

RESILIENCE THROUGH RELOCATION

RESILIENCE THROUGH RELOCATION IN OLDER ADULTHOOD: AN  
INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

by

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## ABSTRACT

Resilience, the process and outcome of successful adaptation to a stressor, is important to maintain wellbeing through stressors such as relocation. Relocation is a common experience in late adulthood which can cause significant stress. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of resilience and its relationship to strengths and resources following relocation in older adulthood. The research questions regarded participants' description of experiencing resilience after relocation and strengths and resources that contributed to that experience. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with a criterion sample of six adults aged 65 and older who had relocated within the last three years. The collected data was analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis, and five group experiential themes emerged. One of the key findings of this study was that the process of resilience (successful adjustment) through relocation in older adulthood takes time and that feeling safe and at home in the new house were signs that the outcome of successful adjustment had been achieved. Further, analysis revealed a heavy emphasis on positive social connections supporting resilience. Several strengths were found to support resilience as well, including a positive focus, spirituality and faith, various personality traits, and hobbies. This study extended the current body of knowledge on resilience by exploring an understudied population, older adults, and by examining the phenomenon of resilience in relocation to independent living situations, an understudied context. Findings from this study contribute to empirical knowledge regarding resilience and could inform supportive interventions and self-help knowledge for older adults facing relocation.

*Keywords:* resilience, coping, older adulthood, relocation, strengths, resources, interpretative phenomenological analysis, resilience portfolio

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

**Introduction**

Most Americans experience the stressor of relocation at some point in their lives. Few individuals remain in one residence throughout their lifespan. Some people, such as those who serve in the military, relocate many times throughout their lives. Relocation can involve various sources of stress and change because it involves displacement from one home environment to another. Usually, relocation necessitates finding new resources such as healthcare, shopping, and entertainment. Relocation often involves connecting with new social circles, adjusting to a new neighborhood, and building a new routine. Relocating usually involves physically moving one's possessions to a new, often unfamiliar, residence. Sometimes relocating involves sorting through one's possessions and making decisions about which things to keep and which to donate or throw away. Sorting and packing one's possessions can involve reflection and emotional engagement with memories connected to the items. Many practical and emotional adjustments must be made throughout the relocation process, and this study was designed to explore the experience of resilience.

Older adults may face more loss-related stressors, while younger adults may face more identity-related stressors (Nieto et al., 2020). Relocation often involves some sense of loss, as a person leaves a home where they have spent time and made memories with loved ones and friends. For those over the age of 65, relocation may be connected to loss factors such as retirement from a career, death of a spouse, or reduced mobility. When older adults relocate to long-term care, they often feel a loss of independence and autonomy (Fitzpatrick & Tzouvara, 2019). Focusing on loss and powerlessness during relocation inhibits successful adjustment (Fitzpatrick & Tzouvara, 2019). Importantly, a longitudinal study found that adults who focus

more on aging-related gains rather than aging-related losses may live longer than their peers (Wurm & Schäfer, 2022). Although relocation usually involves some sense of loss, it does not have to be a negative experience. Many people manage the stressor of relocation while maintaining a positive affect and a high quality of life. This can be attributed to resilience. Resilience is the process and outcome of successful adjustment to a stressor, such as relocation (American Psychological Association, 2023). The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of resilience through relocation in older adulthood and to investigate its relationship to the strengths and resources that older adults perceive as being supportive of their resilience.

Many older adults experience the stressor of relocation at some point during the stage of older adulthood, which includes people aged 65 and older (van der Pers et al., 2018). Relocation can occur for various reasons, including reduced mobility, desire for proximity to family or caretakers, financial concerns, etc. For example, an older adult may move to an apartment when yard work becomes difficult. Other older adults may relocate to be closer to children or grandchildren. In one study, over 40% of the recently relocated older adults had moved to be closer to family members (Li et al., 2022a). Although relocation sometimes occurs due to negative circumstances such as sudden illness or injury, this study focused on adults aged 65 and over who reported fair to very good physical and mental health to keep the focus on relocation rather than health-related stressors. The study also included only those who have recently relocated to independent situations and do not need daily help with tasks like eating or grooming. Between 2010 and 2019, the number of relocators aged 60 and older grew by 1.4 million (Li et al., 2022a). This upward trend underscores the societal importance of providing better support to relocating older adults.



Relocation is a common stressor in older adulthood, but it is an understudied area within current resilience research (Ross et al., 2022; Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019). Much of the recent resilience research has focused on catastrophe and trauma rather than more common stressors such as relocation (Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019; Park et al., 2021). The proposed study builds on current knowledge about coping and resilience by studying factors related to resilience following the stress of relocation in older adulthood. The transactional theory of coping (Folkman et al., 1987) and the resilience portfolio model (Grych et al., 2015) provided the framework for this study. This research aimed to explore the lived experience of resilience in older adults who have recently relocated. Further, the present study will examine the strengths and resources that support resilience for recently relocated older adults. Although this study was intended to include both males and females who met the inclusion criteria, those who chose to participate were all female. Due to this limitation, further study is needed to generalize the results to older adult males. The results of this study contributed to resilience research and may be applicable to resilience interventions and self-help resources created for older adult women facing relocation.

### **Background**

Resilience research has progressed over the years, and the currently accepted definition of resilience is the process and outcome of successful adaptation to a stressor (American Psychological Association, 2023). This definition is critical to current research because it moves resilience away from being understood as a stable personality trait. The currently accepted definition of resilience allows a more comprehensive understanding of resilience as both a process and an outcome. Resilience has been studied from various angles, but the most relevant background knowledge for this study was found in resilience research, positive psychology research, post-traumatic growth research, and coping research. The resilience portfolio model

provided an excellent backbone for this study because it was created in 2015 using empirical knowledge from each of these research areas (Grych et al., 2015). The strengths-based approach to resilience promoted by the resilience portfolio model aligns well with current empirical knowledge (Hamby et al., 2018). Resilience theory and research comprised the foundation of this model, including factors known to support resilience and mechanisms through which those factors work, but this model focuses on the presence of health after adversity rather than the absence of pathology (Grych et al., 2015). The field of positive psychology contributed knowledge on strengths that promote thriving, and coping research contributed knowledge of appraisal theory and contextual effectiveness of coping (Grych et al., 2015). Coping research focuses mostly on managing stress short term, whereas resilience focuses on long-term well-being (Grych et al., 2015). Post-traumatic growth is similar to resilience but is not the same; therefore, post-traumatic growth research was considered in the resilience portfolio model (Grych et al., 2015). The rich background of empirical knowledge made the resilience portfolio model a strong framework from which to study resilience through relocation in older adulthood.

### **Resilience Portfolio**

The resilience portfolio model focuses on malleable traits, strengths that can be nurtured over time (Grych et al., 2015). This model posits that the density and diversity of a person's strengths and resources, combined with effective coping, determine individual resilience (Grych et al., 2015). Density is the total number of strengths and resources a person possesses in their resilience portfolio, and diversity is the number of different categories of strengths and resources possessed (Grych et al., 2015). Resilience strengths and resources fall into the following categories: regulatory strengths, meaning-making strengths, interpersonal strengths,

environmental factors, supportive relationships, (Grych et al., 2015). These strengths and resources support resilience through effective coping (Grych et al., 2015).

Although a broad range of strengths support resilience, the resilience portfolio model categorizes these strengths as self-regulation, meaning-making, and sociability (Hamby et al., 2018). Self-regulation includes strengths such as acceptance, courage, and behavioral adaptability, which Garcini et al. (2022) found to support resilience through daily stressors. Sociability includes strengths that can be used to establish and build relationships such as gratitude, generosity, and forgiveness (Grych et al., 2015). The meaning-making strengths category includes the ability to find meaning in difficulty (Grych et al., 2015). Religion and spirituality can play an important role in resilience by providing a framework through which people can make meaning of difficult or stressful circumstances (Aten et al., 2019). The framework provided by religion and spirituality is helpful to resilience because meaning-making is an essential component of resilience (Grych et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2018). Religion and spirituality can also contribute to effective coping. Religious coping is protective against the adverse effects of stress and promotes metabolic health (Whitehead & Bergeman, 2020). Skalisky et al. (2020) found that religious coping also promotes resilience. The presence of religion and spirituality seem to add density and diversity to a person's resilience portfolio by supporting the categories of meaning-making and coping response.

### **Role of Effective Coping**

Effective coping plays an essential role in resilience (Kural & Kovacs, 2021). Coping is the application of thought processes or actions used to manage the demands of a stressful situation or to regulate negative emotions caused by stress (Folkman et al., 1987). Coping and resilience are often confused with one another, but they are separate and distinct constructs.

Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult circumstances (American Psychological Association, 2023), and effective coping supports resilience. Coping skills are typically aimed at managing the stressor (problem-focused coping), managing the emotions caused by the stressor (emotion-focused coping), or avoiding the stressor (avoidant coping).

Problem-focused coping seems to be the most effective type of coping, but many emotion-focused coping skills are also effective in managing stress, depending on the type of stressor (Chen et al., 2018). Most people use multiple coping methods to handle stressors. For example, a person managing the stressor of relocation may employ coping strategies such as cognitive restructuring, meaning-focused coping, and seeking social support (Garcini et al., 2022; Park et al., 2021). Using these effective coping strategies reduces the negative impact of stress and supports the process and outcome of successful adjustment, which is resilience. Maladaptive coping is coping which does not support healthy adjustment or overall health. For example, alcoholism or rumination do not support healthy adjustment and would be considered negative or maladaptive coping strategies (Moritz et al., 2018). The present study will focus on the coping strategies and other factors that participants perceive as supporting resilience rather than on unhelpful coping strategies and factors that do not support resilience.

### **Benefits of Resilience**

Resilience is an essential factor in older adulthood because it contributes strongly to desirable outcomes such as well-being (Phillips et al., 2016), physical health (Banyard et al., 2017), quality of life (Matérne et al., 2022), and longevity (Lee et al., 2019) despite challenging or adverse circumstances. The meaning-making aspect of resilience also aligns with the desirable developmental outcome of ego integrity in older adulthood, as making meaning of the past

experiences of one's life leads to ego integrity (Goodcase & Love, 2017; van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2022). According to van der Kaap-Deeder et al. (2022), major life events such as retirement or relocation can catalyze the developmental process of reflecting on one's life, leading to ego integrity through meaning-making or despair through regret. Resilience and meaning-making strengths can help guide older adults toward the outcome of ego integrity and may help them avoid the negative outcome of despair (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2022).

Much of the resilience literature has focused on significant stressors like natural disasters, trauma, or violence (Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019; Park et al., 2021). While resilience in response to trauma is important, the literature has failed to address resilience in more typical situations like relocation adequately. Relocation is a common stressor among older adults in the United States (van der Pers et al., 2018). Older adults relocate for various reasons, such as wishing to be closer to family, seeking better neighborhoods, and reducing housing costs (Li et al., 2022a). Changes within one's family, career, or physical health can also initiate relocation in older adulthood (Li et al., 2022a). Unfortunately, the few studies that address resilience in relocation during older adulthood are mostly restricted to adults relocating into long-term care facilities (Fitzpatrick & Tzouvara, 2019). This study aimed to add to resilience knowledge by exploring resilience and its relationship to strengths and resources through relocation in older adulthood beyond the narrow context of long-term care.

The resilience and coping literature primarily focus on other populations, but older adults may have wisdom gained from life experiences that applies to resilience through relocation (*English Standard Version Bible [ESV]*, 2001/2016). Job underscores the biblical concept of wisdom gained through life experience when he says, "Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days" (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Job 12:12). Although the Bible does not

directly address resilience, it does provide several examples of people who experienced the process and outcome of successful adjustment to relocation, which are explored further in the next chapter.

### **Situation to Self**

Bracketing is essential in phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Bracketing involves the researcher's self-reflection regarding personal experiences that could affect the interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological research attempts to remain neutral by acknowledging that the focus is on the participants' understanding of the topic rather than on the researcher's past experiences. Since interpretative phenomenological analysis embraces the researcher's interpretation of the data, some situation to self is necessary. In the present study, it is appropriate for the researcher to use self-awareness in both prior experiences of relocation and the use of healthy resilience. To this end, I will acknowledge my place in relation to the research topic so that the research focus can remain on the study participants.

I have taken time to reflect on my own recent relocation, which involved moving to a new state with my husband, young children, and pets. The relocation was catalyzed by a desire to be closer to family members, and I perceived the relocation as a stressful yet exciting experience. As a work-from-home parent, the change in environment and routine caused significant stress, and the resilience process took about four months. Some sources of stress were obvious and expected such as the physical work involved in packing, cleaning, and unpacking, and the emotional pain of moving away from friends. Other sources of stress were subtle and unexpected such as trying to locate a favorite ingredient in an unfamiliar grocery store and forming connections with new neighbors.

I recognize that the experience of resilience through relocation may be different in my developmental stage (young adulthood) compared to the older adulthood stage (Erikson, 1950). Many strengths and resources contributed to my resilience through the use of effective coping skills (Grych et al., 2018). Family support, goal-driven behavior, meaning-making, and religious coping were especially helpful to my process and outcome of successful adaptation. I found that mindfulness, meaning-making, and a positive outlook supported my resilience and reduced perceived stress throughout the relocation process. Practical task completion such as finding and establishing resources in my new town and making the new house pretty and comfortable helped me to feel more in control of the adjustment process. My experience of resilience through relocation inspired my pursuit of the present study because I recognized that several strengths and resources were especially supportive of resilience throughout the relocation process, and I believed that identifying and developing those strengths and resources would enhance my own resilience.

### **Problem Statement**

Resilience, the process and outcome of successful adaptation to challenging circumstances, is an important factor for humans of all ages. In older adulthood, resilience contributes strongly to well-being, physical health, quality of life, and longevity (Banyard et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2019; Matérne et al., 2022; Phillips et al., 2016). A person's strengths (self-regulation, meaning-making, sociability) and resources (environmental factors, supportive relationships) join with effective coping methods to support resilience (Grych et al., 2015). Effective coping supports resilience and reduces the adverse effects of stress (da Salva-Sauer et al., 2021). Religion and spirituality support positive outcomes associated with resilience such as health and successful adjustment primarily through meaning-making (Aten et al., 2019;

Fitzpatrick & Tzouvara, 2019; Grych et al., 2015; Hall et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2018; Skalisky et al., 2020; Taylor et al. 2020; Terrana et al., 2022; Whitehead & Bergeman, 2020).

The current study addressed three literature gaps. First, very little previous coping or resilience research focused on the older adult population (Ross et al., 2022; Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019). However, older adults can be an excellent source of wisdom and experience (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Proverbs 16:31; Job 12:12; Psalm 71:18, Psalm 92:14, Job 32:7, Titus 2:3, and Proverbs 23:22). Second, relocation in older adulthood is a common but understudied stressor in resilience literature (Li et al., 2022a; van der Pers et al., 2018). Most resilience research has focused on major stressors such as unexpected trauma or natural disasters (Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019; Park et al., 2021). Third, the few studies that focused on factors that support resilience in older adults facing relocation were limited to older adults relocating to long-term care, excluding the many older adults who relocate to independent living situations (Fitzpatrick & Tzouvara, 2019; Johnson & Bibbo, 2014; Koppitz et al., 2017; Lan et al., 2020; O'Neill et al., 2022).

This study focused on an understudied phenomenon (relocation) in an understudied population (older adults) (Li et al., 2022a; Ross et al., 2022). The knowledge gathered in this study advances current resilience research and theory by exploring strengths and resources that best promote resilience during relocation in the developmental stage of older adulthood. Knowledge gained from this study may have practical implications for future interventions and self-help applications.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the lived experience of resilience and its relationship to strengths and resources after relocation in older adulthood.

### **Research Questions**



RQ1: How do older adults who have recently (within three years) relocated describe resilience after relocation?

RQ2: How do recently relocated older adults describe strengths and resources that contributed to experiencing resilience surrounding a move?

### **Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

Some underlying assumptions guided the structure of this study. This study assumed that relocation is a stressful life event. Aging-in-place research posits that most older adults resist relocation (Stafford & Gulwadi, 2020). However, this study could have revealed participants who did not perceive moving as stressful. These participants were not excluded because even individuals with low levels of perceived stress must adapt to the life changes raised by a move. Some adults may report relocating by choice, but this study assumed that even purposeful relocation involves stress because it is a significant life change. A stressor is any event that produces behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and biological changes within a person (Anisman, 2010). This study assumed that any relocation is a significant enough physical change to catalyze at least some degree of behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and biological changes. Therefore, relocation is a stressor, even if perceived stress is minor. This study assumed that interviewees provided honest and complete answers to interview questions. However, participants may have avoided reporting uncomfortable influential factors such as sexual activity or substance use. This study was structured with the biblical assumption that older adults have the wisdom to share with other generations (*ESV*, 2016/2001, Job 12:12, Psalm 71:18; Titus 2:3).

The methodology of this study had some limitations. Qualitative studies are highly subjective because they are designed to rely on the researcher's interpretation of the data rather than on numerical data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological approach adds another

layer of subjectivity because the study data is participants' verbal interpretations of their lived experiences. The double hermeneutic (interpretation by both participant and researcher) involved in phenomenological research is a notable limitation of phenomenology (Smith et al., 2022). The study data is subjective because it comprises self-reported experiences, opinions, and perspectives. The self-report nature of the interview data was a limitation of this study. However, participants were assured of confidentiality to encourage honesty in the interviews. The interview questions were structured to check for consistency in the self-report answers. The data analysis was subjective because the researcher is the instrument of analysis rather than an empirical test. Another limitation of this study is the potential lack of diversity in the sample, as a criterion sample will be used rather than a representative sample. Although this study was limited in some ways, it provided valuable knowledge. This study was designed to maximize the empirical benefits of phenomenological inquiry. Since resilience has yet to be studied extensively in the context of relocation in older adulthood, a qualitative study is an excellent starting point to gain information and perspective for further study.

### **Theoretical Foundations of the Study**

This study was a phenomenological study, which means its purpose was to explore the lived experiences of individuals who have faced a common phenomenon. This study's phenomenon was resilience during a relocation in older adulthood. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is underpinned by the philosophy of phenomenology, hermeneutic theory, and an idiographic approach (Smith et al., 2022). Historically, two main schools of thought are present regarding phenomenology, descriptive and hermeneutic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Descriptive phenomenological approaches are primarily concerned with describing a phenomenon without bias, but hermeneutic phenomenological approaches

acknowledge the importance of the participants' and researcher's interpretations of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

IPA embraces the philosophy of phenomenology through a research focus on deeply understanding the essence of an experiential phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). IPA embraces hermeneutic theory through the researcher's intense engagement with and interpretation of the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). IPA embraces an idiographic approach by employing a detailed examination of each participant's description of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). In this method, each step of the research project employs the hermeneutic circle, which involves continually moving between the parts and the whole and allowing the parts and the whole to influence each other (Smith et al., 2022). Also, the inclusion of hermeneutic theory means that researchers using interpretative phenomenological analysis can go beyond a description of the phenomenon to engage secondary, theory-driven research questions in the interpretative stage, which can be used to evaluate existing theories and models (Smith et al., 2022). Although the project aims to explore individuals' viewpoints and opinions of the phenomenon, some existing theoretical foundations have been incorporated into the study structure, the research questions, and the methodology. Further, the theoretical underpinnings of this study are important, as they influence the lens through which the researcher interprets the study data.

