

How Do Character Strengths Relate to Resilience Among Working Mothers?

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ABSTRACT

In the context of Indonesian culture, working mothers face multiple-role demands and social expectations that position them as the primary caregivers of their families, thereby increasing the need for resilience. Character strengths, classified into six core virtues and 24 specific strengths, are understood as internal resources that can enhance resilience, thereby helping individuals adapt positively to stress. This study aimed to examine the relationship between character strengths and resilience among working mothers in Indonesia. A total of 101 working mothers aged 21-60 years participated in the study through purposive sampling. Character strengths were measured using the Values in Action-Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), while resilience was measured using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). Spearman's analysis indicated a significant positive correlation between character strengths and resilience ($\rho = 0.769$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that the higher a mother's character strengths, the higher her level of resilience. These findings highlight the role of character strengths as a protective factor that enhances resilience in working mothers, providing an empirical basis for developing positive psychology interventions that take the Indonesian cultural context into account.

Keywords: character strengths, positive psychology, resilience, working mothers, well-being

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the development of positive psychology has enriched scientific understanding of the factors that enable individuals to maintain adaptive functioning amid the complexities of modern life (Jo, Pyo, Hwang, Seung, & Yang, 2024; Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, & Wallace, 2006). One of the central concepts within this framework is resilience, conceptualized as a dynamic process through which individuals confront stressors, changes, and life challenges in ways that strengthen protective factors and restore psychological functioning (Richardson, 2002; Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Kumpfer, 1990). Recent empirical findings indicate that resilience not only plays a role in maintaining emotional stability but is also associated with personal growth, enhanced well-being, and long-term adaptive outcomes (Kealy, Rice, Seidler, Oliffe, & Ogradniczuk, 2021). These developments underscore that strengthening resilience capacity constitutes an essential psychological need for populations experiencing high role demands.

One such relevant group is women who simultaneously assume roles as mothers and workers. Cross-national studies show that women often bear greater emotional, relational, and caregiving burdens than men, particularly in societies that continue to uphold traditional gender norms (Patterson & Margolis, 2019; Ugargol & Bailey, 2018). In the Indonesian context—characterized by collectivistic values—the role of motherhood is perceived as the primary caregiving responsibility. Consequently, working women face simultaneous demands between professional productivity and domestic obligations (Widiningtyas, 2022). Such conditions elevate the risk of role conflict, emotional exhaustion, and declines in mental health (Gadzali, Yunizar, & Ausat, 2023), thereby necessitating greater psychological resources to sustain adaptive functioning.

Within the positive psychology literature, character strengths are regarded as one internal resource that can enhance individuals' adaptive mechanisms (Blanchard, McGrath, & Jayawickreme, 2021a). Peterson and Seligman (2004) define character strengths as positive traits manifested through thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that support optimal functioning. Contemporary research demonstrates that individuals with robust character strengths are more likely to sustain positive emotions, engage in self-regulation, and evaluate stressors constructively (Smith, Ford, Erickson, & Guzman, 2021). Empirical evidence also suggests that character strengths contribute to psychological well-being, emotional adjustment, and various indicators of mental health (Xie et al., 2020a). However, the majority of these studies focus on general populations, students, healthcare workers, or specific professional groups.

Despite growing scholarly interest in character strengths and resilience, several research gaps remain. First, studies examining the direct relationship between these variables in the context of working mothers are still limited. As such, findings from previous studies cannot be adequately generalized given the distinct role dynamics experienced by working mothers. Second, most existing research originates from Western cultural contexts, leaving culturally influenced factors—such as gender roles, family structures, and collectivistic values—insufficiently addressed. Third, no studies to date have specifically investigated how character strengths function as psychological capital within the dual-role context of Indonesian women, who navigate unique sociocultural structures and cultural expectations.

In response to these gaps, the present study seeks to make a scientific contribution by examining the relationship between character strengths and resilience specifically among working mothers in Indonesia. This approach is grounded in the argument that character strengths may serve as a culturally relevant psychological foundation to help women navigate complex role demands. Moreover, this research has the potential to provide empirical grounding for the development of positive psychology interventions that are more contextual, culturally sensitive, and applicable to working mothers.

Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Examine the relationship between character strengths and resilience among working mothers in Indonesia.
2. Provide empirical insight into the role of character strengths as an internal resource for navigating dual-role demands.

Methods

The participants of this study were working mothers employed in the formal sector in the Kalimantan region. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, with inclusion criteria consisting of mothers aged 21–60 years, employed in the formal sector, and having at least one child. This sampling technique was chosen because the study required participants with specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. A total of 101 respondents were successfully recruited.

