

Research Paper

Narratives of Resilience, Optimism, and Grit: Lived Experiences of Younger Siblings with Elder Siblings

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the development of resilience, optimism, and grit among younger siblings growing up with elder siblings, focusing on how family dynamics and sibling relationships shape these traits. Through an in-depth qualitative analysis, the research examines how younger siblings perceive and internalize resilience, maintain optimism, and demonstrate grit in response to familial roles and challenges. Semi-structured interviews reveal themes of support, personal growth, and the influence of elder siblings as role models and sources of encouragement. Findings suggest that elder siblings play a significant role in fostering resilience, not only through guidance and motivation but also by allowing younger siblings to observe and emulate adapting coping strategies. Moreover, the experiences of limited support or emotional vulnerability push younger siblings to develop independence and self-efficacy. This study provides insights into the complex, enduring influence of sibling relationships on psychological growth, adaptation, and perseverance.

Keywords: *Optimism, personal growth, modeling, perseverance, self-efficacy*

The current study aims to investigate the narratives of younger siblings and explore the elder siblings' role in shaping crucial psychological traits such as resilience, optimism, and grit. Resilience, optimism, and grit are critical traits for navigating life's challenges, yet their formation in younger siblings has received limited attention compared to studies focusing on broader familial dynamics or elder siblings' experiences. Elder siblings often serve as mentors, role models, or competitors, influencing younger siblings' perseverance, coping mechanisms, and worldviews. And their influence may be direct through active involvement or indirect such as through observing and imitating elder sibling's behavior.

Many research studies have focused on sibling conflict/rivalry, conflict, and overall family interactions with limited notice given to specific psychological processes involved in the development of younger siblings. By employing a qualitative approach, the emphasis is more on personal narratives and the context in which these traits develop. It examines the complex interplay of familial relationships, emotional changes, and psychological growth, contributing novel insights into resilience, optimism, and grit within sibling dynamics. The

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approach looks at the deeper aspects of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of these traits as it introduces new insights into the development pathways of younger siblings that are distinct.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Examining existing literature is critical for understanding the development of resilience, optimism, and grit in younger siblings influenced by elder siblings. Previous studies highlight the psychological dynamics and sibling relationships influencing personal development.

Whiteman et al (2011) explored four psychological perspectives-- psychoanalytic-evolutionary, social-psychological, social learning, and family-ecological systems—emphasizing the complexity of sibling interactions over time and their multidimensional impact. Studies by Blazo et al. (2014) further elaborate on younger siblings' experiences, identifying family and sibling influence as key components shaping identity, motivation, and resilience.

Other research, such as by Clement et al. (2020), focuses on positive psychological factors like grit and optimism and their roles as protective traits. Similarly, Ang et al. (2021) underline the family's critical role in fostering resilience, though few studies specifically highlight siblings' contributions. Wei Ling et al. (2018) expand on resilience by examining sibling dynamics in challenging family settings, advocating for further exploration of their unique influences. The synthesis of these studies underscores a noticeable research gap in addressing younger siblings' lived experiences and the nuanced roles elder siblings play in shaping psychological traits. This study contributes to filling that gap by providing culturally sensitive, qualitative insights into resilience, optimism, and grit within sibling relationships.

METHOD

This section sets out the methodological approach undertaken to study the narratives of younger siblings in the context of how elder siblings play a role in developing the resilience, optimism, and grit of younger siblings.

Aim of the research

The purpose of the study was to investigate the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do the younger sibling's life stories reflect their journey of building resilience, optimism, and grit?
- RQ2: How does the younger sibling's relationship with the elder siblings influence the development of resilience?
- RQ3: How does the younger sibling's relationship with the elder siblings influence the development of optimism?
- RQ4: How does the younger sibling's relationship with the elder siblings influence the development of grit?

A narrative research design was employed to delve into the lived experiences of the participants. Narrative research design is a qualitative research approach that focuses on exploring and understanding the stories or personal accounts of individuals to gain insights into their experiences and the meanings they attribute to them. Semi-structured interviews explored key experiences involving elder siblings' role in shaping resilience, optimism, and

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grit. Interviews were conducted in person or online, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

The study included 12 participants consisting of both male and female individuals aged 18-40, selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevant shared childhood experiences with elder siblings. The sample included individuals who have one elder sibling, as this relationship is central to the research focus. Participants represented diverse educational backgrounds and ethnicities to capture varied perspectives.

Data analysis employed Qualitative Thematic Analysis, through which recurring patterns and major themes were identified. It involved coding the data to categorize recurring ideas and identifying major themes and sub-themes to make sense of the complex information. The analysis focused on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of resilience, optimism, and grit development.

RESULTS

For the purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted whereby participants were asked to recount their thoughts about their experiences. These themes collectively have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the development of psychological growth and life experiences shaped by the participant's relationships with their siblings.

