

# ***Would the Conservative Aspect of Asian Culture Help People Bounce Back?: An Investigation into the Correlation Between Defensive Pessimism and Resilience***

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**Abstract:** The rising interest in resilience as a desired mental health counselling outcome has prompted increased research into its predictors. In addition to genetic factors and excellent social ties, previous researchers argued that people's coping approach toward environmental dangers might be a significant element. Defensive pessimism, a prominent cognitive strategy among conservative civilizations such as Asian culture and persons with a propensity for mental illness, functions as a strategy that protects individuals from failure and misery by decreasing their expectations and anxiety. The author did qualitative research on Asian volunteers to examine the relationship between defensive pessimism and resilience. The results of this paper contradict the authors' hypothesis that adopting defensive pessimism would increase individuals' resilience. And the findings reveal a significant negative correlation between the two. Additionally, the significant linear regression indicated that defensive pessimism might be a weak negative predictor of resilience. The results may contribute to the early identification of harmful coping strategies in psychological assessment and help with treatment plan development in mental health counselling.

**Keywords:** defensive pessimism, resilience, mental health counseling, psychological assessment, treatment plan

## **1. Introduction**

Over the past two decades, researchers, clinicians, and policymakers have incrementally raised their concerns over resilience. The ultimate objective of many mental health counselling approaches is a high level of resiliency that would bring long-lasting benefits to clients in various aspects, including emotional expression, stress coping, and social bonds building [1]. Moreover, other desired outcomes, such as learning new coping strategies and behaviour modification, can also be achieved through the client's and counselor's efficient collaboration. Taking into account the required elements when building a therapeutic alliance, the client's cultural background, and related habits, often require further investigation to fully conduct cultural humility and provide suitable services. Among all the conservative cultures, "being humble" and "being calm" are two particularly treasured characteristics promoted by Asian culture no matter what you are facing, while the underlying logic is to protect themselves mentally by relieving anxiety, in order to bounce back after hardships. Although the objective of this promotion is to benefit people in the long run, few studies have been undertaken on

Asians to determine whether this type of promoted pessimism will have a positive effect on their resilience. This study aims to discover whether, on average, there is a positive correlation between defensive pessimism and resilience among Asians.

Understanding this association would contribute significantly to the psychological assessments in the first few sessions and the treatment planning when dealing with clients with an Asian background. Early identification of cognitive patterns and coping mechanisms enables the therapist to purposefully direct the client to investigate associated elements and experiences to gain insights through interpretations, thus identifying potential motives for the action stage. Knowing the relationship between defensive pessimism and resilience, in addition to engaging with clients to learn about desired outcomes, may enable aid providers to offer more effective suggestions and build more appropriate arrangements for the treatment steps. It can bring more long-lasting positive effects that are beneficial even after termination, such as higher resilience levels.

Previous research has examined the fundamental rationale and potential functions of defensive pessimism, as well as the clinical implications and determinants of resilience. Norem and Cantor observed that although defensive pessimism appears to hamper performance in the long run, it is originally adopted to prevent self-esteem loss in the case of failure [2]. Meanwhile, Collishaw et al. concluded that resiliency was unrelated to IQ or gender but was significantly linked to positive social relationships [3]. However, research on these two variables appears to be lacking, particularly as they pertain to Asian populations.

Consequently, this study's objective is to further investigate the influence of defensive pessimism using a quantitative approach, in order to discover whether a beneficial association exists between this coping strategy and resilience.

## 2. Defensive Pessimism and Resilience

Defensive pessimism is a cognitive strategy, which has been defined as structure interactions of evaluation, preparation, affect regulation, deep introspection, and effort that constitute a person's attempt in a specific sphere of life, such as achievement [4-6]. This unique cognitive approach entails the unrealistic establishment of low expectations and the consideration of the worst-case outcomes of an impending achievement circumstance, regardless of past performance or success [2]. Research from Norem & Cantor indicates that this method is adopted to prevent self-esteem loss as a consequence of failure and, at the same time, to transform anxiety into a driving force that encourages the individual to do well and gain motivation [2]. Despite the fact that defensive pessimism does not result negative impacts on performance outcomes, studies have found that interfering with this technique can lead to performance declines [2,5]. Harmful outcomes like fatigue and emotional variability may occur accordingly. Besides, in the long term, defensive pessimism, which has been identified would make lower life satisfaction, bring about an eventual decline in performance, and cause feelings of despair and worry [2,7,8]. Elliot and Church discovered that the need for achievement and the fear of failure are both positive predictors of defensive pessimism [9].

