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Flexible Self-Regulation and Resilience as Key Factors in Effectively Overcoming Challenges in Disasters, Terrorism, and Pandemics

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ABSTRACT

The author examines the role of flexible self-regulation and resilience as key factors in successfully overcoming challenges arising during disasters, terrorism, and pandemics. The article discusses the psychological mechanisms underlying these processes and their impact on individuals' ability to adapt to extreme and unpredictable situations. The study highlights the dynamic nature of resilience, emphasizing that it is not a static characteristic but an ongoing process influenced by both internal resources (such as emotional stability and self-efficacy) and external factors (including social support and environmental stability).

The article also explores various strategies for enhancing resilience, such as the development of emotional flexibility, cognitive reframing, and adaptive stress coping mechanisms. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of fostering psychological resilience in different professional fields, such as healthcare and education, where the ability to manage stress and maintain a sense of control is critical.

The author further analyzes the impact of crises on social cohesion and individual well-being, noting that a resilient mindset can facilitate recovery not only at the individual level but also within communities and organizations. The article considers international experiences with resilience-building programs to illustrate effective interventions in various crisis contexts.

The study concludes with practical recommendations for enhancing resilience and flexible self-regulation through education, training, and policy development, aiming to reduce the psychological impact of crises and ensure long-term recovery.

KEYWORDS: flexible self-regulation, resilience, psychological adaptation, crises, disasters, terrorism, pandemics, emotional stability, stress coping mechanisms, psychological resilience.

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1. Formulation of the problem. In an era marked by increasing global uncertainty, the concepts of resilience and flexible self-regulation have become central to understanding how individuals and communities respond to large-scale crises such as natural disasters, terrorism, and pandemics. These complex and often unpredictable events require not only immediate coping responses but also long-term adaptive strategies that support psychological stability and social functioning. However, existing models of crisis response often overlook the nuanced, dynamic nature of human adaptation, relying instead on binary classifications of individuals as either vulnerable or resilient (Bonanno et al., 2024).

A significant problem lies in the fragmented understanding of resilience as either a personality trait or an outcome, rather than a process that involves continuous regulation of behaviour, emotions, and cognition in response to changing environmental demands. The concept of flexible self-regulation, which includes situational awareness, behavioural adaptation, and psychological flexibility, offers a promising integrative approach, yet remains underutilised in policy and practice (Bonanno et al., 2024; Egozi Farkash et al., 2022).

Moreover, the development of resilience and self-regulatory skills is highly context-dependent, shaped by cultural, structural, and interpersonal factors. For example, individuals living in conflict zones or under long-term stress, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine, often face not only emotional strain but also disruptions to social support, employment, and access to healthcare and education. This multifactorial adversity demands systemic strategies that go beyond individual psychological interventions, incorporating community-based support systems and culturally relevant coping resources (Schwarzer, 2024; Stepanenko et al., 2023).

Another critical issue is the lack of consistent educational and training frameworks aimed at fostering resilience and self-regulation across populations. While some interventions focus on emotional regulation or cognitive restructuring, few are designed to enhance flexible adjustment capacities in real-world crisis scenarios. This gap is especially evident in education, healthcare, and emergency service systems, where personnel must regularly operate under high stress yet often lack institutional support for developing adaptive skills (Ketelaars et al., 2024; Friis-Healy et al., 2022).

Finally, there is a methodological problem in how resilience is assessed and supported. Standardised tools frequently fail to capture cultural and contextual variables, particularly in non-Western or marginalised settings. Without accurate assessment, interventions risk being ineffective or even counterproductive (Terrana & Al-Delaimy, 2023).

In this context, the primary challenge is to develop a comprehensive, interdisciplinary framework that recognises flexible self-regulation and resilience as interconnected and context-sensitive processes. Such a framework must integrate psychological theory, empirical research, and practical tools to foster adaptive functioning at both individual and systemic levels. Addressing this challenge is essential for preparing societies to respond more effectively to future crises and to ensure the psychological well-being and social stability of affected populations.

