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Research Paper

Comparing Grit and Resilience among Working Professionals

Dr. Urvashi Dutta[1]*, Dr. Anita Puri Singh[2]

ABSTRACT

Being gritty is indicated by working tirelessly towards one's goals and keeping at it without losing interest in spite of challenges and/or fatigue. Demonstrating gritty characteristics refers to being able to make adjustments in one's behaviour according to the circumstance and being able to delay gratification while still working on the task at hand. Resilience is what helps an individual adapt to changes in life. A person who exhibits resilience is better able to deal with these circumstances and 'bounce back' from them quicker. The present study sought to equate the levels of grit and resilience among working professionals belonging to three different working sectors: defence, private and public sector. The complete sample was divided into three-equal sized groups and data collection was completed at the workplace of the subjects. Data was analysed through ANOVA and post-hoc Tukey test. Personnel belonging to the defence sector showed significantly higher levels of grit and resilience as compared to personnel belonging to the other two sectors. Implications of these results were discussed in the light of existing research.

Keywords: *Grit, Resilience, Defence Personnel, Public Sector Personnel, Private Sector Personnel*

Angela Duckworth and her colleagues (2007) started exploring grit, defined as 'perseverance and passion for long-term goals' (Duckworth et al., 2007), as a possible reason that separated those who accomplished more as compared to others possessing similar levels of intelligence. Being gritty is indicated by working tirelessly towards one's goals and keeping at it without losing interest in spite of challenges and/or fatigue. Those who possess grit are able to self-regulate and postpone their need for positive reinforcement while working diligently on a task.

Duckworth et al. (2007) interviewed professionals from various fields of life and surveyed the characteristics that differentiated the best in the field from the rest. The researchers were often amazed when those they interviewed spoke about the peers who managed to accomplish a lot just because of their sustained efforts and commitment in spite of not being as gifted whereas those gifted did not manage to reach the top in their fields.

Grit is an important characteristic when employed in selection of novice teachers with grittier teachers being twice as likely to remain in the position as well as exhibiting higher

[1]Asst. Prof & Head, Dept of Psychology, Hindu PG College, Zamania, Ghazipur
[2]Professor & Head, Dept of Psychology, Govt MLB Girls PG Autonomous College, Bhopal
*Corresponding Author

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student success (Duckworth, Quinn & Seligman, 2009). It has also been found to be a better predictor of retention in the United States Military Academy, success in National Spelling Bee, and teacher effectiveness and retention in low-income urban schools (Duckworth, et al., 2007; Duckworth et al., 2009; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). However, grit doesn't predict performance of cadets in the United States Military Academy (Maddi et al., 2012). Eskreis-Winkler et al. (2014) further revealed that grit could predict soldiers completing the Army Special Operations Forces course, beyond variables such as Big Five personality traits, intelligence, job tenure, etc.

Silvia et al. (2013) suggest that those high in grit generally exhibit a highly developed sense of self and their values, motivations and interests. Those with higher grit stick to their objectives even in the absence of positive feedback (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Reed et al., 2013; Maddi et al., 2013). Duckworth et al. (2010) further reported that gritty individuals don't rely upon positive feedback and continue even when it seems that their efforts are not paying off or even if the activity is non-pleasurable; leading to the inference that it is possible that grit help an individual deal better with life without getting distracted (Kleiman, Adams, Kashdan & Riskind, 2013) even in the absence of immediate, apparent success. Von Culin et al. (2014) demonstrated a positive correlation between engagement and meaning with grit. Singh & Jha (2008) report positive associations of grit with life satisfaction and positive affect, components of subjective well-being.

As a concept that is still relatively unexplored, there is still a dearth of knowledge related to its nature especially in the context of working professionals across different occupational sectors. As grit has been established as a deciding factor for success, the present study attempts to delve deeper into the nature of the variable in a professional context.

As an individual sets goals for his life and tries to achieve them, he is met with various obstacles. Researchers answer the fundamental question of what enables some people to cope better than others with resilience. These changes can be brought about due to smaller level daily hassles or bigger events such as natural disasters, a personal tragedy or work issues, both of which can be equally disturbing. A person who exhibits high resilience is better able to deal with these circumstances and bounce back quicker from adversities as compared to those who exhibits lesser levels of resilience.

Tugade & Fredrickson (2004) defines resilience as the ‘flexibility in response to changing situational demands, and the ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences’.