Several themes were found through analysis:

1. Support and influence in personal growth- The crucial impact of sibling, familial, and social support systems on the individual's resilience and coping mechanisms. This enhances the sustaining influence of relationships on motivation and self-efficacy.

- **Sustaining influence of siblings-** Continuous and profound influence and support from siblings in shaping younger sibling's resilience, coping, and general outlook on life through support, guidance, and role-modeling.
- **Social Support from family and friends-** Highlighting the practical and emotional support from family and friends boosts resilience. The encouragement and understanding provided with the comfort help individuals face challenges with greater confidence and ease.
- **Encouragement and motivation from siblings and family-** They play uplifting roles by giving positive reinforcement and inspiring confidence.
- **Openness to communication and trust in others-** The significance of having trusted individuals as confidants during challenging situations. Emphasizing the empowerment and relief participants feel when they can openly share and express emotions and their thoughts, knowing they are heard and supported.

2. Personal Development and Transformation- This theme looks upon self-awareness, inner growth, and empowerment that come from internal motivation and external encouragement.

- **Inner Resilience awakening and personal transformation-** Those significant experiences when participants had an awakening and experienced growth when in a particular situation.
- **Setting Boundaries and Self-growth-** Emphasizing the importance of setting boundaries for themselves and inner peace.

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- **Faith in self and self-belief-** Journey of believing and having faith in self, understanding how to deal with the surroundings, and finding out what works for them.
- **Developing Courage and Confidence-** Experiences where courage and confidence were showcased. The moments of empowerment.

3. Navigating Uncertainty and Building Resilience- This theme encompasses strategies the participants use to manage challenges, uncertainties, and overwhelming situations. Highlighting the importance of self-reflection, resilience, and patience.

- **Coping with Uncertainty through patience, reflection, and hope-** This sub-theme discusses how participants deal with uncertainty/ambiguity by reflecting on the situation and their experiences while moving forward with the hope of determining their next steps.
- **Calm responses to challenges-** Experiences of participants in handle challenges while staying composed and responding thoughtfully.
- **Moving Forward-** Emphasis on resilience focuses on how individuals bounce back from setbacks and continue to move forward.
- **Self-confidence development and self-efficacy empowerment-** Emphasizes on capability of developing efficacy and confidence, enabling participants to face uncertainty with empowerment.

4. Challenges in Coping and Emotional Vulnerabilities- This theme apprehends the difficulties participants experience when they feel unsupported or not motivated, helpless, anxious, and uncertain.

- **Overthinking and difficulty in processing situations-** This reflects upon the tendency of people to dwell on problems excessively, which makes it harder for them to function effectively.
- **Lack of Support, Influence, and motivation from others-** This reflects upon the impact of feeling unsupported, unmotivated, and ignored, as participants struggle without external encouragement or guidance mostly from siblings.
- **Growth of traits like anxiety and fear of inability to cope-** This highlight how the participants develop anxiety and fear when they doubt their ability to handle an uncertain situation.
- **Experiences of helplessness and hopelessness in challenging situations-** This reflects upon the experiences when individuals feel that no one can help them and they are unable to find solutions, leading to a sense of hopelessness.

5. Positive Thinking and Optimistic Mindsets- This theme focuses on fostering or nurturing a positive and optimistic outlook toward the future, underlining the importance of hope and a forward-thinking approach to coping.

- **Thinking positively and being optimistic-** This sub-theme highlights hopefulness and a positive attitude in maintaining challenges, which can strengthen their ability to face challenges.
- **Futuristic and goal-oriented perspectives-** This sub-theme focuses on those experiences where individuals were able to maintain hope and plan ahead for the future, helping them to stay motivated and resilient through challenges.

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- **Reflecting and introspecting on past challenges to build future resilience-** Importance of learning from past experiences, using reflection to improve the skill of resilience for future obstacles.

DISCUSSION

This study investigates how resilience, optimism, and grit are developed among younger siblings. The following themes emerged from the data, which discuss these experiences and how these objectives have been met.

The theme ‘The Role of Support and Influence in Personal Growth’ highlights the intense impact of siblings and family support in developing resilience. Studies indicate that supportive family relations, to a large extent with siblings, provide a foundation for emotional stability and confidence (Wei Ling Chin et al., 2018). Elder siblings act as role models, contributing, encouragement, and guidance that eventually fosters coping skills and self-efficacy in younger siblings. This particular theme also reflects how open communication with family members and other trusted individuals creates a secure and assured space for younger siblings to share their thoughts and feelings and better express themselves, which eventually contributes to the development of resilience and it also reinforces the beliefs of younger siblings in overcoming challenges. It is found in the first sub-theme that consistent emotional and practical support aligns with literature showcasing sibling relations boost resilience through role-modeling and encouragement. The second sub-theme which is social support from family and friends, aligns with Ang Wei How et al., 2021, who underscore the critical role of family in resilience, through practical and emotional support. The sub-theme which is encouragement and motivation from siblings and family members, talks about the positive reinforcement from siblings and reflects findings on motivation as a factor in the development of resilience, with family reinforcing self-confidence. Further, the sub-theme, openness to communication and trust in others encompasses the responses where it is highlighted that having family members who you trust as your confidants aligns with studies showcasing that a bond with family strengthens resilience by providing emotional relief and support.