Resilience is a concept based on the universal finding that there is huge heterogeneity in outcomes resulting from physical and psychological adversity [10]. This is an unobservable attribute that relates to some persons' relative resistance to environmental risk events, prevailing over hardship or stress, and avoiding expected severe repercussions [11]. In addition, Rutter also argued that a life span view is required when investigating resilience, as it is not entirely equated with individual psychological traits but includes hereditary impacts on sensitivity to environmental risk and physiological responses to external threats [11]. Moreover, he hypothesized that the mechanisms mediating the emergence of resilience might be individuals' coping strategies in response to facing adversities [11]. In terms of predictors of resilience, multiple studies have shown that although intelligence is related with improved psychopathological outcomes in general, it does not appear to be a strong predictor of

resilience. In contrast, social role satisfaction, a positive sense of community, and good interpersonal relationships are significantly related with resilience [3]. DuMont, Widom, and Czaja proposed that life experiences which are stressful may have a protective hardening effect or a detrimental one that evades psychological resources [12]. Rutter concluded that neither stable individual characteristics nor long-lasting environmental factors adequately explain the process leading to resilience [11]. Still, coping mechanisms may play a significant role in resilience's genesis.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants and Procedure

In the study, 293 Asian-origin participants were invited, and 157 of them provided a valid sample (105 female, 44 male, 1 transgender person, 2 two-spirited person, and 5 who declined to state their gender). 94 of them are current students, while 63 are not. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 80, with a mean of 29.86. The level of defensive pessimism, resilience, and other demographic characteristics were evaluated using a self-reported questionnaire of 21 items and distributed online in English and Chinese. No remuneration was provided for this study.

#### 3.2. Measures

**Defensive pessimism.** The level of defensive pessimism was assessed with the validated scale, the Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire from Norem, a self-report consisting of 12 questions (e.g., I imagine how I would feel if things went badly) [13]. Participants were instructed to rate each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 7 (very true of me). All the items were positively worded, and the higher mean of the answers refers to a higher level of defensive pessimism.

**Resilience.** The level of resilience was measured through a validated scale, Smith et al.'s Brief Resilience Scale [14]. This self-report scale contains 6 questions, items 1, 3, and 5 were positively worded (e.g., It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event), items 2, 4, and 6 were negatively worded (e.g., I tend to take a long time to get over set-backs in my life). Participants were instructed to administer the scale as follows: "Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements by using the following scale: 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 6 = strongly agree." This scale is scored by reverse coding items 2, 4 and 6, then calculating the mean of the six items, and a higher mean indicates a higher resilience level.

### 4. Results

The descriptive statistics for the two variables are presented in Table 1. The mean of the defensive pessimism (DF) level was 4.6 (N =157, SD = 1.1), while the mean of the resilience level was 3.2 (N =157, SD = 0.7).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of Mean of Defensive Pessimism and Mean of Resilience.

	Mean of Defensive Pessimism	Mean of Resilience
Valid	157	157
Missing	1	1
Mean	4.645	3.193
Std. Deviation	1.091	0.737
Minimum	1.167	1.333
Maximum	7.000	5.000

Table 2: Normality Test for distribution of Mean of Defensive Pessimism and Mean of Resilience.

	Kolmogorov Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro - Welker		
	Statistics	Degree of freedom	Significance	Statistics	Degree of freedom	Significance
DF mean	0.96	156	.001	.982	156	.044
Resilience mean	.199	156	< .001	.983	156	.046

Table 2 shows the results of the normality test of the two variables, both DF means ( $p < .05$ ), and resilience means ( $p < .05$ ) did not normally distribute. As a result, this research calculated Spearman's correlation instead of Pearson's  $r$  to investigate the correlation between defensive pessimism and resilience.

Table 3: Check of Spearman's correlation between Mean of Defensive Pessimism and Mean of Resilience (Spearman's correlation).

Variable		Mean of Defensive Pessimis	Mean of resilience
1. Mean of Defensive Pessimism	n	-	
	Spearman's rho	-	
	p-value	-	
2. Mean of Resilience	n	157	-
	Spearman's rho	-0.310***	-
	p-value	< .001	-

Note. All tests one-tailed, for negative correlation. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , one-tailed.

Table 3 indicates the results of the correlation test, where there exists a significant negative relationship between DF and resilience ( $r = -.310$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while the attribution of data in Figure 1 displays that there may exist a linear regression between the two variables.

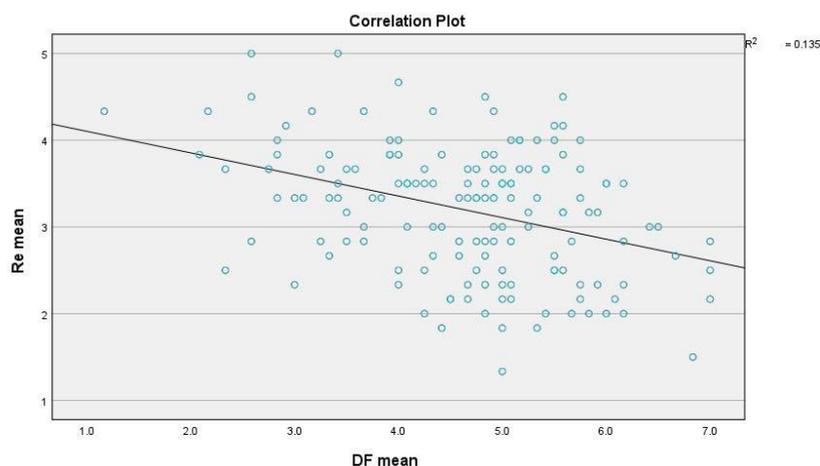


Figure 1: Correlation Plot of Mean of Defensive Pessimism and Mean of Resilience.

