

The role of spirituality and resilience among Yemeni refugee students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article was to explore the role of spirituality and resilience in coping and adaptation among Yemeni refugee students. This qualitative study aimed to explore the themes of spirituality and resilience that emerged among Yemeni refugee students who have experienced from conditions of war after the war that began in Yemen in 2015. This study applied in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore the themes through qualitative interviews with Yemeni refugee students in Saudi Arabia. Thematic analysis was used to determine the role of spirituality and resilience in coping and adaptation. The study showed that Yemeni refugee students commonly use five main coping and adaptation methods to improve their lives in the host country.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Yemen was going through successive crises. These crises increased after the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions. The Yemeni revolution began in Yemen in February 2011 against the ruling regime at the time. The crises increased after the Yemeni youth revolution, which was followed by the coup that occurred in September 2014, which led to a more complex conflict that continues until now [1]

It should be noted that this conflict has resulted in many crises, such as violence, fear, insecurity, deterioration of the economy, and the displacement of many people, internally and externally, in addition to the psychological problems that the Yemeni refugees faced [1]. The conflict in Yemen has been going on for more than six years [2]. In 2020 only more than 27,000 Yemeni family refugees were displaced [3]. Today, according to [3], “the humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains the worst in the world.”

According to [4], 121,074 refugees have arrived to many countries such as Oman, Somalia, and Saudi Arabia. As a result, of the war in Yemen, large numbers of Yemeni refugees have been fled to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The refugee people suffering from many psychological disorders and problems because of the events they lived and the circumstances they went through however, few academic studies of psychological problems have been conducted [5]–[9]. Most importantly, there is no known empirical research study that has looked at the psychological problems of Yemeni refugees in the Saudi Arabia. Only one study has conducted by the researchers [10].

This study aimed to explore the role of spirituality and resilience among Yemeni refugee students who fled to Saudi Arabia due to issues of war in Yemen. It explored the themes of spirituality and resilience among these refugees who have experienced war circumstances. Refugees faced a myriad of experiments and challenges. Refugees around the globe exposed to various psychological distress after displaced to new

countries [6], [11]–[13], however, few academic studies of psychological problems among refugees have been reported. A result of refugees forced displacement, refugees in different places for example Syrian refugees in Turkey [5], Syrian refugees in Lebanon [7], and Syrian refugees in Germany [14] exposed to psychological problems such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety similar to challenges that other refugees faced around the world.

The dearth of research studies that studied the effect of spirituality and resilience on people who encounter the challenges [15]. Although Yemeni refugee students shape an enormous sample of Yemeni refugees, however, there is a scarcity of research regarding spirituality and resilience in the cope with adversity among Yemeni refugees in general and Yemeni refugee students in particular. According to Shaw *et al.* [16], spirituality and religion are support refugees in a deal with tension. Likewise, previous researchers [17], [18] hypothesized that spirituality contributes to the field of psychology. Pandya [19] is among researchers who supposed that spirituality influences on the mental health of refugees. Eminent researchers in the field of resilience that is, Masten [20] described resilient individuals as “resilience in individual people is usually the focus of concern, with an emphasis on the processes that may account for individual differences in patterns of adaptation, function, or development that occur during or following experiences that pose significant threats to the individual.”

Resilience indicates the process of adapting or bounce back after facing any form of adversity, hardship, or stress [20]. Resilience promotes people amidst difficult times. According to previous research [21], resilient individuals react positively when faced with difficulty. There is an urgent need for more research focusing on the psychological problems of refugees [22]. However, there are only a rare of researches on refugee life experiences, especially among Yemeni refugee students.

Given the dearth of data regarding the role of spirituality and resilience among Yemeni refugee students in the face of adversity in the moved country, the authors conducted the current study among Yemeni refugee students living in Saudi Arabia. The study aimed to explore the role of spirituality and resilience in the coping and adaptation of Yemeni refugee students. It explored the themes of spirituality and resilience among those refugees.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The study applied qualitative semi-structured interviews research to understand the experiences of war that the participants lived. Purposeful sampling technique was the appropriate technique to select refugee students based on the inclusion criteria of this study. This study was conducted by using thematic analysis and its guidelines which is a qualitative research method that is commonly used by identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns of meaning among participants’ narratives [23]. An inductive approach to thematic analysis was applied to provide a voice to participants’ experiences. An inductive approach is provided interpretations that are driven explicitly from the participants’ replies. Further, data saturation is achieving by six interviews or more depending on the size of the sample of the population [24]. Thus, the current research continued to conduct the interviews with participants until obtaining saturation of data.