### **Older Adulthood as a Developmental Stage**

The importance of resilience in older adulthood is established by understanding how resilience fits with the developmental stage of older adulthood. According to Erikson's (1950) eight stages of psychosocial development, the developmental stage of older adulthood is characterized by the final identity crisis, ego integrity versus despair. This crisis is marked by a

process of reflection over the events of one's life through which older adults try to assign meaning to their experiences to reach ego integrity. This final stage of identity development begins around age 65 and continues until the end of life (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2022). The current study focused on adults aged 65 and over to maintain focus on one developmental stage. This reduced developmental variables that could affect resilience. Erickson defined ego integrity (the positive developmental outcome of this stage) as a positive evaluation of one's life span, reduced anxiety about eventual death, and a feeling of wisdom (Goodcase & Love, 2017).

Meaning-making is a construct that supports ego integrity and resilience in older adulthood (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2022). Ego integrity is associated with finding meaning in one's past experiences, whether good or bad (Goodcase & Love, 2017). It is also associated with achieving goals and finding peace at the end of life (Goodcase & Love, 2017). The developmental crisis of integrity versus despair is characterized by a reflection of the past events of one's life (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2022). The reflection process can be pictured as a puzzle in which older adults try to fit the pieces (positive and negative events of their lives) into a larger, meaningful picture (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2022). The reflection process aligns with the concept of meaning-making, one of the three strengths categories in the resilience portfolio model. Meaning-making is a category of personal strengths that contributes to resilience. Achieving ego integrity is sometimes prompted by challenging circumstances in older adulthood (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2022). For example, an older adult who decides to relocate may be prompted to reflect on and find meaning in the events of their life as the end of life draws nearer. Ego integrity has been positively associated with feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in older adults, all supportive of psychological adjustment to significant life changes such as retirement and relocation (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2022).

It is important to note that integrity and despair, the two potential outcomes of the developmental stage of older adulthood, are not precisely opposites (Goodcase & Love, 2017). Instead, they are a continuum in which a person identifies more strongly with either integrity or despair (Goodcase & Love, 2017). Throughout the current literature, ego integrity is consistently associated with well-being and successful adjustment, while despair tends to be associated with adverse outcomes such as depression and regret (Goodcase & Love, 2017; van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2022). The capstone of integrity is a feeling of attaining wisdom (Goodcase & Love, 2017). Erikson described the feeling of attaining wisdom as indicating that the crisis between integrity and despair had been successfully resolved (Goodcase & Love, 2017). The feeling of being wise is a logical outcome of making meaning of one's life experiences.

### **The Resilience Portfolio Model**

Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to a stressful event (Grych et al., 2015). Much early research on resilience focused on the protective factors that could reduce the adverse effects of trauma; however, researchers began to realize that this limited view could not fully explain the phenomenon of resilience (Grych et al., 2015). Grych et al. (2015) proposed the resilience portfolio model, a theoretical framework considering current empirical knowledge regarding trauma, coping, and resilience. The resilience portfolio model hypothesizes that resilience is attained and supported by combining many strengths and assets rather than primarily through one strength, asset, or coping skill (Hamby et al., 2018). This framework considers individuals to possess a portfolio of assets (abilities to regulate emotions and behavior, build interpersonal relationships, and foster meaning-making) and resources (supportive relationships, environmental factors, coping responses) that can promote psychological health and resilience in the face of significant stress (Grych et al., 2015). Using this framework, Hamby

et al. (2018) identified strengths such as religious participation, understanding of emotions, purpose, optimism, self-regulation, compassion, social support, and generativity as supportive of adult well-being after adverse experiences.

The resilience portfolio model was created to understand better healthy adaptation among violence victims (Grych et al., 2015). The model was built to be a strengths-based alternative to current resilience theories at the time (Grych et al., 2015). The resilience portfolio model was the first resilience theory to focus on malleable traits which can be built and strengthened over time (Grych et al., 2015). This theory drew from the wealth of empirical knowledge within resilience, positive psychology, post-traumatic growth, and coping research to create a unified framework to move the literature forward (Grych et al., 2015). Resilience research contributed knowledge regarding healthy function through adversity and factors that support that healthy functioning; however, much of the resilience research focused on the absence of pathology rather than the presence of health (Grych et al., 2015). The resilience portfolio model applied knowledge from positive psychology regarding strengths that promote thriving rather than simply the absence of pathology (Grych et al., 2015). Post-traumatic growth research also informed the resilience portfolio model (Grych et al., 2015). Resilience and post-traumatic growth are similar constructs but not the same. Resilience is the process and outcome of successful adjustment to a stressor, while post-traumatic growth is considered healthy personal growth caused by profoundly struggling with a stressor and finding meaning in it (Grych et al., 2015). Coping research informed the resilience portfolio model. Although this model did not adopt any specific coping framework, it aligned with the principles from Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) appraisal theory (Grych et al., 2015). Notably, the resilience portfolio model assumes that different types of

coping are either more effective or less effective depending on the context of the stressor (Grych et al., 2015).

The resilience portfolio model is sometimes called a poly-strengths theory, but the two labels are interchangeable. Sherry Hamby and colleagues (2018) focused heavily on the poly-strengths represented in the framework of the resilience portfolio model. Poly-strengths refer to the number of protective factors a person has (Hamby et al., 2018). The term poly-strengths parallels the term poly-victimization, which refers to the total burden of violent experiences a person has had; these parallel terms further emphasize the roots of the resilience portfolio model for use with victims of violence (Hamby et al., 2018). A person's resilience portfolio can be measured by diversity, how many different types of strengths and resources are present, or by density, how many strengths are present within each category (Grych et al., 2015). The resilience portfolio model claims that higher diversity and density of strengths and resources should result in stronger resilience (Grych et al., 2015). Since the resilience portfolio model was created in 2015, it has been applied to children, adolescents, and adults but has not been explored extensively within the older adult population (Hamby et al., 2016). The present study moved the resilience portfolio model forward by investigating the components that support resilience through the stressor of relocation instead of violence. The phenomenological approach to resilience through relocation in older adulthood allowed a fresh perspective. The results of this study aligned with many of the tenets of the resilience portfolio model.

### **Biblical Foundation**

Erikson's (1950) consideration that wisdom is the outcome of successful meaning-making is a concept supported in the Bible. Wisdom and the stage of older adulthood are consistently correlated throughout Scripture. Job 12:12 (*ESV*, 2001/2016) states, "Wisdom is

with the aged, and understanding in length of days.” This concept of wisdom through life experience is also reflected in Proverbs 16:31 (*ESV*, 2001/2016): “Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.” The current research study was designed to seek the wisdom of older adults by exploring the lived experience of resilience through relocation in older adulthood.

Throughout Scripture (*ESV*, 2001/2016), aging is correlated with vitality (Psalm 92:14), weakness (Psalm 71:9), and mentorship (Psalm 71:18; Titus 2:3). Vitality and weakness may seem like opposite concepts, but tension between two different things is part of the human experience. Psalm 92:14 (*ESV*, 2001/2016) presents a picture of righteous adults as strong and fruitful trees, full of vitality and purpose through old age. In this passage, sharing the righteousness of God is identified as the purpose of vital older adults. This Scripture pictures vitality in old age as being closely related to a sense of purpose and usefulness. Alternatively, Psalm 71:9 (*ESV*, 2001/2016) describes an adult praying that God would not discard him when he is old and weak and no longer feels useful. As older adults face age-related changes to circumstances, health, and personal roles, resilience, the process and outcome of successful adaptation, is essential. The strengths that support resilience (self-regulation, sociability, and meaning-making) can be useful to help older adults retain a sense of purpose and vitality through changing circumstances and stressors such as relocation.

Further along in Psalm 71 (*ESV*, 2001/2016), the author asks God for a chance to teach the next generation about the power and righteousness of God when he becomes old. The present study was founded on the assumption that older adults have wisdom to share and that they have the ability to share that wisdom with others. Scripture presents the idea of older people mentoring younger people. Titus 2:3-5 (*ESV*, 2001/2016) instructs older men and women to live exemplary lives and to teach younger people how to live well. First Peter 5:1-5 (*ESV*,



2001/2016) instructs the elders in the church to teach those in their care gently, like a shepherd guides sheep and to live exemplary lives. This generativity is represented beautifully in Psalm 145:4 (*ESV*, 2001/2016): “One generation shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts.” Older adults can teach younger generations, but they can also learn from one another. Proverbs 27:17 (*ESV*, 2001/2016) says, “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.” In other words, people become better when they learn from each other.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following is a list of definitions of terms used in this study:

**Coping** refers to the cognitive and behavioral skills used to manage the demands of a stressful situation or regulate negative emotions caused by stress (Folkman et al., 1987; Tennen & Litt, 2010).

**Effective Coping** is coping that supports resilience and reduces the adverse effects of stress (da Salva-Sauer et al., 2021).

**Emotion-Focused Coping** is any coping skill aimed at modifying a negative emotional response to the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman 1984).

In this study, an **Independent Living Situation** includes any residence in which the individual does not receive daily support for activities of daily living such as dressing and grooming (van der Pers et al., 2018).

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis** is a qualitative research method created by Smith et al. (2022) that incorporates phenomenological philosophy, hermeneutic theory, and an idiographic approach.

**Late Adulthood** (older adulthood) is the final stage of lifespan development proposed in Erikson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development that begins around age 65 and continues until death; it is characterized by the crisis between ego integrity and despair.

**Long-Term Care** is defined in this study as a living situation in which a person receives daily support for activities of daily living such as dressing and grooming (van der Pers et al., 2018).

**Maladaptive Coping** is coping which does not support healthy adjustment or overall health (Moritz et al., 2018).

**Meaning-Making** is one of the main categories of strengths within the resilience portfolio model, and it is the ability to find meaning in challenging life events; meaning-making is best supported in people who have a clear set of beliefs, values, and goals (Grych et al., 2015).

A **Phenomenon** is the central concept of phenomenological study, and it can include any concept being experienced by the study participants, including concepts such as anger, grief, or love (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Phenomenology** is a qualitative research approach in which the researcher investigates an experienced phenomenon (topic or concept) using systematic analysis methods after purposefully setting aside prejudgments (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Problem-Focused Coping** is any coping skill aimed at changing or reducing the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman 1984).

**Psychological Health** includes well-being, positive affect (visible emotions and mood), and a lack of psychopathology (Grych et al., 2015).

**Resilience** is "the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences" (American Psychological Association, 2023).

**Resilience Resources** are resources that support resilience, including supportive people, positive characteristics of one's social ecology, and socioeconomic status (Grych et al., 2015).

**Self-Regulation** is one of the main categories of strengths within the resilience portfolio model, and it includes emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physiological components; it includes things like planning, executive functioning, self-efficacy, achievement motivation, self-direction, perseverance, grit, and emotion regulation (Grych et al., 2015).

**Sociability** is one of the main categories of strengths within the resilience portfolio model, and it includes interpersonal and intrapersonal strengths used to establish and maintain social connections (Grych et al., 2015).

**Stressors** are events that prompt behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and biological changes within an individual (Anisman, 2010).

**Well-being** can include measures of self-reported life satisfaction, developmental task attainment, and competent functioning (Grych et al., 2015).

### **Significance of the Study**

The phenomenological approach to resilience through relocation in older adulthood holds empirical, theoretical, and practical significance. Empirically, the results of this study can be applied to gaps in current research. Resilience has yet to be studied extensively in relocated older adults (Ross et al., 2022; Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019). However, relocation is common during late life (Li et al., 2022a). The existing research on resilience, coping, or adaptation through relocation in older adulthood mainly focused on the transition to long-term care rather than relocation within independent older adults (Li et al., 2022a). Rather than narrowly focusing on older adults relocating to long-term care, the current study contributed to resilience research by exploring the lived experience of resilience through the common stressor of relocation for older

adults relocating to a situation other than long-term care. The stressor of relocation to long-term care may interact differently with resilience compared to other situations.

The current study was significant theoretically. Many current resilience theories are based on research on unexpected trauma or major disasters (Park et al., 2021; Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019). The resilience portfolio theory was specifically created to address victims of violence (Grych et al., 2015). The present study began to bridge the research gap toward understanding those theories in the context of everyday life stressors like relocation. Further, this study explored the applicability of the resilience portfolio theory within the developmental stage of older adulthood, which added to the theoretical knowledge base by focusing on the understudied older adult population.

Further knowledge about coping and resilience through the common stressor of relocation is practical, as relocation is a stressor most people will experience at least once in a lifetime. The immediate benefits of increased resilience are apparent. They have been underscored by studies highlighting benefits such as physical health (Banyard et al., 2017), increased well-being (Phillips et al., 2016), and even longer life (Lee et al., 2019). The results of this study offered insight that can be applied to interventions aimed at assisting older adults with utilizing and building strengths and resources to assist with ordinary life stressors such as relocation. The knowledge gained from this study may apply to self-help literature and inform those who wish to support loved ones experiencing relocation.

### **Summary**

This chapter has explored resilience in relocation as an essential topic that needed further investigation, especially in the understudied older adult population (Ross et al., 2022; Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019). The interpretative phenomenological analysis approach offered flexibility to

deeply investigate the lived experience of resilience and its relationship to strengths and resources in adults 65 and over who had relocated within the last three years. Interpretative phenomenological analysis applied the philosophy of phenomenology, the hermeneutic theory, and an idiographic approach to discern a rich description and conscientious interpretation of resilience through relocation in older adulthood. The frameworks provided by the resilience portfolio model (Grych et al., 2015) and Erikson's (1950) psychosocial stages of development, and biblical understanding informed the current study's creation. The resilience portfolio model incorporates current empirical knowledge from resilience research, positive psychology, post-traumatic growth research, and coping research and provides a clear framework from which resilience can be studied (Grych et al., 2015). Further, Erikson's (1950) conceptualization of older adulthood as a developmental stage offers insight that was useful in understanding how the developmental stage of older adulthood may affect the relocation experience. The study was founded on the biblical idea that older adults are a valuable source of wisdom and experience (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Proverbs 16:31) and that they are worthy of respect and attention (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Leviticus 19:32).

The study of resilience through relocation in older adulthood has empirical, theoretical, and practical significance. Empirically, the present study contributed knowledge on the lived phenomenon of resilience through relocation to independent living situations in older adulthood, expanding the current knowledge of resilience through relocation to long-term care (Li et al., 2022a). The present study contributed to existing resilience theory by examining the strengths and resources that support resilience through the non-trauma stressor of relocation. The present study has practical significance because of the rising number of relocating older adults in the United States (Li et al., 2022a). The knowledge gained from this study could be applied to

resilience interventions or self-help literature aimed at building the resilience of older adult relocators. The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experience of resilience and its relationship to strengths and resources through relocation in older adulthood.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

**Overview**

This chapter reviews recent literature in psychology and related fields that informed the current study. The literature review demonstrated the viability of the current study by identifying gaps in existing research that could be addressed by the phenomenological study of resilience in recently relocated older adults. A comprehensive search of the available research revealed that resilience, the process and outcome of successful adaptation to a stressor, is supported by an individual's strengths and resources (Grych et al., 2015). To fully support resilience, these strengths and resources must be paired with effective and situationally appropriate coping methods (Grych et al., 2015). Strengths include intrapersonal and interpersonal strengths such as sociability, self-regulation, and meaning-making; resources include environmental factors and supportive relationships (Grych et al., 2015). These strengths and resources are applied to resilience through effective coping (Grych et al., 2015). Religion and spirituality are important in supporting resilience (Aten et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2020; Skalisky et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2020). Religion and spirituality provide a framework from which people can create meaning within stressful situations, supporting the process and outcome of successful adaptation (Grych et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick & Tzouvara, 2019; Jones et al., 2018). The literature review also revealed several benefits of resilience, which could be applied to the stressor of relocation within the older adult population. Although much knowledge has been gained regarding human resilience, a significant gap remained regarding the resilience of older adults. Within the older adult population, resilience through the stressor of relocation was a largely unstudied phenomenon, and the studies that came close focused on relocation to long-term care facilities

rather than independent living situations. This chapter presents a biblical foundation for the study and the current academic literature on resilience.

### **Description of Search Strategy**

The literature search for this section was conducted using the Jerry Falwell Library and other available databases such as EBSCO and PSYnet. Advanced search tools were used to input keywords such as resilien\*, cop\*, relocat\*, transition, older adulthood, adapt\*, stress, poly-strengths, resilience portfolio model, etc. Articles dealing with childhood or adolescent resilience were excluded to keep the focus on older adulthood, and only a few relevant studies on younger or middle-aged adults were included. Existing research on resilience and relocation in older adults is minimal. The following literature review includes a complete picture of the research relating to these topics from the past five years.

Only studies focused on individual resilience were included in the review. Community, racial, business, and economic resilience were outside the scope of the current study. Also, studies that focused on unusual circumstances for relocation, such as imprisonment or military-related relocation, were excluded to keep the focus of the study on topics most relevant to older adults. Only peer-reviewed quantitative, qualitative, and review articles published within the past five years were selected for the literature review. Data mining was used to ensure a complete representation of available literature. The literature search was concluded when no further relevant articles were found, meaning data saturation had been reached.

The biblical foundations of the study were established by considering instances of resilience through relocation found in the character stories in the Bible. A content search was also conducted for Scripture passages regarding the developmental stage of older adulthood.



Research studies uncovered in the literature review that directly related to religion and spirituality were also included.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Stress and Relocation**

Even positive changes can cause considerable stress. A wedding, the birth of a child, or starting a new job are examples of changes that may be highly desired and anticipated but often create significant changes to one's thoughts, behaviors, emotions, and biological patterns, making these exciting events stressors. Relocation can also be perceived as positive in many cases. For example, a person may be moving to a dream home, to be closer to family members, or for some other desirable outcome. On the other hand, relocation by necessity due to reduced finances or the need for a higher level of care can be perceived as a negative event. Underlying positive or negative perceptions of relocation may impact the level of perceived stress caused by relocation, but this study operates on the underlying assumption that relocation for any reason causes enough change to be considered a stressor.

Much of the current research on coping and resilience has been done in the context of trauma or extreme stressors (Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019; Park et al., 2021). However, stressors do not have to be extreme to have a negative effect. For example, Birditt et al. (2020) discovered that interpersonal tension was correlated with lower well-being in an older adult population and that emotion-focused coping strategies such as reappraisal effectively reduced those adverse effects. Another study was conducted on the relationship between pandemic-related stress, coping, and health (Tracy et al., 2021). Higher perceived stress was correlated with depressive symptoms and lower mental health in the sample of 115 older adults (Tracy et al., 2021). However, effective coping was found to mediate the negative repercussions of pandemic-related

stress in older adults (Tracy et al., 2021). As these examples show, even day-to-day stressors can negatively affect the mental and physical health of older adults, and effective coping methods can be helpful in mediating the negative effect of stress.

