



Examining How Meaning of life and Psychological Flexibility Contribute to Emotional Resilience

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Abstract: This study investigated the relationships among meaning in life, psychological flexibility, and emotional resilience in adults. A sample of 120 participants completed measures assessing search for meaning, presence of meaning, valued action, openness to experience, behavioral awareness, and resilience using the Brief Resilience Scale. Correlational analyses revealed consistently positive associations across constructs. The search for meaning was modestly linked to psychological flexibility and resilience, whereas presence of meaning showed stronger associations, particularly with valued action and behavioral awareness. Psychological flexibility emerged as the most robust predictor of resilience, with very high correlations across all subcomponents. These findings highlight the central role of psychological flexibility in adaptive functioning and underscore the importance of fostering presence of meaning as a pathway to resilience. Implications for interventions and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: *Meaning in Life, Psychological Flexibility, Emotional Resilience, Adult Population, Adaptive Coping.*

1. Introduction

Modern adult life is characterized by intensified psychological demands arising from economic instability, weakened social bonds, health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic,

and the erosion of communal ties. These conditions consistently challenge mental well-being and highlight the importance of resilience — the ability to withstand, recover, and grow through adversity. Researchers in clinical and positive psychology have increasingly focused on identifying mechanisms that foster resilience rather than merely explaining psychological breakdowns. Emotional resilience, defined as the capacity to bounce back from distress and maintain functional stability, has become a central construct in this pursuit. Importantly, resilience is not a fixed trait but a dynamic process influenced by other psychological variables, particularly meaning in life and psychological flexibility.

Meaning of Life

Meaning in life extends beyond happiness or subjective contentment. Drawing on Viktor Frankl's logotherapy and subsequent developments in positive psychology, meaning is conceptualized as multidimensional. The first dimension is existential purpose, which refers to having goals and commitments beyond self-interest, such as relationships, professional missions, or community contributions. This orientation provides psychological stability and direction. The second dimension is personal values, which serve as evaluative frameworks guiding perception and behavior. Values act as psychological anchors, maintaining identity across circumstances. The third dimension is sense of coherence, introduced by Antonovsky, which reflects perceiving life as understandable, manageable, and worthwhile. Individuals with coherence interpret adversity as challenges rather than chaos. Collectively, these dimensions form a cognitive and motivational resource that helps individuals remain oriented and motivated during difficult times. Meaning thus functions as a stabilizing framework, shaping how adversity is interpreted and responded to.

Psychological Flexibility

Psychological flexibility, systematically developed within Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), refers to the ability to remain present and engaged with experience while adjusting behavior in line with values. It encompasses several interrelated capacities: acceptance of distress without suppression or overwhelm, cognitive defusion (observing thoughts without treating them as absolute truths), present-moment awareness, a fluid sense of self, clarity of values, and purposeful action guided by those values. Flexibility is not defined by the absence of distress but by effective functioning despite it. It contrasts with experiential avoidance, a vulnerability factor linked to psychological difficulties. By bridging cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains, psychological flexibility equips individuals with process-level skills to pursue valued directions even under adversity. This

positions flexibility as a proactive coping mechanism, enabling individuals to preserve valued functioning rather than eliminate discomfort.

Emotional Resilience

Resilience, the focal dependent variable of the study, refers to the capacity to recover and re-stabilize after adversity, trauma, or stress. Initially framed as a stable trait in developmental psychology, resilience is now understood as a dynamic, context-sensitive process shaped by psychological resources, relationships, and environments. This shift emphasizes resilience as cultivable rather than fixed. In adulthood, resilience is particularly important given challenges such as occupational pressures, caregiving demands, illness, loss, and existential questioning. Crucially, resilience is not emotional invulnerability but the trajectory of recovery — the ability to return to or exceed prior functioning after disruption. This dynamic perspective underscores the potential for interventions that strengthen resilience through enhancing meaning and flexibility.

Relationship between the Key Constructs

Theoretical and empirical work highlights strong connections among meaning in life, psychological flexibility, and resilience. Individuals with coherent meaning report higher well-being, lower depression and anxiety, and greater adaptive coping. Meaning serves as a buffer, situating suffering within broader purpose and reducing its disorienting force. Frankl's clinical observations and subsequent studies confirm that retaining purpose enhances perseverance and recovery. Psychological flexibility also demonstrates consistent associations with resilience, though through complementary pathways. While meaning provides direction and motivation, flexibility supplies process-level skills to pursue that direction despite distress. Acceptance allows engagement with emotions, and values-based action enables purposeful behavior under uncertainty. Together, meaning and flexibility represent complementary dimensions of resilience: meaning provides the “what” and “why,” while flexibility provides the “how.” This synergy positions both constructs as critical antecedents of resilient responding.

