PERSONAL RESILIENCE ON ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION AMONG EMERGING YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia is alarmed by the increasing rate of attempted suicide and suicide cases, as well as psychiatric illnesses such as anxiety and depression. Adolescents and young adults aged from 15 to 34 have been reported as a high-risk group for suicide whereby the leading causes of their death were due to relationship problems, particularly boy-girl relationship. The current study was to measure the level scores for Resilience Scale (RS) among Malaysia's emerging young adults. Five characteristics of RS were explored to examine which characteristic contributes to the highest level in relationship dissolutions. This study included 293 young adults (aged 18 to 29) from Klang Valley where 168 (57.3%) were females and 125 (42.7%) were males. The study used RS and demographic information items. This study indicated that emerging young adults were at the range of moderately-low to moderate level of resilience. The results also showed that characteristic of equanimity, existential-aloneness, and perseverance contributed the highest level among the five characteristics of RS followed by existential aloneness and perseverance. The findings of this study were essential to assist mental health professionals such as counselors, psychotherapists, psychologists, and social workers to explore the most accurate assessment as well as different intervention alternatives based on individuals' characters such as personal resilience as tools in the process of helping for dealing with relationship dissolution issues.

Key terms: personal resilience, emerging young adults, romantic relationship dissolution

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

The National Suicide Registry Malaysia (NSRM) reported an estimated total of 425 suicide cases between January to August 2010 with an average of 60 cases per month and two cases per day (Jin & Lee, 2011). Having said that, Malaysia is alarmed by the increasing rate of attempted suicide and suicide cases, as well as psychiatric illnesses such as anxiety and depression. For instance, adolescents and young adults from ages 15 to 34 have been reported as a high-risk group for suicide (Hayati & Kamarul, 2008) whereby the leading causes of deaths were due to relationship problems, particularly boy-girl relationship (MHM, 2009). It is a struggle for every human being to cope with unpleasant emotions and painful events. Thus, the ability to cope with such emotions and events is termed as resilience (Blum, 1998).

The concept of resilience has received increasing interest among researchers in the field of psychology for the past two decades (Friborg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge, Martinussen, Aslaksen, & Flaten, 2006; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Resilience is mostly known as an important part in the field of behavioral and personality study, whereby scholars are not solely looking at the concept of resilience within the context of an individual, but rather within the sphere of interest on man-to-man interactions and the ways resilience may affect them as well (Friborg et al., 2006). It is because every individual aspect including personality factors, temperament, attitudes, and values has a certain amount of effects on the relationships between them and other individuals (Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001).

Resilience as a word originates from Latin *resilio,* defined as "to bounce back". Some researchers define resilience as a buffer which includes external assets and internal personality traits, to help individuals to cope with difficult life circumstances (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006). Resilience can also be defined as a personality attribute which facilitates individuals in coping with negative events and adverse emotional and psychological outcomes of difficult circumstances effectively and rebounding back from them. For instance, resilience is a person's self-motivated capability which helps them cope with adversity effectively (Machuca, 2002).

This is a fact in all sorts of relationships engaged by every individual. For instance, this fact is predominantly applicable in intimate sharing relationships within the dynamics of a romantic relationship. Therefore, it is fair to assume that resilience might have an important portion of this dynamic. To completely comprehend in what way this may occur, it is initially important to understand by what means researchers look at man-to-man relationships. However, it is also important to understand the concept of relationship dissolution, for instance, romantic relationship dissolutions, as well as the model of it. In more recent research, the focus of attention has been more on examining the impact of specific risks exposure on resilience traits of individuals, particularly in adults (Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarelli & Vlahov, 2006).

Nevertheless, to date, little is known about personal resilience among emerging young adults following romantic dissolutions in Malaysia. Personal resilience has different implications for grief and adjustment after relationship dissolutions. Essentially, a relationship dissolution is a process rather than episodes whereby different individuals use different coping strategies to regain the relationship or to deal with the introduced changes (Sprecher & Fehr, 1998). Hence, personal resilience is the essence of adjustment and grief work in counseling and psychotherapy. Substantially, the results obtained from this study was able to assist in providing a better understanding of emerging young adults' resilience on their romantic relationship dissolution.

The objectives of the current study were twofold: (a) to measure the level of personal resilience among emerging young adults, and (b) to examine what characteristic contributes the highest level among the five characteristics including meaning, equanimity, perseverance, self-reliance, and existential aloneness of the Resilience Scale on romantic relationship dissolutions.