The process of aging may create a risk for various stressors related to life changes (Delhom et al., 2020; Delhom et al., 2022). For example, older adults with severe health problems must often relocate to institutions or long-term care facilities. In contrast, those with moderate health issues may need to move to more accommodative living spaces (van der Pers et al., 2018). Relocation brings significant change, which can be stressful. The presence of place identity can also factor into resistance and stress related to relocation in older adulthood (Li & Zhang, 2021). Further, relocation can disrupt an older adult's social support network, inhibiting one resource that supports successful adjustment (Taylor et al., 2020). Older adults who relocate tend to desire successful adaptation to their new location, which can be supported through resilience (O'Neill et al., 2022).

Li et al. (2022a) studied relocation patterns of older adults in the United States to discover more information about the reasons for relocation and the chosen destinations among older relocators. Li et al.'s (2022a) study recognized that relocation in older adulthood is a growing yet understudied issue. The study revealed that the top three reasons for relocation in older adulthood are proximity to family, neighborhood quality, and housing costs. Further, those with fewer financial, physical, and social strengths and resources were found to be more likely to move than their peers. Other reasons for moving included health and mobility issues, job changes, and family changes. Li et al. (2022a) found that relocations in older adulthood increased dramatically between 2010 and 2019, highlighting the importance of the present study

and others that can provide insight and direction for supporting the growing number of older adults relocating within the United States.

Van der Pers et al. (2018) conducted an analysis to discover how much limitations in activities of daily living, self-rated health, and limiting chronic conditions could predict relocation in older adults living in the Netherlands. A regression model showed that older adults with more severe health problems often must move to institutions or long-term care facilities. In contrast, those with moderate health issues are more likely to relocate to other situations. The results suggested that older adults with moderate health issues, especially limitations in activities of daily living, may need to move to more accommodative living spaces but do not need the intensive services of long-term care facilities. This study offered important information about the impact of health on the decision to relocate in older adulthood; however, it did not include a focus on resilience. The present study focused on the lived experience of resilience through relocation to independent living situations in older adulthood.

Much of the available literature regarding relocation in older adulthood focuses on those transitioning into long-term care facilities (Fitzpatrick & Tzouvara, 2019). A review of such studies highlighted the importance of interventions designed to support resilience in older adults facing the stressor of relocation. Importantly, the study found that self-efficacy and positive preconceptions predicted successful adjustment. In contrast, a focus on loss and powerlessness was a factor that inhibited successful adjustment. Several resilience factors were identified as being helpful, including acceptance, positivity, meaning-making, self-efficacy, and religious identity. Maintaining and creating positive social connections was also crucial for supporting healthy transitions. This study synthesized powerful knowledge regarding the resilience factors that support the successful adjustment of older adults facing relocation; however, the study

focused more on the outcome of successful adjustment than on the process and outcome of resilience. Further, the study applied only to those older adults facing relocation to long-term care facilities and did not include those who may be relocating to other situations. The present study focused on those relocating to independent living situations, rather than long-term care.

The level of perceived autonomy or control an older person has over the relocation decision and process may seriously impact the capacity for resilience (Johnson & Bibbo, 2014). Koppitz et al. (2017) used qualitative methods to explore the impact of unexpected relocation into a nursing home on adaptation (Koppitz et al., 2017). An individual's perceived level of participation in decision-making and continuity in habits and relationships surfaced as factors critical to successful adaptation (Koppitz et al., 2017). Lan et al. (2020) found that older adults often experience fear, struggle, acceptance, and compromise during and after relocation to nursing home facilities. Older adults relocating into care homes in the United Kingdom initially desired to connect with others in their new setting, adapt to the new setting, and maintain connections with their existing social network (O'Neill et al., 2022). Some coping methods they perceived as helpful during the transition were positivity, social connection, and maintaining self-identity (O'Neill et al., 2022). Each of these studies provided insight, but they were restricted to older adults who were relocating into care facilities, a specific type of relocation that may include more or different stressors than other types of relocation. The current study added to the existing body of resilience literature by examining the lived experience of resilience through relocation to situations other than long-term care in older adulthood.

## **Resilience**

The American Psychological Association (2023) defines resilience as both the process and the outcome of successful adaptation to challenging or demanding circumstances. Resilience

literature has historically defined resilience in slightly different ways, but the American Psychological Association's (2023) definition of resilience best represents the current understanding of human resilience within the scientific community. Resilience is not just a personality trait, a state, or an outcome. Instead, resilience is the process and outcome of successful adaptation. The theoretical framework created by Grych et al. (2015) proposed that resilience involves more than just protective factors. Grych et al. (2015) created the Resilience Portfolio Model, which is a theoretical framework in which resilience and psychological well-being are supported by a portfolio of strengths (the ability to self-regulate, infer meaning, and connect with others) and resources (environmental factors and supportive relationships). In this theory, a person with a higher number (density) of different (diversity) strengths and resources in their resilience portfolio is better equipped to show resilience in the face of distress than a person with fewer or less varied strengths and resources (Grych et al., 2015). This is an attractive theory because it supports a development mindset. In other words, resilience is not simply a trait that is present or absent in various degrees. Instead, resilience can be actively supported and increased by developing one's resilience strengths and resources. Resilience interventions built upon the resilience portfolio model focus on helping older adults increase their existing strengths and resources and develop new ones to support present and future resilience. The resilience portfolio model offers a framework to study and understand the complex process and outcome of human resilience.

***Strengths: Self-Regulation, Sociability, Meaning-Making***

According to the resilience portfolio model, many individual strengths have been identified as supportive of resilience, and these strengths can all be understood within three main categories: self-regulation, meaning-making, and interpersonal strengths (Grych et al., 2015).

This has also been identified as the idea of poly-strengths, and the density (total number) and diversity of a person's strengths support individual resilience (Hamby et al., 2018). Hamby et al. (2018) created a study based on the resilience portfolio model that explored the strengths categories within the context of resilience and well-being after adversity. A diverse sample of 2,565 American adults and adolescents was studied. Each participant answered a Likert-based survey that assessed the participants' experiences of adversity (victimization, stressful life events, and financial strain) and strengths (self-regulation, interpersonal strengths, and meaning-making). The participants were then assessed for thriving in the areas of subjective well-being, post-traumatic growth, and mental health. The results of the data analysis showed that the various strengths were responsible for more variance in well-being than the participants' adverse experiences or current social position. Those with more strengths (density) across more categories (diversity) showed higher thriving. Some of the individual strengths most strongly associated with thriving were purpose, optimism, religious involvement, emotional regulation, emotional awareness, psychological endurance, compassion, generativity, and community support. Hamby et al.'s (2018) study offered valuable information on the association between poly-strengths and thriving after adversity but only addressed the stressor of previous trauma. The current study will remedy this gap by exploring resilience through the stressor of relocation.

Most of the current research based on the resilience portfolio model has focused on age groups other than older adults. In one such study, Moisan et al. (2019) found that poly-strengths such as those outlined in the resilience portfolio model were correlated with low levels of distress in a sample of Quebec youth. Another study focused on adolescents found that positive social norms and diverse strengths, such as those presented in the resilience portfolio model, reduced the likelihood of peer violence in a sample of 2,150 young people (Banyard et al., 2020).

A phenomenological study conducted among a group of Venezuelan immigrants in the United States found that supportive relationships, spirituality, and the ability to connect with others were protective factors of resilience within that population (Abrams et al., 2022). Although research supports the resilience portfolio model, this study will explore the applicability of the resilience portfolio model in the context of older adulthood. Research question two investigated how recently relocated older adults describe strengths and resources that contributed to their resilience through relocation.

The resilience portfolio model was created to study resilience in victims of violence; however, the model also seems to apply to resilience in the face of other stressors. Undocumented Latino immigrants reported that six strengths and resources supported their resilience: cognitive reframing, behavioral adaptability, acceptance, sociability, courage, and cultural pride (Garcini et al., 2022). Cognitive reframing (optimism, relativity, impermanence, future focus, and spirituality) supported resilience by fostering meaning, enhancing purpose, and building hope (Garcini et al., 2022). Behavioral adaptability (flexibility, creativity, and resourcefulness) supported resilience by facilitating opportunities, building self-confidence, and increasing self-reliance (Garcini et al., 2022). Acceptance (gratefulness and contentment) supported resilience by increasing satisfaction and positive affect (Garcini et al., 2022). Sociability (kindliness, responsiveness, friendliness, and humor) supported resilience by facilitating and maintaining social connections (Garcini et al., 2022). Courage (tenacity and fortitude) supported resilience by maintaining motivation and helping to withstand difficulties (Garcini et al., 2022). Cultural pride (pride in cultural and immigrant identity) was seen as supportive of resilience by increasing positive affect, creating social connections, and encouraging self-esteem and self-identity (Garcini et al., 2022). The many strengths identified as

supportive of individual resilience in this study align with the poly-strengths outlined in the resilience portfolio model (Grych et al., 2015). Further, these findings were identified within a population showing resilience in the face of daily stressors related to their undocumented immigrant status (Garcini et al., 2022). These findings help broaden the current understanding of resilience and support the concepts of strengths and resources presented in the resilience portfolio model. However, further study is needed to discover how these strengths may or may not support resilience during relocation in older adulthood. The current study investigated the strengths and resources that support resilience during relocation in older adults.

The category of sociability includes intrapersonal and interpersonal strengths that facilitate the establishment and maintenance of positive social connections (Grych et al., 2015). One aspect within this category is healthy attachment. Chopik and others (2019) set up a study to measure whether attachment changes across the lifespan. This study combined data from five data sets to study how attachment changed over 59 years (Chopik et al., 2019). The first data set was collected from 107 people beginning in 1968. The data were collected at ages 14, 18, and 23. The second data set (which was three separate studies) was comprised of data from 354 people. The third data set was collected from 147 people ages 43, 53, 62, and 72. Collectively, participants for this study were examined between the ages of 13 and 72. Attachment orientation was measured for several data set points using items from the California Adult Q-Sort. The researchers then created scales for attachment orientation and compared them. Attachment anxiety and avoidance were found to decline steadily over the lifespan. The findings from this study are interesting in relation to adult attachment. The fact that attachment anxiety and avoidance decline with age should mean that adults become more and more able to form and keep healthy attachments in middle and late adulthood. Since sociability strengths support



resilience, the results of this study could mean that some sociability strengths, such as attachment, are commonly strengthened with age, strengthening the resilience portfolios of older adults.

Spiritual factors such as religious identity and positive religious coping support resilience in the face of stressors (Grych et al., 2015). Religion and spirituality support resilience primarily by providing a framework for meaning-making, but religion and spirituality can also facilitate sociability, self-regulation, and social resources (Jones et al., 2018). Other aspects of religion and spirituality, such as religious coping, are also supportive of resilience. Religious coping includes things like daily reliance on God, connection with a spiritual being, and religious meaning-making; it promotes overall health and supports resilience (Taylor et al., 2020; Whitehead & Bergeman, 2020).

The most important role of religion and spirituality in supporting resilience throughout the literature is related to meaning-making. Meaning-making can be supported best in individuals with a preexisting system of beliefs, values, and goals, such as those in many religions (Grych et al., 2015). Many older adults who had relocated to long-term care facilities identified personal philosophy frameworks, religiosity, and faith to be helpful in adjustment by supporting meaning-making (Fitzpatrick & Tzouvara, 2019). Although meaning-making can be facilitated by beliefs, values, and goals outside of religion and spirituality, the research detailed in this section implies that religious faith contributes to resilience for many older adults.

Broadening the concept further, Jones et al. (2018) discovered that a more comprehensive definition of spirituality, including concepts like nature, inner strength, and human connection, was helpful in researching the role of spirituality in resilience. Jones et al., (2018) found that spirituality promotes family resilience in the face of stress. Jones et al. (2018) set up a qualitative

study to investigate the role of spirituality in family resilience following a severe injury. For this study, spirituality was defined broadly to include the constructs of meaning, hope, purpose, religious faith, and others (Jones et al., 2018). The study results showed that many aspects of spirituality helped support the resilience of families following the stressor of injury (Jones et al., 2018). Specifically, the meaning-making aspect of spirituality was associated with gratitude, hope, and connection with others (Jones et al., 2018). Also, spirituality was experienced more intensely immediately after injury and became less intense over time (Jones et al., 2018). Although this study was focused on the stressor of injury, the results may apply to the stressor of relocation in the present study.

Religious coping supports resilience in those who have experienced trauma. A sample of 12 adults who relocated due to traumatic circumstances reported that religion was perceived to be a significant contributor to their resilience and posttraumatic growth (Taylor et al., 2020). Specifically, participants reported a connection to God through prayer as helpful (Taylor et al., 2020). Aten et al. (2019) reviewed articles focused on religion and spirituality among disaster survivors and found that religion and spirituality supported positive outcomes for this population. Religion and spirituality were represented as general religiosity, representations of God, religious appraisals, meaning-making, and religious coping (Aten et al., 2019). Among these representations, meaning-making emerged as the factor most strongly connected with positive outcomes for disaster survivors (Aten et al., 2019). Skalisky et al. (2020) set up a mixed-methods study to determine the relationship between Islamic religious coping and resilience in refugees living in Jordan. The results indicated that religious coping (including constructs such as connectedness to God and meaning-making) promotes resilience for Islamic refugees (Skalisky

et al., 2020). Somali refugees living in San Diego also highlighted the importance of religious faith, meaning-making, and a sense of community to support resilience (Terrana et al., 2022).

Religious coping is associated with positive outcomes when applied to less extreme stressors as well. Hall et al. (2020) found that Christians who applied religious resources and ideologies to cope with a stressor could cope with the stressor through religious meaning-making. A quantitative study conducted on 267 older adults revealed that daily religious coping, such as reliance on God or connection with a spiritual being, seems to protect against the adverse effects of stress and can promote overall health (Whitehead & Bergeman, 2020).

Sociability, self-regulation, and meaning-making strengths support resilience (Grych et al., 2015). The present study built on current resilience knowledge by exploring the role of these strengths within the lived experience of resilience through relocation in older adulthood. The present study primarily focused on participant descriptions of resilience and then interpreted those descriptions through the lens of current empirical knowledge.

### ***Resources: Environmental Factors and Supportive Relationships***

The second principal component of resilience proposed by the resilience portfolio model is resources that support resilience such as environmental factors and supportive relationships (Grych et al., 2015). Environmental factors include things like a positive work environment, neighborhood cohesion, and socioeconomic status. Supportive relationships can include close connections, such as a spouse or sibling, and other social connections, such as community acquaintances, pets, friends, etc. Current research upholds the importance of environmental factors and supportive relationships to resilience in older adulthood. One longitudinal, large-sample study found correlations between early childhood circumstances such as social connections and socioeconomic status and resilience in older adulthood (Phillips et al., 2016).

This study indicated that the presence or lack of resources, such as socioeconomic status and friendships, can impact a person's capacity for resilience (Phillips et al., 2016).

A study conducted by da Salva-Sauer et al. (2021) corroborated those results. A cross-sectional study of 458 older adults was created to explore protective and harmful factors of successful aging. Socioeconomic status, physical health, resilience, perceived stress level, and depressive symptoms were measured. Positive associations were found between resilience and income level and resilience and education level. Also, the presence of physical disease notably impacted resilience. In contrast with previous studies, gender did not impact resilience or depression scores. This study showed that resilience scores increase alongside income and education levels. Those with higher resilience may be more able to attain higher education and better income. For example, people with more resilience strengths and resources such as self-regulation, positive social connections, and higher socioeconomic status are better equipped to complete college and manage high-paying careers compared to individuals with fewer resilience strengths and resources who may struggle to gain promotions at work or may drop out of college for financial reasons. Alternatively, increased education and higher income may provide a greater density and diversity of strengths and supports, which build resilience over time. For example, an individual who has completed graduate school and has a stable, high-income career may have more time and energy to build resilience strengths and resources such as social connections and coping responses without the burden of daily financial stress. The present study built on the current knowledge by examining the reported role of environmental factors in the experience of resilience through relocation in older adulthood.

Supportive relationships are an essential resource that supports resilience in older adulthood. Reisig and colleagues (2018) conducted a study to discover whether strong family ties

help victims of crime cope with depression and behavioral avoidance. Participants were chosen for this study using white pages and public records. The mean age of the participants was 72.42 years. The data was collected via phone interviews. Participants were first asked to complete a six-question cognitive screening. If this screening was successful, participants were asked to complete an interview. The researchers coded the survey information to measure depressive symptoms, behavioral avoidance coping, criminal victimization, familial ties, interaction terms, and demographic variables. Researchers then ran various statistical analyses, including regression equations, Pearson's  $r$  correlations, etc. The study results showed that although higher victimization scores were positively associated with depressive symptoms, these symptoms were mitigated by marriage and family attachment levels. This is an important finding because it shows that familial attachment can reduce the adverse mental health effects caused by victimization. The study also showed that spousal attachment is more protective than attachment to children (Reisig et al., 2018). The present study built on these results by exploring the role of supportive relationships in relocation-related resilience.

### ***Benefits or Outcomes of Resilience***

Resilience is a critical construct to study, understand, and support in older adults because it has been correlated with well-being (Phillips et al., 2016), quality of life (Matérne et al., 2022), longevity (Lee et al., 2019), and physical health (Banyard et al., 2017). Lee et al. (2019) used longitudinal data to study pathways of vulnerability and resilience and their relationship to longevity. They measured resilience as life satisfaction and optimism (Lee et al., 2019). The study revealed that optimism in midlife was a mediator for the relationship between childhood socioeconomic status and longevity (Lee et al., 2019). Higher life satisfaction and optimism in midlife were also identified as resilience pathways between healthier childhood experiences and

longevity (Lee et al., 2019). This study demonstrated the importance of factors that support resilience, but it only focused on life satisfaction and optimism as resilience factors. The present study will build on these results by presenting deeper and richer data on resilience through the use of phenomenological study.

Matérne et al. (2022) conducted a phenomenological study to investigate the lived experience of resilience and participation after a stroke and their connection to the current quality of life in 19 middle-aged and older adults in Sweden. The semi-structured interviews revealed that meaningful values, adaptation strategies, and social support were essential resilience factors that supported quality of life following a stroke (Matérne et al., 2022). This study revealed the critical role of resilience following the significant stressor of stroke, and the phenomenological approach allowed rich data to emerge. However, the present study addressed how resilience is experienced following the stressor of relocation. The present study measured resilience as participant perceptions of the process and outcome of successful adaptation to relocation rather than as quality of life.

