

## Promotion of Resilient Behaviors to Improve Positive Psychological Functioning in Peruvian Women

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### Abstract

*In recent years, people's psychological functioning and adjustment have been affected by health conditions, the political and social crisis, which has generated economic and labor instability, causing mood and affect problems to have essential repercussions on people's mood, especially in women. It is important to underline that there are still limited empirical studies that show how a resilience plan improves positive psychological functioning in women. Under this problematic context, this research aims to identify the characteristics of resilience and psychological functioning and subsequently develop an intervention proposal. It was a propositional study with a non-experimental design, in which 169 mothers participated. Of these, 66.9% presented difficulties in their resilience, 66.8% had difficulties in their psychological functioning, and women with higher education showed better conditions of psychological functioning. These results constitute essential support in the elaboration of the proposal on resilience to increase the capacities of psychological functioning and to promote the adequate development of resources and coping and adaptability strategies in this group of mothers.*

**Keywords:** Resilience, subjective well-being, psychological functioning, psychological adaptation, positive psychology.

### Introduction

"It is not the strongest who survive, but those who are best adapted to situations". These famous words by Charles Darwin aptly describe psychological resilience. Resilience is described as the capacity for adaptability, perseverance and overcoming the impact of problems (Surzykiewicz et al., 2019; Zelviene et al., 2021). When the conditions of resilience are not adequate, there are difficulties in personal adjustment and psychological functioning, there are no personal resources or capacity to respond to depressive and anxiety states (González-Cantero et al., 2021; Mandujano-Jaquez et al., 2020). Due to the problems derived from the pandemic, the economic and social crisis, people have presented an important affectation on their mental health.

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Every year in the world approximately 300 million people present problems of depression, characterized by a lack of response and sense of life, of these cases 800 000 commit suicide per year, the causes associated with this problem are dissatisfaction with life and economic problems (OPS/OMS, 2019). In the national context, job loss conditions have led to mood problems being notorious, where 3 out of 10 parents present depression, 5% present hopelessness and anguish (UNICEF, 2021), and not only adults present these problems, reports indicate that 20% of adolescents present problems with their mood and affect, and sometimes leads to showing suicidal risk (Sandoval et al., 2018). Locally, it has been found that 32.48% of women present problems with anxiety and depression that impact their coping capacity and psychological adjustment (Benavides, 2021).

Considering the data of the problematic reality, it is deduced that a sector of the population that has suffered the consequences on mental health in a direct way, are women. Their lack of strategy to cope with emotional crises, have caused them to have inadequate life satisfaction and repercussions in their mental health (Huertas-Delgado et al., 2020; Martínez-Ferrer et al., 2016). To understand the relationships and effects that resilience has on psychological functioning, several studies have been developed.

In Spain, Borges-Silva et al. (2017), have analyzed the relationship between psychological needs, motivation, self-esteem and life satisfaction in a sample of 259 women, finding that psychological needs predict internal motivation and self-esteem, as well as psychological needs explain the levels of life satisfaction. They conclude that it is fundamental to be able to cover affect in the interaction process in order to have a better valuational perception and satisfaction with life. Cusinato et al. (2020), analyzed the risk factors, resilience and protection for the well-being of parents and children in psychological distress, and found that the variability of activities due to social confinement affects the psychological resources for good adaptation, was identified as a risk factor and the levels of resilience were low.

Thurston et al. (2018) have studied the causal relationship of resilience with depression in 55 mothers with HIV, finding that higher resilience is related to low levels of stress (-0.45;  $p < 0.01$ ), the effects of HIV and depressive symptoms were stronger when resilience was deficient, and weaker when resilience was high. On the other hand, Grzankowska et al. (2018) studied the role of resilience as an attribute in job satisfaction in 435 women, they found that there are differences in the levels of job satisfaction and resilience as an attribute, but relationships between resilience and satisfaction were found. At the national level, Córdova (2022), when studying the relationship between emotional intelligence and resilience in 83 mothers, found that emotional intelligence and resilience have a direct and significant relationship (.432, sig. 0.01), concluding that better emotional intelligence conditions are associated with good resilient characteristics.

