

Research Paper

Learned Optimism and Resilience across Different Family Types

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ABSTRACT

A study of learned optimism and resilience through the prism of family structures provides a microcosmic understanding of India's larger psychological transition. The present study researched the levels of learned optimism and resilience of adults who lived within a joint and a nuclear family system. The study aimed to examine, assess, and compare the levels of learned optimism and social anxiety among the adults of joint and nuclear families. The sample consisted of 100 participants (Male= 50 & Female= 50), aged 20-30 years, participants belonged to either a joint or a nuclear family that lived in Varanasi city. Findings showed that no significant differences were found between family types and genders on learned optimism and resilience. The participants showed a strong positive relationship between the levels of learned optimism and resilience.

Keywords: *Learned optimism, resilience, family type, joint family, nuclear family*

It is well stated in Indian tradition, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', which means the entire world is one family. This reflects how high a place is given to family and family values in Indian culture. It is not merely considered a unit, but rather the center of social, cultural, moral, and emotional values. Modern days are observed for their changing style in almost all aspects of living, right from the family structure to moving towards the digital era. The shift in traditionally existing joint families to nuclear families has been, in a way, an undeniable necessity of today's time. Unlike earlier people interacting with each other, for every tit and bit now has been limited strictly to digital interactions. People are becoming individualistic; even though families exist, they do function in an individualistic style. There isn't enough sharing of experiences and joy in person. All these things are now taking place online.

Family

The primary social group, which forms the basis of all other social structures, is recognised as the family. An ordinary family consists of parents and children, sometimes extended members such as grandparents, cousins, and other relatives. In Indian culture Family holds an extremely important place in India. In Indian culture, family is considered not just a group of blood relations, but also a centre of ethical, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual values. Many researchers describe the nature of family through two major forms, joint family and nuclear family. Karve (1953) defines joint family as a group of people who

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generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common, and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred.

Mitchell (1979) in his 'Dictionary of Sociology', nuclear family is defined as a small group composed of husband and wife and immature children which constitutes a unit apart from the rest of the community.

Learned Optimism

The concept of learned optimism is based on positive psychology, and it suggests that people have the capacity to develop a more optimistic outlook about their lives. Unlike learned helplessness, which is the condition where people feel helpless because of continuous failure or problems, learned optimism focuses on how people can change and become stronger in the face of adversity. The main idea behind learned optimism is that what we think inside our minds influences how we feel about ourselves and our lives. When we focus on examining and disputing negative ideas, we can make ourselves more optimistic. It involves recognizing negative thoughts, challenging them, and replacing them with more positive beliefs.

Resilience

Resilience is a central term in contemporary psychology literature that refers to the manner in which individuals respond, often successfully, to adversity. Wagnild and Young (1993) have conceptualized the resilience construct for adult populations as a positive dimension of personality that facilitates a response to life stressors. They have developed the Resilience Scale (RS) which was comprised of five key components of resilience, meaningful life, perseverance, self-reliance, equanimity, and existential aloneness. The theory of resilience as a positive construct includes conceptions of coping with adversity, coping with challenges, and finding meaning in life. The study of Wagnild and Young (1993) explored that the resilience construct is a positive personality disposition with its component elements of purpose, perseverance, self-reliance, equanimity, and existential aloneness providing a composite for adaptive responses to stress. This theory is not strictly a trait-based theory but emphasizes relatively stable personal resources that influence how an individual perceives and helps an individual cope with adversity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A study showed that learned optimism significantly positively affects the resilience of adolescents, drawing a direct proportionality line whereby increased levels of learned optimism translate to increased resilience. The adolescents who scored high on learned optimism had scored higher on resilience scale, compared to participants classified as moderate or low on learned optimism. Additionally, the findings indicated that there was a significant difference in the subjects' resiliency based on gender, in that female adolescents were more resilient compared to their male counterparts. These findings collectively point out that learned optimism is an important psychological resource in strengthening an adolescent's capacity to recover from adversity. Research was conducted to explore the role of self-esteem, learned optimism, and resilience in shaping the mental health of university students. The findings indicated that self-esteem, resilience, and learned optimism could significantly influence mental health. (Chamuah & Sankar, 2019)