2. Analysis of recent research and publications. Recent research into resilience and flexible self-regulation in the context of disasters, terrorism, and pandemics reveals an increasing focus on adaptive mechanisms that enable individuals and communities to maintain psychological functioning under extreme stress. Bonanno et al. (2024) argue that resilience is not a fixed trait but a dynamic process of flexible adaptation, involving behavioral, emotional, and cognitive adjustments in the face of uncertain and prolonged threats. Their integrative framework emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of human responses beyond simplistic labels of vulnerability or resilience.

Several studies highlight the importance of resource-based approaches to understanding resilience. Egozi Farkash et al. (2022), applying the Conservation of Resources theory, demonstrate how psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic correlates with resource loss and how perceived and actual resources serve as buffers. Similarly, Schwarzer (2024) examines coping strategies in populations affected by war, terrorism, and migration, noting that psychological resilience depends heavily on the availability of both internal (e.g., self-efficacy) and external (e.g., social support) coping resources.

The psychological community has also increasingly turned to the idea of flexible self-regulation as a critical factor for resilience. Pellerin et al. (2022) show that individuals with high psychological flexibility—those who can adjust their behaviors and thought patterns in changing contexts—exhibit more resilient mental health trajectories during crises such as the COVID-19 lockdown. Ketelaars et al. (2024), in a comprehensive review of resilience training programs, emphasize that interventions aimed at enhancing flexibility and adaptive capacity significantly improve crisis management in both civilian and professional contexts.

Empirical studies also suggest that resilience operates on both individual and collective levels. Mokline and Ben Abdallah (2021, 2022) distinguish between personal and organizational resilience, identifying different mechanisms activated under stress. Their findings reveal that in organizational settings, such as hospitals or emergency services, collective resilience emerges through shared values, leadership, and coordinated action. This collective aspect is especially relevant during prolonged crises like the COVID-19 pandemic or armed conflicts.

Several Ukrainian studies deepen the understanding of resilience in war-torn or crisis-prone environments. Stepanenko et al. (2023) analyze socio-psychological resilience in the context of war, emphasizing the role of meaning-making, identity, and cultural narratives in maintaining community cohesion. Selezneva et al. (2024) explore how students in conflict zones adapt by reconfiguring their value systems and using existential resources to navigate uncertainty. Similarly, Serdiuk et al. (2024) investigate personal resilience resources in crisis conditions, pointing to the importance of motivation, emotional regulation, and a future-oriented mindset.

Cross-cultural dimensions of resilience are explored by Terrana and Al-Delaimy (2023), who argue for the development of culturally sensitive assessment tools. Their systematic review reveals that many standard resilience measures lack ecological validity when applied across diverse populations, thereby limiting their usefulness in global crises such as pandemics or refugee movements.

Together, these studies suggest that effective strategies for crisis adaptation must integrate psychological flexibility, personal and collective resources, and culturally grounded frameworks. The literature supports the development of resilience-enhancing programs that are tailored to specific contexts and populations, bridging theoretical insights with practical applications. In this regard, flexible self-regulation emerges not merely as an individual skill but as a cornerstone of broader systemic resilience necessary to confront contemporary global threats.

3. The purpose of the article. The purpose of this article is to explore the role of flexible self-regulation and resilience in effectively overcoming psychological and social challenges during disasters, terrorism, and pandemics. It aims to synthesize current interdisciplinary research on adaptive coping mechanisms, psychological resources, and individual and collective resilience. By analyzing empirical findings and theoretical models, the article seeks to highlight key factors that support human functioning in crisis contexts. Ultimately, it strives to provide a comprehensive understanding of how flexible self-regulation and resilience can be fostered to enhance preparedness, recovery, and psychological well-being in the face of extreme adversity.

