

Study identifies resilience factors to mitigate burnout in college students

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Mental health issues such as burnout and psychological distress are matters for concern among young adults, and are even more pertinent in today's uncertain global climate. A recent paper by Yale-NUS College

alumna Ms Joanna Chue (Class of 2019) and Assistant Professor of Social Sciences (Psychology) Cheung Hoi Shan identified five components of resilience that are applicable in Singapore's cultural context, and demonstrated that college students possessing a higher degree of resilience were less susceptible to burnout and psychological distress. By identifying learnable components of resilience, the paper points to concrete, actionable ways that young adults can learn this vital characteristic, resulting in better mental health outcomes.

Published in *Current Psychology* in February 2021, the paper reported the results of two interrelated studies. The first established the validity of the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), an internationally recognized measure of [resilience](#), in the Singaporean context, and identified the five factors that constitute resilience among Singaporean students. While there are other measures of resilience, such as the local Singapore Youth Resilience Scale (SYRESS), the CD-RISC is more widely used internationally. Establishing the CD-RISC's validity in the Singaporean context is a valuable result that enables its use by future researchers to make meaningful comparisons between resilience in Singapore and elsewhere.

"It was important to ascertain the validity of the CD-RISC to ensure that when administered to college students, it could accurately measure the construct of resilience in context," said Ms Chue, first author of the study. "Validating the scale would then allow for its use, for example, in quantifying the impact of relevant programs and interventions in strengthening mental resilience."

The study also identified five factors that make up resilience in the Singaporean context: approach coping in adversity (a desire to actively seek ways to solve a problem, rather than avoiding it); self-belief and trust in one's abilities; effort and purpose (being motivated by a sense of purpose and a desire to work hard to attain one's goals); having good

interpersonal and internal resources (including secure relationships, knowing where to find help in difficult times, and traits such as a sense of humor and a disposition to recognize one's past successes and achievements); and spirituality (attributing happenings in life, including adversity, to a higher force such as God or fate).

"The five factors of resilience affirmed that mental resilience comprises both character traits and skills, the latter of which are learnt and honed over time. It's heartening to know that we are all still works-in-progress, and can be equipped with skills to grow and adapt to the stressful situations we face," Ms Chue added.

The second study linked resilience to lower levels of academic burnout in Singaporean [college students](#), which was subsequently linked to lower psychological distress. By helping to regulate burnout, resilience contributed to better mental health overall. This insight points to an actionable way forward for professionals who work with young adults: instead of attempting to change the environment to lower the incidence of burnout—which, while important, is a daunting task—they can focus instead on cultivating resilience through training programs and interventions. Not only is this a more practical way forward, it would also serve [young adults](#) well by equipping them with useful skills to deal with other stressful situations that they may face later on in life.

Asst Prof Cheung noted, "As resilience is a broad term, it was important for us to identify specific traits or skills that constitute resilience, so that we can develop in-house training programs to enhance those skills among our students. After a discussion with colleagues from the Yale-NUS Wellness and Counselling Centres, we found that the skills related to resilience as identified in this study were indeed very trainable. These skills include increasing students' confidence in harnessing their strengths to overcome challenges, teaching students active problem-solving skills, and the effective use of external support sources (such as

peer support) that would enhance their resilience in the face of adversity."

Ms Chue and Asst Prof Cheung pursued these new studies as a continuation of the findings in Ms Chue's capstone project, where final-year Yale-NUS students embark on a year-long in-depth research study in their chosen major and field of study. At Yale-NUS, students have extraordinary opportunities to work closely with faculty to conduct original research, enabling them to increase their competitive edge as they consider graduate studies or other professional opportunities.

More information: Joanna Su Xin Chue et al, Mental resilience enhances the well-being of Singaporean college students through reducing burnout, *Current Psychology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s12144-021-01481-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01481-5)

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