Despite considerable scholarly attention to each construct independently, few studies examine meaning, flexibility, and resilience jointly. Resilience research often omits psychological flexibility, while ACT studies rarely treat meaning as a multidimensional construct. Moreover, resilience studies frequently focus on clinical or younger populations, leaving general adult samples understudied. This fragmentation has created a gap in the literature: although theoretical grounds suggest meaningful interactions among purpose, flexibility, and resilience, empirical studies integrating all three within a unified framework

remain limited. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing both theoretical understanding and practical applications in adult mental health.

1.1 *The Purpose and Significance of the Study*

The present study is designed to directly address this gap by examining how meaning in life and psychological flexibility individually and jointly shape resilience in adults. By integrating these constructs within a single framework, the research seeks to provide theoretical clarification and practical insight. Understanding the mechanisms through which meaning and flexibility promote resilience carries significant implications for clinical psychology, counseling, and preventive mental health. Specifically, the study aims to explore how purposive and process dimensions of psychological well-being interact to foster resilience, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of protective psychological mechanisms in contemporary contexts.

2. Review of Literature

Baykal et al. (2026) studied 259 employees, finding meaning in life predicted resilience, which mediated effects on anxiety and life satisfaction. Results highlight organizational programs fostering meaning and resilience post-pandemic. This confirms that resilience mediates meaning's impact on anxiety and satisfaction, underscoring workplace interventions in post-pandemic recovery.

Zegarra-López et al. (2025) proposed a model where psychological flexibility predicts meaning in life and flourishing, indirectly enhancing well-being. Findings emphasize interventions targeting flexibility to foster purpose and fulfilment. Therefore, showing how psychological flexibility indirectly promotes well-being via meaning and flourishing, supporting positive psychology interventions.

Arora and Pandey (2024) examined yoga and meditation among 209 Indian adults, finding significant improvements in cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation. Practitioners outperformed non-practitioners, with practice status and age predicting outcomes. The study advocates integrating traditional practices into India's mental health framework.

Plys et al. (2023) reviewed 46 studies, finding openness and awareness correlated with reduced anxiety and depression in older adults. Flexibility inconsistently related to quality of life, highlighting measurement gaps. This also shows that psychological flexibility reduces distress in older adults, though links to quality of life remain inconsistent.

Garg et al. (2022) surveyed 508 individuals aged 25–75 in eastern India. Emotional resilience negatively correlated with age but positively with financial status. Playfulness, curiosity, and learning from experiences emerged as the strongest personality predictors of resilience. This shows that emotional resilience is shaped by age, financial status, and personality traits such as playfulness, curiosity, and experiential learning, emphasizing socio-demographic and personality influences on resilience during COVID-19.

Gopal et al. (2020) conducted a longitudinal study of 159 Indian adults during lockdown. Anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms increased over time, disproportionately affecting women. Resilience buffered adverse outcomes, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive mental health policies.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to examine how meaning of life and psychological flexibility contribute to emotional resilience.

3.2 Objective

- a) To examine the relationship between meaning of life and emotional resilience in the study sample.
- b) To examine the relationship between psychological flexibility and emotional resilience in the study sample.
- c) To investigate the relationship between meaning of life and psychological flexibility in the study sample.

3.3 Hypothesis

H₁: There will be a significant positive relationship between meaning of life and emotional resilience, such that higher levels of meaning of life will be associated with greater emotional resilience in adults.

H₂: There will be a significant positive relationship between psychological flexibility and emotional resilience, such that higher levels of psychological flexibility will be associated with greater emotional resilience in adults.

H₃: There will be a significant positive relationship between meaning of life and psychological flexibility, indicating that individuals who report greater meaning in their lives will also demonstrate higher levels of psychological flexibility.