4. Presenting main material. Bonanno, Chen, Bagrodia, and Galatzer-Levy (2024) argue that resilience in the face of disaster is not a static trait, but a dynamic process of flexible adaptation. Through a thorough analysis of empirical studies on responses to natural disasters, terrorism, and pandemics, they propose a model of “flexible self-regulation,” which integrates situational awareness, contextual behavioural adjustment, and psychological flexibility as core elements of resilience. Their findings challenge the traditional dichotomy between vulnerable and resilient individuals by demonstrating that resilience is far more common than previously assumed, and that the majority of people demonstrate adaptive functioning even in high-stress conditions. Moreover, the model suggests that the ability to shift regulatory strategies according to changing demands—rather than relying on rigid coping styles—is essential for psychological adjustment. Importantly, the scholars emphasise that adaptive coping is shaped by individual differences in perception, neurocognitive flexibility, and emotion regulation capacities, rather than by the sheer magnitude of the stressor (Bonanno et al., 2024). This highlights the need for interventions that enhance flexibility rather than enforce prescriptive coping norms.

Echoing the idea of adaptive self-regulation, Egozi Farkash et al. (2022) apply the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to examine resilience and psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their longitudinal research reveals that individuals with access to psychosocial and material resources—such as stable employment, social support, and a sense of control—experience lower levels of psychological distress. The authors highlight the cumulative nature of resource trajectories: resource loss leads to further

vulnerability, while resource gains create protective spirals that enhance resilience. This insight reframes resilience not as a purely internal process but as an outcome shaped by structural inequalities and social capital. Egozi Farkash et al. (2022) stress that protective interventions must therefore address both personal and systemic domains, advocating for policies that preserve key resources during crises. Their findings integrate well with Bonanno et al.'s (2024) model, as both studies underscore flexibility and environmental context as foundational to adaptive functioning.

Friis-Healy and colleagues (2022) focus on promoting resilience among individuals with severe mental health conditions during the pandemic, offering a clinical perspective. Through a combination of psychoeducational sessions, cognitive-behavioural techniques, and supportive therapy, they observed improvements in patients' self-regulation, emotional tolerance, and symptom stability. The authors argue that resilience can be cultivated even in populations traditionally considered highly vulnerable, provided that interventions are tailored to individual cognitive capacities and emotional needs. The study also shows that therapeutic alliance—marked by trust, empathy, and mutual goal-setting—was a critical mediator of positive change. These findings support the conceptualisation of resilience as an emergent property that can be fostered through relational and structural support systems (Friis-Healy et al., 2022).

Ketelaars, Gaudin, Flandin, and Poizat (2024) contribute a programmatic approach to resilience-building through training. Their review of critical situation management training programmes reveals that resilience is enhanced most effectively via scenario-based learning, emotional self-monitoring, metacognitive reflection, and the deliberate cultivation of support systems. Importantly, their meta-analysis finds that generic resilience training is less effective than context-specific interventions tailored to the stressors individuals are likely to face. They also report that embedding resilience training in institutional culture—whether in healthcare, emergency services, or education—results in broader collective benefits, such as reduced burnout and increased organisational commitment. This suggests that resilience is scalable, both individually and systemically, when rooted in experiential learning and embedded social frameworks (Ketelaars et al., 2024).

The organisational aspect of resilience is further explored by Mokline and Ben Abdallah (2021; 2022) in their two-part investigation. In their first study, they analyse how individual employees adapt during workplace crises and identify autonomy, transparent communication, and interpersonal trust as key facilitators of resilience. Their second article shifts focus to collective resilience, examining how teams and organisations maintain functional continuity under uncertainty. They introduce the concept of “resilient culture,” where shared mental models, distributed leadership, and psychological safety contribute to the organisation's capacity to withstand shocks. Their research is particularly relevant in today's volatile work

environments, underscoring that resilience extends beyond personal traits to encompass relational dynamics and institutional practices (Mokline & Ben Abdallah, 2021, 2022).