The participants were 10 Yemeni refugee students (eight females and two males) who were their ages ranged from 18 to 20 years in secondary school. All participants identified as Yemeni Muslim refugee students in the level of secondary school, also who entered the Saudi Arabia as refugees in 2015 and after. At the time of the interview, participants had been at Makkah in Saudi Arabia for one year at least. The first author was given the contact information for the 10 Yemeni refugee students who provided verbal consent previously to participate in the current study.

Prior to starting the interview with participants, they were asked to sign the informed consent form to provide information about this study, included the purpose of the study, benefits, risks, approval, and incentives. After participants had filled informed consent, the researchers employed a qualitative research design that involved in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews to collect data. The individual interview format was selected because interviews may include sad memories or sensitive subjects. Given the continuous COVID-19 pandemic and its related issues, all participants selected to be interviewed online by using social media. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to one hour.

Interview questions were developed by the first researcher to explore the role of spirituality and resilience among Yemeni refugee students who fled from Yemen due to war crisis. Interview questions focused on the themes of spirituality and resilience as a result of war experience and challenges that had faced by participants after displaced from their country. The interview questions addressed a wide range of areas by asking participants to describe: to what extent they maintain their worship, what times they feel close to Allah, and what, how the most challenges they faced after their displacement they deal with it, and how they deal with difficult situations and surrounding events. The present research explored features of the participants’ strengths after they were displaced from their country to form a comprehensive understanding of their spirituality and resilience as refugees under war circumstances.

3. RESULTS

The qualitative interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim in Arabic. Qualitative data were analyzed by a Microsoft Word document using inductive objective analysis. After each interview was transcribed, the process of checking involved listening to the recording audio of each interview many times and completing the transcription process to ensure reliability. The data such as included the names and any personal identifiers of the participants will not be shared. The obtained transcripts are sorted inside booklets to be analyzed during the process of analyzing data. After generating the codes process, the researchers identified themes by considering codes that had features [23]. Next codes and themes were outlined, and then codes were arranged into suitable themes.

In the phase of the analysis, the first researcher had read the transcripts of participants and added summarized notes. Then, the researcher developed a codebook based on themes determined in the transcripts. Creswell and Clark [25] outlined that the process of generating the codebook is helping in organizing the obtained data. After carefully analyzing the transcripts, the broad themes were completed, and then the clearly defined themes were used. Next, the first researcher categorized the concepts that reflected the perspectives of the participants [25]. Participant quotes are categorized based on the participants' speech and experiences. After that, the statements of the participants were organized into initial codes that were categorized into spirituality and resilience. During the data coding process, the codes were wider at the beginning, and the codes were then narrowed down to contain detailed codes afterward. After the researcher made sure that all the obtained data were included in the qualitative analysis and classified into common subjects. Accordingly, the analysis data has been terminated. Figure 1 shows steps of the analysis process.

Essential themes examining how spirituality and resilience help Yemeni refugee students in adaptation in the host country. The themes related to spirituality included religious practices and satisfaction and acceptance (*rida*) with fate (*qadar*). Hence, there are three themes related to resilience included optimism, build new relations, and the role of family support. These themes are presented in Figure 2.