Beyond well-being and quality of life, aspects of resilience may result in better physical health (Banyard et al., 2017). Banyard et al., 2017 used the resilience portfolio model to study the role of resilience strengths in supporting physical health while accounting for childhood maltreatment. Regulatory, meaning-making, and interpersonal strengths were independently associated with better physical health in adolescents and adults (Banyard et al., 2017). This study offered valuable insight into the potential benefits of resilience, but it did not extensively study the resilience portfolio within the older adult population. The present study explored the experience of resilience in relocation for older adults, adding to the current body of knowledge.

### ***Resilience and Aging***

Resilience contributes to successful aging. Current research on successful aging considers five categories: physical health/functional status, daily life activity, material security, social resource, and mental efficacy (Kim et al., 2022). The category of mental efficacy includes self-esteem, perceived control, mental status, and resilience (Kim et al., 2022). Kim et al. (2022) considered resilience to be both personal competence and acceptance of self and life, and resilience plays a significant role in overall mental health. Despite the importance of resilience in older adulthood, current resilience research focused on older adults is minimal. Stafford and Gulwadi (2019) addressed the need for more research applying resilience theory to the concept of aging in place by creating a qualitative study focused on ten adults aged 88 and older who had been living independently in one place for at least 40 years. The study aimed to explore the adaptations needed for successful aging in place within the context of resilience theory (Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019). The results supported a strengths-based approach to resilience, and the authors recommended further research into lived resilience within the older adult population (Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019). The present study provided further knowledge that can be used to support resilience in older adults, which will also support successful aging.

Self-perceptions of aging have long been considered to impact mortality within psychology research (Wurm & Schäfer, 2022). A large-scale, longitudinal study conducted by Wurm and Schäfer (2022) found that adults over age 40 with more gain-related self-perceptions of aging were at a much lower risk of mortality than those with less gain-related self-perceptions of aging. In other words, people who connect the aging process with ongoing development are likely to live longer than those who do not (Wurm & Schäfer, 2022). This finding is vital to the study of resilience because multidimensional self-perceptions of aging reflect self-perceptions of resilience factors (Wurm & Schäfer, 2022). This study points to the importance of further study

into gain-related self-perceptions of aging, which focus on ongoing development (Wurm & Schäfer, 2022). The current study is based on a developmental mindset, assuming that resilience is a construct that can be intentionally supported and strengthened throughout the lifespan. The interview questions were designed to uncover the presence or absence of a developmental mindset in the study participants.

Park et al. (2021) set out to explore American resilience through the transition of national closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. They discovered widespread evidence of resilience in coping with pandemic stress exposure, as evidenced by diminishing levels of distress and consistent levels of well-being. Twenty-three stressors were measured, including changes to social routine, reduced finances, and fear of infection exposure. This study equated resilience with the successful adjustment to a stressor. This partially aligns with the American Psychological Association's (2023) definition of resilience as both the process and the outcome of successful adaptation to difficult experiences (Park et al., 2021). Data analysis revealed social support, mindfulness, and meaning-focused coping to be predictive of resilience in this study. Interestingly, older adults tended to be more resilient than younger adults. The researchers attributed this phenomenon to lower baseline distress and stress exposure combined with higher mindfulness and social support levels in older adulthood. This study revealed valuable information on the role of resilience in dealing with the various stressors related to the pandemic, and it identified older adults as being more resilient than younger adults; however, the focus of this study was on resilience as the outcome of successful adjustment to a stressor. The current study built on this by defining resilience as both the process and the outcome of successful adjustment to a stressor.



## **The Role of Coping**

Coping is entwined with resilience in many ways. The resilience portfolio model considers appraisals and coping behavior to be factors that work in tandem with an individual's strengths and resources to support the process and outcome of resilience (Grych et al., 2015). Coping methods can vary widely and include things like cognitive restructuring, planning, seeking social support, venting, avoidance, mindfulness, exercise, spending time outdoors, engaging in a hobby, humor, and religion (Schäfer et al., 2020). The transactional theory of coping, which has been widely accepted and studied, posits that coping skills are those cognitive and behavioral skills that individuals employ to manage stressors (Folkman et al., 1987). According to the transactional theory framework, most people respond to situations that they appraise as stressful or threatening by implementing some combination of problem-focused coping (focused on the person-environment relationship) and emotion-focused coping (focused on the emotional reaction) (Folkman et al., 1987). Research has found that some coping strategies, such as avoidance or alcohol abuse, are maladaptive, while more active coping strategies can promote positive outcomes (Chen et al., 2018; Moritz et al., 2018). Coping literature categorizes coping in various ways, such as problem-focused versus emotion-focused, approach versus avoidance, and behavioral versus cognitive (Nieto et al., 2020). For the sake of clarity, problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance coping will be covered in this section. Although the focus of the present study is resilience, not coping, various coping skills may emerge during data analysis as factors that contributed to the experience of resilience during relocation.

Problem-focused coping is any coping method aimed at changing, reducing, or eliminating the stressor, while emotion-focused coping is aimed at feeling better about the

stressor. Problem-focused coping is any coping skill aimed at changing or reducing the stressor (Folkman et al., 1987). For example, a person facing relocation may appraise the relocation as stressful and make a plan to accomplish moving-related tasks. In this example, the problem-focused coping strategy is planning, because it is directly related to affecting the stressor.

Emotion-focused coping is any coping skill aimed at modifying a negative emotional response to the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). For example, the individual who appraises relocation as stressful may choose to focus on the positives surrounding the relocation. In this example, the emotion-focused coping skill is a focus on positives, because it is focused on changing the negative emotions related to the stressor. Some coping strategies can be considered either problem-focused or emotion-focused, depending on the context. For example, if a person diagnosed with cancer seeks social support to learn more about cancer and its treatments, then seeking social support would be labeled a problem-focused coping strategy. However, if that person seeks social support to vent or to gain sympathy, then seeking social support would be labeled an emotion-focused coping strategy. Often, people combine these two types of coping in response to stressors (Lazarus & Folkman 1984).

Problem-focused coping, also called active, positive, or approach coping, is typically favored in coping literature as being more successful than other coping methods and is associated with myriad benefits. Problem-focused coping may be facilitated through feelings of mastery and is most useful in situations in which an individual feels a measure of control (Ben-Zur, 2018). It is less effective for situations outside of an individual's control. In situations in which problem-focused coping can be applied, it can mediate the negative effects of stress such as poor mental health and higher depressive symptoms (Tracy et al., 2021). Problem-focused coping is correlated with secure attachment and resilience (Kural & Kovacs, 2021). It is possible that

individuals with secure attachment are more likely to use problem-focused strategies rather than emotion-focused coping strategies (Kural & Kovacs, 2021). Chen et al. (2018) conducted a study on 187 adults, grouped by age, and found that problem-focused coping was positively related to positive affect in the sample. Galiana et al. (2020) found that problem-focused coping had a positive effect on the well-being of older people. Niihata et al. (2017) studied a large sample (N=1,354) of Japanese adults on hemodialysis and discovered a significant association between problem-focused engagement such as problem-solving and cognitive restructuring and longer survival, improvement in physical health, and improvement in mental health. In a group of trauma survivors, researchers found that active coping skills were correlated positively with both self-compassion and post-traumatic growth (Munroe et al., 2022).

Approach coping strategies, similar to active coping skills, are aligned with reduced depression symptoms, while avoidance coping strategies are aligned with increased depression symptoms (Nieto et al., 2020). According to Nieto et al. (2020), older adults are more likely than young adults to use approach coping strategies. One study explored the relationship between coping and stress among adult refugees (Poudel-Tandukar et al., 2020). Poudel-Tandukar et al. (2020) discovered that problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies were inversely associated with stress levels. Chen et al. (2018) conducted a mixed methods study on a sample of 187 adults in the United States to investigate stress and coping in adulthood and to discover whether coping strategies mediate the association between age and affect. Older adults reported lower levels of positive affect and lower usage of problem-focused coping. The study showed that problem-focused coping can mediate the association between positive affect and age. This study identified problem-focused coping as an important component of psychological health in older adulthood.

Emotion-focused coping is any coping skill aimed at modifying a negative emotional response to the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). One emotion-focused coping strategy is reappraisal (Birditt et al., 2020). Reappraisal is a coping strategy in which individuals change the meaning of a situation to promote positive affect and reduce negative emotions (Birditt et al., 2020). Coping strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and goal adjustment support healthy adaptation to challenges (Loidl & Leipold, 2019). Reappraisal is similar to cognitive reframing and is effective in promoting well-being in older adulthood (Birditt et al., 2020). The strategy of cognitive reframing includes constructs such as optimism, relativity, impermanence, future focus, and spirituality (Garcini et al., 2022). Cognitive reframing can be used to reframe challenging situations, and it supports resilience by fostering meaning, enhancing purpose, and building hope (Garcini et al., 2022). The strategy of acceptance includes approaching challenging circumstances with an attitude of gratefulness and contentment (Garcini et al., 2022). Acceptance is an emotion-focused coping strategy that supports resilience by increasing satisfaction and positive affect (Garcini et al., 2022). Emotion-focused coping lowers the chance of developing depression symptoms following a stressful event (Li et al., 2022b). Emotion-focused coping is closely related to avoidant coping, in which people avoid a stressor.

In a study of American resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, avoidant coping was predictive of increased distress and decreased well-being, which aligns with previous coping research (Park et al., 2021). Although avoidant coping is typically correlated with adverse outcomes, it is not always a maladaptive strategy. Pearce et al. (2022) found that a video game was helpful for adults coping with stress because it provided temporary detachment, a sense of accomplishing goals, and social connection with other players. This is an exciting discovery, as video games could be a good coping option for older adults who cannot socialize in person.

Avoidant coping exemplifies the importance of considering situational context because it is helpful in some situations and harmful in others.

Although problem-focused coping is favored within coping research, various types of coping (emotion-focused, problem-focused, adaptive, avoidant, etc.) are either more or less effective depending on situational factors. For example, a person faced with the stressor of violence may find that avoidant coping is the best option, while a person faced with the stressor of loneliness may find that problem-focused coping is most effective. Coping methods are typically employed to reduce or manage stress successfully; however, the combination of coping skills should depend on the situation surrounding the stressor (Ben-Zur, 2018). Problem-focused coping is most effective in controllable situations, and emotion-focused coping is most effective in situations beyond an individual's ability to control. Meaning-focused coping, such as searching for meaning, accepting the situation, and looking for positives, may be constructive coping strategies for promoting resilience in situations outside of an individual's control (Park et al., 2021). Most people use a combination of coping methods to manage stress effectively. For example, a person facing the stressor of relocation may ask a friend for help packing (problem-focused coping), talk to that friend about the changes happening (emotion-focused coping), and take a few moments each day in prayer and reflection (religious coping).

On a more straightforward and practical note, physical activity and exposure to nature are recognized as coping techniques that support mental health in older adulthood (Ejiri et al., 2021). A generally healthy lifestyle can support an individual's ability to manage stressful changes with resilience (Ejiri et al., 2021). Physical activity, especially outdoors, contributes to mental health in older adults and is a helpful coping technique (Ejiri et al., 2021). However, the researchers

concluded that exposure to nature may have been more effective than exercise as a protective factor within the study (Ejiri et al., 2021).

Effective coping supports resilience by reducing the negative impact of a stressful event on a person's well-being (Grych et al., 2015). Although most coping studies measure stress in terms of perceived stress level, Siwik et al. (2020) studied the effects of problem-focused coping, emotional processing, and emotional expression on both perceived and physiological stress. This study found that problem-focused coping was associated with adaptive differences in perceived and physiological stress (Siwik et al., 2020). Li et al. (2022b) found that both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping predicted a lower chance of depression following a stressful event. Effective coping, whether problem-focused, emotion-focused, or avoidant, helps reduce perceived stress and supports resilience (Poudel-Tandukar et al., 2020; Shafer et al., 2020; Siwik et al., 2020). Active coping, meaning-focused coping, and seeking social support promote resilience (Park et al., 2021).

Effective coping also supports resilience through appraising and responding to stressors. The resilience portfolio model claims that after appraising a situation as stressful, people choose to cope with that stressor in various ways depending on their unique portfolio of strengths and resources (Grych et al., 2015). Further, this model presents the idea that effective coping skills are developed over time by successfully managing minor stressors (Grych et al., 2015). Those who have developed healthy coping habits are better equipped to show resilience in the face of major negative stressors such as loss or violence (Grych et al., 2015). Coping skills are proposed to indirectly affect psychological health through the appraisal of and response to stressors (Grych et al., 2015).

Very little coping research is aimed at understanding how older adults cope with relocation. One study that came close was a review study in which Ross et al. (2022) reviewed research published between 1990 and 2021 regarding coping strategies that older adults used to manage the daily stressors of living at home. The research aimed to examine differences between coping in older adults with and without cognitive impairment and to gather information that could be helpful in supporting older adults to age in place (Ross et al., 2022). Only 16 studies were identified for and included in the review, pointing to the recognized need for further research focused on adults over 60 (Ross et al., 2022). Although the present study focused more on resilience than coping, the results contribute knowledge on the role of coping as it supports resilience through relocation in adults aged 65 and over.

### **Resilience Interventions**

Resilience interventions were not included in the qualitative design of the present study, but knowledge of existing resilience interventions is important to understanding the implications and possible future applications of this study. Many interventions show promise for use in supporting resilience for relocating older adults, but no existing interventions have been designed for or tested in relocating older adults. Emotional intelligence is a strength that supports resilience through adaptive coping (Delhom et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence is one of the skills represented by the self-regulation strengths category of the resilience portfolio model. Emotional intelligence involves skills that allow people to use information gained from emotions (Delhom et al., 2020). This encourages the use of adaptive coping to deal with life stressors, which, in turn, promotes resilience (Delhom et al., 2020). Delhom et al. (2020) found that an intervention designed to raise emotional intelligence in older adults increased adaptive coping and personal resilience. This study was replicated by the same authors in 2022 when Delhom et

al. (2022) discovered that an intervention aimed at increasing the emotional intelligence of older adults supported the use of adaptive coping skills such as positive reappraisal, seeking social support, and problem-solving, which in turn enhanced individual resilience.

Simple interventions focused on art or storytelling may be effective in encouraging resilience in older adults. Reed et al. (2020) suggest that interventions centered around creative arts therapy could help promote resilience in healthcare professionals by allowing them to reconstruct meaning through transformative methods. This reconstruction of meaning through art is proposed to support coping skills and social support, but it was not tested in the older adult population (Reed et al., 2020). One case study tested an intervention in which a small group of older adults met weekly to tell stories from their lives (Mager, 2019). In the group sessions, each member was encouraged to share a 15-minute personal story related to specific issues (Mager, 2019). The other group members were asked to listen without offering advice or opinions (Mager, 2019). Notably, each group session opened with a guided relaxation exercise and ended with a simple gratitude exercise (Mager, 2019). Happiness and resilience scores increased slightly following the intervention, but the finding was not statistically significant (Mager, 2019). Mager et al. (2019) concluded that the results might have shown statistical significance if the study design and sample size had been more powerful. Mager's (2019) study showed the potential for simple resilience-building interventions, such as storytelling, specific to older adults. The basic premise of a storytelling intervention integrates well with the category of meaning-making in the resilience portfolio model (Grych et al., 2015) and with the process of reflection and meaning-making in pursuit of ego integrity (Erikson, 1950).

One promising resilience intervention is the RISE (resilience, integration, self-awareness, engagement) yoga-based retreat intervention (Reeves et al., 2022). A qualitative study was



conducted with 17 adult professionals who attended the 5-day RISE retreat to combat the high stress of their work environments (Reeves et al., 2022). The participants were interviewed three months after the intervention (Reeves et al., 2022). All participants perceived the effects of the RISE intervention to be beneficial to their psychological health and to their workplace interactions (Reeves et al., 2022). Among other benefits, the intervention resulted in higher resilience to stress and better emotion regulation (Reeves et al., 2022). This intervention supported resilience by highlighting coping skills, individual strengths, and social resources that could be used to successfully overcome daily challenges (Reeves et al., 2022). The qualitative data upheld a previous quantitative study that identified increased resilience measures in participants following the RISE intervention (Dyer et al., 2020; Reeves et al., 2022). The RISE intervention offers promise in building resilience in adults by building coping skills and highlighting existing strengths and resources, but the intervention was aimed at and tested among working professionals rather than older adults. The effects of the RISE intervention on resilience in recently relocated older adults are still untested.

Resilience interventions may be most effective when they are designed to strengthen existing strengths and resources, such as those listed in the resilience portfolio model. Tuck et al. (2022) systematically reviewed resilience interventions aimed at college students. This review was performed within the context of the resilience portfolio or poly-strengths theory (Tuck et al., 2022). The review study found that interventions focused on mindfulness, humor, acceptance, exercise, fun or meaningful activities, and social connection were the most effective, which supported the poly-strengths theory (Tuck et al., 2022). However, the studied population was mostly aged 25 or younger, and further study is needed to determine whether the same results would apply to older adults. A qualitative study designed to study adversity and resilience in

Somali refugees living in San Diego found that resilience was supported by religious faith, meaning-making, and a sense of community (Terrana et al., 2022). The results of this study suggested that resilience interventions for relocated refugees should focus on existing supports and strengths rather than individual coping skills (Terrana et al., 2022). The present study produced a rich description of the experience of resilience through relocation to independent living situations in older adulthood. The knowledge gained in this study may be helpful to inform future resilience interventions aimed at supporting resilience in older adults facing relocation.

### **Biblical Foundations of the Study**

The current study is deeply rooted in respect for biblical and spiritual influence. Spirituality, religiosity, and spiritual coping have already been addressed as they relate to meaning-making, a strength which supports resilience. This section goes further to detail the specific biblical concepts that underlie the present study.

#### **Older Adults as a Source of Wisdom**

The Bible presents older adults as being a valuable source of knowledge and wisdom (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Proverbs 16:31; Job 12:12; Psalm 71:18, Psalm 92:14, Job 32:7, Titus 2:3, and Proverbs 23:22). Older adults should be respected and honored by younger generations (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Leviticus 19:32; Ephesians 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:1). First Peter 5:1-5 (*ESV*, 2001/2016) situates the idea of generational interaction within a biblical context. According to this passage, older people should guide and mentor younger people and live as examples that can be followed (*ESV*, 2001/2016, 1 Peter 5:1-5). Young people are to respect older people, and all generations are to avoid pride and selfishness (*ESV*, 2001/2016, 1 Peter 5:1-5). In other words, all generations should learn from each other and work together. This concept is somewhat contradictory to the youth-centered Western culture. Subtle and blatant ageism is common in

popular media such as television and movies, with older adults often being portrayed as forgetful, frail, grouchy, and disconnected. The Western youth-centered attitude is reflected in the lack of current research regarding resilience in older adulthood. The current study focused on the older adult population with the goal of gaining wisdom about resilience through relocation, which can be shared with others and used to support relocating older adults.

### **Biblical Examples of Resilience in Relocation**

The Bible may not speak directly to resilience, but similar constructs can be found.