To achieve the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated:
1. What is the level of personal resilience among emerging young adults?
2. What characteristic contributes to the highest level among the five characteristics including meaning, equanimity, perseverance, self-reliance, and existential aloneness of the Resilience Scale on romantic relationship dissolutions?

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the participants were selected using purposive sampling method. They were 293 emerging young adults from Klang Valley which compromises Kuala Lumpur, its outskirts and connecting cities, as well as Selangor state towns. Out of 293 participants, 168 were females (57.3%) and 125 were males (42.7%).

Sample

Participants were emerging Malaysian young adults ranging from ages 18 to 29 with a mean of 23.98 (SD = 2.59). In terms of marital status, 174 (59.4%) participants were single, 94 (32.1%) were partnered or married, 25 (8.5%) were separated or divorced and widowed. As for ethnicity, 138 (47.1%) were natives (Malay and Others), 112 (38.2%) were Chinese, and 43 (14.7%) were Indian. Besides that, participants have an average level of English proficiency.

Besides, participants who were recruited were involved in a romantic relationship that (1) ended in the previous twelve months, and (2) the relationship lasted for at least three months. This is important to avoid involving participants who were still within the grieving period. Past research has found that individuals were adjusted to the dissolution within one year.

Instruments

Two major instruments were utilized in this study as follows:

i. Demographic Information Items
    The demographic item was set and arranged by the researcher to get information regarding participants' demographic background.

ii. The Resilience Scale (RS) (Wagnild & Young, 1993)
    The Resilience Scale (RS) was a self-report questionnaire with the attempt to explore the positive adaptation to a major life event of old women and also based on a comprehensive literature review of resilience.
    Five characteristics were reflected based on the 25 items of RS namely self-reliance, meaningfulness, perseverance, equanimity, and existential aloneness, which used a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 or strongly disagree to 7 or strongly agree). RS scores range between 25 and 175. For instances, scores that are more than 145 indicate moderately high resilience to high resilience. Next, scores from 116 to 145 demonstrate moderately low resilience to moderate resilience, and scores of 115 and below indicates low resilience.
    More contemporary studies reported that RS is psychometrically comprehensive with diverse populations from diverse age range although it was authenticated with older women originally (Ahern, Kiehl, Sole, & Byers, 2006; Wagnild & Young, 1993).
    Substantially, in a review of 12 studies administered to adolescents who were at-risk, United States' adult Irish immigrants, mothers with preschool-aged children, protected assaulted women, single juvenile mothers, homeless teenagers, novice military wives, and mid adults and elderly, the results reported its internal consistency was high with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .85 to .94 (Wagnild, 2009).
    By correlated RS scores with measures of life satisfaction (r= 0.37, p = 0.001), depression (r = -0.41, p = 0.001), morale (r = 0.32, p = 0.001), and health (r = -0.26, p = 0.001), the concurrent validity of RS was obtained. From the

empirical evidence, it showed that the RS is an understandable and consistent instrument to measure resilience.

The permission was acquired to use this instrument from the author's website upon agreement of the terms of use.

Data Collection

Following the completion of a pilot study involving 30 selected participants from the Klang Valley area, the main data collection proceeded. Participants are contacted via e-mail, internet groups, and key contacts. Once identified, each potential participant was administered with a consent form and a set of questionnaires. Data was collected and it was stored into SPSS.

Data Analysis

In the current study, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) were used for statistical analyses. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized for data analysis. Descriptive statistics in the form of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to examine the characteristics of the participants and the level scores of Resilience Scale, respectively. As for inferential statistics, multiple linear regressions were conducted to examine what characteristic contributes to the highest scores among the five characteristics of the Resilience Scale to romantic relationship dissolutions.

FINDINGS

The Level of Personal Resilience among Emerging Malaysian Young Adults

By using descriptive statistics, the results showed that the mean score of the RS total scale was 125.15 (SD = 24.05). Hence, 18.1% of the participants demonstrated a moderately high resilience to high resilience. On the other hand, 55.3% of the participants reported moderately low resilience to moderate resilience and 26.7% of participants reported a low level of resilience.

Table 1 describes the descriptive statistics of Resilience Scale level and Figure 1 presented the percentage of participants' level of Resilience Scale.