The second theme ‘Personal Development and Transformation’ focuses on growth from within, self-awareness, and empowerment, which is often influenced by the presence of elder siblings. According to the literature review, personal transformation, particularly through ‘self-reflection’ and ‘boundary setting’, is vital for resilience to develop (Singh et al., 2011). Those moments of self-realization and self-confidence allow younger siblings to expand and grow and this kind of personal transformation is fueled by both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic reinforcement from family. Inner resilience awakening and personal transformation encompass the experiences of self-realization aligning with resilience literature, showing how moments that are transformative build awareness in self. The sub-theme, setting boundaries and self-growth talks about setting boundaries as a part of self-growth which resonates with research highlighting autonomy and self-control as significant factors of resilience. In the next sub-theme, which is faith in self and self-belief, it is said that trust in abilities of our abilities relates to the development of resilience, reinforcing self-efficacy as an essential quality for getting control of challenges. The sub-theme of developing courage and confidence, mirrors the findings on self-assurance being important for resilience, supported by family dynamics that enrich confidence and independence.

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The third theme 'Navigating Uncertainty and Building Inner Resilience' centers around the participant's ability to manage uncertainty through resilience strategies, which includes self-reflection, patience, and calm responses, aligning with research emphasizing adaptability as a core resilience trait (Wei Ling Chin et al., 2018). It was revealed through participants that patience, maintaining hope, and reflection are vital for navigating uncertain unknown situations. These adaptive strategies help younger siblings to maintain their resilience, and problem-solving skills development and continue pursuing their goals despite obstacles and uncertainty. The first sub-theme which is coping with uncertainty through patience, reflection and hope talks about how the research shows patience and hope are integral parts of resilience development, aligning with findings on adaptive responses to uncertainty. Calm Responses to Challenges sub-theme talks about how remaining composed in difficult situations mirrors literature emphasizing emotional regulation as a strategy for resilience. Moving forward after setbacks sub-theme talks about Perseverance, as noted by Clement et al., (2020), which is key to resilience, helping participants learn through failures and push forward. The self-confidence development and self-efficacy empowerment sub-theme align with studies on self-efficacy, showing confidence in one's abilities strengthening resilience and adaptability.

The 'Challenges in Coping and Emotional Vulnerabilities' theme describes the psychological challenges younger siblings encounter, especially when they lack support or motivation. Literature suggests that feeling unsupported or demotivated can increase vulnerability to helplessness, anxiety, and overthinking (Ang et al., 2021). Such emotional challenges underline the importance of family and sibling support; the absence of these networks often results in fear of failure and self-doubt. This theme indicates how a lack of support exacerbates emotional vulnerabilities, affecting younger siblings' resilience and hampering their ability to cope effectively. The sub-theme of overthinking and difficulty processing situations talks about excessive rumination aligns with studies on emotional vulnerability, showcasing the impacts of resilience by complicating problem-solving. Lack of support, influence, and motivation from others is another sub-theme and research puts forward that motivation and encouragement are crucial for resilience, so the absence of these can become an obstacle for coping skills. The next sub-theme which is the growth of traits like anxiety and fear of inability to cope, aligns with studies that note that anxiety and self-doubt rise from the absence of support, which leads to increased stress and decreased resilience. Experiences of helplessness and hopelessness in challenging situations suggest that without guidance or emotional reinforcement, individuals are more likely to experience hopelessness and feel overwhelmed.

The theme of 'Positive Thinking and Mindset' focuses attention on positivity and a goal-oriented mindset as being the foundational aspects of resilience. A review of the literature supports the role of optimism and futuristic thinking in building resilience, as individuals who maintain a positive outlook and set direct and understandable goals are better equipped to handle and face adversity (Clement et al., 2020). Younger siblings who reflect on past experiences of success and maintain hope for the upcoming things, develop a stronger front of resilience, as this mindset fosters perseverance and helps to alleviate the impact of setbacks. The sub-theme of thinking positively and being optimistic links optimism to resilience, as a positive outlook and thinking boosts individuals' ability to cope. Research indicates that setting goals promotes resilience by participants and a clear sense of purpose and direction. This has been stated in the next sub-theme, futuristic and goal-oriented perspectives. The next sub-theme, reflecting and introspecting on post-challenges to build

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future resilience, literature showcases that learning from past experiences enhances resilience, and enables the individual to better navigate future obstacles. The themes and sub-themes integrated illustrated the deep nature of resilience which is highly influenced by siblings, family dynamics, personal development, strategies for coping, and most importantly positive thinking.

