

Resilience and Perceived Social Support among the Aspirants of Competitive Examinations

Naima Nazar* Mamman Joseph C**

Abstract

Resilience and perceived social support are two related concepts. Although there is a wealth of research about resilience, social support and their relationship with each other in different populations, only a few studies assessed resilience and social support among the aspirants of competitive examinations. Hence the present study aims to fill this gap in the literature. The sample of the study consisted of 225 aspirants of competitive examinations from Kerala, whose age ranged from 18 to 36. Resilience scale by Wagnild and Young (1987) and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley (1988) were used for data collection. The findings revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between resilience and perceived social support. It was also identified that the participants have a low resilience and a moderate perceived social support. Low resilience negatively impacts their mental health and hence strategies to enhance resilience should be adopted.

Key words: Aspirants, competitive examinations, resilience and perceived social support

About Authors :

*P.G. Student, **Asst. Prof. Dept. of Applied Psychology, Central University of Tamil Nadu

Introduction

Numerous competitive exams are conducted in India every year for securing services and posts in the governmental or non-governmental organizations. Examinations for recruitment to various services and posts are conducted by Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), Staff Selection Commission (SSC), State Public Service Commission, Railway Recruitment Board (RRB), Bank and Insurance sectors, University grants commission (UGC) etc... These competitive exams are tough, with lakhs of aspirants appearing for a limited number of seats. Even though the number of eligible candidates are increasing each year, the number of vacancies has not increased proportionately (Zou & Shahnawaz, 2013). Hence a huge gap exists between the aspirants and aspired job vacancies leading to an increase in competition. The aspirants of competitive examination thereby undergo stress, anxiety, tension and they also experience emotional turmoil. Hence an incessant presence of resilience is an important factor to cope with these emotional problems faced by them.

Resilience can be defined as the flexibility of an individual in responding to the changing environmental situations and his ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences (Lazarus, 1993; Kunte & Vijay, 2014). It does not imply an invulnerability to stress but rather implies an ability to recover from negative events (Garmezy, 1991). It concerns both the exposure of adversity as well as the positive adjustment to the outcomes of that adversity (Luther, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). Resilience cannot be said as a trait that either people have or do not have. It involves thoughts, behaviours and actions that can be learned and developed in any individual. Resilience may change over time as a function of development and one's interaction with the environment (Kim-Cohen & Turkewitz, 2012). Social support can promote the development of resilience in individuals (Ozbay, Fitterling, Charney & Southwick, 2008).

Social support is the verbal and nonverbal communication occurring between the providers and recipients that help in reducing the uncertainty about self, others, relationships and functions; and thereby enhancing the

perception of personal control in the individual's life experiences (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). It is an exchange of resources between the individuals, which is perceived by the provider or the recipient, so as to improve the well-being of the recipient (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984).

Social support can be viewed in two aspects; actual and perceived social support. Actual support is the support that an individual receives in terms of what is said, what is given, and what is done for that individual. Whereas, perceived support is an individual's belief regarding the level of support he or she is receiving in spite of the actual support provided (Junker & Shutterstock, 2011).

Social support enhances the recipient's well-being, the overall physical and mental health of the individual. If people receive ongoing support, it provides them with a sense of security, bolsters their self-esteem, strengthens their self-identity and then they are less likely to be vulnerable to stressors than people who have not received such support (Mitchell, Billings & Moos, 1982; Wallston, Alagna, DeVellis, & DeVellis, 1983).

Somasundaram and Devamani (2016) identified that resilience significantly correlated with perceived social support in a positive direction. It was also found that high resilience is associated with less hopelessness and high social support. Many other researchers like Westfall (2014), Sabouripour and Roslan (2015), Ozbay, Johnson, Dimoulas, Morgan, Charney, and Southwick (2007), and Chang and Yarnal (2018) also identified that increasing social support improved resilience. The findings of Zou and Shahnawaz (2013) revealed that social support is positively and significantly correlated with resilience among the aspirants of competitive examinations. Amrita and Arora (2012) investigated the resilience among adolescents preparing for engineering and medical entrance examinations. The findings revealed that individuals with high resilience showed better academic performance as compared to those perceiving themselves to be having a low

resilience.

Although there is a wealth of research about resilience, social support and their relationships with each other as well as with other factors in different populations, only a few of the studies measure resilience and social support among the aspirants of competitive examinations. Hence the present study aims to fill this gap in the literature.

Objectives

1. To find out the level of resilience among the aspirants of competitive examinations.
2. To find out the nature and extent of perceived social support among the aspirants of competitive examinations.
3. To find out the relationship between resilience and perceived social support among the aspirants of competitive examinations.

Method

Research Design

The present study aims to identify the relationship between perceived social support and resilience among the aspirants of competitive examinations. Hence a correlational research design is employed in this study.

Sample

The sample comprised of 225 aspirants, 53 males and 172 females, of competitive examinations for various jobs selected through convenience sampling method from Kerala. The age of participants ranged between 18 to 36 years.

Tools

1. Resilience scale

This scale was developed by Wagnild and Young (1987) to measure the resilience of an individual. It has a high Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.91 and test retest reliability of 0.67 to 0.84.

2. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

This scale was developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley (1988) to measure the extent to which an individual perceives social support from three sources: Significant Others (SO), Family (FA) and Friends (FR). It has good test-retest reliability with Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 to 0.98 in non-clinical samples and 0.92 to 0.94 in clinical samples.

Procedure

The data was collected through direct field survey and online survey. The participants were natives of Kerala. For direct field survey, the

researcher approached various coaching centers for competitive examinations and took permission from the respective authorities to collect data. The participants were met by the researcher and informed consent was collected. Confidentiality of responses was also assured. The data was collected from 225 participants using convenience sampling method. The data was coded and then analyzed using statistical techniques such as Spearman's Rank Order Correlation method, Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test.

Results

Table 1 The extent of resilience

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Resilience	225	124.76	27.34

Table 1 shows that the resilience among the aspirants of competitive examinations is on the low end.

Table 2 The nature and extent of perceived social support (PSS)

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Support from family	225	22.08	6.36
Support from friends	225	20.96	6.22
Support from significant others	225	21.17	6.68

Table 2 shows that the aspirants of competitive examinations have a moderate score in perceived social support. They have a moderate score in all the three types of support, among which support from family have the highest score followed by support from significant others and support from friends respectively.

Table 3 Spearman's Rank Correlation of Resilience and Perceived Social Support

Variable	PSS	P
Resilience	0.660	0.01

Table 3 shows that there is a significant positive correlation between resilience and perceived social support among the aspirants of competitive examinations.

Discussion

One of the major objectives of the present study was to find out the extent of resilience among the aspirants of competitive examinations. The findings revealed that the participants have a low level of resilience. This shows their difficulty to adapt well when there are significant sources of stress.

Lower resilience may lead to depression, anxiety, emotional and peer problems (Hjemdal, Vogel, Solem, Hagen & Stiles, 2011; Ziaian, de Anstiss, Antoniou, Baghurst & Sawyer, 2012). It may lead to a decreased level of happiness, optimism and life satisfaction (Aboalshamat et al., 2018; Sabouripour & Roslan, 2015). This also results in hopelessness and low self-esteem among them and lower their academic performance and academic achievement, which may further affect their performance in the examinations (Amrita & Arora, 2012; Karatas & Cakar, 2011; Somasundaram & Devamani, 2016; Zou & Shahnawaz, 2013).

Another important finding of the present study was that the participants have a moderate level of perceived social support. Moderate level of social support may help them to reduce the negative effects created due to a low resilience up to a great extent. The participants have a moderate level of support from family, friends and significant others, among which they receive a higher level of support from family followed by support from significant others and support from friends respectively.

The social support perceived by these aspirants plays a moderate role in buffering against the harmful impacts of stress by exerting a positive influence on the stressful events as well as the coping ability of the individual, as stated by stress buffering model (Rodriguez & Cohen, 1998). According to social cognitive perspective, social support help to make positive thoughts and emotions to come to mind more easily than negative thoughts and emotions and thereby improve one's mental health (Lakey & Drew, 1997).

Another major objective of the present study was to find out the relationship between

resilience and perceived social support. The finding shows that there is a significant positive correlation between resilience and perceived social support. Sharing the roles and responsibilities with other family members may help them to relieve from the stress due to family responsibilities. The study groups may provide the aspirants with informational and emotional support and thereby reducing their examination stress and anxiety.

The psycho-social interactive model of resilience states the importance of social environment in the resilience of an individual (Muller, Ward, Winefield, Tsourtos & Lawn, 2009). The result is in line with the findings of Zou and Shahnawaz (2013), Chang and Yarnal (2018), Somasundaram and Devamani (2016); and Weidong et al., (2012).

Implications

The low resilience among the participants is an alarming condition, which further affects their physical as well as the mental health. Hence, the participants may not be able to perform well in the highly competitive examinations. This may lower the expectations of the family, which may lead to physical and mental health problems among family members, family conflicts, negative attitude towards the aspirant, low self-esteem of family members and as whole the well-being of the entire family. The chances are more that the aspirants may have negative thoughts, depression, suicidal ideation, make suicide attempts due to this repeated failures and increased stress. This may further affect the family members. The aspirants of competitive examinations are adults who are in the peak of economically productive age. Hence, low resilience among them may affect their mental health and well-being and in turn reduce their potential to be the most productive individuals in the society.

Recommendations

Government has to plan and implement various policies programme and strategies to enhance the resilience of this group.

Programmes to enhance resilience can be conducted by psychologists through the coaching centres for competitive examinations. Individual counselling, mentoring and career counselling can be provided on a regular basis. In order to improve resilience, social support enhancement programmes can also be conducted. Since there are only few researches conducted in this population, there is a need of further studies to get a detailed account of the mental health problems faced by them.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted to identify the relationship between resilience and perceived social support. Low level of resilience and a significant positive relationship between resilience and perceived social support were identified. A low level resilience among the aspirants of competitive examinations indicates the stress and anxiety experienced by them. It may lead to various psychosocial and mental health problems in them. The urgent need for the development and implementation of various policies and programmes to enhance the resilience of this population also discussed here.

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