Steadfastness, for example, is presented in Scripture as a positive outcome of enduring difficulty:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (*ESV*, 2001/2016, James 1:2-4)

In 2 Thessalonians 3:5 (*ESV*, 2001/2016), steadfastness is recognized as a characteristic of Christlikeness, which is the highest aim of Christians.

Further, the construct of resilience is demonstrated in the narratives of characters presented throughout the Bible. Several biblical characters exhibited resilience within the context of relocation. These narratives do not provide extensive details about the resilience process, but they all demonstrate the outcome of resilience, which is successful adjustment. Noah built an ark to save his family and all the animals from the destruction of the great flood (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Genesis 6:22). Noah's adjustment process after the flood was not perfect. He had at least one instance of overindulging in alcohol, which could be considered maladaptive coping (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Genesis 9:21; Moritz et al., 2018). But despite this issue, he was ultimately able to successfully lead his family to thrive in their new, unfamiliar environment (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Genesis 9).

After Abraham followed God's call to leave his home and relocate to an undisclosed location (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Genesis 12), he became rich (Genesis 13:2) and fathered the entire nation of Israel (Genesis 25). Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Genesis 37:28). He showed resilience in the face of traumatic relocation by working hard (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Genesis 39: 5) and becoming an influential leader in his new country, eventually saving his family from a great famine (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Genesis 45). Ruth chose to relocate when she followed Naomi to her hometown (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Ruth 1). She provided for her mother-in-law's physical needs and eventually married and built a family (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Ruth 4). Rahab experienced the destruction of her city, Jericho (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Joshua 6:23), and successfully adapted to the Israelite culture (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Joshua 6:25). Esther was forced to relocate to the palace because of her beauty (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Esther 2). She was able to win the king's heart and position herself in power to save her people, the Israelites, from their enemies (*ESV*, 2001/2016, Esther 8). These stories do not specify many practical factors that may have supported individual resilience, but faith and reliance on God are central themes of every story. The current study revealed that the meaning-making framework provided by belief in God, religion, or spirituality is an important support for resilience through relocation in older adulthood for some people.

### **Summary**

While resilience literature is advancing, study in the older adult age group still needs to be done. A review of current literature demonstrated the need for further study examining resilience in older adulthood, specifically in the context of relocation. Relocation is a common stressor in older adulthood and a growing issue in the older adult population (Li et al., 2022a). Although many older adults relocate to be closer to family members, reduce housing costs, and

seek better neighborhoods, most current research on relocation in older adulthood focuses on relocation to long-term care. Resilience through relocation in older adulthood is important because resilience leads to well-being (Phillips et al., 2016), quality of life (Matérne et al., 2022), physical health (Banyard et al., 2017), and even longevity (Lee et al., 2019). Some resilience interventions show promise, and initial results suggest that interventions should support and build strengths and supports (Tuck et al., 2022). Further study could support creating and implementing a resilience intervention designed for older adults who are relocating.

Many examples of resilience through relocation are present in Scripture. Biblically, older adults are recognized as holders of wisdom (*ESV*, Proverbs 16:31). Therefore, learning more about how older adults experience resilience is valuable. The literature review presented in this chapter presented three literature gaps that the current study will address. First, older adults are an understudied population within the resilience literature. Second, resilience through relocation is an understudied phenomenon. Third, the narrow array of studies on resilience and relocation within an older adult population has focused on long-term care rather than independent living situations. The current study addressed these literature gaps by studying the phenomenon of resilience through relocation to an independent living situation in the stage of older adulthood.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

### Overview

This chapter details the interpretative phenomenological analysis method used to explore the lived experience of resilience and its relationship to strengths and resources during relocation in older adulthood. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is a qualitative method that is gaining popularity in psychology research (Smith et al., 2022). It is especially useful for psychology research because it was developed to fit the specific experiential research needs of the psychology field (Smith et al., 2022). This qualitative approach is used to draw out a close description of a lived, experiential phenomenon while carefully acknowledging the interpretation of the researcher (Smith et al., 2022). In the present study, the interpretative phenomenological analysis method provided a rich description and conscientious interpretation of resilience through relocation in older adulthood. The data for the present study was gathered through semi-structured interviews with a small, homogeneous sample of six adults aged 65 or older who relocated to an independent living situation within the last three years. All of the individuals who agreed to participate in this study were female. Each participant identified as resilient and reported fair to good health. Participants were recruited in and around Shelbyville, Indiana, via social media, newspaper, and paper advertisements. The interviews were audio recorded, and a verbatim transcript was created for use during the analysis process.

The study and analysis were structured to meet Smith et al.'s (2022) suggested criteria for a high-quality, interpretative phenomenological analysis. These criteria include a sustained focus on a particular aspect of the phenomenon, rich data presented, a measure of prevalence to assess the thematic structure, carefully elaborated themes, complex interpretative engagement, and illustrated data analysis steps in the final write-up (Smith et al., 2022). The study's

trustworthiness was supported by attending to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability for qualitative studies, as described by Creswell and Poth (2017). Data analysis included data immersion, exploratory noting, experiential statements, personal experiential themes, case-by-case analysis, and group experiential themes. The interpretative phenomenological method fulfilled the purpose of the study by providing a rich, close description and conscientious interpretation of the phenomenon, which was resilience through relocation in older adulthood.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: How do older adults who have recently (within three years) relocated describe resilience after relocation?

RQ2: How do recently relocated older adults describe strengths and resources that contributed to experiencing resilience surrounding a move?

### **Research Design**

#### **Phenomenology**

The best qualitative approach to address the above research questions is Phenomenology. Phenomenology is one of several common qualitative approaches to research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is primarily concerned with deeply exploring a shared experience among individuals to focus on the essence of that experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is less concerned with objective reality and more with the human perception of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Within the category of phenomenological research, most phenomenological methods can be placed into two categories: descriptive phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology is primarily concerned with describing an experienced phenomenon and uncovering the essence of the phenomenon (Etough & Smith, 2017). The three most

influential researchers within descriptive phenomenology are Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre. Heidegger introduced the idea that phenomenological research must be hermeneutic, meaning that someone must interpret the studied phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). Husserl's transcendental phenomenology focused heavily on the researcher's responsibility to "bracket" oneself out of the studied phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). Merleau-Ponty focused on the embodied nature of the relationship between humans and the world and recognized that each human has a unique perspective of phenomena that cannot be perfectly understood or replicated by another human being (Smith et al., 2022). Sartre focused his phenomenological studies on the social relationships of his participants (Smith et al., 2022). Some researchers do not move beyond the relatively pure practice of descriptive phenomenology, but many modern researchers are embracing methods that include some element of interpretation within the repertoire of phenomenological methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Many researchers go beyond descriptive phenomenology, and their approaches can be categorized as hermeneutic, or interpretative, phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with describing and interpreting a lived experience while respecting the interpretation of the participant and researcher (Etough & Smith, 2017). Although hermeneutics was originally used to study texts, such as the Bible, Schleiermacher reinterpreted hermeneutics in the 1900s to include the individuality of the researcher conducting an interpretative study (Smith et al., 2022). Later, Heidegger introduced the idea that phenomenological research must be hermeneutic, meaning that someone must interpret the studied phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). Gadamer built on the concept of hermeneutic phenomenology by focusing on the mutual influence of the interpretation and the phenomenon during the research process (Smith et al., 2022). He



recommended maintaining an attitude of openness throughout the research process (Smith et al., 2022). The foundation of hermeneutic phenomenology is the hermeneutic circle, which is a hermeneutic way of thinking that “circles” between the parts and the whole repeatedly, allowing the parts and the whole to influence one another (Smith et al., 2022).

### **Smith’s Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Phenomenological methods and approaches can vary somewhat within the guidelines of phenomenology. These variances are often specific to the study or the researcher. One approach gaining popularity within psychology research is the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method promoted by Smith et al. (2022). Interpretative phenomenology has existed since 1996 but has become increasingly popular over the last ten years (Smith et al., 2022). The IPA method was developed for the experiential research needs of the psychology field (Smith et al., 2022). This method includes the basic tenets of phenomenological research and recognizes the importance of the researcher’s interpretation during data analysis. A researcher using the IPA method should attempt to avoid bias by maintaining self-awareness throughout the study and data analysis, utilizing a sustained focus on the phenomenon as experienced by the participant before moving into interpretation. IPA is formed upon three fundamental principles. First, the research focuses on the phenomenon, the participant’s experience. Second, the researcher engages intensely with the participants’ descriptions of the phenomenon through interpretation. Third, the researcher examines each participant’s description of the phenomenon in detail. The fundamental principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis are based on phenomenological philosophy, hermeneutic theory, and ideography. Phenomenological philosophy is primarily concerned with describing the essence of a lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hermeneutic theory acknowledges the importance of the human interpretation of a

description (Smith et al., 2022). Idiography is focused on the specific meaning of a person's experience, which is uncovered through a detailed examination of one individual's experience (Etough & Smith, 2017).

The IPA method embraces the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is a research approach that "circles" between the parts and the whole repeatedly, allowing the parts and the whole to influence each other (Smith et al., 2022). It also involves a double hermeneutic, meaning the researcher interprets the participant as the participant interprets the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). An idiographic approach is focused on detail and depth of analysis rather than on generalization to a large population (Smith et al., 2022). Although psychology research typically aims to apply knowledge to larger populations, idiographic research dives deeply into the details of an experiential phenomenon within a particular context to gather knowledge (Smith et al., 2022). It develops generalizations cautiously (Smith et al., 2022). Rather than dealing with group averages, like inferential statistics or quantitative research, idiographic research often focuses on a single case study (Smith et al., 2022). The profoundly detailed information from idiographic research can be used to inform and give direction to broader studies (Smith et al., 2022). The IPA method applies an idiographic focus to the study data (Smith et al., 2022). Because of the time commitment required for idiographic study, Smith et al. (2022) recommend small sample sizes and advocate studies focused on a single participant. This small focus can significantly contribute to psychology by connecting the IPA results with existing psychology research (Smith et al., 2022).

The primary research questions of an IPA study should be open questions focused on the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). As information emerges, research questions may be reworked during the data analysis phase (Smith et al., 2022).

Secondary, theory-driven questions can be addressed at the interpretative stage to evaluate existing theories and models (Smith et al., 2022). Notably, a secondary research question engages with a theory but does not test it (Smith et al., 2022). For example, the data analysis of the current study revealed some strengths and resources similar to those described in Grych et al.'s (2015) resilience portfolio model. If those similarities had been a bit stronger, a secondary research question such as the following could have been addressed: To what extent are the strengths and resources listed in the resilience portfolio model perceived as supportive of resilience by older adults who have recently relocated? This secondary research question would have only been addressed within the interpretative stage at the end of the data analysis because the focus of the study should remain on the phenomenon as it was experienced and understood by the participants.

Studies using the IPA method typically include samples of 1-30 participants. Smith recommends that samples be on the small end of that spectrum due to the detailed idiographic focus required within the IPA method (Etough & Smith, 2017). Further, the sample for an IPA study should be as homogenous as possible (Etough & Smith, 2017). Smith recommends choosing a sample size with careful consideration to factors such as practicality, richness of data, and analysis method, and he posits that IPA studies can be effective and rigorous even with only one participant (Etough & Smith, 2017). Smith et al. (2022) recommend a sample size of three for undergraduate research, five for Master's-level research, and six to ten for doctoral research. The present study began with a sample size of six participants, and data collection remained open until I was satisfied that the first six interviews yielded rich data that were sufficient for the study. This design aligned with Smith's recommended sample size of 6-10 participants for a doctoral-level dissertation study (Etough & Smith, 2017).

The semi-structured interview is the preferred data collection method for IPA studies because it offers flexibility to ensure rich data collection (Etough & Smith, 2017). Within the interview process, the participant is the experiential expert, and the researcher is the sensitive and empathic enabler (Etough & Smith, 2017). Smith et al. (2022) recommend using an interview guide of six to ten open questions with predetermined prompts to elicit rich data. These questions should result in 45- to 90-minute interviews, which should be conducted in a quiet, comfortable environment (Smith et al., 2022). It is crucial for the researcher to establish rapport with the participant and to conduct the interview attentively (Smith et al., 2022). Attentive listening usually involves spontaneous probing of interesting or important statements (Smith et al., 2022). The interview guide should be treated as a guideline rather than as a rigid structure during the interview (Smith et al., 2022). Truth is not the goal; instead, the goal is to uncover the meaning of the phenomenon as it was experienced (Smith et al., 2022).

Data analysis for the IPA method is inductive, which means it begins with the data and moves upward rather than beginning with a preconceived idea (Etough & Smith, 2017). It is also interrogative, meaning it can engage with mainstream constructs in psychology research (Etough & Smith, 2017). Although IPA research is more of an approach than a step-by-step process, Smith et al. (2017) have recommended a series of steps for researchers using the IPA method for the first time. During the data analysis, the researcher distills the data into the most salient and understandable themes supported by quotations directly from the participants. The analysis process involves deep engagement with the detailed data so the researcher can filter out the noise, so to speak, and find the heart of the experienced phenomenon.

Phenomenology is an appropriate method for the current study because the questions center around a deeper understanding of the role of resilience in the shared lived experience

(relocation) of a group of individuals (older adults) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach will allow a glimpse into the essence of resilience through relocation in older adulthood (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study of resilience through relocation in older adulthood lends itself to a phenomenological approach better than other approaches such as narrative research, grounded theory, or ethnography. Grounded theory would be appropriate if a researcher intended to do a more comprehensive study of the issue intending to develop a theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative research would be more appropriate if the researcher wished to explore a larger picture of a person's life, but it is not appropriate for the study of one experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethnography would be more appropriate if the study were meant to understand resilience within a broader cultural context, but it is not the best method for the current study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A quantitative approach to the current study could be informative. Still, the lack of research directed at resilience through relocation in older adulthood indicates the need for a qualitative study to understand the phenomenon better.

Compared to the strict parameters of quantitative research methods, qualitative research allows human experience to be entwined in the data collection process. Since psychology studies humanity, including the human experience in the data collection process makes sense. Phenomenology integrates the human experience and seeks to understand and describe it fully. Although interpretive frameworks guide qualitative research, it is also an open-ended process (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 16). The qualitative research methodology can be tuned and adjusted throughout the research process to fit the results best (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 16). Adjustments should always be made thoughtfully, but the open-endedness of qualitative research can allow the inclusion of essential data that could be lost in more structured studies. Philosophical assumptions can guide the outcome of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth,

2018, p. 18). Because qualitative research allows space for adjustments throughout the process, potential problems in the study can be identified and addressed in real-time. This is a great advantage, as flaws can be addressed to make the research study more effective. Creativity is vital in qualitative data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 161). There is room for creativity and personality in every aspect of qualitative research, and creativity is encouraged (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 161). This creativity could assist older adults in opening up and providing deeper data for the study. The semi-structured interview questions and possible prompts will provide structure to allow creativity within the focused parameters of the study.

A phenomenological approach to this topic will offer insight that can be applied to interventions aimed at assisting older adults with learning and implementing coping skills to assist with stressors such as relocation. A meaningful phenomenological study is grounded within a theoretical and philosophical framework rather than a specific methodology (Smith et al., 2022). In other words, the approach is more important than the method. The interpretative phenomenological analysis approach fulfilled the purpose of this study by providing a rich, close description and a careful interpretation of the phenomenon, which was the experience of resilience through relocation in older adulthood.

### **Participants**

A criterion sample of at least six adults aged 65 and over was needed for this study. Participants must be primarily English-speaking to support the clarity of interview data. Participants must also report having relocated to an independent living situation within the past three years to be included in the study. The adjustment period for older adults following a move seems to take an indeterminate amount of time. The initial plan was to interview participants within six months of relocation so the experience would be fresh in their memories, but that time

frame was too short, and IRB approval was gained to extend the timeframe of relocation to three years. This change was acceptable within the interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology. The IPA method does not require a specific time frame between an event and data collection as long as the participants are willing and able to provide vivid, detailed accounts of their experiences (Smith et al., 2022). The change was also supported by previous empirical studies. Lan et al. (2020) found that nursing home residents go through up to five stages of adjustment after relocation, which takes an undetermined amount of time. Also, according to Johnson and Bibbo (2014), adjustment to the relocation takes several months for older adults; therefore, interviewing after the adjustment process is fully completed makes sense.

The time between relocation and interviews or assessment for similar studies varies wildly from at least two weeks (Koppitz et al., 2017) to several years (Fitzpatrick & Tzouvara, 2018; O'Neill et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2020). Further, most resilience scales are not designed to be time-specific. This is in contrast to stress scales, which usually specify a time frame such as one month or one year. Since this is a resilience study, the richness of the interview data is more important than maintaining a narrow scope of time. Three years was the chosen limit for the window of relocation because the COVID shutdowns began ending about three years before this study in June 2020. COVID was an event that widely impacted society. Many people seem to use COVID as a mark in time. When people try to recall life events, they tend to use the COVID shutdowns as a point of orientation that clearly marks the point between “before” and “after.” For research purposes, those who have moved within the last three years have experienced relocation in a post-COVID society.

In this study, an independent living situation includes any residence in which the individual does not receive daily support for activities of daily living such as dressing and

grooming (van der Pers et al., 2018). Participants must report fair, good, or very good general mental and physical health to move ahead to the interview phase. The requirement of health was intended to keep the focus of the study on the stressor of relocation instead of becoming sidetracked by health challenges such as injury or illness. Even if significant life changes such as debilitating injury or serious health events such as heart attack or stroke caused the individual to relocate, major life events beyond relocation could cause outside stressors and affect an individual's experience of resilience during relocation. Those with minor health changes were not excluded, but participants who reported poor health were excluded from the study. This was assessed using a self-report, Likert-based question on the eligibility survey (See Appendix B). Those who reported a three, four, or five on the Likert scale (1 was very poor health and 5 was very good health) were accepted into the study. Participants must also report resilience in the eligibility survey because this study focused on the experience of resilience through relocation. The survey question included the study definition of resilience and ask participants to report the extent of resilience experienced in their recent relocation. Those who report a three, four, or five on the Likert scale were accepted into the study. Some people may experience resilience without identifying it as resilience, but this study focused on those who perceived themselves as having experienced resilience to facilitate rich data collection. A demographic survey (See Appendix C) gathered other demographic information to support the transferability of the results, including gender, race, marital status, education level, and job status. Homogeneity of experience, age, and location in the sample was desirable to support the quality of this interpretative phenomenological analysis. However, some diversity of gender, race, marital status, education level, and job status was attained by employing diverse recruitment methods, and that diversity supports the transferability of the results.



