

Psychology of Personality and Individual Differences: Theory and Applications

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Week 11

Lecture 25: Positive personality trait: Resilient Personality

I welcome you all to Module 11, which is about developing positive personality traits. This is the second lecture of this module, and overall, it is lecture number 25. So, today we will be talking about another positive personality trait, which is a resilient personality. Before we talk about today's lecture, let me briefly recap the last lecture. So, the last lecture was the first lecture of this module which was lecture number 24. In that lecture, we introduced the idea of positive personality traits. In that context, we discussed character strengths. We discussed the meaning of character strengths and the benefits of studying character strengths or psychological strengths. We also discussed, more specifically or in detail, the VIA classification of strengths and virtues proposed by Peterson and Seligman. Further, we discussed how character strengths are associated with happiness and well-being. In the end, we discussed how to cultivate character strengths or the ways by which we can enhance certain character strengths in our lives.

So, in today's lecture, we will be talking about the concept of a resilient personality. Further, we will be talking about the meaning of a resilient personality, and the characteristics of a resilient personality, and at the end, we will be talking about the clinical implications of understanding a resilient personality. Let us start with the concept of resilience by defining it. Resilience is a very important concept in the field of clinical psychology, in the field of positive psychology because it is very closely connected to the concept of well-being when facing difficulties in life. There are many definitions of the concept of resilience. We will be talking about some of these formal definitions. One of the definitions of resilience is that it is a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity. Resilience is characterized by good outcomes despite serious threats to adaptation or development.

The gist of this definition is that Resilience is mostly defined in the context of when certain adversities or traumatic situations happen in one's life, or certain obstacles or challenging situations happen in one's life. In those situations, how people positively adapt to those challenges or difficulties in life, how quickly they can bounce back from adversities and the problems of life, and function properly in their lives. In that context, the definition of resilience has two important aspects, one is the exposure to significant threats or adversity. So, resilience is always defined in the context of exposure to certain adversities in life. There will be some traumatic situations, there will be some challenging situations, and there will be some adversity in life and therefore resilience is always defined in that context. As a result, there has to be some kind of adversity or challenges in one's life. The second important aspect is how you positively adapt to those challenges of life or adversities of life and how quickly you can adapt. These are the two important aspects of achieving positive adaptation despite threats and the encounter of threats. So, these are the two important aspects that define resilience. The more quickly one can bounce back from adversities or the problems of life or adapt more quickly, the better resilience one has.

The concept of resilience is defined in the context of how easily or how quickly one can bounce back or be able to positively adapt to challenges or difficulties in one's life. Now, some researchers have distinguished between whether we should consider resilience as a trait or resilience as a process. Some researchers look into resilience from both aspects. Both aspects are true in the sense of resilience. Sometimes resilience could be a trait-like characteristic that some people have a trait of resilience. It is almost like an inbuilt personality trait when they can quickly bounce back. Some people look at it as more of a process, based on what are the different contextual factor that contributes to resilience. So, resilience could be looked at from both perspectives, it could be as a trait or it could be as a process depending on how you look at it. Now since this is a course on personality psychology, we will be mostly focusing on resilience as a trait, or as a personality trait.

There are lot of literature available on the process of resilience and we will be not focusing much on that part. So, a resilient personality is mostly defined by trait-like

qualities that demonstrate a strong, well-organized, and integrated sense of self along with the characteristics that foster meaningful reciprocal relationships with others. Certain characteristics or traits are present within an individual that make the person highly resilient. Our investigation here in this lecture will mostly, focus on that perspective only.

So, these traits collectively contribute to high levels of adaptability and effective functioning. Because the concept of resilience is mostly used in the context of adaptation and effective functioning, many researchers say that a resilient personality is mostly the opposite of personality disorders or psychological disorders. If you have high resilience, that means you will be further away from psychological disorders while less resilience leads to more psychological disorders. It is more like two ends of a spectrum. Resilient personalities can be seen as the opposite of personality disorders, which are characterized by very rigid, maladaptive patterns of perceiving, thinking, and relating. So, these disorders involve deficits in self-concept and impaired capacity for forming healthy interpersonal relationships. If you see all these common characteristics of psychological disorders, they all reflect a lack of resilience or are the opposite of what makes a person resilient.