The background review clearly explains how resilience acts as a mechanism for the good development of various aspects of life: it reduces depression, helps to have a better emotional intelligence, is associated with self-esteem, motivation and other variables that regulate human behavior. What has not yet been well documented is the role that psychological resilience plays in positive psychological functioning in women. Under this problematic context, we sought to know the characteristics of resilience in mothers in order to elaborate a proposal to improve positive psychological functioning in this group of women.

## **Methodology**

### **Type and design of research**

It was applied research because it sought to identify the characteristics of specific variables to develop an intervention proposal. It was of non-experimental propositional

design because no manipulation of variables was done (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza-Torres, 2018; Sánchez et al., 2018).

### Participants

169 women in conditions of extreme poverty were considered, with ages ranging from 18 to 40 years, most were mothers with primary education. All mothers attending the day of the application of the questionnaires were considered, those who did not develop the questionnaires completely and those who marked double answers were excluded.

### Instruments

Resilience was evaluated with the Wagnild & Young (1993) questionnaire, adapted for Peru by Novella (2002), whose purpose is to evaluate how resilient people are in the face of adversity and to see how they overcome in the midst of these circumstances. Its structure has four dimensions and contains 25 items. The content validity values have been higher than 0.80, the goodness of fit and construct validity indices have been RMSEA= .054, SRMR= .0561, and reliability higher than .70 (Gordillo, 2018).

To assess positive psychological functioning, the questionnaire created by Merino et al. (2015) was used, whose purpose is to know the perception about the quality of psychological functioning, it consists of six dimensions and 33 items. The content validity has shown values above .80. In construct validity, 11 factors with three items each have been found, with absolute values above .60, reliability was between .70 and .80.

### Procedures

In the first place, the corresponding permissions were requested for the application of the evaluation instruments, and then the objective of the research was explained to the International Compassion project coordinator, who provided all the facilities for the development of the study. Finally, we proceeded to apply the questionnaires to the mothers, taking into account their acceptance of the informed consent. Once the results were obtained, the database was prepared.

### Data analysis method

After transferring the data to an Excel format, we proceeded to perform the required statistical analyses. Content validity was processed by means of Aiken's V statistic, and the reliability of the data of both instruments was obtained by means of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Frequency tables were used to characterize the variables.

## Results

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the population.

	Minimum	Maximum	Avg	SD	Total
Age	14	65	37,51	11,770	169
Education level	Primary 41,4	Secondary 45,0	Higher incomplete 2,4	Higher 11,2	100,0
Marital status	Married 45,0	Cohabitant 37,9	Single 13,6	Separated 3,6	100,0
Frequency of anxiety and depression	Yes 50,3	No 49,7			100,0

The minimum age was 14 years, the maximum age 65, with a mean of 37.51, a standard deviation of 11.770, 41.4% have only primary education, 45.0% have completed secondary school and only 2.4% have incomplete higher education and 11.2% have complete higher education.

Table 2. Characteristics observed in resilience at the general level and dimensions.

Levels	Resilience		Self-confidence		Equanimity		Perseverance		Personal satisfaction		Feeling good about oneself	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Under	65	38,5	62	36,7	64	37,9	58	34,3	60	35,5	66	39,1
Regular	48	28,4	63	37,3	50	29,6	58	34,3	67	39,6	62	36,7
High	56	33,1	44	26,0	55	32,5	53	31,4	42	24,9	41	24,3
Total	169	100,0	169	100,0	169	100,0	169	100,0	169	100,0	169	100,0

At the general level, 38.5% present low levels of resilience, 28.4% present regular levels and 33.1% have high levels of resilience. The highest percentage (36.7%, 37.3%) present low and regular levels of self-confidence, likewise, the dimensions of resilience need to be strengthened.

Table 3. Characteristics observed in positive psychological functioning at the general and dimensional levels.

Categories	Psychological functioning		Self-esteem and resilience		Enjoyment		Optimism		Autonomy and vitality	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Under	58	34,3	65	38,5	66	39,1	76	45,0	61	36,1
Regular	55	32,5	52	30,8	48	28,4	39	23,1	66	39,1
High	56	33,1	52	30,8	55	32,5	54	32,0	42	24,9
Total	169	100,0	169	100,0	169	100,0	169	100,0	169	100,0

There are percentages that do not show much difference in terms of levels of positive psychological functioning at the general level (34.3%, 32.5%, 33.1%); the highest percentage of participants present difficulties in their self-esteem and resilience (38%); likewise, the majority do not perceive a good capacity for enjoyment (39.1%); followed by 45% who present low levels of optimism; 36.1% and 39.1% present low and regular levels of autonomy and vitality.