Recruitment was conducted through Facebook, newspaper ads, and paper ads. Due to the need for in-person interviews, the recruitment efforts were focused on Shelbyville, Indiana, and the surrounding area. I posted a recruitment ad to my personal Facebook and requested permission to post the ad on the pages that local seniors may access, such as Shelby Senior Services, Inc., Seniors Helping Seniors In-Home Care, McKay Manor, Shelby County Post, and the Shelbyville News. Unfortunately, that generated no results. A short recruitment ad was submitted to the local newspaper, *Shelbyville News*. A reporter picked up the story and published a human-interest story in the newspaper with the recruitment details. Also, a paper flyer was posted in the Shelbyville Public Library and at a local senior center. The diverse recruitment methods were designed to generate some diversity within the desired homogeneous sample. For example, those on the younger end of the age range may be more likely to respond to social media ads, while those who have completed higher levels of education may be more likely to respond to the newspaper ad. Further, the diverse recruitment methods were designed to allow the sample to be recruited quickly.

Though a sample size of six is small, it fits within the recommended parameter of 6-10 participants for an IPA dissertation study (Smith et al., 2022). Smith's (2022) recommended sample size has been exemplified in recent precedent. Smith et al. (2022) recommend using sample sizes as small as one for thorough, rich analysis. However, sample sizes of six to ten participants are more common for dissertation-type studies (Smith et al., 2022). For the current study, a sample size of six was large enough to reveal rich data, diverse enough to be generalizable, and small enough to apply ideographic focus to each case.

### **Study Procedures**

## **Recruitment**

Before beginning data collection, the research proposal was submitted to the Internal Review Board to obtain permission for the study. After permission was granted, a sample of six adults who meet the inclusion criteria was contacted to schedule interviews. Participants were recruited through social media, word-of-mouth, and newspaper ads as detailed in the previous section. All recruitment advertisements included my Google Voice phone number and email address. Respondents were asked to complete a brief survey over the phone to determine eligibility. The eligibility surveys (see Appendix B) completed over the phone were recorded in a password-protected Microsoft Word document. The option to complete the eligibility survey over the phone rather than through an online survey service supported diversity within the sample. It allowed those who are not comfortable with an online survey format to participate in the study. The first six respondents who met the inclusion criteria were contacted, and an in-person interview was scheduled. Active recruitment continued for seven weeks before data collection was closed.

The rationale for closing data collection was threefold. First, recruitment exhausted within the current study parameters. The sample criteria had already been expanded to include participants who had moved within three years of the study, rather than six months, and expanding the study further was undesirable. Much of the local aging community in Shelbyville, Indiana seems to age in place with various supports until independence is no longer an option. Of the six study participants, most were recruited through word-of-mouth and networking. Three were referred to the study through church and personal acquaintances, two responded because of an article in the local newspaper, and one was referred by another participant. The flyers and social media ads prompted no response.

Second, a sample size of six participants was the acceptable minimum number in the study design, and all six initial interviews yielded rich data. Each of the participants was able to relate her experience of resilience through relocation vividly in the interviews.

Third, interpretative phenomenological analyses are designed for homogeneous, small samples, with sample sizes as small as one to maximize the richness and thoroughness of analysis (Smith et al., 2022). Studies with fewer than 10 participants can better present each set of Personal Experiential Themes and the Group Experiential Themes rather than focusing mainly on the Group Experiential Themes (Smith et al., 2022). Therefore, a sample size of six is a good fit for interpretative phenomenological analysis. No compensation was promised or provided for participation in this study.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Each semi-structured interview began with introductions and a brief conversation to describe the project and build rapport. An informed consent document (see Appendix F) was explained by the interviewer and signed by the interviewee. Each question on the interview guide (see Appendix A) was asked during the interview, and the interviewer added clarifying questions as needed. The interviews were audio-recorded, and a verbatim transcript was created for data analysis.

Precautions were taken throughout data collection and analysis to ensure data security and participant confidentiality. First, the eligibility survey (see Appendix B) was administered verbally over the phone, and the collected information was stored on a password-protected laptop. Second, the semi-structured interviews took place in a semi-private location at the Shelby County Public Library where others could not easily overhear or at participants' homes. Five of the six interviews took place in the participants' homes at their request. The interviews were

audio-recorded using the Voice Memos app on the researcher's laptop and phone, and the recording and backup recording were secured with password-protection. Third, verbatim transcripts were created using Sonix, a secure AI transcription service, and were then transferred to password-protected Microsoft Word files. Fourth, each participant was assigned a pseudonym, which was used in all documentation following initial data collection. Fifth, all data and audio recordings will be deleted immediately following the completion of this study or kept on a password-protected computer. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted. Sixth, the informed consent documents (see Appendix F) were printed and physically signed by participants. These documents will be stored in a secure lock box until the study has ended and will then be destroyed.

### **Instrumentation and Measurement**

#### **Eligibility and Demographic Surveys**

As described above, eligibility for the study was determined by administering a short eligibility survey (see Appendix B) over the phone. Eligible participants were asked to schedule an in-person interviews, and each participant completed a short demographic survey (see Appendix C) at the time of the interview. That information was compiled and presented during data analysis. However, no identifying information, such as names or locations, was included in the analysis. Although anonymity was assured through pseudonyms, demographic information was essential to the research process. The final research report included basic demographic information for the study sample, including, gender, marital status, education level, and job status to offer clarity regarding the type of sample studied. This supported the generalizability or transferability of the study results. Providing demographic information within the study offered a layer of accuracy and information that created richness and added value to the study's meaning.

With this rationale in mind, demographic information was collected and reported to inform the transferability of this study.

### **Semi-Structured Interview Consent and Guide**

Participants were provided with three options for the in-person interview location: the local library, the local YMCA, or the participant's home. Five participants chose to be interviewed at home, and one chose the local library. Each interview began with introductions and a brief, unscripted conversation to describe the research process and build rapport. A script could have hindered rapport, which is essential to IPA data collection (Smith et al., 2022). Therefore, following introductions, I offered a simple overview of the interview process and answered any participant questions without a script. The interviewees were asked to read and sign an informed consent document (see Appendix F) and complete a paper demographic survey (see Appendix C) before the recorded interview begins. Each participant was informed that pseudonyms would be used to protect confidentiality but that some verbatim quotes would appear in the final study, meaning absolute confidentiality could not be guaranteed. Each interview was recorded using Apple Voice Memos on a laptop (primary recording) and a phone (backup recording). To preserve participant anonymity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to be used in transcripts and all research records. The primary recordings were transcribed into verbatim transcripts using Sonix and checked for accuracy, and identifying information was changed or omitted to protect confidentiality. Microsoft Word was used for the data analysis process.

An Interview Guide (see Appendix A) guided each semi-structured interview. The Interview Guide was a set of six predetermined, open questions, and clarifying or supplemental questions were included as needed. Most of the questions were designed with predetermined

possible prompts that could be used to elicit rich data. The interview guide was created to align with IPA data collection guidelines (Smith et al., 2022). The open questions include evaluative, narrative, descriptive, and comparative questions related to the experience of resilience through relocation (Smith et al., 2022). Each interview question was open-ended, and the guide was carefully designed to avoid manipulative, over-empathic, or leading questions (Smith et al., 2022). The Interview Guide was followed with each participant to collect information that could be used to answer the study research questions. As Smith et al. (2022) outlined, the Interview Guide contained six questions, which supported an interview length of 30 minutes to one hour. This interview length was enough to reveal rich data without inducing fatigue.

Further, the interview questions were structured to be slightly repetitive to elicit reflective, rich, and honest answers. Per phenomenological philosophy, I explored all relevant data during the interview and tried to avoid interrupting the participants, who are the experts on their experience of resilience during relocation (Smith et al., 2022). The positive focus of the interview questions was designed to empower participants to become more self-aware of their resilience strengths and resources. The interview guide (see Appendix A) was reassessed following the first interview as part of the iterative process and no changes were made (Smith et al., 2022).

Psychological or emotional risks to the participants were minimized by maintaining a positive focus on resilience and the personal strengths and resources that supported that resilience through the participants' recent relocation. It was expected that participants would benefit from the self-reflection involved in the interview process. This self-reflection was paired with a focus on the positive aspects of resilience that were experienced during relocation. The risk-benefit ratio of this study was heavily in the participants' favor. This study design involved

very minimal information and psychological risk. Further, it is possible that there were benefits for the participants who engaged in self-reflection, a focus on positives, and meaning-making through the semi-structured interview process.

### **Qualitative Validity**

Validity is essential when conducting qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, validity is the level of trustworthiness or goodness that a study represents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study will support validity by promoting credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Further, this study was structured to be a high-quality interpretative phenomenological analysis according to the evaluative criteria presented by Etough and Smith (2017).

This study included some specific validation strategies in the research process. Credibility is similar to internal validation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the current study, credibility was supported by using multiple data sources (participants) to build a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Further, these data sources were triangulated with the researcher's perspective and current psychological research regarding relocation and resilience in older adulthood during the interpretative phase following data analysis.

Transferability is similar to external validation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transferability is supported in qualitative research by presenting a thick, detailed description of the setting or participants being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This thick description lets the reader decide whether the study's results could transfer to other settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The idiographic approach to the current study generated detailed descriptions and supported transferability. The demographic information gathered and presented also supported

transferability, as it informed the readers of the demographic characteristics represented by the study participants.

Dependability and reliability are similar concepts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Dependability involves the stability of the data over time and conditions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study's reliability, or dependability, were enhanced by using primary and back-up audio recordings. The transcription process described previously also promoted reliability. Reliability was supported in this study through audio recordings and written, verbatim transcription. Careful record-keeping also promoted dependability.

Confirmability, similar to objectivity, was supported by making an audit trail and conducting a miniature audit (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Confirmability centers around establishing the value of the study data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An audit trail is a trail of evidence from data collection to the final report (Smith et al., 2022). The audit trail was achieved through careful record-keeping and recorded notes throughout the analysis process. This audit trail was clear enough for a researcher not connected with the study to follow. Even though a different researcher may interpret the data from a different perspective and come to a different conclusion, the audit trail served as a justification that my data analysis was a credible and logical conclusion from the collected data (Smith et al., 2022). Further, a miniature independent audit was conducted by the dissertation chair following analysis of the first transcript (Smith et al., 2022). The chair reviewed my analysis (steps one through five) of the first transcript to ensure that the results were plausible and the data was retrievable before the analysis process continued to the remaining transcripts. The dissertation chair randomly selected one personal experiential theme from the first transcript and followed the trail of evidence for that personal experiential theme backward to the original transcript to ensure that the analysis was credible and



logical. The miniature independent audit confirmed that the audit trail was clear, the data was retrievable, and that other researchers could potentially repeat the results (Smith et al., 2022). The audit trail and miniature independent audit were alternative measures to inter-rater reliability (Smith et al., 2022). Rather than trying to reach a consensus between researchers or establish one ultimate measure of truth, the audit trail and miniature audit established the extent to which the data analysis was systematic, transparent, and credible (Smith et al., 2022).

Although no specific evaluation rubric has been accepted for IPA, Smith has presented some evaluative criteria for recognizing a high-quality IPA study (Etough & Smith, 2017). First, a sustained focus should be on a particular aspect of the experienced phenomenon. In this case, the sustained focus was on the aspect of resilience and the strengths and resources that supported it. Second, rich data should be presented from experience. Third, a measure of prevalence should be used to assess the thematic structure. Fourth, the themes should be carefully elaborated. Fifth, the researcher should demonstrate a complex interpretive engagement with the material. Each data analysis step should be illustrated in the final write-up (Smith et al., 2022). Each of these evaluative criteria were considered during the data analysis and interpretative phases of this study.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Verbatim Transcript**

After the demographic information was analyzed and charted, the focus turned to the data collected via interview. Sonix, an AI transcription service, was used to create verbatim transcripts of each interview, which were exported to Microsoft Word documents for analysis. However, an automatic rendering can have errors, so the transcripts provided by Sonix were checked manually using the primary recording to ensure accuracy. The manual comparison

between the written verbatims and the recorded interviews served as the first step of data analysis, which was familiarization. Security precautions were taken to ensure privacy for the participants. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, which was used on the transcripts and during analysis to protect privacy. Further, all transcripts and analysis notes were secured on a password-protected laptop and backed up securely in OneDrive, a password-protected, cloud-based service.

### **Analysis**

Data analysis for this study followed the interpretative phenomenological analysis methods suggested by Smith et al. (2022). Interpretative phenomenological analysis includes general phenomenological procedures like familiarization, memoing to create an audit trail, and thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each analysis step included the hermeneutic circle of moving between the parts and the whole for a grounded, clear interpretation (Smith et al., 2022). The present research followed the recommended data analysis steps (Smith et al., 2022).

Step one was data immersion (Smith et al., 2022). Data immersion was conducted by reviewing the interview data slowly and repeatedly while opening one's awareness for connections, minutia, and patterns in the data that may not have been immediately apparent (Smith et al., 2022). During data immersion, I began making exploratory notes in the margins of the transcript using Microsoft Word's "comments" feature.

Step two was exploratory noting (Smith et al., 2022). In this step, I continued to make exploratory notes and comments on the data transcripts. The goal of step two was engagement and close analysis rather than structure or results (Smith et al., 2022). According to Smith et al. (2022), the researcher's exploratory notes should be detailed, dense, and specific and focus on the participant's point of view. The process of exploratory noting was used to create an audit trail

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). The audit trail was used throughout the analysis process as a validation strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Exploratory noting was conceptualized as capturing the researcher's abstract thoughts during the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Those captured thoughts were further examined to guide analysis and add richness and validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using Word's comments feature to organize exploratory notes was helpful because comments could be attached to words, phrases, or transcript sections. Additionally, later comments were added to original comments as replies to preserve the record of my thoughts. Microsoft Word's comments feature also recorded the date and time of each comment, which helped create an audit trail.

Step three of data analysis was constructing experiential statements (Smith et al., 2022). In this step, the goal was to consolidate and crystalize my thoughts up to that point. During step three, I worked to reduce the volume of detail in the exploratory notes while retaining the complexity and remaining closely tied to the original transcript. This step had some interpretation and inferences of meaning, but the experiential statements remained closely tied to the participant's experience. A new document was created in Microsoft Word for this step, and each experiential statement included a related key phrase (direct quotation from the original transcript) with its page number from the transcript for reference.

Step four was searching for connections across experiential statements (Smith et al., 2022). This search involved looking at the experiential statements in random order and grouping them into connected clusters. To facilitate this step, each experiential statement was pasted into separate notes using the "Stickies" application, which simulates sticky notes. The experiential statements were then manipulated and grouped on the computer screen, like sticky paper notes on a tabletop.

Step five was naming the personal experiential themes and consolidating and organizing them in a table (Smith et al., 2022). Each cluster of experiential themes (from step four) was named and formatted into a table with related subthemes and supporting evidence. Each subtheme was supported by at least one experiential statement and its related key phrase with its page number from the original transcript. The table format created an evidence trail to support the interpretation of the data. The table was created in Microsoft Word, and each Personal Experiential Themes table was included in Chapter Four.

Step six was continuing the individual analysis of other cases (Smith et al., 2022). Steps one through five were completed on each transcript individually before I moved on to step seven to preserve the individual focus of data analysis. Before moving on to step seven, each participant had a file that included an original transcript with attached exploratory notes (comments), a document with experiential statements, and a completed table of personal experiential themes. Each document was clearly labeled for easy retrieval since the IPA method is designed to be an iterative or ever-evolving process.

Step seven was working with personal experiential themes to develop group experiential themes across cases (Smith et al., 2022). This step aimed to uncover both shared and unique features of the participants' experiences by examining the personal experiential themes. The group experiential themes were organized into a table with supporting personal experiential themes, supporting experiential statements, and supporting key phrases, each leading back to the original transcripts with pseudonyms and page numbers. This step was the interpretative synthesis of the interpretative analysis done on each case. Each group experiential theme and subtheme included supporting evidence from at least half (three) of the study participants. According to Smith et al. (2022), in studies with several participants, the results should be

presented in a way that represents an idiographic focus while maintaining clarity. The data analysis steps used in this study are not the only way to analyze data in an interpretative phenomenological analysis study. Smith et al. (2022) posit that interpretative phenomenological analysis is an approach more than a method. However, the seven analysis steps mentioned in this section follow Smith et al.'s (2022) recommendations for those attempting interpretative phenomenological analysis for the first time.

### **Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations**

#### **Delimitations**

Delimitations were established for the present study to ensure focused data collection and usable results. First, this study was restricted to the developmental stage of older adulthood. Erikson's (1950) psychosocial development theory identifies the final stage of development as comprising adults aged 65 until death. Within the older adult stage, Erikson (1950) theorized that the most crucial developmental crisis is ego integrity vs. despair. It was expected that those in the older adult age group may experience resilience differently than those in other developmental stages, and focusing only on older adults increased the homogeneity of the sample, which is critical in IPA studies (Smith et al., 2022).

Second, this study focused only on resilience experienced in the context of relocation from one independent living situation to another. This boundary was established by interviewing those recently relocated and excluding those reporting unstable health. The interview questions were also designed to maintain a focus on relocation-related resilience. For example, suppose information on resilience through the death of a spouse was revealed in the interview stage. In that case, it would be appreciated and acknowledged, but the participant would be prompted to

describe how that experienced resilience affected the experience of resilience through their recent relocation.

Third, the focus of the interview questions was deliberately pointed to positive factors surrounding resilience during relocation. Factors that detracted from resilience, such as maladaptive coping strategies or low socioeconomic status, could have emerged from the interviews, and all data was mentioned in the final report. However, the questions were structured to explore the positive aspects of resilience. The analysis and report focused on supportive factors for resilience through relocation.

Fourth, this study focused on a small, homogeneous criterion sample. This smaller sample size allowed a richer and more efficient study. The goal of interpretative phenomenological analysis is to dive deeply into each participant's unique experience rather than to gather data from many individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 158). Small sample sizes make deep, rich data collection possible. In this study, the sample consisted of six participants who had experienced the same phenomenon, resilience through recent relocation.

### **Assumptions**

This study was created with some assumptions in place. First, this study assumed that a qualitative approach was more appropriate than a quantitative approach because of the complexity of resilience through relocation in older adulthood. One of the benefits of qualitative research was that it allowed room to fully observe the details of what happened. Diving into detail can reveal contextual influences that quantitative research may not note. The qualitative research approach created space to integrate and generalize details that have been discarded as extraneous in a quantitative context. Complex data was incorporated into the general conclusions of this qualitative research using coding, themes, and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.

181). Rather than only allowing a narrow data window for analysis, as in quantitative research, qualitative research has space for complex data. Humans are complex creatures, and qualitative research can present that complexity well.

Second, this study assumes the importance of contextual influences for the participants and the researcher. Contextual influences can come in many forms. A person's social position, past involvement, and principles can influence context (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). The contextual influences of the researcher and participants should be identified to have a clear axiological view of the research project. The researcher's contextual influences were addressed through bracketing and reflection, and the participants' contextual influences were addressed throughout data gathering, analysis, and presentation of the results.