This essay therefore performed a linear regression test on the two variables. Tables 4, 5, and 6 show that there is a significant linear regression between DF mean and resilience mean ( $R^2 = 0.134$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and that the equation Resilience =  $-0.134$  DF + 4.34 exists, with the DF rang being 1-7 and the resilience rang being is 3.34 – 4.34.

Table 4: Model summary of the linear regression between Mean of Defensive Pessimism and Mean of Resilience (Model summary – Mean of Resilience).

Model	R	$R^2$	Adjusted $R^2$	RMSE
$H_0$	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.737
$H_1$	0.366	0.134	0.129	0.688

Table 5: ANOVA of the linear regression between Mean of Defensive Pessimism and Mean of Resilience (ANOVA).

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
$H_1$	Regression	11.383	1	11.383	24.048	< .001
	Residual	73.368	155	1		
	Total	84.751	156			

Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Table 6: Coefficients of the linear regression between Mean of Defensive Pessimism and Mean of Resilience (Coefficients).

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
$H_0$	(Intercept)	3.193	0.059		54.283	< .001
$H_1$	(Intercept)	4.343	0.241		18.034	< .001
	Mean of Defensive Pessimism	-0.248	0.050	-0.366	-4.904	< .001

## 5. Discussion

The results from this quantitative research stated an insight into the relationship between defensive pessimism and resilience.

Both the mean of defensive pessimism and the mean of resilience did not distribute normally, but there was a significant negative relationship between them. Furthermore, participants' resilience level could be predicted by their defensive pessimism level. Although the impact of this coping strategy is weak, it still has a negative influence on resilience.

According to previous studies on these two variables, the author hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between them in Asian people, and assumed that the adoption of defensive pessimism as a defense mechanism would benefit people's resilience competency. However, the result of the study stated a contrary fact. The findings suggest that defensive pessimism can act as a constraint on Asian resilience. This means that those who tend to adopt defensive pessimism are more likely to be less resilient and less able to cope with difficulties in life situations. Additionally, it is possible that learning to abandon this specific coping strategy can help to buffer the effects of stress and improve resilience in Asian people.

These findings can help mental health professionals like counselors and psychologists develop more effective treatment plans and assessments for Asian clients. By recognizing the significant correlation between defensive pessimism and resilience, professionals may be able to consciously identify this coping strategy. Through the effect of open discussions with clients to decide whether to abandon or keep them, so as to bring more lasting benefits for the clients during mental health counseling. It may be essential for individuals struggling with defensive pessimism and feeling vulnerable or lacking a sense of security in daily life or in front of stressful occasions. These results

can inform the development of a more effective and suitable treatment plan for mental health counseling, especially for Asian clients.

Besides the results, the author wants to discuss two related elements here as they may work as confounding or third variables that affect the result and draw limitations.

On the one hand, to make the questionnaire more accessible to a larger population, including those who do not understand English clearly, the scale will be translated into Chinese. However, according to the study by Smith et al., the founders of the two main scales, their scales were only validated in English-speaking [14]. Therefore, an independent study on the validation of the Chinese version of the two scales may be required to make the results more accurate and reliable. Additionally, other Asian languages such as Japanese and Korean should be selected if the intention is to make the results more representative of all Asian customers.

On the other hand, this essay chose the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) mainly because of its conciseness compared to other resilience scales. It only contains six items, less cognitive labor would attract more participants. However, the primary variable that BRS adopted to predict the resilience level is time and mainly asked about how quickly people could recover from hardships. As a result, while for the reliability and validity of this scale has been validated, a more comprehensive scale can be developed if the following questions were considering, e.g., is it literally possible to "Bounce back"? To get back to exactly the same original condition? Is "time spent" the only and the best factor to measure resilience?

Accordingly, a more comprehensive scale can be built in later studies to assess resilience, which contains items to examine cognitive competence (e.g., memory), social tendency (e.g., the degree participants enjoy their social relationships), mental health statements (e.g., depressive symptoms, anxious symptoms, alert level), and derailment level.

In addition, because of the disparity between the number of female and male participants, it was not possible to determine whether the DF level and resilience of the two primary gender groups differ significantly. Furthermore, according to the supplemental analysis, there appears to be a negative association between the participant's age and the mean of DF, whereas there is a positive link between their age and their level of resilience. However, because the age range is so vast and multiple outliers may have affected these results, they are neither statistically significant nor sufficiently representative. To further explore the association between age and the two variables, additional research involving a larger number of individuals from various age groups is required.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study demonstrates a significant negative association between defensive pessimism and resilience, while a linear regression exists between the two variables. This investigation will contribute to psychological assessment and treatment plans for Asian clients in mental health services, and the author hopes that additional research and resilience scales can be developed to provide more accurate data and explore other potential predictors of resilience, thereby bringing Asian clients greater long-term benefits in mental health counselling.

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