In that sense, some researchers argue that the concept of resilient personality is the opposite of psychological disorders. A lot of these ideas that we will be discussing in this particular lecture, which talks about sources of personality strength, come from a Western cultural perspective. Much of it is also applicable universally, but some of these concepts could be mostly connected to Western culture. However, we will also be talking about the relational perspective, which is very prevalent in collectivist cultures as well. Since a lot of research happened in Western culture as a result it may have a certain taste of those Western cultural aspects. So, let us see what the characteristics of a resilient personality are. We will be looking at some of the important characteristics. If someone has a resilient personality, what are the qualities they have or What are the traits or characteristics they have?

Skodol, a researcher in 2010, listed some of the traits of a resilient personality, and we will be discussing some of these traits. If you see all the traits, broadly two major aspects

are there in a resilient personality. One is a strong sense of self; stating that there is something within themselves. All resilient personalities have a very strong sense of self, which we will discuss. Another aspect is that they have very good interpersonal skills—relating with other people. So, in the context of a strong sense of self, it means that resilient personalities have high self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, higher self-understanding, positive future orientation or optimism, and the ability to manage negative emotions and behaviors. These are some of the things that make a strong sense of self. That means some of the traits or characteristics within the person give a very strong foundation in their personality, making them resilient. We will be talking about some of these things in more detail. This is one important aspect of a resilient personality.

Stating about another aspect is that their interpersonal skills are very important. As a result, resilient personalities not only possess individual traits like optimism and emotional regulation, but they also exhibit very strong interpersonal skills that enhance their ability to build and maintain supportive relationships. These relationships play a crucial role in helping individuals cope with stressful situations. So, they generally have better interpersonal skills, which helps them build a better social support network, and this helps them during times of adversity or crisis. If you have a stronger support system, you are more likely to easily face and bounce back from life's difficulties because other people will support you. So, these are two broad, important characteristics of a resilient personality. Now let us see each of these aspects in more detail.

In the context of a strong sense of self, we have seen that one of the important aspects is they have a higher sense of self-efficacy or self-confidence. So, a resilient personality is marked by a strong belief in one's ability to handle life's challenges effectively, with self-confidence and self-efficacy being fundamental to resilience. Based on what is your belief system, if you always believe that you will not be able to help, or you will not be able to handle a situation, based on that belief system will automatically make you less resilient, and you will likely avoid situations and run away from them. Having an internal sense of belief that gives you a sense of self-confidence—that you are more likely to have confidence in your ability to handle situations and challenges of life, is very important in the concept of resilience. Now, this ability or sense of self-efficacy may develop slowly

as one faces different aspects of life; it may not develop suddenly but it may develop as one faces more and more challenges and succeeds in handling them. Slowly, they develop confidence in their ability to handle situations, and that sense of ability gives them resilience, enabling them to function and adapt in a much better way. So resilient individuals, in that context of adaptation or self-confidence, also have something called an internal locus of control—which we have discussed in detail in earlier lectures—meaning they believe in their actions rather than external factors like fate or luck largely influencing events. So, when you think that you are the agent or the cause, or that you can make certain changes, you are more likely to put in effort and try to handle the situation and do your best to bring about changes. So that's called an internal locus of control.

On the other hand, people with an external locus of control always believe in fate and luck, making them much more passive in terms of not taking initiative. Thus internal locus of control is something that makes people more resilient, giving them more self-confidence and self-efficacy. These beliefs foster more effective problem-solving coping strategies, enabling them to face difficulties with optimism—qualities that help them adapt and cope with difficult or stressful situations, making them more resilient. So, this is one important aspect of a strong sense of self.

