes: Independent, Optimistic, Strong

All participants in this study identified as resilient individuals. This resilience manifested primarily through their independence, demonstrating an ability to navigate life's challenges autonomously. Participants articulated that

their resilience stemmed from this self-reliance, indicating that a resilient person is independent enough to manage difficult situations and stand on their own. Furthermore, optimism was a pervasive characteristic among most participants who considered themselves resilient. This positivity in life correlated directly with their optimistic outlook. Many students encounter financial difficulties, yet resilient individuals can accept adversity and think realistically about how to proceed. A sense of strength was also a key theme, with some participants viewing themselves as strong individuals. They acknowledged that everyone faces problems and challenges, and that overcoming adversity requires not allowing external factors to bring one down. Additionally, resilience was characterized by unwavering determination in the face of devastating hardships. It involves not giving up, staying resolute, and making rational decisions even in challenging circumstances. Parents, meanwhile, consistently strive to balance their children's safety with opportunities for growth and learning in preparation for adulthood. While driven by a desire to protect their children from danger (APA, 2021), they also foster environments where resilience can develop. Moreover, resilience, as manifested through independence, optimism, maturity, and strength, directly influences students' academic performance. Resilient students are better equipped to cope with setbacks, maintain motivation, and persevere in their studies. This resilience contributes to a positive academic environment and enhances emotional strength, both of which are crucial for improved academic outcomes.

Question 2. How have you demonstrated resilience in your life?

Themes: Shows Acceptance, Being Mature, Being Independent

Resilience often manifests through acceptance, where individuals frame adversity as a challenge, enabling them to better understand and cope with difficult situations. Embracing a given circumstance is crucial for releasing grudges and allowing pain to subside, thus facilitating forward movement. Another key aspect of resilience is maturity. After accepting adversity, individuals often develop a more mature outlook. The participants in this study demonstrated this by providing well-reasoned responses to the research questions, reflecting a deepened understanding of their experiences. For some, faith in God also emerged as a source of strength, providing a sense of solace and guidance through difficult times. This spiritual maturity allowed them to lean on a higher power even when feeling broken. Independence is a further manifestation of resilience. It signifies the ability to navigate life's path even without the constant presence of others. Adjusting to circumstances where one might feel alone can be seen as an act of both independence and resilience. This ties into self-sufficiency, which is identified as a crucial component of resilience. It underscores the importance of individuals being able to manage life independently, even amidst adversity, thereby exemplifying both independence and resilience. Cultivating self-sufficiency empowers individuals to confront challenges autonomously. This finding aligns with Cassidy's (2015) research, which demonstrated that higher self-efficacy—a belief in one's ability to succeed—significantly predicted academic resilience, especially in situations directly affecting the individual. Finally, acceptance, maturity, independence, and self-sufficiency act as vital psychological resources that positively influence academic performance. These traits enable students to effectively cope with setbacks, sustain motivation, and persist through difficulties, leading to improved educational outcomes and personal growth.

Question 3. How did you cope with moments when you felt like giving up?

Themes: Rationalization, Suicidal Attempts, Being Mature

Students' responses to difficult situations, particularly the third question on overcoming thoughts of giving

up, revealed several key coping mechanisms. Many rationalized their situations, analyzing them before acting, which helped mitigate impulsive reactions to unpleasant words. While negative remarks can trigger impulsivity, rational thought proved beneficial. It became evident that escaping problems offers no true solution, a point showed by the emergence of suicidal ideation as a theme; some participants considered ending their lives to escape adversity. Lastly, the data highlighted the maturity of several individuals, demonstrating that a mature perspective is crucial for navigating life's challenges and can inspire others facing similar struggles. One prominent theme was life-threatening gestures, with participants admitting to considering suicide as an escape. This revealed that resilience can coexist with melancholy and mental distress, a journey often fraught with emotional and psychological obstacles (Burrell, 2020). The emotional and psychological resilience—demonstrated through rationalization, maturity, and distress management—directly supports students' academic performance. These traits foster perseverance, emotional stability, and effective problem-solving, enabling students to navigate adversity and progress academically.

