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# Comparative Analysis of Resilience and Life Values Among Muslim Higher Education Students: The Influence of Traumatic Experiences, Gender, and Living Area

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#### **Abstract**

This study wanted to see how resilience and life values might be different in Muslim college students based on their past experiences with trauma, their gender, and whether they live in a city or the countryside. We asked students from Aceh, Indonesia, to take part in our study. This area has seen a lot of trauma from a big tsunami and a civil war. We used two tools, the Brief Resilience Scale and the Life Values Inventory, to measure resilience and life values. Our results showed that students who had experienced trauma were more resilient. But we didn't find any differences in resilience or life values based on gender or where the students lived. We did find that students who were more resilient also had stronger life values. This tells us that we need to think about past trauma and life values when we're trying to understand resilience in Muslim college students. In the future, we need to keep studying these things and come up with ways to help these students be more resilient and have strong life values.

# **INTRODUCTION**

Life is inherently unpredictable, often presenting individuals with traumatic experiences that test their mental health and overall resilience (Mancini & Bonanno, 2006). These experiences, ranging from personal losses to global crises, can profoundly impact an individual's psychological well-being. Over the years, the psychological community has made significant strides in understanding and exploring the impact of traumatic experiences on the human psyche (Bryant, 2019; Durodié & Wainwright, 2019; Hatta et al., 2023). One aspect that has emerged as vital in mitigating the damaging effects of such occurrences is resilience. Resilience is defined as the ability of individuals to bounce back from adversity and maintain or return to their pre-trauma level of emotional, mental, and physical functioning (Southwick et al., 2014).

However, resilience does not function in a vacuum. It intertwines with an individual's life values – personal principles or behavioral standards that guide their actions and decisions (Liuşnea, 2021). Life values have been hypothesized to play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards adversity and resilience, thereby potentially affecting an individual's capacity to cope with and recover from traumatic experiences (Arredondo & Caparrós, 2023). Despite their

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importance, life values are an often overlooked aspect in research studies focusing on trauma and resilience.

Resilience, as a psychological construct, has been extensively studied in the context of traumatic experiences (Hatta et al., 2023; Mancini & Bonanno, 2006). Research has shown that individuals who have experienced trauma can exhibit a wide range of responses, from severe psychological distress to resilience, or the ability to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning (Bonanno, 2005). However, the mechanisms through which traumatic experiences influence resilience are complex and multifaceted, involving a dynamic interplay of individual, social, and environmental factors (Admadeli & Embu-Worho, 2021).

Several studies have found that individuals who have experienced trauma may develop enhanced resilience as a result of their experiences, a phenomenon known as posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). On the other hand, some individuals may struggle to recover from traumatic experiences, experiencing ongoing psychological distress and decreased resilience. These contrasting findings highlight the need for further research to understand the factors that contribute to resilience in the aftermath of trauma.

Gender is another important factor that can influence resilience and life values (Portnoy et al., 2018; Zabaniotou et al., 2020). Research has shown that men and women may respond differently to traumatic experiences and may exhibit different patterns of resilience. For example, some studies have found that women are more likely than men to experience symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following trauma, yet they also show high levels of resilience and posttraumatic growth (Tolin & Foa, 2008). Additionally, Kobayashi and Delahanty (2013) found that women are more likely than men to develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following certain types of trauma, with sleep disturbances playing a significant role, and that gender-specific mechanisms may influence the relationship between sleep impairment and PTSD development.

In terms of life values, research has suggested that men and women may prioritize different values, which could influence their responses to trauma. For example, Schwartz and Rubel (2005) found that women tend to place higher importance on benevolence and universalism values, while men prioritize power and achievement values. These gender differences in life values could potentially influence resilience and responses to trauma, although more research is needed in this area.

The living environment can also play a crucial role in shaping resilience and life values. Studies have shown that individuals living in rural and urban areas may face different types of stressors (Novita & Huwae, 2023) and may have access to different resources, which can influence their resilience. For example, rural residents may have stronger social networks and community ties, which can enhance resilience, but they may also face challenges such as limited access to mental health services (Handley et al., 2019).

In terms of life values, research has suggested that rural and urban residents may prioritize different values due to differences in their social and environmental contexts. For example, a study by Molero et al. (2022) found that Emotional Intelligence significantly influences optimistic and pessimistic attitudes among individuals, with pessimism being notably associated with the rural context, suggesting that socio-cultural differences between urban and rural environments can impact life values. These differences in life values could potentially influence resilience and responses to trauma, although more research is needed in this area.