A study of Molinero, Martin, and Núñez (2018) showed a significant correlation between optimism and resilience among university students from the University of Cádiz. Using

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hierarchical multiple regression, the study showed that optimism was a predictor of resilience. In addition, no significant difference was found between the levels of optimism and/or resilience among males and females, and between different age groups. The results of the study indicated that optimism is a protective component that plays a vital role in adapting successfully to the challenges of university life.

Chadwick (2019) looked back on the application of learned optimism and the concept of resilience within the Student Engagement team at Macquarie University with the goal of providing improved support for their student groups during times of rapid change within the institution. The study demonstrated the value of learned optimism in that it could be developed within the team in order for the collective benefits of positive transition and an enhanced student experience to be gained. The findings indicated that the concepts of learned optimism and team growth could be incorporated within working practices and training in order for the needs of the students to be more effectively met. The value of the application of the concept of resilience within the institution was indicated.

Objectives

1. To compare the levels of learned optimism and resilience among participants.
2. To find the difference in the levels of learned optimism and resilience among different types of family.
3. To examine the relationship between learned optimism and resilience.

Hypotheses

1. There will be no significant difference in the levels of learned optimism and resilience between male and female participants.
2. There would be no significant difference in learned optimism and resilience among participants belonging to Joint and Nuclear families.
3. There will be found a positive relationship between learned optimism and resilience.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of 100 participants (50 males & 50 females) aged 20-30 years. Participants belonged to either a joint or a nuclear family that lived in Varanasi city. There was used the snowball sampling method for selected the sample.

Inclusion criterion:

- Individuals living in either a joint family or a nuclear family.
- Individuals aged between 20 and 30 years.
- Individuals with proficiency in basic English.

Exclusion criterion:

- Children, adolescents, and older adults.
- People who are not literate.
- Individuals diagnosed with a mental health disorder.

Instruments:

1. **Learned Optimism Scale** (LOS; Pethe, Dhar, & Chaudhari, 2010) is a widely used tool for measuring learned optimism in the field of research. The scale is constructed on a five-point Likert scale. The test consists of 22 statements. No reverse scoring is

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needed. Split-half reliability of the scale is found to be 0.99, making it highly reliable for the studies. The score range is from 22 to 110.

2. **Resilience Scale** (RS; Wagnild&Young, 1987) consists of 25 statements, and respondents indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement using a 7-point Likert scale. The 25-item Resilience Scale (RS) is the original resilience measure and is considered the “gold standard” for resilience assessments among researchers worldwide. It is a highly valid and reliable 25-item measure that measures resilience in any setting. The score on this scale can range from anywhere between 25 to 175.

RESULT

Table 1: t-test for Gender Differences in Learned Optimism and Resilience Scores

Variable	Groups	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Learned Optimism	Female	88.72	11.68	-1.147 <i>ns</i>	.254 <i>ns</i>
	Male	91.22	10.07		
Resilience	Female	133.84	19.85	-0.087 <i>ns</i>	.421 <i>ns</i>
	Male	137.08	20.28		

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *ns* = non-significant

The finding showed that there was no significant difference ($t = 1.147$ & $p = 0.254$) between females ($M = 88.72$, $SD = 11.68$) and males ($M = 91.22$, $SD = 10.07$) concerning the learned optimism scores, Furthermore, there was no significant difference ($t = 0.087$ & $p = 0.421$) found between the resilience scale scores in females ($M = 133.84$, $SD = 19.85$) and males, ($M = 137.08$, $SD = 20.28$).