Resilience is also one of the Big Five personality traits that we discussed. It is negatively associated with traits like neuroticism. The neuroticism trait makes people less resilient because they are emotionally unstable and they get easily disturbed or irritated by life's problems. Thus, neuroticism as a trait makes people less resilient which is strongly connected with negative emotions and experiences. People with neuroticism view the world as a more threatening place, making them more vulnerable and less resilient. In contrast, resilience is positively linked with extroversion and positive emotionality. This reflects a tendency to confront challenges with confidence and positivity, so people who are more extroverted, experience positive emotions and are more likely to have a higher sense of resilience. This is in contrast to people with neuroticism, who experience more negative emotions which shows its connection with certain personality traits. Another important aspect of a resilient personality is better self-understanding which means that such individuals possess insight into their motivations, emotions, strengths, and

weaknesses. The more you understand your inner dynamics—your strengths and weaknesses—the greater your self-awareness and self-understanding, in turn, give you a sense of personal identity; it allows you to perceive yourself as a coherent individual with a clear sense of meaning and purpose. Therefore, self-understanding is very important otherwise, people without self-understanding will be propelled by external stimuli because they lack self-awareness. Whatever happens in the outside world, they will be more, influenced and attracted to those events. If you have more self-understanding, you will know what your preferences are and what directions you should take. People will have better judgment about those aspects and they will be more likely to make better decisions in terms of the right things in various situations. So, the development of personal identity is an essential task of adult development, which may lead to better resilience and so on. This accurate self-awareness and monitoring of one's emotions is a very important aspect of the concept of social intelligence and emotional intelligence. So, these are some of the concepts that are very important in terms of increasing the quality of life and success in life.

Self-awareness is very important in all these concepts, including resilience. This emotional awareness helps resilient individuals manage their emotions effectively and maintain strong interpersonal relationships. The more self-awareness you have, the better you will understand yourself, and in that way, you will be able to relate better with other people and maintain strong interpersonal relationships, which are also important components of resilience. Also, resilience often involves a strong spiritual dimension. It may involve, in certain cases—not necessarily in every case—individuals viewing themselves within the context of a larger world, contributing to their motivation and excitement of self-discovery. So, something beyond their existence, which means transcendental dimensions of spirituality, and so on. This process of self-exploration plays a very important role in the continuous growth and development of a resilient personality. These are other important aspects where self-understanding, self-exploration, and self-awareness also contribute to a resilient personality.

Another important characteristic related to the concept of self is positive future orientation. Based on the idea about what is your orientation toward the future, and how

you look at your future, all that plays a very important role in the sense of resilience. So, resilient individuals are mostly future-oriented and motivated to achieve success across various aspects of life. So, they generally have a better positive orientation about the future and they pursue their goals to achieve a better future. So, you have a vision for your future that will propel your present life and give you in the right direction, face difficulties, and, achieve success. So, that vision is very important, therefore, if somebody does not have any vision for the future, they will not get the courage to face difficulties and go there. So, resilient individuals tend to be goal-driven, industrious, and productive, showing determination and persistence in pursuing their personal goals and objectives.

Because of the positive future orientation, it automatically gives you more energy, industriousness, and productivity, because your future vision will direct all this energy in that direction. Although typically optimistic about the outcomes of their endeavors, resilient people are also flexible and adapt to changing circumstances and setbacks. Now that positive orientation doesn't mean you have an unrealistic expectation that everything will go in a positive direction. It means you have a vision that is positive and you work towards it but if something changes, some setbacks come, you are also flexible to change your plan from plan A to plan B, and that flexibility or that mental flexibility—is very important for resilience. So that is something that most resilient personalities also show—those characteristics. So, they handle limitations and challenges with composure, demonstrating emotional resilience and the ability to accept setbacks. The ability to accept setbacks, failures, and flexibility in terms of changing perspectives—all these are very important. Only having a positive vision doesn't make someone resilient. How you deal with problems and setbacks is what is more important in the concept of resilience. Control is another important aspect related to the self—the control of negative behaviors and emotions. If one is not able to manage their emotions, if some problem happens, some failure occurs, automatically negative emotions will arise. One will feel dejected, depressed, sad, and so on. These emotions are natural outcomes of failures, problems, and obstacles in one's life.

But then, how do you handle those emotions? How are you able to manage those emotions? All these situations will determine your resilience. Since we all experience

emotions, it is important to manage them. As a result, if we are not able to manage them, we will not be able to bounce back and go on with the functioning of our day-to-day activities. So how we control our emotions or impulses are very important aspect of our ability to deal with emotions or cope with them. So that is also a very important part of the concept of emotional intelligence, which is very important for resilience as well.