The literature on Muslim higher education students, particularly in relation to resilience and life values, is sparse but growing. This demographic represents a unique intersection of cultural, religious, and educational contexts that might significantly influence their resilience and life values. Muslim students, like their peers, face the typical challenges associated with higher education, such as academic stress and social pressures. However, they also navigate

unique stressors related to their religious and cultural identities, such as experiences of discrimination or balancing religious practices with academic demands (Ali et al., 2015). These experiences can be traumatic and test their resilience.

In terms of life values, Muslim students may prioritize values that are influenced by their religious beliefs, such as benevolence, humility, and respect for tradition (Ives & Kidwell, 2019). These values could potentially influence their responses to trauma and their resilience. Furthermore, gender and living area (rural or urban) may also intersect with their religious identity to influence their resilience (Maba et al., 2022) and life values. For example, Muslim women may face unique challenges related to gender and religion that could impact their resilience. Similarly, Muslim students in rural areas may have different experiences and resources compared to those in urban areas, influencing their resilience and life values (Ali et al., 2015).

# **Rationale of the Study**

This study holds significant importance due to its unique focus on Muslim higher education students, a demographic that has been underrepresented in the existing literature on resilience and life values (Ali et al., 2015). By examining the interplay of traumatic experiences, gender, and living area within this specific group, this research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of resilience and life values. Despite the recognition of the importance of life values in shaping attitudes towards adversity and resilience, and the acknowledgment of the unique stressors faced by Muslim students (Ali et al., 2015), there is a dearth of comprehensive studies investigating these factors within the context of the Muslim student population. This study aims to bridge this gap, thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge and informing the design of culturally-sensitive support systems. By doing so, it will enhance our understanding of trauma resilience in culturally diverse student populations, a crucial step in promoting mental health and well-being in these communities.

# **Objectives**

The primary objective of this study is to compare resilience and life values among Muslim higher education students based on their experiences with trauma, gender, and living area, and to further examine the impact of resilience on life values. Specifically, the study aims to discern whether there are significant differences in resilience and life values between students who have and have not experienced trauma, between male and female students, and between students living in rural and urban areas. Additionally, the study seeks to investigate the influence of resilience on life values, exploring whether higher levels of resilience are associated with certain life values. By conducting these comparisons and examining these relationships, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics that shape resilience and life values within this demographic. The findings from this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on resilience and life values, and will provide critical insights that can inform the development of culturally sensitive interventions and supports tailored to the unique experiences and challenges faced by Muslim higher education students.

# **METHODS**

## **Design and Participants**

The research undertaken employed a cross-sectional design, conducted in the region of Aceh, Indonesia. Crucially, it focused on participants who both had firsthand experience of traumatic events related to either the devastating tsunami disaster or the civil war engendered by the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka movement or not. Using convenience sampling, participants were sought out and invited to partake in the study via WhatsApp.

#### Instruments

The research deployed three key instruments. Firstly, a set of questions were crafted to capture demographic factors. Secondly, the Brief Resilience Scale, developed by Smith et all. (2008), was employed to gauge the resilience of participants. Finally, the Life Values Inventory, originally conceived by Crace & Brown (1996), was used to ascertain the life values held by participants.

The Life Values Inventory, originally developed in the English language, was carefully adapted to Bahasa Indonesia, the local language, for the purposes of this study. The authors adhered closely to the guidelines stipulated by the International Test Commission (Hernández et al., 2020) during this process. The translation phase was conducted at a research center within a University located in Indonesia, a hub offering translation services to support lecturers, students, and researchers in their various scholarly endeavors. Proficient English translators at the center undertook the task of translation and back-translation. Conversely, the Brief Resilience Scale was readily available in Bahasa Indonesia (Maba, 2018), and thus did not require translation.

# **Demographic questions**

The demographic questionnaire consists of a series of targeted questions designed to gather information about the individual's characteristics, experiences, and environment, essential for contextualizing the results. Participants are asked about their gender, age, religion, and ethnicity, providing information about their identity. Further inquiries are made about their place of residence and academic semester to understand their living conditions and academic progression. To gain insight into their familial setting, a question is posed about the number of siblings they have. To better understand their financial circumstances, the questionnaire inquires about their monthly expenditure, including housing costs, and whether they hold a job apart from their student status. Information about their social engagement is gathered by asking if they are actively involved in organizations. A question about the type of their residence is included for further clarity on their living conditions. Finally, two pivotal questions are included to identify whether the individual was affected or victimized by two significant events: the Aceh Independence Movement and the Tsunami disaster. These questions provide essential context for understanding the unique experiences of the participants, which can significantly influence their life values and resilience. The former two demographical questions were used as the inclusion criteria of data analysis. The author will only analyze data from participants who were experienced either tsunami or war.