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Very Low (25-100)	45	15.4
Low (101-115)	33	11.3
On the Low End (116-130)	70	23.9
Moderate (131-145)	92	31.4
Moderately High (145-160)	46	15.7
High (161-175)	7	2.4
Total	293	100.0

$N = 293$

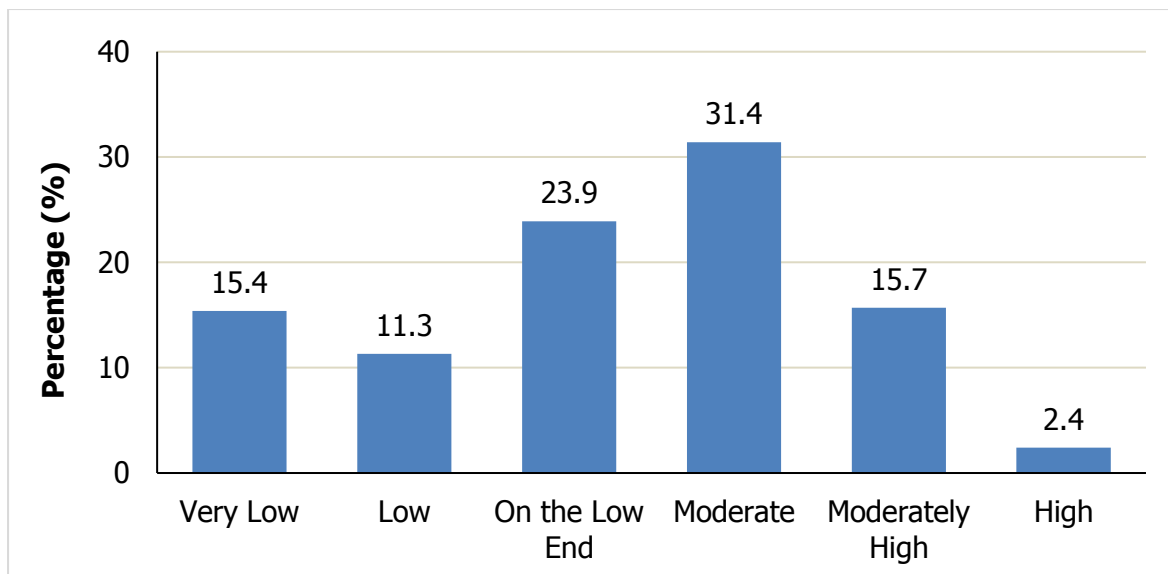Table 1: Descriptive statistics of Resilience Scale level

Figure 1: The participants' level of Resilience Scale

Characteristic Contributing to the Highest Level of the Resilience Scale on Romantic Relationship Dissolutions

Multiple linear regressions were used to examine what characteristic contributes to the highest level among the five characteristics of the Resilience Scale on romantic relationship dissolutions. Using the enter method, a significant model emerged. The results of the regression indicated the three predictors explained 60.3% of the variance ($F_{5,287}$ = 89.665, p <.0005, Adjusted R Square = .603) (see Table 2, 3, and 4). Significant variables are equanimity (β = -.297, p = .001) which contributes highest level among five characteristics of Resilience Scale followed by existential aloneness (β = -.284, p = .004) and perseverance (β = -.219, p = .013).

Model		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5	7954.544	89.665	.000[b]
	Residual	287	88.714		
	Total	292			

*p < .05
N = 293

Table 2: Analysis of Variance

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R Square
1	.781[a]	.610	.603

Table 3: Model Summary

	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Self-reliance	-.253	.300	-.085	-.845	.399
Meaning	.203	.291	.065	.697	.486
Perseverance	-.675	.270	-.219	-2.499	.013
Equanimity	-.872	.250	-.297	-3.496	.001
Existential Aloneness	-.737	.255	-.284	-2.889	.004
Constant	73.895	3.269		22.603	.000

Table 4: Multiple regression analysis (Enter) for characteristics of Resilience Scale on romantic relationship dissolutions

DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings revealed the total scale mean score for resilience (125.15) was contemplative of the moderately-low to moderate resilience category (116-145) as reported by Wagnild (2011). In other words, 55.3% of these emerging young adults scored between scores of 65 and 73 (116-130), and they might have reported some depression and anxiety in their lives (Wagnild, 2011).

Past literature revealed that the majority of the research results reported means scores of at minimum 142 (Bonanno et al., 2006; Fuller-Iglesias, Sellars, & Antonucci, 2008; Moorhouse & Caltabiano, 2007; Parinyaphol & Chongruksa, 2008; Wagnild, 2003, 2011; Wagnild & Young, 1993). However, the total mean score for this study fit within the mid-range of resilience as determined by Wagnild (2011). In general, everyone is resilient to some degree. Individuals within this range (moderately-low to moderate) of resilience may have a problem of letting go on things that they cannot control over, might feel they are not appreciated wholly, and view their lives as unfulfilling. However, individuals can strengthen their resilience to make a positive change in their lives (Wagnild, 2009).