In addition to this, self-disciplined, resilient people experience and appreciate positive emotions, often having a well-deserved sense of humor and an overall sense of well-being. So, these positive emotions play a very important role in resilience. The moment we experience more and more negative emotions, our whole mental perspective changes, and we tend to see things in a negative direction only, we see more failures and darkness because emotions direct our thought processes.

On the other hand, positive emotions broaden our perspectives, give us more hope, instill hope for the future, and provide us with the energy to face life's problems. So obviously, there will be negative emotions when problems happen, but then the ratio of positive to negative emotions that one experiences plays a very important role. If we experience too many negative emotions, resilience is less likely to happen but in comparison to negative emotions, if we have more positive emotions, it will make us more resilient.

Subjective well-being, happiness, and many of these things are associated with low levels of neuroticism. Neuroticism, as we have already seen, is negatively related to resilience, and high levels of extroversion, along with self-efficacy and autonomy, are important characteristics that promote resilience. So, these traits help them maintain a positive outlook and cope effectively with stress and adversity.

Another important characteristic related to the concept of self is called hardiness. Psychological hardiness means that certain characteristics make people mentally tough. What are those characteristics? So, hardiness is a construct that consists of a psychological sense of strength that one develops. So, according to this concept, psychological hardiness comes from three important aspects. One is the sense of control in one's life which means a person's tendency to believe they can influence events in their life rather than feeling helpless in the face of external forces. So, if you believe that you

can control things—whatever is controllable— though we cannot control everything in life, a lot of things are beyond our control. But even if we give up on things we can control, then we become helpless, thinking we cannot do anything makes people less psychologically tough or less resilient. A sense of control is something that gives you a sense of psychological strength which is part of hardiness, a sense of hardiness. So, it's a belief about to what extent you can influence the events in your life. If you have a stronger belief about that, then you will try to take the initiative and change things based on whatever is under one's control. So, individuals high in control view themselves as agents of their outcomes. They believe that they have to put in effort to make changes in their life which is very important.

One is a sense of control that gives a sense of hardiness, and another is a sense of commitment, which reflects a sense of engagement and purpose in life. So, if you commit to something, that means you will engage with it despite whatever problems arise. If you are committed to something, despite adversities and challenges, you will keep working in that direction. So rather than feeling alienated, individuals with high commitment actively participate in life activities and derive meaning from their experiences. Whatever challenge comes in one's life, that sense of engagement and completing whatever the task is the sense of commitment.

The last one is a sense of challenge, which means people with this trait see change as a natural part of life and view it as an opportunity for growth rather than a threat to security. If any problem happens or anything comes in one's life, change happens in everybody's life. It's a natural aspect of everyone's life. So, people with a sense of challenge view change as a natural thing. They accept it and they don't resist those changes and they try to see opportunities in that change. Every change will also bring certain opportunities. One way is to make these changes and do whatever is needed to keep your life in a certain direction, or you just feel victimized by the situation. Then you are not having a sense of challenge and you will always feel threatened about security and so on. So, this is about the sense of challenge. It is an approach towards life where you see changes as a natural part of life and you see opportunities in changes and try to make the best use of those changes. So, the sense of control, sense of commitment, and

sense of challenge are the three qualities that make people psychologically tough or stronger, and ultimately, it is an important aspect of the sense of resilience.

Resilient personalities generally have higher scores on hardiness which means higher on these three traits. Another important aspect is called ego resilience, which is also connected to a resilient personality. It talks about a personality trait that enables individuals to adapt flexibly and resourcefully to life's stressors. It is a trait that gives individuals the ability to adapt flexibly. Therefore, flexibility is very important. How do you adapt to life situations flexibly? Whatever situation happens, you adapt accordingly. That sense of flexibility and resourceful adaptation to certain situations gives you a sense of ego resilience. So, this trait is also very important in the context of a resilient personality.