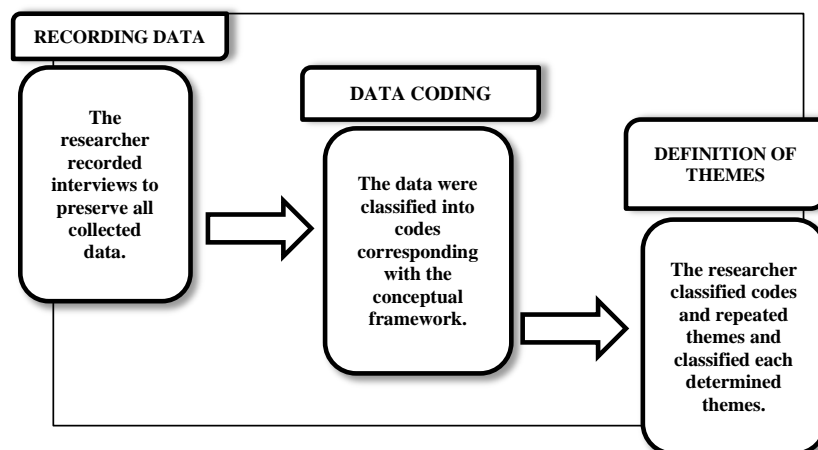


Figure 1. Steps of the analysis process

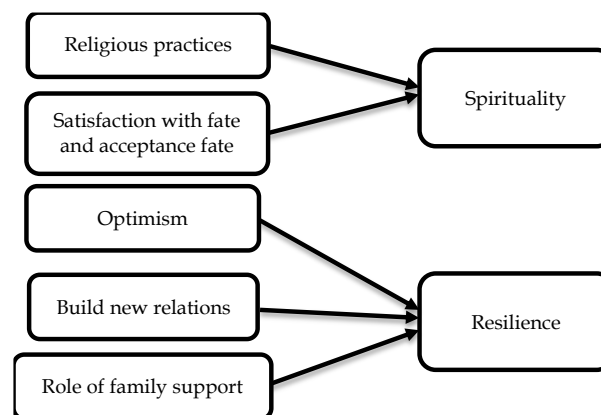


Figure 2. Themes of the current study

3.1. Religious practices

Religious practices were essential to Yemeni refugee student's ability to deal with challenges. All participants mentioned that their continuing to practice religious rituals had an impact on their lives after their displacement. Most participants think that their practice of religious rituals is a direct source for their feeling relief in particular when they feel upset. As one participant described:

“Performing the prayers on time, reciting the Holy Quran, and the daily blessings (Azkar)... gives me a feeling of reassurance and comfort, especially if I was sad or upset, and so on.”

They expressed that practice religious rituals such as reciting the Holy Quran, prayer and other practice provided them feelings of comfort.

Most Yemeni refugee students felt that their relationship with Allah helped them immensely in adapting and accept their new conditions. The comment of one participant included the importance of prayer and reciting the Quran and others. As another participant described:

“Praying in the congregation, reciting the Holy Quran with memorization, obeying parents, reciting morning and night’s Muslim daily blessings (Azkar), praying midnight prayer (witr)...it provides me an indescribable feeling, I forget all the worries of the world, I feel rest and relax.”

Participants explicitly indicated that their prayer, reciting, reciting morning and night’s Muslim daily blessings (*Azkar*), and so on therefore enable coping and adaptation. Further, faith has been assisted them in different fields of their life. As well, it helped them have hope for a better future. As one participant pointed out:

“Perform worship, closeness to Allah, and acts of obedience helped me a lot in my life ... it relieves my tension.”

As Yemeni refugee students face risk and challenges, their belief that Allah helps them cope is essential to being able to overcome the difficulties and absorb experiences of war. Further, the participants seem to be depended on their relationship with Allah to deal with their conditions, and specifically in how to adapt successfully to their new life. Likewise, another participant declared that:

“At the beginning, I did not always practice rituals ... I did not perform them much ... but then I started to stick to it and feel that it motivates me because I became interested in my study, and I did not felt upset as I was before.”

3.2. Satisfied with Allah's fate (*qadar*) and acceptance (*rida*) fate

For Muslims, feeling of satisfaction with the fate of Allah is essential as it is the sixth pillar of faith (*Iman*) in Islam. As the Prophet was asked about faith (*Iman*) in hadith, He (the Prophet) answered, “It is that you believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers and in the Last Day, and in fate (*qadar*), both in its good and in its evil aspects.” The concept of *qadar* helps Muslims to feel comfort and happiness and pleasure, unlike the person who does not accept and adapt to the surrounding circumstances. Participants attributed their feeling of pleasure to their satisfaction with fate (*qadar*) and acceptance of their fate. As one participant mentioned:

“Feeling satisfied with our fate (qadar), success, and grant blessing power ‘baraka’, help me to overcome the difficulties.”