Others assert that resilience consists of recovery, resistance and reconfiguration (Lepore & Revenson, 2006). They define recovery as returning to homeostasis after encountering a stressful situation; resistance as not showing any reaction in response to a stressful situation; and reconfiguration as the returning back to baseline functioning in a changed form due to the encounter with the stressful experience. Cohen (2017) opines that everyone possesses resilience; there is no one who does not possess the trait, every individual experiences the intensity of the event. However, the difference lies in the ability of an individual to put it to use: those who are resilient have found ways of coping quicker as compared to others.

Although most definitions of resilience point towards a ‘bouncing back’ capacity, Jay (2013) presents a new perspective, reasoning that resilience is an enduring struggle which may have continued for years, not merely a bounce. Rohn (2016) asserts that a resilient person requires a lot of self-discipline (which needs to be developed and nurtured over years) and positive

self-talk, along with an awareness of one's own skills, talents and strengths, in order to rebuild energy following adversity.

Numerous protective factors have been identified in the literature related to resilience, including hardiness (Bonanno, 2004), extraversion (Campbell-Sills, Cohan & Stein, 2006), spirituality (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006), self-efficacy (Gu & Day, 2007), positive affect (Zautra, Johnson & Davis, 2005) and self-esteem (Kidd & Shahar, 2008). Numerous studies report a positive relationship between resilience and well-being (Wagnild & Young, 1993; Gross & John, 2003; Mak, Ng & Wong, 2011; King, 2008; Samadi, 2006; Brown, 2008). Tugade & Fredrickson (2004) and Tugade, Fredrickson & Barrett (2004) report that high trait resilience is characteristic in people with experiences in positive emotions like gratitude, love and interest post-crisis and that this experience of positive emotions in a post-crisis situation mediates the effect of resilience on psychological growth (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh & Larkin, 2003). Studies also report that resilient individuals utilise coping strategies that generate positive emotions like finding benefits and positive reappraisal (Affleck & Tennen, 1996; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000b) to adjust to negative emotional experiences and have often demonstrated the capacity to bounce back from stress-inducing experiences more quickly and efficiently (Carver, 1998).

The effect of individual differences in psychological resilience has also been documented. Tugade et al. (2004) observed that higher levels of resilience are linked to faster cardiovascular recovery under laboratory conditions. Higher resilience was found to be associated with lower anxiety symptoms (Connor & Davidson, 2003) and lower depressive symptoms (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Fredrickson et al., 2003). Such individuals are more likely to deal with adverse events better, maintain mental health, and attain better psychological well-being (Bonanno, 2004).

Resilience is reported to be positively influenced by social support (Wilks, 2008). Smith (2009) report that resilience is positively correlated with clarity in mood, social support and optimism. Souri & Hasanirad (2011) observed that resilience influences psychological well-being and that optimism alone is insufficient to predict well-being without accounting for resilience. Li (2008) investigated the relation between stress, resilience and secure attachment in a sample of college students and reports a negative correlation between stress and resilience.

A positive correlation between resilience and self-esteem helped reach the conclusion that a high amount of self-worth helps to decrease the negative effect of failure (Mehrotra & Chaddha, 2013). Shilpa & Srimathi (2015) also report resilience to be negatively related to perceived stress. Dawson & Pooley (2013) report that perceived social support and optimism together are the strongest predictors of resilience. Wolff (1995) listed social power, autonomy, better problem-solving and a better chance of maintaining health under high-stress situations as characteristics of a resilient individual. Those who are resilient often show many other positive personality traits such as perseverance in the face of adversity, realistic self-esteem and flexibility, which help them to maintain not only their psychological health but also their ability to tackle new situations (Masten, 2001). Ungar (2005) further listed problem solving ability, internal locus of control, optimism and assertiveness as essential characteristics of resilience.

Taken together, the existing literature makes clear that grit and resilience are both vital determinants of professional functioning, and yet comparative investigation of their levels

across different working sectors remain sparse. The present study was therefore undertaken to address this gap by examining and comparing grit and resilience among defense, public and private sector professionals in the Indian context.

Objectives

- To compare the levels of grit and resilience in working professionals (defence, public sector and private sector personnel).

Hypotheses

- **H_{A1}:** There will be a significant difference in the mean scores of grit among defence, public and private sector professionals.
- **H_{A2}:** There will be a significant difference in the mean scores of resilience among defence, public and private sector professionals.

Sample

The total sample for the present study consisted of 450 working adults. The total sample was divided into three equal-sized sub-groups on the basis of their professional sector. Group 1 comprised 150 members of the defence sector (young officers of the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force). 150 public sector personnel made up group 2 which consisted of personnel under permanent employment of the government in Higher Education Institutes not below grade 2. Group 3 encompassed 150 personnel working in the private sector specifically belonging to private banks and corporate organizations.