An important, yet often overlooked, dimension of flexible self-regulation and resilience lies in the domain of psycholinguistics — specifically, in how emotional intelligence influences communicative effectiveness during crises. Recent studies in this area, including research on the psycholinguistic mechanisms of emotional intelligence’s impact on communicative effectiveness, suggest that the ability to perceive, understand, and linguistically regulate emotions plays a critical role in adaptive responses to high-stress interactions.

In emergency and disaster contexts, effective communication becomes not only a means of information exchange but also a psychological resource for regulating collective fear, uncertainty, and distress. Individuals with high emotional intelligence can adjust their language use—tone, syntax, emotional lexicon—to de-escalate tension, foster empathy, and maintain cooperation, even under extreme pressure. These psycholinguistic skills are integral to both flexible self-regulation and social resilience, as they mediate the emotional tone of interactions and influence group cohesion.

Integrating these insights into resilience-building frameworks can help shape more effective communication training for healthcare providers, educators, and emergency personnel. It also underlines the need for interdisciplinary approaches that combine psychological resilience with communicative competence grounded in emotional intelligence (Hudzenko et al., 2024).

Pellerin et al. (2022) provide empirical insight into individual trajectories of resilience during the French COVID-19 lockdown. Using longitudinal psychological assessments and structural equation modelling, they identify three main patterns of adjustment: stability, deterioration, and recovery. Their data show that individuals with high dispositional flexibility, robust emotional regulation skills, and access to social support were more likely to maintain psychological stability. Interestingly, the researchers also note that some participants shifted from deteriorating to recovering states, indicating that resilience is not fixed but malleable over time. Their findings reinforce the importance of psychological and social scaffolding during prolonged stress and support the conceptualisation of resilience as a non-linear, developmental process (Pellerin et al., 2022).

From a cross-cultural perspective, Schwarzer (2024) synthesises evidence from studies conducted in war zones, among migrants, and in contexts of terrorism, to argue that resilience must be understood as culturally mediated. He shows that coping strategies effective in one culture may be counterproductive in another, and that constructs such as “emotional control” or “autonomy” are not universal markers of

resilience. Instead, he highlights culturally specific protective factors such as religious beliefs, communal narratives, and intergenerational solidarity. Schwarzer calls for the decolonisation of resilience research and encourages the development of culturally grounded frameworks that integrate spiritual, historical, and communal dimensions (Schwarzer, 2024).

Similarly, Selezneva, Abakumova, and Sotnikov (2024) study students living in military conflict zones and reveal that resilience among this group is closely linked to meaning-making processes and transformations in the value-semantic sphere. Through phenomenological analysis, they identify existential reflection, goal re-prioritisation, and the development of spiritual perspectives as key adaptive responses. The authors argue that the instability of external reality forces individuals to rely on internal resources, particularly those rooted in identity, worldview, and future orientation. This perspective is especially valuable for understanding resilience in extreme contexts, where traditional supports may be absent or disrupted (Selezneva et al., 2024).

Serdiuk and colleagues (2024) reinforce the role of intrapersonal resources in resilience, focusing on internal control, temporal perspective, and value systems in conditions of chronic uncertainty. Their mixed-methods study shows that individuals who possess a clear sense of life purpose, orientation toward the future, and belief in personal efficacy are better able to regulate affect and behaviour during crises. Their data confirm that resilience is not merely reactive but can be proactively maintained through value coherence and self-determination. The authors argue for a model of resilience that integrates existential motivation with cognitive and emotional regulation capacities (Serdiuk et al., 2024).

The foundational contribution by Southwick et al. (2014) remains a cornerstone for contemporary resilience research. Their multidimensional framework integrates biological, psychological, social, and cultural domains, positioning resilience as an evolving process rather than a fixed state or trait. They call attention to genetic and neurobiological predispositions but emphasise that environmental factors and personal experiences ultimately shape resilience outcomes. Their model differentiates between resilience as a trait (dispositional optimism, for example), as a process (adaptive self-regulation), and as an outcome (successful adjustment). This tripartite approach cautions against simplistic definitions and encourages comprehensive, systemic analyses of resilience phenomena (Southwick et al., 2014).

