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Thinking Matters Symposium

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## Effect of Nutrition on Resilience in Adults with Childhood Trauma

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# Adverse Childhood Experiences, Nutrition, and Resilience

Researchers: Tim McLaughlin, Carrie Merrill, Katie Munn, and Nicole Wickstrom (MSW Candidates), under the guidance of Rachel Casey, MSW, PhD, Faculty Member

## Background

- ❑ Previous studies have shown that healthy nutrition has a positive effect on our physical and emotional well-being (Marsman et al., 2018; Harbottle, 2019).
- ❑ It is unknown whether those nutritional benefits extend to individual levels of resilience among those who have suffered childhood trauma.
- ❑ The purpose of this research was to determine whether nutritional habits influence the relationship between childhood trauma and resilience.

## Methods

- ❑ Quantitative research project
- ❑ Measurement tools:
  - Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Questionnaire – modified to be more inclusive
  - Brief Resilience Scale
  - Dietary History Questionnaire - adapted (for brevity)
- ❑ Qualtrics survey design (30 questions)
- ❑ Convenience sampling
- ❑ Emailed to USM students in departments of:
  - Social Work
  - Nursing
  - Counseling
  - Sociology
  - Psychology

## Results

- ❑ Resilience and nutrition are not independent: ( $r_s=0.36, p<0.05$ ). Participants who demonstrated positive nutritional habits were likely to be more resilient than those who did not (See table 2).
- ❑ ACE scores and nutrition are independent: ( $r_s=-0.15, p>0.05$ ).
- ❑ ACE scores and resilience are independent: ( $r_s=-0.044, p>0.05$ ).

## Research Question:

Does nutrition affect levels of resilience in adults who have suffered childhood trauma?

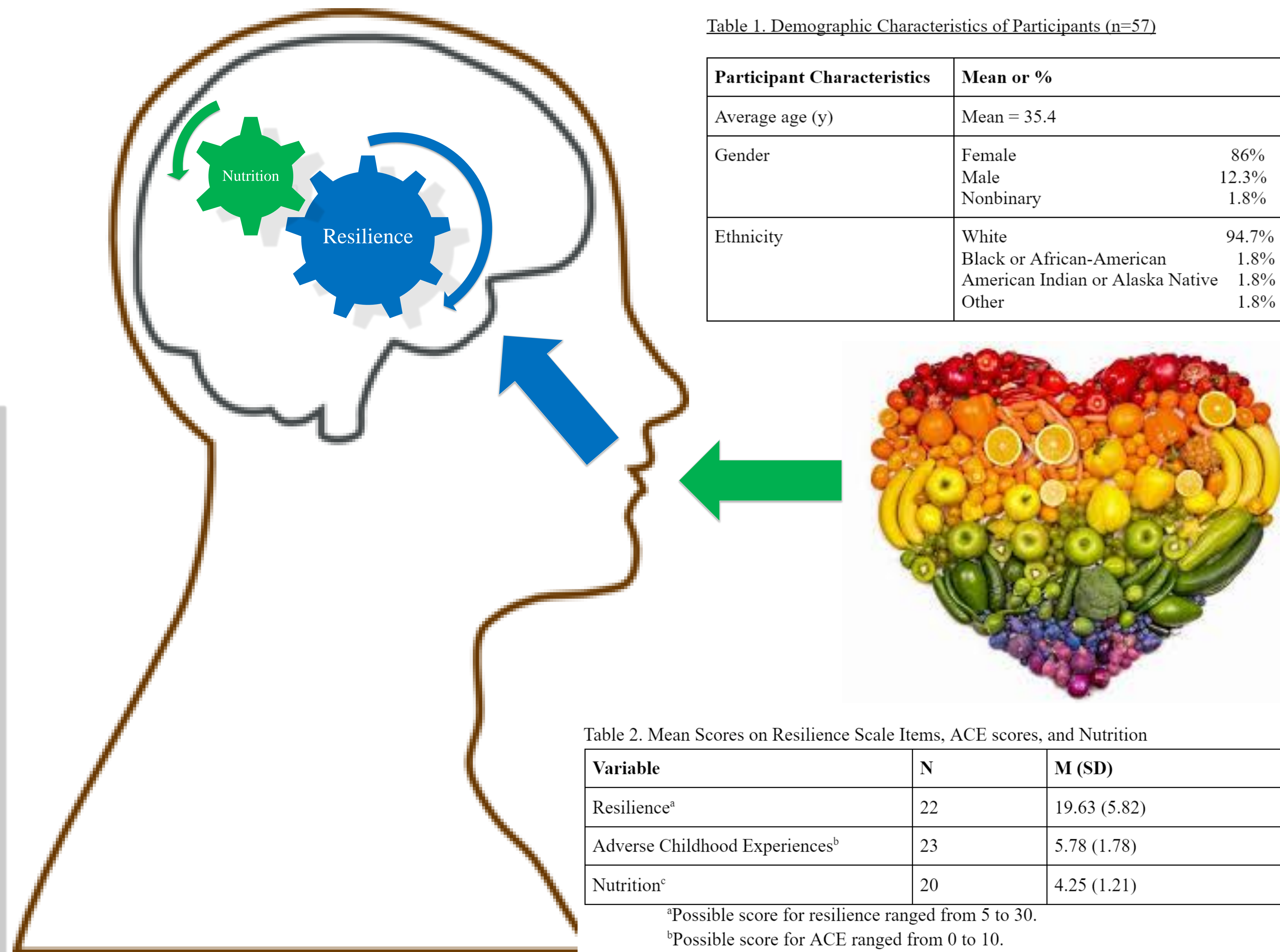


Figure 1. Representation of the relationship between nutrition and resilience

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n=57)

Participant Characteristics	Mean or %
Average age (y)	Mean = 35.4
Gender	Female 86% Male 12.3% Nonbinary 1.8%
Ethnicity	White 94.7% Black or African-American 1.8% American Indian or Alaska Native 1.8% Other 1.8%

Table 2. Mean Scores on Resilience Scale Items, ACE scores, and Nutrition

Variable	N	M (SD)
Resilience <sup>a</sup>	22	19.63 (5.82)
Adverse Childhood Experiences <sup>b</sup>	23	5.78 (1.78)
Nutrition <sup>c</sup>	20	4.25 (1.21)

<sup>a</sup>Possible score for resilience ranged from 5 to 30.

<sup>b</sup>Possible score for ACE ranged from 0 to 10.

<sup>c</sup>Possible score for nutrition ranged from 0 to 9.

## Discussion

- ❑ The significant correlation discovered through this research of a positive relationship between nutrition and resilience supports findings of previous research (Marsman et al., 2018; Harbottle, 2019) done on this topic.
- ❑ The lack of correlation between childhood trauma and either variable of nutrition or resilience was unexpected and does not support the literature (Williams et al., 2011; Mutlu et al., 2016) reviewed for the purpose of this current study.
- ❑ Limitations identified which may account for this contradictory finding are as follows:
  - Small sample size (n=57)
  - Lack of participant diversity (see Table 1)
  - Resilience in university students/staff may already be higher than the average population, as evidenced by the fact that they are successfully pursuing, or have already attained, a higher level of education.

## Conclusion

Since higher levels of resilience have been shown to positively affect the way an individual copes with any number of stressful life events (Calandri, 2016), providers may find it more beneficial to focus on changeable behaviors, such as nutritional intake, which can aid in the successful navigation of those challenges in a healthier manner.

## Acknowledgments

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## References

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