On the other hand, the Resilience Scale directly measures individual resiliency based on five essential characteristics Meaningful (Purpose), Self-reliance, Equanimity, Perseverance, Existential Aloneness (coming home to yourself) (Wagnild & Young, 1990). The results of the regression indicated that three predictors explained 60.3% of the variance. Significant variables are equanimity which contributes the highest level among five characteristics of Resilience Scale followed by existential aloneness and perseverance. Meaningful and self-reliance were not significant in this study.

To date, there is no standardized or corresponding data for the subscales scores. However, past research reported that item means for subscales were considered to be fairly high if the score was within 5 to 5.5 ranges even though most of the results reported on item scale ranges and means in literature were higher (Humphreys, 2003; Wagnild, 2003, 2011). Essentially, resilient individuals have their characteristics to deal with disasters, failures or misfortunes to keep them going in the face of challenges (Wagnild, 2011).

To summarize, it is essential to note that results obtained from participants that consists of Malaysia's emerging young adults were statistically supported and consistent with several discussed studies. The present study may have appeared beneficial in explaining Malaysia's young population's reactions following romantic

relationship dissolution. Essentially, it can bring several therapeutic implications to different fields.

Therapeutic Implications

The current study essentially has several implications for helping mental health professionals such as counselors, psychotherapists, psychologists, clinical psychologists, and social workers. Firstly, it may provide beneficial information in their theoretical and applied studies to explore the most accurate assessment as well as different intervention alternatives. They may utilize individuals' characters such as personal resilience as tools to help deal with relationship dissolution issues.

Furthermore, relationship dissolution may be a distressing experience for individuals. Personal resilience may act as an intermediary between adversity and psychological anguish. Essentially, they were able to rebound from distressing and hurtful feelings of romantic relationship dissolutions. Interventions based on self-training can be practiced in the counseling session to enhance an individual's resilience.

Professionals in helping profession should contemplate giving individuals who have low levels of resilience greater attention following romantic relationship dissolution. Since personal resilience affects romantic relationship dissolution, it is preeminent to include positive enhancing strategies to intensify the efficiency of treatment strategies while handling depressed individuals following the termination of relationships.

Limitations of the Study

The present study has several limitations. The first limitation highlights the overall generalization of the findings. The current study explored the personal resilience of emerging young adults' population in Klang Valley which includes Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Hence, the results cannot be generalized for Malaysia's overall emerging young adult populations. However, it is also true that Klang Valley is much more representative than other states due to its composition and mixed population as Klang Valley is an industrial state in Malaysia, and it receives many emerging young adults from all over the country to either work or study there. Also, as a quantitative survey study, the variables examined were limited to those easily measured by this methodology.

Recommendations

To date, little is known on emerging young adults' resilience on reactions (grief experiences) to the dissolution of a romantic relationship. Hence, further exploration needs to be done concerning different aspects including personal resilience of emerging young adult loss. The data collected in this study offers valuable resource for future research.

Essentially, further research could include participants from different states in Malaysia to improve the ability to generalize the results and to make sure that the results were not solely to the existing population. Future study should also conduct similar studies but using different populations such as groups consisting of middle-age adults and old age adults, married couples, homosexual groups, and diverse social-economic status groups. These would be useful samples to enrich the findings of the present study.

Subsequently, experimental research and longitudinal research are crucial to explore the causes and effects, to explain in more detail, and to develop the results of the present study. Furthermore, qualitative data regarding this subject could be

included in future research for a more comprehensive understanding of emerging young adults' resilience. Therefore, a longitudinal study is helpful because a relationship termination or breakup is a progression.

Hence, it is crucial to interview the participants about actual lives that they had experienced regarding romantic relationship dissolution including losses due to death and non-death. It might deliver an enhanced understanding of young adults' psychological strength and ability to bounce back following relationship dissolution.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the current study demonstrated that scores of the resilience scale for emerging young adults were at the range of moderately-low to moderate level of resilience. Furthermore, results also showed that characteristics of equanimity, existential-aloneness, and perseverance contributes to the highest level among the five characteristics of the Resilience Scale, followed by existential aloneness and perseverance. In spite of its limitations, this study provides several important implications for helping professionals and mental health professionals. Further research is essential to enhance understanding regarding emerging young adults' resilience. Lastly, parallel investigations which includes more diverse populations would be beneficial and a longitudinal study may also be useful since relationship dissolution is a progression.

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