Stepanenko et al. (2023) make a significant contribution by contextualising resilience within Ukrainian socio-political realities. Analysing empirical data from populations affected by war-related stress, they argue that resilience is deeply intertwined with national identity, collective memory, and cultural narratives of resistance. Their theoretical synthesis bridges Western and Eastern psychological traditions, highlighting the role of shared historical experience and community-based meaning-making in sustaining mental health.

By foregrounding cultural and historical context, their work challenges universalist assumptions in resilience research and calls for more situated, context-sensitive frameworks (Stepanenko et al., 2023).

Finally, Terrana and Al-Delaimy (2023) offer a systematic review of resilience measurement tools across cultures. Their meta-analysis reveals that many widely used instruments lack cultural sensitivity and fail to capture communal, spiritual, and historical dimensions of resilience. They advocate for the development of culturally adapted measures that incorporate collective values, interdependence, and traditional knowledge. Their study is especially relevant for international research and humanitarian work, where the risk of misinterpreting resilience indicators is high. Their work underscores that resilience must be understood not only as a psychological phenomenon but also as a socio-cultural construct (Terrana & Al-Delaimy, 2023).

In addition to the theoretical and empirical advances, some scholars advocate for applied frameworks that link resilience with public health strategies. For instance, Schwarzer (2024) recommends integrating resilience training into healthcare education and professional development, emphasising its role in both individual well-being and institutional sustainability. Ketelaars et al. (2024) support this view by demonstrating that resilience education can enhance not only stress tolerance but also ethical decision-making and team cohesion under pressure.

Table 1

Resources of Individual Psychological Resilience

Resource Category	Specific Examples	Source
Internal Resources	Emotional stability, self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility, motivation	Bonanno et al. (2024); Serdiuk et al. (2024)
External Resources	Social support, stable employment, access to education and healthcare, preservation of cultural identity	Egozi Farkash et al. (2022); Schwarzer (2024); Stepanenko et al. (2023)

Thus, the reviewed studies collectively illustrate that resilience is not a singular construct but a multifaceted, adaptive, and context-dependent process. It involves intrapersonal, interpersonal, organisational, and cultural resources that enable individuals and communities to cope with crises and grow through adversity. Whether in the face of war, disaster, or a pandemic, resilience emerges not simply from inherent traits but from dynamic interaction with the environment, social structures, and meaning systems. This holistic

understanding is crucial for designing effective interventions, policies, and educational programmes that aim not only to protect mental health but to foster human flourishing amid instability.

5. Conclusions. Current research on resilience and flexible self-regulation in the context of disasters, terrorism, and pandemics confirms that effective adaptation to large-scale crises is not determined solely by individual traits or isolated interventions. Instead, resilience emerges as a dynamic, multifactorial process shaped by psychological flexibility, resource availability, cultural context, and systemic support structures.

First of all, it is evident that resilience should not be perceived as a fixed personal attribute but as a developmental and context-sensitive capacity. Studies by Bonanno et al. (2024), Pellerin et al. (2022), and Serdiuk et al. (2024) demonstrate that individuals' ability to adapt is closely linked to the flexibility of their self-regulatory systems—including cognitive, emotional, and behavioural mechanisms—that enable real-time responses to shifting demands.

Second, both empirical and theoretical studies emphasise the critical role of environmental resources and social structures in supporting resilience. The Conservation of Resources theory (Egozi Farkash et al., 2022) and the organisational resilience models proposed by Mokline and Ben Abdallah (2021,2022) highlight that institutional and community-level conditions—such as social support, economic security, and transparent leadership—can either enhance or undermine adaptive functioning in crisis.