Table 2: t-test for Family Type in Learned Optimism and Resilience Scores

Variable	Family Type	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Learned Optimism	Joint	90.84	11.015	0.795	0.428 <i>ns</i>
	Nuclear	89.10	10.863		
Resilience	Joint	136.74	17.878	0.637	0.526 <i>ns</i>
	Nuclear	134.18	22.082		

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *ns* = non-significant

These results showed that there was no statistically significant difference ($t = 0.80$ & $p = .428$) between Joint and Nuclear families in learned optimism scores: joint family ($M = 90.84$, $SD = 11.02$); nuclear family ($M = 89.10$, $SD = 10.86$). Also, there was no statistically significant difference ($t = 0.64$ & $p = .526$) in resilience scores when comparing Joint families ($M = 136.74$, $SD = 17.88$) to nuclear families ($M = 134.18$, $SD = 22.08$).

Table 3: Correlation between learned optimism and resilience.

Variable	Learned Optimism	Resilience
Learned Optimism	*	0.716**
Resilience	0.716**	*

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$

The result showed that there was a strong positive relationship between the levels of learned optimism and the levels of resilience ($r(98) = 0.716$, $p < 0.001$). The findings indicate that the scores of learned optimism and resilience positively correlate with each other.

DISCUSSION

This study tried to uncover the dynamic processes of Learned Optimism and Resilience with a focus on the impact of Gender as well as Family types (Joint versus Nuclear families). Contrary to many conventional sociological suppositions, this research showed that demographic factors mattered little in arriving at these psychological conditions, while the internal correlations between these psychological conditions were of great importance.

The statistical findings showed that there were no significant differences in the levels of Learned Optimism and Resilience between male and female adults. Males and females have shown more or less equal levels of learned optimism and resilience., that confirmed the first hypothesis. Traditional stereotypes that portray men as inherently more resilient and women as more prone to anxiety are challenged by this finding.

Seligman (1991) found that gender is not considered a primary determinant of optimism; differences are more closely related to explanatory style and life experiences, and argued that learned optimism is a cognitive style that can be acquired through learning and experience.

Gender-neutral parenting is becoming more popular in modern urban or middle-class environments. Resilience and emotional expression are becoming more and more valued traits for both boys and girls. This lessens the difference in how they acquire coping strategies. A common "psychological toolkit" has emerged as a result of the shift toward equitable upbringing, which explains why resilience scores did not significantly differ. McLean et.al (2011) indicated that the "gender gap" in psychological distress is getting smaller, which is the main characteristic of modern adult populations. Besides, as the socio-cultural roles change and the access of women to the educational and professional fields becomes equal, their cognitive appraisal styles (Optimism) and coping mechanisms (Resilience) have already matched those of men. The data reinforce the notion that these variables are more influenced by individual personality and life experiences than by biological sex.

The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences among the participants of joint and nuclear families on learned optimism and resilience. i.e., the adults belonging to joint and nuclear families scored similar on learned optimism and resilience scales. The second hypothesis is also confirmed. The main reason for a non-significant outcome emerges from the fact that every family system contains its own set of benefits and drawbacks, which effectively neutralize each other. People experience social support from joint families, but they face intense interpersonal stress because they must share their personal space and deal with continuous social observation and multiple authority figures. A nuclear family system enables people to develop self-sufficiency and independence, which form the basis of resilience, but it does not offer immediate assistance. Many studies explored that psychological well-being, resilience, and optimism are more strongly associated with the quality of family relationships than with family structure itself.

The lack of personal space that comes with joint families can be stressful, even though they offer a safety net. The nuclear family structure enables family members to develop self-sufficiency. My data analysis shows that these variables create equal levels of optimism and resilience. Modern psychology demonstrates that family functioning, which refers to how family members interact with each other, holds greater influence on mental health outcomes than Family Structure, which describes who resides in the household.