Third, some biblical concepts, such as the wisdom of age, were relevant to the current study's assumptions. The Bible (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2016/2001) correlates aging with wisdom (Job 12:12) and mentorship (Psalm 71:18; Titus 2:3). The present study was structured with the assumption that many older adults have wisdom regarding resilience and can articulate that wisdom in an informative manner. This assumption aligns well with the philosophy of phenomenology, which regards the participants as experts on the study phenomena. The participants were treated as experts on the phenomenon of resilience through relocation in older adulthood because they experienced it personally.

### **Limitations**

Every scientific study is limited in some way, and engaging each of the study's limitations is an integral part of the research process. The most noteworthy limitation of the present study was its subjectivity as a phenomenological study. Phenomenological data is inherently subjective because it relies on the researcher's interpretation of each participant's

human interpretation of their lived experience. Due to individual differences, each participant experiences the phenomenon uniquely. The philosophical assumption of ontology highlights the importance of understanding that people experience multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 19). Further, one researcher may interpret the data differently than another (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 181). The axiological philosophical assumption demands that the qualitative researcher express potentially conflicting values or biases because of the impressionability of the data outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20). I maintained self-awareness throughout the study and did not discover any personal or conflicting biases that could have affected the study results. In Chapter One, I took the time to situate myself in relation to the study through bracketing, and I was careful to set aside my own experience and give sustained attention to the participants' experiences before moving into interpretation of the data. The limitation of subjectivity is also the greatest strength of phenomenological study. The element of human interpretation allows a deeper and more connective analysis of the data, resulting in a rich understanding of the lived phenomenon. Qualitative research is focused on understanding and respectfully co-constructing knowledge with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 32). These foci can produce valuable and rich data, but the exact study could never be replicated.

Another limitation of this study was the self-report nature of the data. All data was gathered via interview and self-report and may not be entirely accurate. The participants could have misremembered or misrepresented parts of their experience. The interview questions were designed to cover the same phenomenon from slightly different angles to address this limitation by checking for individual consistency. Further, the interpretative phenomenological analysis aimed to uncover the participants' understanding of the experience rather than to create an absolutely accurate account of the experience (Smith et al., 2022).



The criterion sample was also a limitation of this project. Although the diversity of race, gender, and marital status was desirable, the sample for this study was limited by opportunity, availability, and location. Further, the sample had to be a somewhat homogenous criterion sample for an interpretative phenomenological analysis because all participants must have experienced the same phenomenon. In this case, all participants were older, resilient adults with generally good health who had relocated within three years of the study and who lived in or near Shelbyville, IN. The study was limited further because all willing participants were female, and no male participants were represented. The study was designed to include both male and female participants, and recruitment efforts were aimed at both male and female participants. However, no males expressed willingness to participate. Therefore, the study's generalizability, or transferability, was limited due to the lack of diversity within the criterion sample.

### **Summary**

This study investigated the experience of resilience through relocation in a criterion sample of recently relocated older adults by employing interpretative phenomenological analysis. This method ensured an idiographic, detailed approach to the phenomenon of resilience through relocation in older adulthood (Smith et al., 2022). Further, this method allowed intense interpretative engagement with the participants' descriptions through hermeneutic theory (Smith et al., 2022). Each participant experienced relocation within three years of the interview. Data was collected by conducting audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with each participant. The primary goal was to understand the participants' experiences from their perspectives. For data analysis, verbatim transcripts of each interview were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. The use of an interview guide (see Appendix A) ensured data collection consistency, and a demographic survey (see Appendix C) provided demographic

information on the sample that was presented in the final report. Various measures increased the validity and quality of the study. Applying the interpretative phenomenological method fulfilled the study purpose by affording a thick description and conscientious interpretation of the phenomenon: resilience through relocation in older adulthood, which was presented in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### Overview

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience of resilience and its relationship to strengths and resources after relocation in older adulthood. This purpose was exemplified by examining two research questions, which guided the study. The first research question centered around the experience of resilience through relocation: “How do older adults who have recently (within three years) relocated describe resilience after relocation?” The second research question focused on factors that supported resilience: “How do recently relocated older adults describe strengths and resources that contributed to experiencing resilience surrounding a move?” To study the research questions, a criterion sample of six older adults was recruited, and each participant engaged in semi-structured interviews, detailed in the previous chapter. Verbatim transcripts from each interview were used for data analysis, and the interpretative phenomenological analysis procedures were applied to analyze the data. As an interpretative phenomenological analysis, absolute truth was not the goal; instead, the goal was to uncover the meaning of the phenomenon as it was experienced (Smith et al., 2022). This chapter will present the results of the data analysis including descriptive results, personal experiential themes, and group experiential themes.

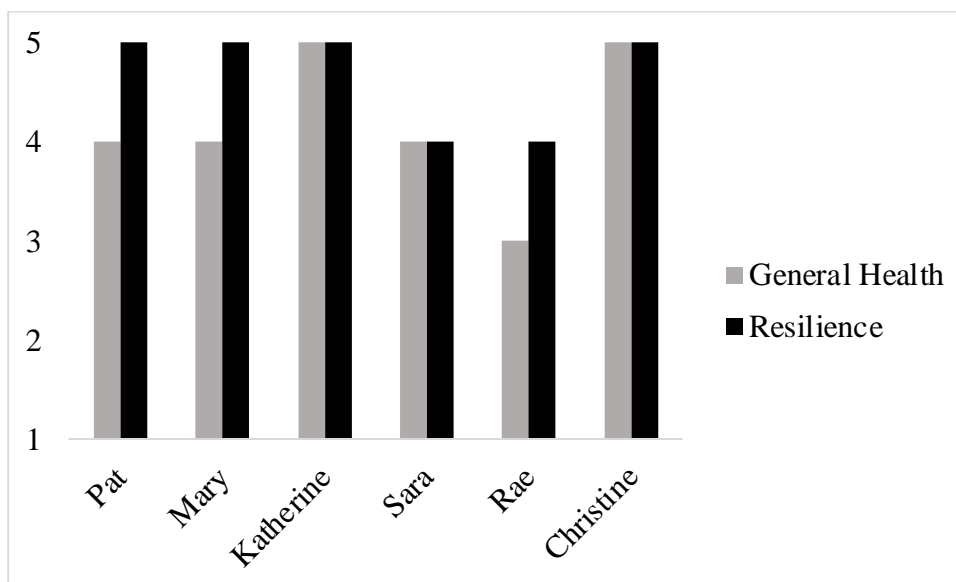
### Descriptive Results

Six participants met the inclusion criteria and engaged in the study. Each participant was 65 years of age or older, lived in an independent situation in Shelbyville, Indiana, spoke English as her primary language, and had relocated within three years of the study. All six participants were White females. Four of the participants were retired, one was working full time, and one was heavily involved in volunteer work. The participants reported varying levels of education.

One participant had earned a GED, three had completed some college, one had earned a bachelor's degree, and one had earned a master's degree. All participants rated their general health over the last year as 3 or above on a five-point scale, and all participants rated the extent to which they experienced resilience through relocation as 4 or 5 on a five-point scale as seen in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Self-Reported Levels of General Health and Resilience*



### Study Findings

Data analysis for this study followed the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) steps suggested by Smith et al. (2022). Step one of data analysis was data immersion, in which I reviewed the verbatim transcript from the interview with one participant several times and began making exploratory notes in the margins of the transcript using Microsoft Word's "comments" feature. Step two of data analysis was exploratory noting, in which I completed detailed, dense, specific notes on the transcript that were focused on the participant's point of view. An excerpt of Christine's transcript with exploratory notes was included (see Appendix G). Step three of

data analysis was constructing experiential statements, in which I reduced the volume of the exploratory notes while maintaining the complexity, remaining closely tied to the transcript. The experiential statements taken from the excerpt shown in Appendix G was included (see Appendix H). Step four was searching for connections across experiential statements, in which I pasted each experiential statement into a virtual note using the “Stickies” application in random order and grouped them into related clusters. Step five was naming the personal experiential themes and organizing them into the tables that are presented in this chapter. Step six was completing an individual analysis of each participant’s personal experiential themes. Step seven, the final step of analysis, involved working with the personal experiential themes to develop group experiential themes across cases. To maintain consistency, the group experiential themes are presented in the same style as the personal experiential themes.

This data analysis was designed and conducted with attention to quality. The trustworthiness of the study was supported through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, following suggestions by Cresswell and Poth (2018) and Etough and Smith (2017). Credibility was evidenced in this study by using multiple sources of data (participant interviews) and triangulation with the researcher’s interpretation and current empirical knowledge. Transferability was evidenced in this study through the presentation of demographic information. Dependability was evidenced in this study by using audio recordings, meticulous transcription, and careful record-keeping. Confirmability was evidenced in this study by creating an audit trail and conducting a miniature audit.

One hallmark of high-quality IPA research is its highly individual focus. Rather than using “coding,” IPA requires a deep analysis that culminates in a table of Personal Experiential Themes for each participant and a table of Group Experiential Themes across cases. These tables

include themes and subthemes for each participant. Each subtheme is supported by several experiential statements, each with a page number and direct quotation from the original transcript. Presenting the analysis in table format is essential because it allows the reader to clearly follow the logic trail through each step of the analysis process.

In this section, each participant's personal experiential themes (PETs) are presented individually, and the group experiential themes (GETs) are presented after them. The PETs and GETs are organized to address research question one (regarding the experience of resilience through relocation) first and research question two (regarding strengths and resources that contributed to resilience) second. During data analysis, I was careful to analyze the data one case at a time to create unique, highly individual PETs. After each of the individual cases were analyzed, I began checking for similarities and differences to create group experiential themes.

The personal and group experiential themes presented in this chapter were formatted according to Smith et al.'s (2022) suggestions. Personal experiential themes and group experiential themes were noted in bold uppercase font, and subthemes were noted in bold lowercase font. Experiential statements with page numbers were followed by italicized quotes from the interview transcripts. Throughout Chapters Four and Five of this dissertation, participants will be referred to using pseudonyms. Common female names were assigned to each participant to protect their identity, and those pseudonyms were used throughout the data analysis and discussion chapters to highlight the individual focus of this research style. Using pseudonyms rather than participant numbers should enhance a connection between the reader and the data without compromising participant identity. It should also make the study results more memorable and readable than they would be without the use of pseudonyms.

**Pat's Personal Experiential Themes**

Pat's personal experiential themes were resilience through relocation, resources supported resilience, and inner strengths supported resilience. Pat, a widow, was the only participant in the study who reported working full time. She chose to build a home large enough to accommodate family gatherings because she loves having her family come over and spend time together.

**RESILIENCE THROUGH RELOCATION****The move was hard!**

The moving process was harder on her than it had been in previous moves. p. 1

*"That was the third time where I've had to move temporarily and then move again within a short time. Um, it was a lot harder on me this time."*

Moving was harder for her than previous moves had been because of age and because she no longer had the support of a spouse.

*"It was it was a lot harder on me. It took a lot more out of me than previously. And once again, I think part of it had to do with my age and um, part of it had to be with being on my own and everything." p. 3*

*"I was older, um, I was by myself, whereas before I had my husband to lean on and depend on to some degree, um, so it was, it took more out of me this time than it had the previous times." p. 1*

The moving process forced her to deal with unresolved grief from her husband's passing. p. 7

*"I think it did help me realize that no, I can buy whatever I want or go wherever I want, but I just have to accept some things. And quit searching for something to fill that void because nothing's going to."*

**Acknowledging doubts was part of the process.**

Second thoughts are part of the adjustment process. p. 2

*“There are days when I think, Oh, Pat, you should have never built this house.”*

She still has some doubts about the relocation. p. 8

*“This time I have more time alone where I can think, oh, should I have done this?”*

### **Adjusting took time.**

The process of adjusting to the move took time. p. 8

*“Absolutely It took me longer.”*

The adjustment was not immediate, but it did happen. p. 7

*“There were times when I cried and I thought, what have I done? But once I got settled and everything was the way I hoped it would be, I was like, okay, you got this.”*

Moving to a new house can cause feelings of caution and awareness. p. 3

*“The first month it was kind of I wouldn't say I was scared, but I was more aware of sound and being in a new house, learning the sounds, I was more cautious.”*

*“I would double check the doors at night. Make sure to double check the alarm, make sure I had my panic button with me and everything.”*

The adjustment process takes time. p. 7

*“I am very content now and. But it did take a while.”*

The process of successful adjustment took longer than previous moves and is still ongoing. p. 8

*“This time it's taken. It took me longer.”*

### **What does successful adaptation look like?**

Part of successful adjustment means feeling settled and recognizing the new house as “home.” p.

2

*“I'm here, been here long enough where I'm settled and it's home.”*



Feeling safe and relaxed in the new home is one sign of successful adjustment. p. 3

*“After I got used to the house, good neighbors moved in and everything, then I felt more relaxed with it.”*

Four months after moving, there was a moment in time when she identified that she had successfully adjusted. p. 3

*“I remember thinking. Yeah, this was a good idea, Pat, and just feeling like, okay, I've got this.”*

## **RESOURCES SUPPORTED RESILIENCE**

### **Relationships**

Family and friends supported her resilience through practical help. p. 4

*“Anything I needed, you know, sometimes even before I ask, they had it taken care of.”*

The verbal support and encouragement of family and friends was essential to her resilience. p. 4

*“They were very encouraging and very positive about it. If they would have been ... had a negative attitude. That would have really brought me down.”*

Verbal support from family and friends is essential to resilience. p. 9

*“I really think you need the support of your family or your friends. Because if you don't have that, if they're saying negative things, that will bring you down quicker than anything if you don't have the support.”*

Without her family's presence and support, she would not have successfully adapted. p. 4

*“I probably would have sold the house and gone back to a condo.”*

Three main resources supported her resilience: family and friends, faith that everything would work out, and finances. p. 5

*“My family, my faith that it was going to be all right and having the financial ability to do some of the things that I do.”*

Resilience is easier for people with supportive family, personal faith, and a sense of humor. p. 9

*“Most people, if they have the support of their family, if they have faith that everything happens for a reason, and if they have a sense of humor, I think those will be the ones that do the best.”*

### **Other Resources**

Physical health was helpful during the move. p. 6

*“My health plays a big factor into it too.”*

Physical health made the moving process possible. p. 6

*“If I had not been as healthy as I was, I probably would not have and could not have done the move.”*

Moving by choice supports resilience. p. 9

*“The move being because it was what I wanted, not out of necessity for whatever reason.”*

The financial means to hire movers made the moving process easier. p. 2

*“When my house got finished, it, and I moved here, and fortunately I was once again able to pay for movers to do it, which is so nice.”*

The efficiency of the movers setting things up took some stress out of the experience. p. 2

*“Everything was set up and stuff. So that helped remove a lot of stress.”*

## **INNER STRENGTHS SUPPORTED RESILIENCE**

### **Strength, Determination, and Independence**

Personal strength and determination support resilience p. 5

*“I just think it's a strength that God has given me.”*

Claiming a family identity of strength and independence supported resilience. p. 5

*“I come from a long line of on both sides of my family of independent, determined strong women and, and my daughters and my granddaughters all have the same characteristic.”*

**Humor**

A sense of humor supported her resilience p. 5

*“I think it's your faith, a sense of humor, your support system.”*

Humor was a great coping strategy that helped through the most stressful moments of the move.

p. 5

*“So, I think I think at times like that, you just have to, you know.”*

**Positive Outlook**

She feels blessed and has a positive outlook. p. 6

*“Every day I have that reinforcement of how blessed I am.”*

Working with those who are less fortunate supports her resilience by reminding her of the positives and blessings in her life. p. 6

*“Anytime I think, oh, my knee hurts or my hip hurts or my back hurts. Usually by the time I meet my first patient that morning, it's like, oh no, that doesn't bother me at all.”*

People with a positive outlook tend to be the most resilient, even if that resilience takes time. p. 9

*“The ones that look at it half full are going to say, yeah, I'm just fine it took me a while. I had some struggles, but I did it.”*

**Meaning Making**

Her belief that God had a plan for her relocation made her relocation experience meaningful. p. 4

*“I am a firm believer that God works in mysterious ways.... I just feel like everything happens for a reason.”*

Her move felt worth it because the new house had room for family members who needed a long-term stay, and the stay allowed her to strengthen close relationships. p. 4

*“If I hadn't done this, I could have missed out on all of that and I wouldn't trade that for anything.”*

The purpose of her move was to create space to spend time with her family, and achieving that goal supported her resilience. p. 4

*“So, yes, because of them, that helped. That was just what I wanted and fortunately I was able to achieve it.”*

### **Mary's Personal Experiential Themes**

Mary's relocation experience seemed to be uncomplicated and easy. Her experiential themes were as follows: the process of adjusting to a move is sometimes easy and fast; social connections support resilience; and actions and habits support resilience. Mary's husband, volunteer work, and church seemed to be highly important to her during the interview.

#### **THE PROCESS OF ADJUSTING TO A MOVE IS SOMETIMES EASY AND FAST!**

##### **Moving was a positive experience.**

Adjustment happened almost immediately. p. 2

*“Yes, it did.”*

The move seemed to be a very easy and positive process overall. p. 1

*“It went perfect.”*

She and her husband had desired this move for a long time. p. 1

*“We have had wanted to move for a long time.”*

##### **Moving brought positive changes.**

The move was a positive change that she and her husband were ready for. p. 2

*“It was a change that we were ready for.”*

Moving was good because it meant they were closer to their children, and their relationships became stronger.