3.4 Variables

Independent Variable: Meaning In Life (MIL) and Psychological Flexibility (PF)

Dependent Variables: Emotional Resilience (ER)

3.5 Sampling Method

This study investigates the role of meaning in life and psychological flexibility in fostering emotional resilience among the Indian population, specifically within two age groups: young adults (18–30) and middle adults (40–60). Utilizing standardized measures like the Meaning in Life Scale and the brief resilience scale, the study analyzed a sample of 120 participants, evenly divided between the two age groups, recruited through purposive sampling from diverse urban and semi-urban backgrounds. This approach ensured a broad representation of varying life purposes and well-being levels, facilitating a comprehensive comparative analysis of the findings.

3.6 Description of Tools

Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ): The MLQ is a 10-item self-report measure assessing two dimensions of meaning: Presence of Meaning (five items, reflecting how purposeful and significant life feels) and Search for Meaning (five items, reflecting active pursuit of meaning). Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale. In this study, the Presence subscale is emphasized, as it captures consolidated meaning linked to resilience. The MLQ demonstrates strong psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha typically ranging from .82 to .92, and shows good test-retest reliability and validity. Its dual subscales allow nuanced differentiation between individuals who have established meaning and those still constructing it.

CompACT Scale: The CompACT is a 23-item measure of psychological flexibility, developed within the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) framework. It assesses three subscales: Open to Experience (acceptance of difficult internal events), Behavioral Awareness (present-moment attention), and Valued Action (acting in line with values despite discomfort). Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with some reverse-scored, and a composite score reflects overall flexibility. The CompACT demonstrates strong reliability ($\alpha \geq .80$), test-retest stability, and convergent validity with measures of well-being and distress. Its multidimensional structure makes it particularly suitable for examining flexibility as a dynamic, adaptive process in resilience research.

Brief Resilience Scale (BRS): The BRS is a concise 6-item self-report measure assessing the ability to bounce back from stress and adversity. Items include positively and negatively worded statements, rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Scores are averaged to yield a

continuous resilience score (1–5), with higher scores indicating stronger recovery capacity. Unlike broader resilience measures, the BRS focuses specifically on recovery processes, offering a clear operationalization of resilience. It demonstrates strong reliability ($\alpha \approx .80-.91$), adequate test-retest validity, and discriminant validity from related constructs such as optimism or social support. Its brevity reduces participant burden while maintaining robust psychometric integrity.

3.7 Statistical Analysis

The data collected in the present study were subjected to correlational statistical analysis, selected on the basis of the study's correlational research design and the nature of the variables under investigation. The statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 26.0, with a significance threshold set at $p < .05$ (two-tailed) for all inferential tests.

3.8 Correlation Analysis

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to examine the relationships between life purpose, happiness, well-being, and perceived stress. This analysis helped determine the strength and direction of associations among these continuous variables. A positive correlation indicated that as one variable increased, so did the other; whereas a negative correlation suggested that an increase in one variable was associated with a decrease in the other. The significance of the correlation coefficients was assessed to determine whether the observed relationships were statistically meaningful or likely due to chance ($p < .05$).

4. Data Analysis

The primary aim of the present study was to examine how meaning in life and psychological flexibility contribute to emotional resilience in adults. Specifically, the study investigated the relationships between the dimensions of meaning in life, subcomponents of psychological flexibility (valued action, openness to experience, and behavioral awareness), and emotional resilience. The sample consisted of 120 adult participants ($N = 120$), and Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the strength and direction of associations among the variables.

Table 1. *Pearson Correlations among variables ($N = 120$)*

Variable	MIL-S	MIL-P	VA	OE	BA	BRS
1. MIL-S	—	.623**	.320*	.419**	.362*	.287*

2. MIL-P		—	.703**	.526**	.672**	.443**
3. VA			—	.714**	.740**	.829**
4. OE				—	.724**	.792**
5. BA					—	.813**
6. BRS						—

Note. MIL-S = Search for Meaning in Life; MIL-P = Presence of Meaning in Life; VA = Valued Action; OE = Openness to Experience; BA = Behavioral Awareness; BRS = Brief Resilience Scale. Dashes on the diagonal represent the correlation of each variable with itself.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The study revealed consistently positive correlations among meaning in life, psychological flexibility, and resilience, supporting the hypothesized associations. The search for meaning (MIL-S) was moderately correlated with presence of meaning (MIL-P; $r = .62$, $p < .01$), showing that individuals actively searching for meaning also report higher perceived meaning. However, MIL-S had weaker links with psychological flexibility subscales: valued action ($r = .32$, $p < .05$), openness to experience ($r = .41$, $p < .01$), and behavioral awareness ($r = .36$, $p < .05$). Its correlation with resilience was weak ($r = .28$, $p < .05$), suggesting limited contribution to stress recovery. In contrast, presence of meaning (MIL-P) showed stronger associations: valued action ($r = .78$, $p < .01$), openness to experience ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), behavioral awareness ($r = .67$, $p < .01$), and resilience ($r = .44$, $p < .01$). Psychological flexibility subscales were highly intercorrelated ($r = .71-.74$, all $p < .01$) and strongly tied to resilience: valued action ($r = .82$, $p < .01$), openness ($r = .79$, $p < .01$), and awareness ($r = .81$, $p < .01$). Overall, presence of meaning was more influential than search in fostering flexibility and resilience, while psychological flexibility emerged as the strongest predictor of resilience, underscoring its central role in adaptive functioning.