In 2025, the traditional "isolation" of the Nuclear family no longer exists in the same way. High-speed internet, video calls, and social media allow individuals in Nuclear families to maintain "virtual jointness" with extended relatives. The physical presence of Joint family members does not guarantee their digital connection to one another. Families of different types can now connect through digitalization. The emotional and social resources that used to belong only to Joint families have become available to Nuclear families through technological advancements, which create psychological similarities between these two family types. Most adults today face the same external stressors (economic inflation, job competition, urban traffic, global news) regardless of their home life. The major environmental stressors that exist outside the family unit tend to create more damage than the everyday family interactions that take place inside the home. If the external environment is the same for both groups, their levels of Social Anxiety and Optimism will likely converge. The two-family structures function within identical social environments. The various domestic arrangements between partners create less stress than the common challenges that life presents to everyone.

The ongoing scientific investigation into human resilience, nowadays, is predominantly considering it as a personal cognitive asset, which is created through individual suffering rather than a group-conferred advantage. One's Resilience is determined by one's own moving up the ladder and down the rungs in the external world (school, work, relationships). Resilience is one's internal 'psychological muscle.' The family is the gym, but the individuals are the ones doing the lifting. Hence, the kind of family does not radically change the potential for muscle building.

This leads to the view that the "buffer effect" of Joint families—long theorized to protect individuals from stress through a large support network—may well be of no consequence in modern times. Ahuja (2016) asserts that joint families provide shared support, but at the same time, they have a tendency to create family feuds and lower an individual's autonomy, which are stress factors too. On the contrary, Nuclear families may appear "disconnected", but they often nurture stronger self-reliance. Your findings point to the fact that the character of family relationships matters a lot more than the number of people living together. This revelation implies that family function is more significant than family type.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a significant positive relationship between Learned Optimism and Resilience.

The findings revealed that there was found a strong positive relationship between Learned Optimism and Resilience. The relationship that is the strongest among the data is identified by Martin Seligman (1991) as "Explanatory Style." Adults with an optimistic disposition classify defeats as mere delays rather than permanent character defects. The resiliency trait is formed by such mental flexibility. When you hold the conviction that 'this too shall pass,' you, in fact, cultivate stamina for enduring hard times. Carver and Scheier (2014) strengthen this viewpoint by demonstrating that optimists even become more involved in problem-solving during a crisis, thus gradually building their resilience.

Resilience is 'bouncing back,' but you cannot bounce back if you think the situation is hopeless. Learned Optimism offers the "explanatory style," which assures an individual that a setback is temporary. This conviction is what gives the persistence required for Resilience. To put it simply, they are both different aspects of the same thing: Optimism is the mental process, while Resilience is the corresponding behavior.

Limitations, implications, and directions for future research

First, the sample size ($N = 100$), though adequate to detect differences in basic t-tests and correlations, is too small to detect subtle "interaction effects" between gender and family type. For instance, even though the difference in Social Anxiety between Joint and Nuclear families was not significant, a mean difference of points does suggest that this could be a significant trend to be picked up by a larger and more diverse sample.

Second, this study relies heavily on self-report measures. As noted by Paulhus and Vazire (2007), self-reports are prone to social desirability bias, in which participants may over-report levels of Resilience or under-report Social Anxiety in an attempt to appear more "adjusted." In the context of family type, this is especially relevant, whereby cultural expectations for harmony in Joint families may affect how individuals self-report their internal distress.

Third, because of the cross-sectional nature of this data, it limits the degree to which we can make any causal claims. Although we found a strong positive correlation between Learned Optimism and Resilience, we cannot definitively say that optimism causes resilience; rather, it might be that highly resilient individuals develop an optimistic explanatory style over time.

CONCLUSION

The psychological relationship between learned optimism and the function of resilience in joint and nuclear family environments is thoroughly examined in this study. The findings have a number of significant ramifications for how mental health functions in modern societies. It shows that optimism and resilience are not significantly influenced by gender or family type (Joint versus Nuclear). It seems that people from either kind of family structure exhibit similar traits, in contrast to conventional sociological beliefs. It seems that interpersonal relationships are more important than family structure. The study shows that learned optimism and resilience have a strong synergy. A cognitive explanatory style that sees setbacks as transient and specific is a fundamental pillar for developing psychological hardiness, as confirmed by the strong positive correlation.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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