Another participant described further the importance of the feeling of satisfaction with Allah's fate (*qadar*) as, “I am feeling of pleasure of Allah ... I satisfied with my fate (*qadar*).” The belief and acceptance of fate among the refugee students were essential that strengthened the participants' ability to cope with challenges; they thought that everything that happened to them was a fate from Allah. This acceptance of what happened to them affected their way of thinking and how to act in their new life after their displacement from their country.

3.3. Optimism

Optimism aided refugees build hope for a better future. Several participants indicated how they used their optimism to give them hope for improvement in their conditions. Most of the participants had an optimistic outlook that contributed to responding to hard life events, especially as they experimented with war situations. In this case, the feeling that their future will be better is attributed to their optimism.

Participants described utilizing optimism to receive comfort in their current life. For example, *“I became stronger and I had a greater desire to succeed.”* Another participant said, *“I am thinking in my future ... I have great optimism.”*

In spite of the difficult events, optimism and hope emerged in the words of the Yemeni refugee students. The majority of participants seem to have clinging to hope helped alleviate their suffering that they faced after their displacement and fled from conflict in their country. A participant described:

“Difficulties that faced in the beginning, I overcame later, and I have the determination to achieve my hopes.”

Many of the participants revealed an inspiration for optimism and hope for the future. They assured that it gave them faith in attaining their hopes. For example, one participant said:

“I could not overcome some of the difficulties, so I decide to delay my goals until overcome these difficulties.”

They indicated their personal determination to fulfill hopes and an optimistic vision for the future, which in turn affected how they view the worldwide around them. As someone said:

“I encountered difficulties at first and then managed to overcome them, I did not change, and I would achieve my goals.”

Most of the participants strongly believe that their optimism relieves their stress after their displacement condition they faced. The participants made it clear that they will remain strong in the face of disasters and calamities, and will never give up. This indicates the role of their resilience in promoting them to cope with difficult circumstances.

3.4. Build new relations

All participants mentioned that building relationships with others in the host country helped them to accept the new environment. When individuals face new conditions in particular in a new environment, it becomes so difficult to accept the new environment and becomes so easy to feel frustrated by distressing challenges. Nevertheless, Yemeni refugee students appeared to be resilient in adapting. As one participant shared:

“When we remember that the situation of many refugee people similar to our situation, and we are not alone ... it is helped us a lot. I recognized new people who helped me to out of my loneliness.”

Participants described their suffering from alienation from their families and their homeland, as another participant said:

“We are suffering from longing for family and the homeland.”

Further, most of the refugees used similar words when describing the difficulties they faced such as new people, alienation, a new school, a new environment, and a feeling of loneliness. As one participant mentioned such issues:

“... study was a big concern for me, and how I would adapt at a new school in the new community ... at the beginning I got exhausted ... I did not try to know any of the schoolmates for a whole month, “...I was sitting alone and saying to myself I do not belong to you.”

Building new relationships relieved refugees from focusing on the circumstances they had gone through, and their contact with new people who had other ideas helped them strengthen their resilience. These relationships with others were a source of support and relief for the refugees. Another participant shared:

“I encountered a new environment, a new school, new people ... it was very difficult for me but I got over that as the days went by.”

3.5. The role of family

The family plays an essential role in support Yemeni refugee students. The family provided support to their children and attempt to provide an appropriate family environment. Thus, the presence of care, guidance provided by the family for their children were important to support [26]. In the current study, the participants indicated that their family support was a place of relief. As they feel their families are behind them in cope with the new changes which reduce their suffering which helped them to be resilient. For example, one participant said:

"There are many difficult situations that we face in our lives... and the dealings with them differ ... sometimes I face them by returning to Allah and praying ... or returning to the family to solve these difficulties."

Refugees indicated that their families supported them when they were exposed to risk and dark times in their lives. One participant stated, *"I ask help from my family to cope with troubles that I faced in school."* Another participant said, *"I encountered the hardships and overcame them because my family stood with me."* Thus, the support provided by the family is no less important than the other topics mentioned in the current research, if it was not the most important.