The respondents on the study were selected through purposive sampling by the researcher. Cognizant of the nature of the study, categorization on the basis of gender and/or age was done. However, the researchers did ensure that the respondents had worked for minimum 2 years in the present organisation for participating in the study.

Tools

1. Grit Scale (GS): Constructed and standardized by Duckworth et al. (2007), the grit scale was developed with the purpose of assessing the level of grit an individual demonstrates. The scale yields scores on two subscales: consistency of interests and perseverance of efforts along with an overall score where high scores indicate higher levels of grit. For the purpose of the current study, the 12-item version was employed which requires responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'not at all like me' to 'very much like me'.

The scale possesses acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.85$) as reported by Duckworth et al. (2007). Further, validation of the scale was done by Duckworth & Quinn (2009) through a confirmatory factor analysis and reported both consistency of interest and perseverance of effort as first order latent factors that were loaded on a second order latent factor grit with 0.62 and 1.30 respectively.

2. Connor – Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC): The scale was developed by Connor & Davidson (2003) with the purpose of assessing the ability of an individual to cope with stress and adversity. The scale is available in 2-item, 10-item and 25-item validated versions and the 25-item version was employed for the present study. Respondents rate the items on a scale from 0 (not true at all) to 4 (true nearly all the time) and a high score on the scale indicates high levels of resilience.

The scale reports adequate internal consistency (α = 0.89) and exhibits a high test-retest reliability with r = 0.87 (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Alpha reliability for the various factors was also found to range from 0.69 to 0.80. While validating against Kobasa Hardiness Measure, it was found to be positively correlated (r=0.83, p<0.0001) and correlated negatively to the Perceived Stress Scale (r=-0.76, p<0.001) and the Sheehan Stress Vulnerability Scale (r=-0.32, p<0.0001) indicating adequate levels of validity.

Design & Procedure

The study adopted a differential design for the purpose of assessing the difference in the levels of grit and resilience of the three groups of working professionals. One-way ANOVA would be employed to establish the significance of any difference being found in the three groups.

As per the demands of the study, the data was collected from various locations in parts. The sample for the defence personnel group was approached at cantonments located in Bhopal, Mhow, Sagar, Varanasi & Delhi. The sample for the public sector group was accessed from government colleges of Bhopal and Jabalpur. Corporate offices of Bhopal and Indore were approached for the data for the private sector group.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The data collected on the variables under study were explored through descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation. Cronbach's alpha for the present study was found to range from 0.61 to 0.82 for the three groups of working professionals indicating acceptable to good reliability. Table 1 below presents the descriptive statistics of grit and resilience of defence, public and private sector professionals through SPSS.

Table 1 showing descriptive statistics of grit and resilience among defence, public and private sector professionals

Variables	Organization	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Grit	Defence	150	46.67	6.288	34	60
	Public Sector	150	40.05	4.372	29	49
	Private Sector	150	35.28	7.596	22	54
Resilience	Defence	150	37.22	6.814	22	53
	Public Sector	150	27.65	5.474	6	48
	Private Sector	150	29.54	5.441	15	40

To test the first hypothesis set stating there will be a significant difference in the mean scores of grit among defence, public and private sector professionals, one-way ANOVA was conducted. Table 2 presents the summary of ANOVA for grit.

Table 2 Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of scores indicating grit among defence, public and private sector professionals

Variable		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Grit	Between Groups	9822.093	2	4911.047	126.615	.000**
	Within Groups	17337.907	447	38.787		
	Total	27160.000	449			

***significant at 0.01 level of significance*

Perusing the above table, it is evident that the three groups differ significantly in their perceived levels of grit. The obtained F value was also significant (F (2, 447) = 126.615, p<0.01). Thus, hypothesis **H_{A1}**, which states that there will be a significant difference in the mean scores of grit among defence, public and private sector professionals, is supported.

Table 3 presents the post hoc analysis through which it can be concluded that defence professionals exhibit the highest levels of grit as compared to public sector professionals and private sector professionals with the private sector professionals demonstrating the lowest level of grit.