The study involved two main variables, namely resilience and character strengths. Resilience was measured using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), which was adapted by Noviyanti (2022) based on the resilience dimensions proposed by Connor and Davidson (2003). The instrument comprises 25 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale. The adapted version demonstrated item validity coefficients of $r_{ix} \geq 0.25$, item discrimination values ranging from 0.267 to 0.700, and a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.896.

Meanwhile, character strengths were measured using the Values in Action–Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), consisting of 30 items based on the six virtues and 24 character strengths identified by Peterson and Seligman (2004), adapted from Suharyani (2023). Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale. The instrument showed item validity coefficients of $r_{ix} \geq 0.30$, item discrimination values ranging from 0.801 to 0.812, and a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.917.

Data were collected online through a Google Form distributed via social media. Prior to completing the instruments, participants were asked to read and agree to an informed consent statement. The submitted data were downloaded and underwent a data-cleaning process to ensure the removal of duplicate entries and the completeness of all responses. Variable scores were calculated by summing item scores according to each instrument's scoring guidelines. IBM SPSS was used for data processing and statistical analysis. Prior to hypothesis testing, a linearity test was conducted to ensure a linear relationship between the variables. Furthermore, the relationship between character strengths and resilience was analyzed using Spearman's Rho correlation, which was selected because it is more appropriate for data that do not meet the assumption of normality.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis

Variable	N	Mean	Skor		SD
			Min	Max	
Resilience	101	76.96	63	95	7.527
Character Strengths	101	96.49	81	120	10.367

Table 1 presents an overview of the levels of resilience and character strengths among the 101 research participants. The mean resilience score of 76.96, with a score range of 63 to 95 and a standard deviation of 7.53, indicates that participants' resilience levels fall within a relatively high category with limited variability. Meanwhile, character strengths show a mean score of 96.49, with a range of 81 to 120 and a standard deviation of 10.36. These findings suggest that respondents possess generally high character strengths with moderate dispersion. Overall, the descriptive results demonstrate that participants in this study exhibit relatively strong profiles of resilience and character strengths.

Table 2. Test of Normality

	Kolmogorof-Smirnov ³			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig	Statistic	df	Sig
Resilience	.157	101	.000	.934	101	.000
Character Strengths	.196	101	.000	.872	101	.000

Table 2 displays the results of the normality tests using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk procedures for both research variables. All significance values were below 0.05, indicating that the data for resilience and character strengths were not normally distributed. This non-normal distribution justified the use of nonparametric analytical techniques; therefore, Spearman's correlation was selected as the most appropriate method for examining the relationship between the variables. Accordingly, the analyses conducted in this study adhered to proper statistical procedures based on the distributional characteristics of the data.

Table 3. Test of Linearity

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Resilience * Character Strengths	Between Groups	(Combined)	4493.594	32	140.425	8.146	.000
		Linearity	4037.114	1	4037.114	234.186	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	456.479	31	14.725	.854	.680
Within Groups			1172.248	68	17.239		
Total			5665.842	100			

The results of the linearity test presented in Table 3 show that the relationship between character strengths and resilience is linear. This is evidenced by the significance value for the Linearity component, which was below 0.05, indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Moreover, the Deviation from Linearity component produced a significance value of 0.680, suggesting no deviation from linearity. Thus, the relationship

between the variables appears stable and consistent in following a linear pattern, supporting the appropriateness of using correlation analysis to examine their association.

Table 4. Test of Correlation

			Resilience	Character Strengths
Spearman's Rho	Resilience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.769**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	101	101
	Character Strengths	Correlation Coefficient	.769	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	101	101

Table 4 reports the results of the Spearman's Rho correlation test between character strengths and resilience. The correlation coefficient of 0.769 with a significance value of 0.000 indicates a very strong and statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The positive direction of the correlation suggests that higher levels of character strengths are associated with higher levels of resilience. Nevertheless, this result reflects a strong association rather than causality; thus, it cannot serve as a basis for inferring a cause-effect relationship. Therefore, the findings confirm a close link between positive character traits and individuals' capacity to cope with stress, without implying causal direction.

Discussions

The findings of this study demonstrate a very strong positive relationship between character strengths and resilience among working mothers in Indonesia. This result provides empirical evidence that character strengths function as internal resources that support individuals in maintaining psychological stability and coping with stress or life challenges (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These findings directly address the research questions outlined in the introduction, namely whether character strengths are significantly associated with resilience in working mothers, and how positive character traits contribute within the cultural context of Indonesia, where gender role norms remain strongly embedded. The results support the argument that character strengths constitute a personal foundation that is both relevant and culturally contextual for women who must simultaneously manage emotional, social, and occupational pressures. This finding aligns with prior studies showing a significant positive association between character strengths and resilience (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017; Vančáková, Chamarro Lusa, & Martínez-Martí, 2021).