In the context of ego resilience, many characteristics make people ego-resilient. Some of these things include optimism which means positive outlooks, beliefs in ability, and productive activity which means a tendency to engage in goal-directed and effective behaviors. Insight and warmth which is the combination of emotional intelligence and the ability to maintain healthy, warm relationships. Skilled expressiveness which is the ability to communicate thoughts and emotions effectively, demonstrating adaptability in social interactions. These are some of the characteristics associated with ego resilience. All these also contribute to the sense of a resilient personality.

So, these are all important aspects of strengths of self or one important cluster of characteristics of a resilient personality. Another cluster we talked about is that resilient personalities have better interpersonal skills. Now let us see what comes under interpersonal skills. So, one important aspect of interpersonal skills is sociability. Sociability means resilient individuals are more naturally sociable, gregarious, and extroverted than average. Generally, they have a more tendency towards connection with other people. They are more social in that sense; they are more gregarious and extroverted generally. So that is another important aspect that helps them to get better social support and so on. They tend to be gracious, cordial, affable, and genial which makes it easier for them to meet new people from friendships and enjoy companions. As a result, they usually have an extended social network that they can rely on during

challenging times. The idea is that during challenging times if you have a better social network which need not be like a very large network or something like that but most of a meaningful network where you can rely on certain people. That more meaningful relationship with certain people is very important in terms of dealing with difficult times. So, sociability as a quality makes people more likely to have a social support network because of those characteristics. Resilient people score high on agreeableness, another trait of the big five-factor, of the five-factor model, which reflects their tendency to be cooperative, compassionate, and kind in social interactions. These are the qualities related to agreeableness, which is a tendency to be cooperative with other people, compassionate, understanding others' feelings and perspectives of life, and kind in social interaction. All this also actually increases the chances of better relationships with other people and more meaningful social networks are important for a resilient personality. They also possess strong interpersonal communication skills. This is also important in communicating with other people—communication skills that enable them to build and maintain supportive and positive relationships. During stressful periods, resilient individuals can access social support, which is a very important part of resilience, while maintaining a capacity for self-reliance. They also have a very strong, very interesting combination of self-reliance and social support because you cannot rely only on yourself in all situations. You need to get support from other people. So, maintaining a balance is important. Where you need support, you are also able to get it from other people. This is one of the important aspects of resilience. That sense of balance is very important in coping with adversity.

Another aspect of interpersonal relationships is emotional expressiveness. The ability to appropriately express emotions to others plays a crucial role in fostering strong interpersonal relationships which are invaluable during times of stress. How are you able to communicate your emotions and express emotions? So resilient individuals are adept in openly conveying warmth and sharing their feelings, creating deep emotional bonds, and trusting others is something very important. This sense of emotional expressiveness also helps them to build stronger relationships with others or bond with other people. This openness in communication allows emotional support to flow more freely, helping connect and making connections making it easier for resilient individuals to take in the

support network. So, by healthily sharing emotions, resilient people strengthen their relationships and enhance their coping mechanisms through trust and mutual understanding. This also contributes to interpersonal relationships.

Another important thing in the context of interpersonal relationships is understanding the interpersonal context and empathy. So, empathy is the ability to perceive and understand the feelings of other people or the perspective of other people and how other people are viewing the world, to what extent you can understand others' perspectives of life then one can connect with other people and one can kind of relate with other people if you only look at the world only from through your understanding or your perspective of life and you ignore how other people are looking at it you cannot make a connection with people. To make a connection you have to understand others' perspectives and be kind of empathetic that is the whole idea of empathy. Putting yourself in the shoes of other people. So that ability is very important in the interpersonal context and context of resilience also. This empathic quality allows people to connect with others on a deep emotional level and communicate their understanding effectively. Their empathy is often accompanied by unselfishness and altruism as they show genuine concern for the well-being of others. This is another important aspect in terms of making interpersonal relationships better and positive, which enhances, and contributes to our sense of resilience and facing difficulties in one's life.