Table 3 showing post hoc analysis (Tukey-HSD) of grit among defence, public and private sector professionals

Dependent Variable	**Working-Sector (I)**	**Working-Sector (J)**	**Mean Difference (I-J)**	**Sig.**
Grit	Defence	Public Sector	6.627	.000**
		Private sector	11.393	.000**
	Public Sector	Private sector	4.767	.000**

***significant at 0.01 level of significance*

To test the second hypothesis stating there will be a significant difference in the mean scores of resilience among defence, public and private sector professionals, one-way ANOVA was conducted. The summary table of ANOVA is presented in table 4.

Table 4 Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of scores indicating resilience among defence, public and private sector professionals

Variable		**Sum of squares**	**df**	**Mean square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Resilience	Between Groups	7703.151	2	3851.576	109.014	.000**
	Within Groups	15792.973	447	35.331		
	Total	23496.124	449			

**significant at 0.01 level of significance

A scrutiny of the above table demonstrates that the three groups have significantly different levels of resilience. The obtained F value was also significant (F (2, 447) = 109.014, p<0.01). Thus, hypothesis **H_{A2}**, which states that there will be a significant difference in the mean scores of resilience among defence, public and private sector professionals, is supported.

Table 5 presents the post hoc analysis through which it can be understood that the defence professionals have higher levels of resilience than the public and private sector professionals (p<0.01); and the public sector professionals have lowest levels of resilience as compared with private sector employees (p<0.05).

Table 5 showing post hoc analysis (Tukey-HSD) of resilience among defence, public and private sector professionals

Dependent Variable	Working-Sector (I)	Working-Sector (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Resilience	Defence	Public Sector	9.567	.000**
		Private sector	7.680	.000**
	Public Sector	Private sector	-1.887	.017*

***significant at 0.01 level of significance*
**significant at 0.05 level of significance*

Grit as defined by Duckworth et al (2007) refers to the passion and persistence that an individual demonstrates for his / her long-term goals. The results (presented in tables 1, 2 &3) show that defence personnel show the highest level of grit with private sector personnel showing the lowest level.

The very nature of defence work demands an unwavering commitment to long-term objectives. Protecting the country and the countrymen is an ongoing process which requires not just regular physical training but sustained mental work and consistency of purpose. Those who are mentally tough do not necessarily display higher levels of courage, talent or intelligence, to the contrary it is mostly about consistency, it's about sticking to one's daily routines and practices (Clear, 2020). In the defense context, this consistency is a structural requirement - the work enforces a long-term orientation, putting the mission ahead of personal comfort, and a tolerance for delay in reward - precisely the conditions under which grit is developed and maintained. Present results are consistent with Duckworth et al. (2007) and Eskreis-Winkler et al. (2014) which indicates retention and performance in military contexts is predicted by grit.

Public sector employees work in a relatively less pressured environment. Responsibility on government projects tends to be distributed collectively across the department rather than in a single individual. Furthermore, there are no long-term repercussions or direct personal consequences of goals not being completed. This structural dilution of accountability may be the reason that an individual's investment in long-term pursuit decreases. Gritty individuals continue to work towards their goals even in the absence of external reinforcement as reported by Duckworth et al. (2010), however this internal persistence requires consistent environments that fosters it.

Private sector employees exhibited the least grit in the three professional groups. The explanation for this may be approached through the lens of nature of goal orientation rather than the intensity of effort. Very few private organisations provide a stable long-term working environment, salary progression and career advancement leading to limited organizational loyalty and high attrition, especially in banks and corporate setups sampled in the present study. It is the absence of this fixed long-term professional goal rather than the absence of effort that results in the passion component of grit getting little opportunity to develop.

The ability of an individual to bounce back from obstacles has been understood to be resilience. From table 1, it can be understood that defence personnel exhibit the highest levels of resilience followed by the private sector and the least demonstrated by the public sector professionals (tables 4 & 5).

Defence personnel lead lives defined by challenges even in peacetime, as they are made to complete various missions to stay in a state of constant mental alertness. Critically, they do not face these situations in isolation; the organisational culture of the defence forces is very tight-knit providing strong emotional and social support which is identified as one of the strongest predictors of resilience (Wilks, 2008; Smith, 2009). The regular physical and psychological training further facilitates building resilience by repeated exposure to controlled challenges and equipping them with effective coping strategies. This combination of structured challenge, a clear sense of purpose and rigorous peer support creates conditions that are most conducive to development of high resilience. This is consistent with Tugade et al.'s (2004) finding that resilient individuals not only bounce back faster themselves but they also cultivate positive emotional resources in those around them.