# Resilience

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), created by Smith et al. (2008), is a self-report questionnaire specifically designed to evaluate an individual's capacity to recover from stress, an aspect defined as resilience. This scale, distinct from others that measure resilience as a mixture of traits, aligns more closely with the original conceptualization of resilience as the ability to bounce back from stress. Composed of six items, including three positive (e.g., "I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times") and three negative statements (e.g., "It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event"), participants express their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale. The negative items are reverse scored, and the overall resilience measure is determined by the average score of the six items. Owing to its brevity and easy administration, along with demonstrated good internal consistency and validity, the BRS has been widely applied in research investigating resilience, stress, and health outcomes. The Cronbach alpha BRS in this study was relatively good ( $\alpha = .71$ )

## **Life values Inventory**

The Life Values Inventory (LVI) is a self-report measure, developed by Richard Knowdell and refined by Kelly Crace and James Brown (1996), designed to provide insight into an individual's core life values that shape their attitudes, decisions, and behaviors. This psychometric tool assesses values across six broad dimensions including Self-Relation and Personal Growth, Relationship and Responsibility, Work and Leisure, Health and Wellness, Spirituality and Community, and Society and Environment. The LVI is comprised of various statement-based items, such as "It is important to me to have a close circle of friends" or "I value opportunities to grow and develop as an individual", each probing different aspects of the previously mentioned dimensions. Respondents express their level of agreement with these items on a 5-point Likert scale, allowing for a cumulative score per category, indicating the individual's value emphasis in different life areas. High scores denote a high importance placed on the corresponding values, offering valuable self-insight and decision-making frameworks. Importantly, the LVI does not prescribe a 'right' or 'wrong' set of values, but instead, promotes introspection and understanding of one's internal motivations.

## **Procedures**

The initial phase involved finalizing the selection of the most appropriate research instruments for this study, with the aim to capture demographic details, resilience, and life values effectively. Upon the completion of this selection process, data collection was initiated via the dissemination of these instruments. Participants, fitting the pre-determined criteria, completed the instruments, facilitating the accumulation of valuable data for analysis.

# **Data Analysis**

Data obtained from the completed questionnaires were thoroughly collated and subjected to a detailed statistical analysis using the SPSS 26 software, ensuring a meticulous examination of the data set. At the outset, a descriptive analysis was carried out to illustrate the frequency, mean, and standard deviation of the demographic variables, as well as for the BRS (Brief Resilience Scale) and LVI (Life Values Inventory). This initial step helped us comprehend the fundamental patterns and variations within the data. For the comparison of resilience and life values among different groups of Muslim higher education students based on their trauma experiences, gender, and living area, the Mann-Whitney U test was utilized. This non-parametric test was chosen due to its ability to compare differences between two independent groups when the dependent variable is either ordinal or continuous, but not normally distributed, which was expected given the nature of our study and its demographic. Furthermore, we conducted a linear regression analysis to investigate the more nuanced influences of resilience on life values.

# **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### Results

The study involved a near-equal split of participants who had experienced traumatic events such as war or tsunamis (n = 152, 49.8%) and those who had not (n = 153, 50.2%), with a larger representation of females (n = 274, 89.8%) than males (n = 31, 10.2%). Participants, aged on average 20.78 years (SD = 4.12), were predominantly from urban areas (n = 179, 58.7%) compared to rural ones (n = 126, 41.3%), and most had three or more siblings (n = 223, 73.11%). Living expenses for the majority fell between 1.000.000 and 1.500.000 (n = 127, 41.63%), and a substantial proportion did not have a side job or were not hustling (n = 245, 80.33%). More than half were involved in intra/extra campus organizations (n = 177, 58.03%).

Table 1. Demographical information of participants (n = 305)

Variables	n	%				
Traumatic experience (war or tsunami)						
Yes	152	49.8				
No	153	50.2				
Sex						
Male	31	10.2				
Female	274	89.8				
Age	M = 20.78; $SD = 4.12$					
Living Area						
Rural	126	41.3				
Urban	179	58.7				
Siblings						
0	16	5.24				
1	14	4.59				
2	52	17.04				
3 or more	223	73.11				
Living expenses						
< 500.000	33	10.81				
500.000 - 1.000.000	99	32.45				
1.000.000 - 1.500.000	127	41.63				
> 2.000.000	46	15.08				
Side job / Hustling						
Yes	60	19.67				
No	245	80.33				
Join Intra/Extra Campus Organization						
Yes	177	58.03				
No	128	41.97				

Table 2. Differences of resilience and life values based on the traumatic experience, living area, and sex (n = 305)

Variables	M	SD	Traumatic Experience		Living Area		Sex	
	M	SD	Z	p	Z	p	Z	p
Resilience	19.42	3.15	-2.512	.012	409	.683	763	.446
Life Values	165.63	19.34	690	.490	407	.684	-1.174	.240

Table 3. Impact of Resilience on Life Values (n = 305)