Family support presents a powerful motivation for their resilience that influenced the way they cope in the host country, where the participants expressed the extent of the support family's contribution to alleviating the conditions of displacement and developing their capabilities in light of difficult circumstances. Many participants had chosen to develop their resilience rather than succumbing to the conditions of displacement. Participants emphasized the influential role that family support plays through continuous guidance in overcoming obstacles.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study point to the importance of the role of spirituality and resilience among these Yemeni refugee students. It is essential to overcome their war experience after displaced to the host country. In the present study, researchers investigated compared Yemeni refugees' war experiences of spirituality and resilience with the previous literature on other refugee's findings of both spirituality and resilience.

In this study, participants described multiple themes of spirituality and resilience. Participants emphasized the significance of religious practices such as prayer on time, reciting the Holy Quran, prayer to Allah provided them with a sense of comfort which strengths their relation to Allah and assists them in adaptation and coping. It also led them to reduce this distress in the displacement county. This aligns with [16], who conducted a qualitative study among forced migrant Muslim refugees, and found those participants' private practices like prayer and recite the Holy Quran to strengthen their faith that Allah helps them to solve their problems. Further, [27] who studied the coping strategies among Palestinian refugee families in Malaysia presented somewhat similar experiences. The researchers determined that Palestinian refugees used spirituality as a religious coping strategy through their staying period in Malaysia.

The current research found that satisfied with Allah's fate (*qadar*) and acceptance (*rida*) fate were included in the experiences of all participants. This result is not surprising, spirituality in Islam viewpoint is "a constant reference to Allah and ensuring that everything one does is in accordance with Allah's pleasure" [28]. Yemeni refugee students in the current study shown that Allah will reward them for their patience and face their difficult conditions. The findings of the current study are in line with [6] who found that Syrian refugees in the UK appeared to accept their circumstances as Allah's will (*qadar*).

Yemeni refugee students in the current study shown that they received their resilience from the belief that Allah had the ability to change their condition for the better and they had a strong belief that a better future waiting for them. For Yemeni refugee students emphasized that they relied on their optimism to adapt to their displacement circumstances. This aligns with previous findings of Palestinian refugees [27]. They have developed a positive image of their situation in Malaysia. Similarly, the current findings explored that Yemeni refugee assuming that instead of grumble and complain, they were comparing their situation with Yemeni people who were suffering in Yemen. Hence, this result infers that optimism contributes to adaptation among Yemeni refugee students.

Participants in the current study emphasized the importance of building relationships with others in promoting their resilience. This finding also confirmed that building new relationships is a factor of resilience that identified as a sub-component of resilience [29]. This finding is consistent with the qualitative study [6] which was conducted on Syrian refugees in the United States and showed that the support provided by the community represents an important source of resilience. Thus, building new relationships with people in the host country helps them accept the new situation, reduce tension and isolation and promote their resilience.

The role of family support provided by the family to its children represents a source of resilience evinced by the Yemeni refugee students, which in turn helped them to overcome the conditions they face. This study also proved identified family factors as a sub-component of resilience [29]. This finding is consistent with the concept of Masten [30] who described resilience as the capacity of a dynamic system such as a family to resist or rebound back from hardships that threaten its viability, stability, or development. Hence, participants in the current study confirmed the important role played by the family in enduring misfortunes.

5. CONCLUSION

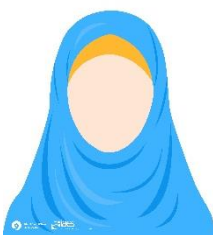
Yemenis have gone through very difficult conditions, and their conditions have worsened after the last war in Yemen that began in 2015. As a result of the current war, many Yemenis fled to different countries such as Saudi Arabia. The current qualitative study demonstrated that the Yemeni refugee students in Makkah Al-Mukarramah used five methods that helped them to cope and adapt to the new environment. There are two methods of spirituality, included religious practices and satisfaction and acceptance (*rida*) with fate (*qadar*). Hence, there are three ways of resilience, which included optimism, build new relations, and the role of family support.





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