Private sector professionals exhibit the next highest level of resilience. Private sector personnel encounter challenges on a daily basis in the form of targets, job insecurity, competition and fast changing organizational demands. Added to that, they must adapt to and develop their own coping strategies. This combined with limited institutional support may function as a resilience building process, consistent with Call's (2003) and Carver's (1998) results suggesting that resilient individuals employ problem-focused strategies and positive reappraisal to navigate negative experiences.

Government employees displayed the least level of resilience among the three sectors. In the Indian context, once an individual secures a government job, the threat of job loss is minimal and the structural features of public sector employment - diffused responsibility, low performance pressure, high job security - mean that they will very rarely have to face situations that would demand full activation of their coping capacities. As the professional environment does not present high-stakes challenges, the psychological muscle of resilience has a lesser opportunity to develop. These results are consistent with Choubisa's (2009) where private sector employees exhibited higher resilience as compared to public sector employees.

The present study comes with its own limitations. The sample was drawn through purposive sampling which, while appropriate for the present study design, limits the generasibility of findings. The data was collected from specific geographical locations in India, which may not be representative of all defence, public and private sector professionals across the country. Furthermore, potentially important variables such as gender, age, socio-economic background which have been known to relate to grit and resilience in prior research were not controlled.

A noteworthy pattern in the present findings is the difference in the grit and resilience scores across the civilian sectors, suggesting that the two constructs, while related, do not develop through the same conditions. Adversity in private sector employment builds reactive coping capacity but is unable to sustain long-term goal commitment that grit requires because the environment offers no stable horizon to make a commitment to. In contrast, in the public sector a more brittle form of goal adherence is demonstrated which is more likely governed by institutional routine and role obligation rather than genuine intrinsic motivation and investment which generally does not create the internal resources essential for when adversity arrives. It is only in the context of the defence sector that both conditions seem to converge with structured challenges, clear purpose, regular training and strong social cohesion seem to cultivate and reinforce grit and resilience simultaneously. This also resonates with Kleiman et al.'s (2013) and Silvia et al.'s (2013) studies linking grit to

meaning and self-awareness which are foundational to resilience (Rohn, 2016) underscoring the importance of deliberate cultivation of these characteristics rather than assuming that they emerge as a byproduct of professional demands.

The findings of the present study carries significant implications for human resource management, occupational psychology and policy development across sectors. Defence personnel demonstrated significantly higher levels of grit and resilience which underscores the role of structured, purpose driven training environments in cultivating these psychological characteristics. Review of training and development programs in light of these findings may greatly benefit organizations in the public and private sector. Building perseverance, goal commitment and adaptive coping capacities in the workforce would benefit greatly from this direction.

While assessing for public sector organisations, the need for deliberate structural interventions are highlighted. Precise delineation of individual responsibility, establishing performance benchmarks which are meaningful and fostering a culture of purposeful goal pursuit could serve to enhance both grit and resilience among government employees. Considering the important public functions they are entrusted with, the consistently low scores of resilience is particularly concerning.

For the private sector, the findings throw light on the fact that although the work environment helps in building resilience, it doesn't translate into grit. The instability and short-term nature of work culture in the private sector may be responsible for the inability to develop consistent passion for long term goals that grit requires. Organizations in the private sector may benefit from investing in a career development framework that offer employees a longer-term professional horizon fostering conditions under which grit can take root.

At the macro level, training programs based on strategies outlined by Jay (2013), Warner (2009), and Masten & Reed (2002) which highlight developing active coping skills, fostering positive reappraisal, building trusted social support networks and cultivating personal strengths should be a core area of work for human resource development. Targeted interventions aimed at building grit and resilience in professional settings could yield meaningful benefits for individual mental health as well in the form of protective psychological resources as has been demonstrated by their association with positive affect, life satisfaction and psychological well-being (Singh & Jha, 2008; Fredrickson et al., 2003; Connor & Davidson, 2003).

The present study set out to compare the levels of grit and resilience among working professionals belonging to three sectors: defence, public and private sector. Both hypotheses were significant with significant differences found across all three groups for both variables. Consistent with the rigorous nature of their professional environment, defense personnel exhibited significantly higher levels of grit and resilience as compared to both public and private sector professionals. Among public and private sectors, public sector professionals showed higher grit but lower resilience than their private sector counterparts.

The findings carry significant implications for understanding how the structural and cultural conditions of different professional environments shape the psychological characteristics of individuals working within them. Grit and resilience are capacities that are cultivated, reinforced or suppressed by the demands of one's professional life. As organizations recognize the central role of psychological strengths to employee performance, well-being

and retention, the present findings provide an empirical foundation from which sector-specific interventions can be developed and evaluated.

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