So, the idea is that all these characteristics that we discussed, promote a sense of reciprocal social support. The more you understand other people, the more other people are also more likely to reciprocate those gestures and support. These are some of the characteristics of a resilient personality and certain aspects of their personality contribute to their sense of resilience in their relationship with other people making their social network better, and more meaningful and they can derive support during times of difficulties. So, they can bounce back much easier way. So, these are some of the important aspects of resilience or different characteristics of resilience.

Now, a lot of research shows resilience to act as a or resilient personality acts as a protective factor in different situations of life, or different vulnerable situations in life where people can go into a disorder stage, or people can have a breakdown and so if you

have resilient characteristics, you are more likely to protect this act as a protective factor. It will protect your kind of mental health. A lot of studies indicate in those directions, where the findings from children in the community study some of community studies show the significant protective role of resilient personality traits in youth development, especially in the context of youths, if they have a resilient personality, it can protect them from many negative outcomes of one's life. This study suggests that traits like confidence, optimism, insight, warmth, productive ability, and social, and interactional skills at the age of 16 are linked to a decreased likelihood of various adverse outcomes by the age of 22. So, if you have a resilient personality, developmentally it acts as a protective factor and you are more likely to be protected from negative outcomes in life, which include a lower risk of developing psychiatric disorders, attempting suicide, engaging in violent and criminal behavior, facing interpersonal difficulties and experiencing educational occupational problems. So, you are less likely to face all these problems if you have a resilient personality. This is some of the research in the same sample of youths. This study also highlights the concept of ego resilience that we discussed earlier where high levels of this trait can act as a protective buffer against psychological disorders even when individuals encounter multiple negative life events.

This sense of resilient trait protects them from all negative impacts of life or going into the disorder stage. In another study, in the collaborative longitudinal personality disorder study in 2007, positive achievement and interpersonal experiences during childhood and adolescence were found to significantly contribute to the decrease of avoidant personality disorder and schizotypal personality disorder. So certain characteristics if you see interpersonal experiences that are connected to the resilient personality decrease the likelihood of certain psychological disorders like avoidant personality disorder and schizotypal personality disorder over four years.

It protects this particular trait or resilient trait protects people from some of the psychological disorders including personality disorders. So, achievement motivation and social skills competency are often mentioned aspects of resilience and positive youth development. These are the traits that protect people from these personality disorders. So positive childhood experiences in the achievement and relationship domains predicted

remission from these disorders, avoidant personality disorders, and schizotypal personality disorders even in the presence of physical, sexual, and verbal abuse and neglect. The basic idea is certain traits associated with a resilient personality protects people from psychological disorders.

So, what are the clinical implications of these findings? As we have already seen almost most researchers think a resilient personality is the opposite of psychological disorders. If you have developed certain resilience characteristics of a resilient personality, you are less likely to or less vulnerable to psychological disorders. So, this will have very important clinical implications, particularly in the context of disorders and other things that say resilient personality traits have a significant implication for both treatment and preventing mental disorders. Early interventions that focus on fostering personal strengths, competencies, and interpersonal skills have shown to be beneficial, particularly for young patients. Certain competencies related to resilience are found to be very beneficial for young patients and they protect them from psychological disorders. So, by promoting resilience early on in the life of a person, individuals are better equipped to manage stress and challenges in the later part of their life or the remaining part of their life. Research indicates that an increase in resilience is associated with greater improvement in various clinical settings, including primary care outpatients, general psychiatric outpatients, and patients undergoing treatment for conditions such as generalized anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. These are the names of a few psychological disorders.

The idea is that any intervention that increases or promotes resilience in the personality of a person is found to protect people from all kinds of psychological disorders. So, this research also shows any intervention program related to stress management that focuses on enhancing resilience has been shown to improve the emotional well-being of patients with cancer, reduce depression, and help them to stay engaged in their life activities, so promoting resilience also promotes many positive outcomes and reduces negative outcomes in terms of psychological characteristics. By targeting resilience through therapeutic interventions, mental health professionals can significantly enhance patient outcomes, offering protective factors against present and future psychological distress.

So, in that sense, it has very important clinical implications, and any therapies that are designed to enhance or promote resilience can protect people from all kinds of psychological disorders. These are some of the things about resilient personality traits and their implications in our lives. With this, I stop here. Thank you.