Question 4. How do you perceive the role of resilience in a person's life, and what makes it significant?
Themes: Fundamental in Surviving, Used as Motivation

A significant majority of respondents identified resilience as indispensable for survival, characterizing it as the fundamental trait enabling individuals to persist throughout their lifespan. Furthermore, several participants indicated that resilience serves as a potent motivator for the pursuit of personal objectives. This assertion is consistent with the Resilience Theory espoused by Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000), which posits that resilience is not merely significant but fundamentally requisite for navigating and surmounting adversity to achieve favorable outcomes amidst considerable risks. This perspective give emphasis to resilience's critical role in fostering perseverance and enabling endurance through life's trials. This aligns with Arguelles et al. (2024) research on pandemic grief, where diverse emotional responses coexisted with coping strategies, illustrating the multifaceted and vital nature of resilience in the face of profound loss. Consequently, resilience, viewed as a pivotal trait for both survival and motivation, plays an integral role in fostering students' academic success. It cultivates perseverance, emotional endurance, and goal-directed behavior, thereby empowering students to navigate adversity and achieve academic excellence.

Question 5. How do you share or express your resilience to others, or in your interactions with others?
Themes: Encourage other people, Inspire other people

The participants' responses consistently demonstrated their capacity to encourage others. By sharing their personal experiences of overcoming and surviving adversity, they aimed to foster resilience in others, enabling them to move forward. A key method through which participants conveyed their resilience was by inspiring others, often by discussing positivity. This aligns with Sutton's (2019) assertion that resilient individuals not only recover from adversity but also exhibit growth, adaptability, and the ability to inspire others through their outlook and actions. Students who actively encourage and inspire their peers by sharing experiences and maintaining a positive outlook exemplify a form of resilience that transcends individual achievement. Their influence fosters a supportive and motivating academic environment, which in turn enhances overall student performance and persistence.

Question 6. What life lessons have you gained from your experiences as a member of a family that experienced a separation or change in structure?

Themes: Being Happy, Being Optimistic, Being Strong

This research aimed to understand the key takeaways for participants who grew up in broken families. Despite facing adversity, these individuals managed to cultivate and maintain happiness. A significant number of participants also highlighted that they learned to be optimistic. While optimism is often associated with adolescence, the findings suggest that for these participants, their positivity stemmed not from age but from a conscious effort to remain hopeful despite their incomplete family structures. Overall, a fundamental lesson they learned was how to be strong. Developing psychological resilience becomes crucial following challenging life experiences. This aligns with Seligman's concept of "learned optimism" (as cited in Gibbon, 2020), which emphasizes its potential for global improvement and as a key mechanism for individual flourishing. Furthermore, individuals who cultivate resilience are better equipped to navigate future difficulties and contribute positively to their environment. The development of happiness, optimism, and strength (all core components of resilience) empowers students to overcome personal adversities and significantly enhances their capacity for academic success. Resilient students are better positioned to maintain motivation, focus, and perseverance, ultimately leading to improved academic performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Senior high school students from broken families consistently demonstrate remarkable resilience, characterized by their independence, positive outlook, and strong personalities. These attributes enable them to effectively navigate challenging circumstances and maintain autonomy. Their realistic perspective prevents them from being overwhelmed by adversity, allowing them to adapt and even thrive amidst life's obstacles. Despite confronting significant hardships, including thoughts of giving up or even suicidal ideation, these students employ positive and rational coping mechanisms to overcome such struggles. They often share their experiences with peers, fostering motivation and mutual support, which highlights the crucial role of social engagement in their resilience. The data suggest that a disrupted family background can paradoxically cultivate optimism, emotional regulation, and inner strength, all of which are vital for progressing through difficulties. This cultivated resilience directly correlates with their academic performance. Students who are independent, optimistic, and emotionally regulated are better equipped to handle the stresses of school, maintain focus, and persevere through academic challenges. Their ability to manage adversity and seek support translates into sustained effort and improved academic outcomes. To enhance academic success, several implications emerge: encouraging close relationships and open expression of feelings within families can significantly reduce miscommunication and emotional distress, building a stronger foundation for students. And school-based initiatives, such as "cell group" programs, can create safe spaces for students to express themselves, develop empathy, and learn problem-solving skills through shared experiences. Such programs can strengthen resilience by promoting social connectedness and mutual understanding among students facing similar familial challenges, ultimately supporting their academic and personal growth.

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