Variables	В	SE	β	t	P
Life Values	.046	.009	.284	5.159	.000
Resilience as DV	df	F	$\mathbb{R}^2$	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	р
	1	26.612	.081	.078	.000

Table 2 presents the differences in resilience and life values based on the traumatic experience, living area, and sex. The mean resilience score was 19.42 (SD = 3.15), with significant differences based on traumatic experience (Z = -2.512, p = .012). However, living area (Z = -.409, p = .683) and sex (Z = -.763, p = .446) did not significantly impact resilience scores. Life values had a mean score of 165.63 (SD = 19.34), and were not significantly influenced by traumatic experience (Z = -.690, p = .490), living area (Z = -.407, p = .684), or sex (Z = -1.174, p = .240).

As shown in Table 3, a linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the impact of resilience on life values. The model was significant (F(1, 26.612) = .081, p = .000), explaining 7.8% of the variance in life values (Adjusted R² = .078). Within the model, resilience significantly predicted life values (B = .046, SE = .009,  $\beta$  = .284, t = 5.159, p = .000). Normality of residuals was confirmed through a normality test, with a p-value greater than .05 (p = .200) indicating a normal distribution. Additionally, multicollinearity was assessed using the

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), which was less than 10, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern in the model.

#### Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis of resilience and life values among Muslim higher education students, taking into account their experiences with trauma, gender, and living area. This objective was driven by the need to understand the unique experiences and challenges faced by this demographic, which could significantly influence their resilience and life values. The results of the study offer a nuanced understanding of these dynamics, revealing how traumatic experiences, in particular, can significantly impact resilience. This contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between resilience and life values within the context of Muslim higher education students, providing valuable insights for future research and intervention strategies.

Our findings indicate that traumatic experiences significantly impact resilience among Muslim higher education students, aligning with previous research that has highlighted the role of traumatic experiences in shaping resilience (Hatta et al., 2023; Mancini & Bonanno, 2006). Students who had experienced traumatic events such as war or tsunamis exhibited different resilience levels compared to those who had not. This finding supports the concept of posttraumatic growth, where individuals who have experienced trauma may develop enhanced resilience as a result of their experiences (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

However, contrary to some previous studies (Portnoy et al., 2018; Zabaniotou et al., 2020), we did not find significant differences in resilience and life values based on gender or living area. This could be due to the unique cultural and religious contexts of our study population, which may influence resilience and life values differently than in other populations. It is also possible that other factors not measured in this study, such as social support or coping strategies, may play a more significant role in shaping resilience and life values among Muslim higher education students.

The results also revealed a significant positive relationship between resilience and life values, indicating that higher levels of resilience are associated with certain life values. This finding aligns with the hypothesis that life values play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards adversity and resilience (Arredondo & Caparrós, 2023; Liuşnea, 2021). It suggests that individuals with higher resilience may prioritize values that promote recovery and growth in the face of adversity.

The findings of this study have significant implications for Muslim higher education students. Given the demonstrated impact of traumatic experiences on resilience, it is crucial for educational institutions and mental health professionals to consider these experiences when providing support to Muslim students. The significant relationship between resilience and life values suggests that fostering resilience could be tied to promoting life values that align with the students' cultural and religious beliefs. This could involve integrating values-based approaches into mental health interventions or educational programs. For instance, programs could be designed to help students explore and affirm their life values, particularly those that promote resilience in the face of adversity. This could be particularly beneficial for Muslim students who may face unique stressors related to their religious and cultural identities, such as experiences of discrimination or balancing religious practices with academic demands (Ali et al., 2015). By recognizing and addressing these unique experiences and values, we can better support the mental health and well-being of Muslim higher education students.

# **Limitations and Suggestions**

However, this study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim

to use more representative sampling methods to ensure that the findings are applicable to the broader population of Muslim higher education students. Second, the cross-sectional design of the study prevents us from making causal inferences about the relationships between traumatic experiences, resilience, and life values. Longitudinal studies are needed to explore these relationships over time and determine the causal pathways.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study provides valuable insights into the interplay of resilience and life values among Muslim higher education students, particularly in the context of traumatic experiences. The findings underscore the significance of traumatic experiences in shaping resilience and highlight the intertwined nature of resilience and life values. While the study did not find significant differences in resilience and life values based on gender or living area, it opens avenues for further research to explore these dynamics in more depth. Importantly, the study emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive approaches in promoting resilience and mental health among Muslim students, taking into consideration their unique experiences and values. As we continue to expand our understanding of these complex dynamics, we move closer to developing more effective, tailored interventions that can support the well-being of Muslim higher education students in the face of adversity.

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## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT**

All authors have made significant and equal contributions to the development and execution of this study. They have approved this final version of the manuscript for publication.

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