5. Discussion

The study explores the relationships among meaning in life, psychological flexibility, and emotional resilience in adults, revealing three significant findings. Firstly, the search for meaning in life (MIL-S) correlates moderately with the presence of meaning (MIL-P), but shows weaker connections to psychological flexibility and resilience. This indicates that seeking meaning does not inherently lead to psychological benefits, aligning with previous research highlighting that unresolved searches can hinder adaptive outcomes. Thus,

interventions should focus on supporting individuals in moving from searching to establishing a stable sense of meaning.

Secondly, the presence of meaning (MIL-P) is more strongly related to psychological flexibility and resilience, particularly regarding valued action and behavioral awareness. Existing literature, including works by Ryff and Singer, Steger, and George and Park, supports the idea that a clear and stable sense of life meaning serves as a psychological anchor, guiding purposeful action even in adversity. Consequently, meaning-centered interventions, such as narrative therapy and reflective practices, are expected to enhance resilience more effectively than those emphasizing mere existential exploration.

Lastly, the study emphasizes the robust relationship between psychological flexibility and resilience, with strong correlations among its components—valued action, openness to experience, and behavioral awareness. This reaffirms psychological flexibility as essential for adaptability and stress management, echoing findings from Hayes et al. and others. The results advocate for integrating flexibility-enhancing methods like Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), mindfulness, and resilience training across various contexts.

Overall, the findings delineate how meaning and psychological flexibility contribute to resilience, with presence of meaning being the more decisive factor. This supports Frankl's notion of meaning as a foundation for resilience, while also highlighting the critical role of psychological flexibility. The study advocates for comprehensive interventions that cultivate both a coherent sense of meaning and adaptable responses to challenges, thereby enhancing resilience at individual and community levels.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the connections between meaning in life, psychological flexibility, and emotional resilience among 120 adults, aiming to assess if meaning in life—measured by search (MIL-S) and presence (MIL-P)—relates to psychological flexibility and resilience, as indicated by the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). The analysis revealed significant positive correlations: MIL-S had a moderate correlation with MIL-P ($r = .62$), weakly to moderately correlated with psychological flexibility dimensions (valued action $r = .32$, openness $r = .41$, behavioral awareness $r = .36$), and a weak relationship with resilience ($r = .28$). In contrast, MIL-P exhibited stronger correlations, particularly high with valued action ($r = .78$), moderate with openness ($r = .52$), and moderately high with behavioral awareness ($r = .67$), alongside a moderate correlation with resilience ($r = .44$). Psychological flexibility dimensions were highly interrelated ($r = .71-.74$) and strongly correlated with resilience:

valued action ($r = .82$), openness ($r = .79$), and behavioral awareness ($r = .81$). Notably, psychological flexibility stood out as the strongest predictor of resilience, emphasizing its role in adaptive functioning. The presence of meaning (MIL-P) was highlighted as more impactful than the search for meaning (MIL-S), underscoring the significance of perceiving life as meaningful rather than merely searching for meaning. This study extends current literature by clarifying how meaning and flexibility support resilience.

However, limitations include the cross-sectional design, which limits causal inference, and the potential bias from self-report measures. The sample's narrow scope may also hinder generalizability. Future studies are encouraged to utilize longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causal pathways, broaden sample diversity, and investigate additional mediating factors like cultural values and social support. It is recommended that interventions focus on enhancing the presence of meaning and psychological flexibility, as these elements are crucial for promoting resilience. In conclusion, the findings suggest that nurturing meaning in life—especially its presence—and improving psychological flexibility are vital for bolstering emotional resilience, offering future research and practical implications for clinical, educational, and organizational settings.

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