Table 4. Differences between resilience and sociodemographic variables.

Resilience	Level of education		N	Mean rank	H de Kruskal-Wallis	Sig.
	Primary		70	83,19		
	Secondary		76	77,61		
	Incomplete high school		4	117,50	10,456	,015
	Higher		19	114,39		
	Total		169			
	<b>Marital status</b>					
	Married		76	86,99		
	Cohabitant		64	79,62		
	Single		23	98,89	3,871	,276
	Separated		6	63,92		
	Total		169			
	<b>Age</b>					
	<= 20		7	84,07		
	21 – 30		49	75,66		
	31 – 40		47	83,89		
	41 – 50		38	101,42	6,268	,180
	51+		28	81,14		
	Total		169			
	<b>Anxiety depression</b>		U de Mann-Whitney			
	Yes		85	76,86		
	No		84	93,23	2878,500	,030
	Total		169			

There is a significant difference between the levels of resilience according to the level of education (.015), the people who develop better resilience are those who have completed higher education. There are also significant differences between the prevalence of depression and anxiety and resilience (.030).

Table 5. Difference between positive psychological functioning and sociodemographic variables.

	Level of education	N	Mean rank	H de Kruskal-Wallis	Sig.	
Positive psychological functioning	Primary	70	84,69	13,622	,003	
	Secondary	76	75,24			
	Incomplete high school	4	120,88			
	Higher	19	117,61			
	Total	169				
	<b>Marital status</b>					
	Married	76	83,44	6,214	,102	
	Cohabitant	64	81,88			
	Single	23	105,72			
	Separated	6	58,58			
	Total	169				
	<b>Age</b>					
	<= 20	7	93,64	2,914	,572	
	21 – 30	49	79,63			
	31 – 40	47	84,77			
	41 – 50	38	95,20			
	51+	28	78,79			
	Total	169				
	<b>Anxiety depression</b>				<b>U de Mann-Whitney</b>	
	Yes	85	72,84	2536,500	,001	
No	84	97,30				
Total	169					

Positive psychological functioning only has significant differences with the degree of education (.003), those with completed higher education present greater positive psychological functioning. Finally, there are significant differences with the presence of anxiety and depression (.001).

Table 6. Resilience-based proposal to strengthen positive psychological functioning.

N°	Description of sessions	Objective	Time
01	Self-acceptance by identifying strengths and weaknesses	To achieve self-acceptance by identifying strengths and weaknesses	60 minutes per session
02	Acceptance of the past and preventive life measures	Acceptance of their past and then develop activities to avoid making the same mistakes.	
03	Interpersonal relationships	Strengthening interpersonal relationships through the practice of various strategies	
04	Understanding and acceptance of emotions	Understand and accept their emotions through strategies	
05	Assertiveness and search for meaning in life.	To teach assertive communication techniques within interpersonal relationships	
06	Gratitude	To teach the value of gratitude and how this can help to improve well-being	
07	Optimism	To develop strategies to act positively in life	
08	Autonomy	To recognize and strengthen the level of autonomy through the application of cognitive and behavioral techniques	
09	Mastery of the environment and conflict resolution	Teach conflict resolution techniques	

10	Enjoyment	To value each action that is done, enjoying the process of all the activities that are carried out
11	Elaboration of life project (Part I)	Elaborate their life project, pointing out the activities they are going to do for that purpose
12	Elaboration of life project (Part II)	Elaborate their life project, indicating the activities they are going to do for that purpose

The proposal is based on resilience and its dimensions and seeks to strengthen and increase the levels of positive psychological functioning for a better emotional balance and response capacity.