CONCLUSION

This conclusion consolidates the core insights revealed through the research. Exploring the lived experiences of younger siblings provides a deeper understanding of how they develop these psychological traits, shaped by dynamics of support, influence, personal challenges, and family roles.

One of the chief findings of this study highlights the fact that younger siblings' resilience is determined by the presence of family support particularly from elder siblings and by periods of independence that force them to develop self-reliance. Sibling relationships provide a crucial foundation for resilience-building, where elder siblings often serve as role models, mentors, and sources of encouragement. Their influence encourages younger siblings to persevere through challenges, provides examples of healthy constructive coping strategies, and builds self-confidence. These experiences of self-sufficiency and navigating challenges strengthen their ability to cope with adversity independently.

The theme of "navigating uncertainty and building inner resilience" emerged strongly in the data, showing that younger siblings cultivate resilience through patience, reflection, and adaptability. Another key finding is the role of a positive mindset and forward-thinking perspective in maintaining optimism. Younger siblings, those observing elder siblings' life paths, often model a hopeful outlook that enables them to see possibilities beyond immediate challenges. This optimism is fostered through family support but also through self-directed thinking that emphasizes growth, learning, and progress. Individuals who participated in the study consistently referenced the importance of "thinking positively and being optimistic," reflecting a conscious focus on challenges as opportunities for growth and maintaining hope in the face of adversity.

The "positive thinking and mindset" theme captures how this outlook becomes an essential element of resilience, allowing them to look toward the future with confidence. By reflecting on past experiences and drawing on familial support, younger siblings build an optimistic mindset that helps them during difficult times and motivates them to pursue personal goals.

The study also reveals that grit demonstrated through perseverance and self-belief is a crucial factor among younger siblings. The presence of elder siblings provides them with examples of persistence and adaptability, helping to foster grit. Younger siblings often model their elder siblings to face setbacks, bounce back, and achieve success. This observation strengthens their resolve to persist, even in the face of failure or discouragement. The sub-themes of "self-confidence development and self-efficacy empowerment" reflect this internalization of grit, where younger siblings consistently build a belief in their capacity to overcome obstacles independently.

Moreover, the study underlines that grit is not only about enduring challenges but also involves active personal growth. Younger siblings demonstrate grit by setting goals, developing strategies, and repeatedly moving forward through obstacles, a process highly

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influenced by their family dynamics and the examples set by their elder siblings. The combination of resilience, optimism, and grit forms a balanced psychological toolkit that younger siblings can carry into various aspects of their lives.

The study also recognizes the challenges younger siblings face. Some participants reported experiences of emotional vulnerability, especially in instances of “overthinking and difficulty processing situations,” or “lack of support, influence, and motivation.” These moments of vulnerability underscore that family and sibling support is invaluable, but the absence of it can lead to heightened anxiety, self-doubt, and feelings of helplessness. However, these kinds of challenges contribute to the growth of resilience by pushing younger siblings to find strength and solutions within themselves.

This theme of “challenges in coping and emotional vulnerabilities” highlights the delicate nature of resilience and grit development, showcasing that emotional struggles are not only part of the process of resilience-building but also contribute to self-awareness and emotional maturity. Challenges faced during times of low support or motivation offer younger siblings a chance to shape and strengthen their coping strategies and emotional resilience.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on how resilience, optimism, and grit develop among younger siblings within the familial context, specifically under the influence of elder siblings. The family environment provides both challenges and support that shape younger siblings’ psychological growth. The role of elder siblings as confidants and role models is instrumental in fostering resilience, optimism, and grit, helping younger siblings navigate life’s uncertainties with strength and hope. However, the occasional lack of support or emotional struggle shows that resilience is formed not just by positive reinforcement but also through facing and overcoming adversity independently. These findings convey significant implications for understanding sibling relationships and family dynamics as foundational influences on mental well-being and psychological development. In the field of counseling psychology, practitioners can emphasize the role of sibling relationships in resilience-building which could inform family-based interventions and support strategies. Additionally, recommending the development of self-confidence, goal-setting, and emotional awareness in younger siblings may further support their resilience and psychological growth. As a whole, this study provides a nuanced view of how through the complex interplay of support, challenges, and individual growth, younger siblings develop a unique set of skills that help them navigate life’s challenges with resilience and hope. The lasting impact of sibling and family relationships deepens the importance of these bonds in creating one’s capacity to persevere, be a source of optimism, and strengthen resilience over time.

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Conflict of Interest

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