The strong positive association identified in this study is consistent with theoretical conceptualizations of character as an adaptive resource. Peterson and Seligman (2004) argue that character strengths are stable positive traits that facilitate positive emotions, self-regulation, and constructive appraisal of demanding situations. The presence of strong character traits enables individuals to evaluate challenges more realistically, maintain motivation, and overcome obstacles using more adaptive strategies. This aligns with the resilience model proposed by Richardson (2002) and Richardson et al. (1990), which conceptualizes resilience as a process supported by individuals' internal capacities to recover from psychological disruption.

The findings of this study also correspond with a growing body of empirical research over the past decade. Martínez-Martí and Ruch (2017) found that positive character traits contribute to resilience in adult populations from diverse backgrounds, even after controlling for variables such as optimism and social support. Similarly, Blanchard, McGrath, and Jayawickreme (2021b) reported that relational character strengths such as empathy and social intelligence play a role in psychological recovery following interpersonal loss. Among healthcare professionals, Xie et al. (2020b) identified that bravery, self-regulation, and gratitude were the character strengths most consistently associated with effective stress management. Collectively, the alignment between the present findings and contemporary literature suggests that character strengths function as relatively stable protective factors across various contexts, including among working mothers navigating complex role demands in Indonesia.

When interpreted within the Indonesian cultural context, the relevance of these findings becomes even more pronounced. Indonesia is a collectivist society with gender norms that position mothers as the primary caregivers, even when they are employed in the formal sector (Hyunanda, Palacios Ramírez, López-Martínez, & Meseguer-Sánchez, 2021). These expectations require women to balance professional productivity with domestic responsibilities. Previous research shows that the guilt arising from these competing demands can motivate mothers to act in accordance with traditional gender norms, such as sacrificing personal time or adjusting work schedules without significant changes in caregiving roles (Aarntzen et al., 2019). In such situations, character strengths may serve as psychological capital that helps working mothers maintain adaptive functioning. This is supported by findings from Schutte and Malouff (2019), who reported that interventions targeting signature strengths can increase positive affect and life satisfaction while reducing depression. Thus, the strong relationship found in this study may be interpreted as an adaptive response shaped by the need to manage pressures across multiple life domains simultaneously.

The results also present opportunities for developing programs or policies aimed at supporting the well-being of working mothers, although such applications require further empirical testing. The strong association between character strengths and resilience suggests that positive character traits may be a relevant aspect to consider when designing psychological support programs. Carr et al. (2021) found that positive psychology interventions integrating character strength development effectively enhanced happiness, life satisfaction, and reduced depressive and anxiety symptoms. However, as this study did not test the effectiveness of any intervention, recommendations regarding character-based training should be framed as exploratory directions. Future experimental research is needed to determine whether enhancing specific character strengths can meaningfully improve resilience among working mothers.

In the meantime, organizations and workplaces may consider adopting general strategies that facilitate the expression of character strengths, such as providing autonomy, flexibility, and opportunities for employees to utilize their personal strengths in their roles. Allowing individuals to apply their character strengths at work has been associated with increased well-

being and work engagement in other contexts (Bakker & Van Woerkom, 2018), suggesting that similar principles may offer initial insights for developing support systems tailored to the needs of working mothers.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged as considerations for future research. First, the study did not examine the specific contributions of individual character strengths. The measurement used in this study was aggregate in nature, preventing identification of which particular strengths most strongly support resilience among working mothers. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture changes in resilience and character strengths over time. Work experiences, family conditions, and shifts in role demands may influence both variables dynamically; thus, causal direction or longitudinal patterns cannot be inferred.

Third, this study did not account for contextual factors that may influence resilience, such as partner support, family relationship quality, workload, organizational demands, or workplace flexibility. The absence of these variables limits the comprehensiveness of the findings, as resilience in working mother results from interactions between personal and environmental factors. Fourth, the study sample was drawn from a single geographic region—Kalimantan. Cultural values, gender norms, and occupational characteristics in this region may differ from other parts of Indonesia. These contextual differences may influence both the development of character strengths and mothers' responses to dual-role pressures. Therefore, future studies should examine more diverse samples to achieve a more representative understanding.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that character strengths play an important role in supporting the adaptive capacities of working mothers when facing the demands of multiple roles. The strong relationship between character strengths and resilience demonstrates that positive personal qualities can serve as internal factors that help working mothers maintain psychological functioning amid both professional and domestic pressures. Within the Indonesian cultural context, which continues to position mothers as the central figures in caregiving, these results suggest that positive character attributes may serve as relevant resources for navigating the dynamics of dual roles. Although the observed relationship does not establish causal influence, the emerging pattern provides direction for future research to explore more specific mechanisms and to consider contextual factors that contribute to the development of resilience. Overall, this study enriches the understanding of the role of character strengths in the well-being of working mothers and opens opportunities for more comprehensive future investigations.

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