## Discussion

Considering the effect of resilience in recent years of health and economic crises (Surzykiewicz et al., 2019; Zelviene et al., 2021), the first objective was to determine the characteristics of resilience and positive psychological functioning, where 66.9% present difficulties with resilience, that is, they need to strengthen self-confidence, they do not have emotional stability (Mandujano-Jaquez et al., 2020; Wagnild & Young, 1993). On the other hand, 66.8% do not have adequate psychological functioning expressed in a low valuation of personal esteem, lack of capacity for enjoyment and vitality (González-Cantero et al., 2021; Merino et al., 2015). Therefore, high levels of resilience improve adverse conditions and improves adaptation, reduces problems related to anxiety and depression, those with poor psychological functioning are more prone to present burnout symptoms (Anggadwita et al., 2022; Portela & Machado, 2022). Analysis of these results indicates that the post-pandemic consequences have been diverse, affecting resilient behavior and positive psychological functioning. There are inadequate coping strategies for job loss and loss of close family members. These effects on these psychological processes have developed throughout the world, although in some countries more than others, so identifying the characteristics of these variables is of vital importance.

The second objective was to determine the significant differences between resilience and psychological functioning as a function of various demographic variables. It was found that the level of education has a significant difference, which means that having education is associated with low or high levels of resilience, those with higher education develop better levels of resilience. When analyzing the variable of psychological functioning, it is observed that women with higher education present higher quality of functioning, which means that education has to do with low or high levels of psychological functioning. Anxiety and depression generate problems in resilience and psychological functioning. Analogous data are found in recent research. D'Alterio et al. (2023) have found that people who have had problems with anxiety and depression have lower levels of resilience, transitional communities have low resilience, while urban communities have high resilience (Zhang et al., 2023). Reflection on these results indicates that both resilience and positive psychological functioning develop as a function of the level of critical and cognitive thinking. Many people, when they are in adverse conditions, always tend to look at things negatively, they are not able to take a different look at the circumstances and see the positive side. For the most part, those people with good critical and reflective thinking are the ones who assimilate situations faster and find balance.

Considering that resilience reduces the impact of adversities (Zhang et al., 2023), a proposal consisting of 12 sessions of 60 minutes each, has been developed based on the dimensions of resilience. It is certain that this proposal will strengthen the capacity for resilience and psychological functioning. A study by Cusinato et al. (2020) has found that the variability of activities due to social confinement affects psychological resources. In patients with HIV who present with anxiety and depression, it was observed that higher resilience is related to lower levels of depression, the effects of depressive symptoms

were stronger when resilience was poor, and weaker when there is high resilience (Thurston et al., 2018). These findings help to have a clear understanding that improving resilience capacity helps to strengthen various areas of development. While it is true, the studies consulted, none have analyzed resilience along with positive psychological functioning, much less propose a plan for improvement, for such reason, these conditions allow this study to have a contribution to society.

In closing, it is taken for granted, and with good theoretical support, that the promotion of resilience as an element, enhances the regulation of various psychological processes, improves the conditions of psychological functioning, and thus makes them a better capacity for equanimity, balance and adaptability. Although it is true that, at the national and local level, so far there is no known work that has explored these two variables and the development of an improvement plan, therefore, it is important to continue replicating the studies in larger populations and considering different units of analysis to continue confirming or contrasting these results.

## Conclusions

The research findings indicated that the highest percentage of women need to improve their resilience and positive psychological functioning, situations that have been aggravated by the health, political and social crises experienced in recent years. Education improves the characteristics of resilience and psychological functioning, as well as those who have presented the last month's problems of anxiety and depression, have had difficulties having an adequate emotional balance.

This study provides a new perspective on resilience, especially after the recent times of crisis. Taking as a reference the knowledge reported in research indicating that resilience acts as a predictor and enhancer of various psychological processes, especially positive psychological functioning in women. On the other hand, at the national and local level, this is the first study that proposes a resilience proposal to improve autonomy, optimism, life purpose, and self-determination, and it will also serve as a basis for further research using the same variables, with the same or different populations.

One of the limitations of the study is the sample, considering that it was a small sample and being mothers from a district of the Piura Region, it only reaches an exploratory study category, so it would be important to conduct further research with a larger sample and that can consider the analysis of the results establishing comparisons between groups, taking into account that it is unknown how the behavior of these variables is in men, so it would also be important to know if the results are maintained or are similar.

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