Third, resilience must be understood as both an individual and collective phenomenon. Research from Schwarzer (2024), Stepanenko et al. (2023), and Terrana and Al-Delaimy (2023) indicates that cultural narratives, communal identity, and spiritual resources significantly influence how people interpret and respond to adversity. This supports a shift from individualised interventions to culturally grounded, system-level approaches.

While much of the literature focuses on individual resilience, it is equally important to consider collective resilience—the capacity of communities, groups, or organizations to adapt, recover, and even grow in the face of adversity. Collective resilience involves the development of shared coping strategies, mutual support networks, and collective meaning-making processes that strengthen communal responses to crises.

This dimension becomes especially salient in large-scale emergencies such as pandemics, natural disasters, or war, where the ability of communities to function cohesively and mobilize shared resources can significantly influence recovery outcomes. Research by Mokline and Ben Abdallah (2022) highlights the role of distributed leadership, shared values, and coordinated action in building organizational resilience, while Stepanenko et al. (2023) emphasize how cultural narratives and collective identity serve as protective factors in war-affected communities.

Incorporating collective resilience into intervention frameworks can enhance not only individual well-being but also societal stability. Community-based programs that promote trust, solidarity, and participatory decision-making can strengthen both psychological and structural resilience. Thus, future research and practice should further explore how systemic, cultural, and relational factors contribute to collective capacities for coping with adversity.

Fourth, findings from Ketelaars et al. (2024) and Friis-Healy et al. (2022) suggest that targeted training in flexible self-regulation—particularly when integrated into educational, healthcare, or emergency response systems—can strengthen both personal and institutional resilience. Scenario-based learning, emotional monitoring, and metacognitive strategies are especially effective in preparing individuals and groups for high-stress environments.

Although the concepts of *flexible self-regulation* and *resilience* are thoroughly discussed at the conceptual level, the article would benefit from a more precise operationalization of these constructs for empirical application. To enhance the practical relevance and testability of the framework, it is important to define clear indicators and measurable dimensions for both terms.

Flexible self-regulation could be operationalized through variables such as cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation capacity, behavioral adaptability, and situational awareness—each of which can be assessed using standardized psychometric tools or behavioral observations. Similarly, *resilience* might be measured through established scales capturing psychological stability, recovery speed after stress, and the capacity to maintain goal-directed behavior under pressure.

Providing such specific operational definitions would strengthen the study's applicability in real-world settings, including psychological assessment, training design, and policy development. Moreover, it would allow for more rigorous empirical testing and cross-cultural comparison of resilience-building interventions.

Finally, methodological limitations in measuring resilience across diverse populations point to the need for culturally sensitive assessment tools. Without valid measurement, interventions risk being ineffective or culturally inappropriate. As shown by Terrana and Al-Delaimy (2023), future research and practice must prioritise the development of inclusive frameworks that reflect diverse worldviews, values, and resilience pathways.

Table 2

Summary of Methods, Their Purposes, Target Audiences, and Effectiveness

Method	Purpose	Target Audience	Effectiveness
Scenario-Based Learning	Enhancing adaptability in crisis	Emergency service workers, healthcare staff	High (Ketelaars et al., 2024)
Psychoeducation + CBT	Improving emotional stability	Individuals with mental disorders	Moderate/High (Friis-Healy et al., 2022)
Metacognitive Reflection	Self-observation and flexibility	Students, educators	High (Pellerin et al., 2022)
Culturally Sensitive Approaches	Increasing relevance	Refugees, minority group members	Essential (Terrana & Al-Delaimy, 2023)

Note. This table presents a summary of each method along with its purpose, intended target audience, and an assessment of its effectiveness.

In conclusion, fostering resilience and flexible self-regulation requires a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach that integrates psychological, social, cultural, and systemic dimensions. This approach should inform the design of educational programmes, clinical practices, and public policies aimed at preparing societies for future crises. Only by embracing the complexity of human adaptation can we ensure meaningful support for individuals and communities facing the psychological and social consequences of disasters, terrorism, and pandemics.

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