*“It brought us closer to our kids.” p. 2*

*“We now are closer to them. And our grandkids still come over and still help us. And we are more of a part of their life than we were before.” p. 3*

Moving was good because the property is quiet and other people do the maintenance work, which immediately decreased her stress. p. 2

*“It's quiet and, and it's finally, you can breathe and not have to worry about anything.”*

She was able to keep many of the same resources such as church, shopping, doctors, etc. that she had used before, and the move made those resources more convenient, which supported her fast adjustment. p. 2

*“But other than that, we had to always travel to go to a store. And now we don't have to travel.”*

### **Even “easy” moves have challenges.**

The one negative of the move was leaving behind neighbors that they cared about. p. 6

*“I will say that we do miss our neighbors. There was a person that lived right across from us that that they had children and, and we were close to them.”*

Even though the move went well and felt easy, it was still a big adjustment. p. 2

*“It was still a change.”*

### **SOCIAL CONNECTIONS SUPPORT RESILIENCE.**

#### **People can support the resilience of others by helping in practical ways.**

The church family volunteered to move their things and return the moving truck. p. 2

*“The church came and got us and moved us.”*

Her kids did some renovations to prepare the new place. p. 2

*“My son and my daughter did the painting and redoing the floor.”*

Many people were helpful, which supported her resilience. p. 2

*“And it helped me that a lot of people was involved and, and I had a lot of help.”*

### **Social connections are essential to resilience.**

Resilience during relocation is supported by strengthening social relationships. p. 4

*“And as you move, create bonding relationships.”*

Closer connection with her support system supported her resilience throughout the moving process. p. 4

*“Being more in contact with a support system.”*

Her resilience was supported by more consistent social and spiritual connections. p. 3

*“The church is open seven days a week and, and a group of people meet together every morning at 6:30 and pray.”*

The move helped her husband become more active and social. Seeing her loved one happy and involved supported her resilience process. p. 4

*“The move helped us because now my husband, he DoorDashes and he Ubers and he, he, he keeps busy, and he has become friends with an elderly person that lives out in the country.”*

### **ACTIONS AND HABITS SUPPORT RESILIENCE**

#### **Volunteering to help others can support resilience.**

Her volunteer work quilting supported her resilience because she was able to be more consistently involved. p. 3

*“That helped a lot because the people that are involved in quilting was 45 minutes away and now, now they're in the same town.”*

Volunteering to make quilts for others supports her resilience by providing a creative outlet and a source of joy and social connection. p. 5

*“It's a ministry that always remembers.”*

### **Spiritual and religious supports play an essential role in resilience.**

The church and church family played a central role in her experience of resilience. p. 1

*“Last year we bought a senior condominium. And, and it's only about two minutes from the church.”*

The move allowed her to have a deeper and more consistent prayer life (spiritual development) because she can meet with a prayer group daily at the church. p. 3

*“So that helped me to have a more of a steady prayer life.”*

Church family, personal prayer, and attending church services have supported her resilience and fast adjustment. pp. 3-4

*“That's helped me...in a tremendous way because we felt a part, but the, the travel was so hard on us that and now it's like we're finally home.”*

### **Focusing on the positives supports resilience.**

Resilience involves looking toward the future more than looking to the past. p. 4

*“Don't look at the past. Um, look at the future.”*

Even though moving involves challenges and some sense of loss, resilience is supported by focusing on involvement at the new place. p. 6

*“You do still miss that area. But, but you're looking and you're involved in another one.”*

### **Katherine's Personal Experiential Themes**

Katherine's personal experiential themes were what resilience through relocation looks like, positive social connections support resilience, personal strengths support resilience, and

actions support resilience. Katherine was a retired widow. She reported high resilience through the relocation experience but mentioned that her resilience process was still ongoing two years after the relocation. Katherine's case was a good example of a relocation in which adjustment was not immediate or easy, but resilience was very high.

### **WHAT RESILIENCE THROUGH RELOCATION LOOKS LIKE**

#### **The relocation process involved many challenges.**

One stressor during the resilience process is making decisions about so many things. p. 5

*"How I had to adapt or mainly is taking care of the business myself."*

Downsizing and going through things was a difficult process leading up to the move. p. 2

*"I was stressed. I mean, because oh, I had to get rid of things."*

Selling her late husband's things was stressful. p. 2

*"I had to have an auction because he had tractors and motorcycles and a jet ski and all this."*

Leaving her old community and friends was tough. p. 4

*"I love those people down there and the neighbors."*

#### **Resilience is not always a straightforward or fast process.**

The move was made after a long period of consideration and prayer. p. 2

*"Well, I've thought about it and prayed about it a lot."*

The resilience process took time and is still in progress. p. 4

*"It took a little while and it's still there's times I'm like, what in the world have I done?"*

Sometimes resilience involves acknowledging second thoughts. p. 4

*"There's times where I, I second guess myself."*

#### **Feeling safe and having a healthy support network are signs of successful adjustment.**



Her new home felt like the right place for her from the first time she saw it because it fit her needs better than the previous home. p. 2

*“When I saw this, it just clicked. It was just like, this is it. Because it's small enough, I can. I can take care of it for a while.”*

Feeling safe in the new home and neighborhood is one sign of healthy adjustment. p. 1

*“One thing is safety I feel.”*

Feeling that a support system is in place is another sign of healthy adjustment. p. 1

*“Yeah, a support system.”*

She has had a health scare since moving and felt very supported by her network. p. 11

*“But, you know, I had a good support.”*

She feels like she has adjusted very well. p. 1

*“I would say very well.”*

## **POSITIVE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS SUPPORT RESILIENCE**

### **Many people supported her resilience through offering practical, tangible support.**

She had a lot of help with the moving process. p. 2

*“I had a lot of help.”*

The practical help and care offered by others was described as supportive. p. 3

*“I had a lot of support.”*

Her brother helped her move by transporting her grand piano. p. 2

*“My brother helped me with the move.”*

A friend in real estate supported her resilience by listing her rental properties. p. 3

*“So, she had helped me a lot. And so that was a support thing, you know, because I was really stressed out about getting rid of everything.”*

A friend supported her resilience by spending a full day helping her pack. p. 3

*“She says, I’m going to come over and help you pack. And she brought boxes and helped me pack. Oh, my lord. It was amazing. She spent a whole day helping me pack.”*

Her former church family, her in-laws, and her brother helped her through the move. p. 3

*“The church people helped. His family helped, helped load. My brother has a piano business, so he had a big truck.”*

Her new church family supported her by unloading the truck and setting up the furniture. p. 3

*“The church here was tremendous in helping the guys come and helped.”*

## **PERSONAL STRENGTHS SUPPORT RESILIENCE**

### **Personality**

Having an independent personality supported her resilience during the adjustment period. p. 7

*“I have a need to be around people to a certain extent. But I do enjoy being by myself. So that’s just kind of my personality, I guess.”*

A stable personality is helpful when adjusting to changes. p. 13

*“I have a friend, she’s either way up or she’s way down, you know? And I’m not that way. So that helps, I guess, with. Um, when you have to make changes.”*

### **Positive thinking and positive self-talk**

Positive self-talk is the most important thing she would advise a younger person to focus on to build resilience. p. 12

*“I’ll say that you can do this.”*

Anxiety and feelings of inadequacy are common and never really disappear, but positive thinking and positive self-talk help. p. 13

*“But I mean, it still it still happens.”*

Positive self-talk and positive thinking are important to build resilience. p. 11

*“Just self-positive thinking.”*

### **Faith**

Faith is the most important resilience support she has identified. p. 8

*“The number one thing I'd say, you know, with losing a companion and, um, and then making the move and everything.”*

The songs she plays and sings support resilience because of their positive focus. God worked through those songs to calm her anxiety and overcome her feelings of inadequacy. p. 13

*“Songs that I play and sing, they just, I don't know... The Lord would just come and help me to overcome the feelings of inadequacy and what am I going to do? Anxiety.”*

Scriptural promises and personal prayer help her connect with God for His support. p. 8

*“And I take everything to him in prayer.”*

### **ACTIONS SUPPORT RESILIENCE**

#### **Focusing on others and volunteering**

Volunteering, focusing on others, and feeling needed helped her adjust to the move and supported her resilience. p. 9

*“It helps you, you know, to feel like you're needed.”*

Being able to babysit for a family member has supported her resilience. p. 8

*“But sometimes she has to come into town for something, you know, and she'll drop them off here.”*

Teaching piano lessons to a little girl for a year helped her feel useful. p. 9

*“It was just so sweet. I. I taught her for a year.”*

She helps others who can no longer drive. p. 9

*“I have stepped in to help her.”*

She volunteers her musical ability to help at various church functions. p. 10

*“I’m helping out with the music.”*

She does not want to be as busy as she used to be, but it is helpful to stay involved and help others. p.

*“If I can just do it once in a while, it helps me.”*

### **Hobbies**

Reading and playing the piano supported her resilience after the move by helping her cope when she was feeling lonely. p. 5

*“I like to read. I spend a lot of time playing the piano.”*

Reading and playing the piano supported her resilience in the past. p. 7

*“It helped me adjust after my husband passed away.”*

### **Sara’s Personal Experiential Themes**

Sara’s personal experiential themes were relocation as a caretaker, social connections, and personal strengths that support resilience. Sara was married and was the primary caretaker for her husband who had dementia. She also had a pet who was very important to her. Her role as primary caretaker made her experience of resilience through relocation unique in the study.

### **RELOCATION AS A CARETAKER**

#### **Her husband’s successful adjustment deeply impacted her own experience of resilience.**

She timed the move around her husband’s recovery from an injury and set up his things first to support his adjustment. p. 3

*“Stayed here a week and moved in before he got out of rehab.”*

She realized that she and her husband could not continue to maintain the farm at their age, and she did not want it to get run down, so she decided to make the initial move when her husband had to enter rehab for an injury. p. 3

*“I knew before then that we were getting too old and couldn't take care of 40 acres.”*

She knew at first sight that the new home was right because it had grass and trees for her husband to look at. p. 3

*“And I said, this is it. I said, because he's got this whole back yard of, of trees and grass.”*

Moving immediately reduced her daily concern for her husband's safety, which made her happy. p. 5

*“I was happy. Because I didn't have to worry about him so much anymore.”*

Her husband's successful adjustment and approval of the move supported her own resilience. p. 4

*“He was just oh, my gosh, I like this.”*

Her husband's positive reaction to the move made resilience much easier for her. p. 4

*“It did. It really did. Because I didn't know what he'd do.”*

**Even though her husband, family, and friends are important to her, she recognized her own importance when making decisions.**

The first house she moved into was great, but the setting was too noisy and inconvenient, so she decided to move a few houses down for a better view and quieter setting. p. 1

*“Place I liked. I just didn't like the setting.”*

Some people criticized the second move, but she knew it was what she wanted. p. 1

*“Everybody was so shocked that I wanted to move over here.”*

Even though her husband is an important consideration, she chose the second move with her own future in mind. p. 1

*“I don't want to be right on that road when my husband passes away. I'll be here by myself, So. I want there to be somebody on both sides.”*

Independence was important to her during the move. p. 3

*“It's better than being in assisted living.”*

Her comments showed a development mindset. She appreciates her life and she is looking forward to the future. p. 16

*“We've really got a good life. We really have. But I'm not ready to leave it, so. I'm ready to keep going.”*

She expects a long life because of her family history of longevity. p. 15

*“And I have longevity in my family.”*

## **SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**

### **Practical Help**

Her sister-in-law supported her resilience by helping her find a great new home! p. 3

*“My sister-in-law came from Georgia, and, uh, she went with me to all the, uh, places around here.”*

Her new community is supportive because they help each other. p. 6

*“We each help each other, you know.”*

A long-time friend supported her resilience during the move by offering practical help during the move. p. 7

*“She's been out here three times helping me with the moves.”*

Friends are an important component of her support system, and they show support through offering help. p. 14

*“I have wonderful friends, you know, who are willing to help us do anything that needs to be done.”*

Since she loves people, having many people support her during the move was extra helpful. p. 14

*“I like to be around people. So having a bunch of people helping me was wonderful.”*

### **Intentional Connectivity**

Maintaining connection with a social group through the move was important to her. p. 2

*“It’s a little further for me to drive, but not that far.”*

She has arranged for other caregivers for her husband during the week so she can get out and socialize. p. 2

*“I have some people stay with him on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday so that I can go out.”*

She has set up care for her husband and dog several days a week so she can participate in the activities with her peers. p. 6

*“I can do that on Tuesday through Friday because I have somebody here with them.”*

### **Social Support**

One of her friends has been a mutual support for over 60 years. They even successfully supported each other to quit smoking, which is typically a very stressful process! p. 15

*“We quit smoking together.”*

Her son and grandchildren are part of her support system. p. 13

*“Anytime I need them, they’re here.”*

She and her husband like to go out to eat together often. p. 7

*“I don't cook a lot. We you go out and eat a lot.”*

She meets a group of friends to go out to eat regularly. p. 7

*“There's only three of us to go that we go now.”*

Family connections supported her resilience. p. 7

*“I have my husband's brothers here. My family comes out and sees me.”*

The close social connections and frequent activities provided by her new community helped her to adjust quickly. p. 5

*“I was very happy over here and, and this community back here.”*

## **PERSONAL STRENGTHS THAT SUPPORT RESILIENCE**

### **Positivity**

Making the moving process fun is the best way to support resilience. p. 17

*“To make it fun.”*

Choosing to make relocation fun will help it go more smoothly and support the resilience process. p. 17

*“Don't make it a draggy thing, you know. It's fun. We're going to do it, and we're going to enjoy it.”*

Thinking positively and developing a positive outlook supports lifelong resilience. p. 17

*“I like to think positive. I'm a positive person.”*

Her positive personality supported her resilience through the relocation process. p. 14

*“I'm just a happy person.”*

### **Connectivity and Activity**

The interpersonal strengths required to make new friends and maintain long-term relationships supported her resilience. p. 14



*“I like people and I make friends really easily because I do like people.”*

Staying busy (active and social) is essential to overall wellbeing and supported her resilience during the relocation process! p. 7

*“You got to stay busy if you want to live. Yeah, you really do.”*

Growing flowers is a hobby that has supported her resilience. p. 11

*“I’ve got my window boxes out there. Uh, I planted those.”*

### **Acceptance and Adaptability**

She and her husband are close friends with another couple, and they have adapted to his health by changing their weekly out-to-eat plans to weekly take-out at home together. p. 10

*“Recently we have changed that, and we go out and get it and bring it back and eat here or eat at their house.”*

Acceptance and adaptation are essential skills during the aging process. p. 2

*“I could tell from 75 on how much energy I was going to have. And I thought, well, I got it in the morning, that's ok.”*

During the move, she used practical adaptations to manage the limitations brought on by aging.

She has energy in the morning, so she uses the morning to get things done. p. 2

*“My energy is in the morning. I am. And I work. I work in the morning. I take a nap in the afternoon.”*

She chooses to keep a relaxed attitude toward incomplete tasks because she will have time to do them later if they don't get done immediately. That attitude reduces her stress and supports resilience. p. 7

*“If I don't get it done that day, I don't worry about it.... Tomorrow is another day, so I'll get it done.”*

**Rae's Personal Experiential Themes**

Rae, a retired widow, felt the loss of her husband deeply through her relocation experience. Her experiential themes included the following: moving is difficult; what is resilience; people and activities support resilience; and personal strengths support resilience. Rae overcame significant challenges during her move and subsequent adjustment that included feeling victimized by her moving company and hospitalization. However, her difficult relocation experience highlighted her resilience and strength throughout the relocation and adjustment process.

**MOVING IS DIFFICULT.****Moving was associated with loss.**

Leaving the farm was tough because of the great memories she and her husband made there.

*"It wasn't easy to leave because my husband and I were so happy on the farm."* p. 2

*"That was a hard, hard decision. To sell my home. Because my husband and I had been so happy there."* p. 3

Moving out of state meant leaving her husband's grave behind.

*"Hardest thing I ever had to do in my whole entire adult life was leave him at the cemetery. But the next hardest thing I ever had to was sell my home and move."* p. 6

*"I feel like I've deserted him. I mean, I know he's not there. I know. I know his soul's in heaven. But still, the last place I left him was there."* p. 7

Downsizing and getting rid of meaningful items was difficult.

*"Sorry, I might cry. I had to sell things that meant something to me."* p. 4

*"It's very hard to just watch your stuff go to strangers."* p. 6

**Moving involved making life-changing decisions.**

Making all the decisions about what to keep and what to let go of was tough p. 4

*“Then was the decision of what to, what to get rid of and what to keep.”*

Choosing to sell her home was hard. p. 5

*“It was very traumatic to have to sell a home that I'd lived in all those years.” p. 5*

*“You live someplace for 40 years and think you're going to be there from now on.” p. 6*

She chose to move to be closer to her children in case her health declines in the future. p. 2

*“The reason I moved here was because my children.”*

### **WHAT IS RESILIENCE?**

The resilience process takes time. p. 10

*“It's just taken me a while to get adjusted.”*

Resilience involves learning from the past and moving forward. p. 15

*“I look back. There's things I would change if I could. But you can't change the past, so you just learn and go on.”*

Her sign of adjustment was feeling like Shelbyville was home and her former home was a place to visit. p. 10

*“And I said, I'm glad to go down there. But I said. Shelbyville is my home now.”*

### **PEOPLE AND ACTIVITIES SUPPORT RESILIENCE.**

#### **Family and friends supported her through positivity.**

Her kids were supportive throughout the moving process. p. 11

*“And then of course, my kids, they were tickled to death that I was coming back, but they were very supportive, too.”*

Siblings-in-law were supportive during the move. p. 11

*“They were very supportive because they knew that I needed to be close to my kids in case I got, in case something happened.”*

Previous church family and friends supported her decision to move. p. 11

*“I had a lot of positive support.”*

### **Social connections supported her resilience process.**

People in her new community accepted her right away, and that helped a lot. p. 6

*“And they just accepted me like they've known me all my life. And that means a lot because I was scared.”*

She feels that asking for advice and ideas from other people would have supported her resilience.

p. 15

*“To be perfectly honest, I really never thought about talking to somebody else until it was too late.”*

She feels much closer to her daughter since moving. p. 8

*“Since I've moved here, we become awfully close.”*

Joining in on the regular activities provided by her new community has supported her resilience.

p. 13

*“Most of the activities that they have, I do.”*

Being near her children and grandchildren has supported her resilience. p. 9

*“And to see my, my kids and my grandkids and be able to see them any time I wanted to. That made a big difference, too.”*

### **PERSONAL STRENGTHS SUPPORT RESILIENCE.**

**Determination, independence, and strength of will supported resilience through the move and throughout life.**

Determination and independence are personal strengths that supported resilience. p. 13

*"I'm a very determined independent person. And I want to do for myself as much as I can."*

Determination and strength of will have supported lifelong resilience. p. 14

*"Determination and being strong willed has helped me a lot. It's helped me through my life, really."*

She was resilient through childhood abuse and adult difficulties by being a determined, independent person. p. 6

*"I'm a very determined. Uh, independent person. Uh, I had to be because I was raised in a very abusive home. So, you either had to be a bull or a mouse, and I definitely wasn't no mouse."*

### **Being proud and goal-oriented supported resilience through the move.**

Pride in overcoming obstacles and reaching goals is a personal strength that supported resilience. p. 13

*"I take pride in overcoming obstacles."*

Resilience is supported by intentionally setting goals and working toward them. p. 16

*"Setting goals and trying to reach them, you know, or being determined you're going to."*

The experience of resilience through relocation was difficult, but achievable. p. 15

*It's been kind of a tough journey, but I'm a tough person, so I made it.*

### **Various coping methods supported resilience.**

She felt that God led her through the moving process and confirmed specific prayers. p. 3

*"Big or little, I do nothing without praying about it. I think God just led me and I just followed."*

Visiting her husband's grave and her old home, church, and friends supported her resilience process. p. 7

*"I've been back three times since I moved out here."*

Positive self-talk supports resilience. p. 14

*“I also talk to myself and get myself straightened up, too.”*

### **Christine’s Personal Experiential Themes**

Christine, a retired widow, had the highest level of education in the study with a master’s degree. Her personal experiential themes were moving is stressful, resilience takes time, social support is essential to resilience, and personal habits and strengths support resilience. Christine reported that it took her six to nine months to feel fully adjusted after the move.

#### **MOVING IS STRESSFUL.**

##### **Sorting through and letting go of belongings was a stressor during the moving process.**

Moving involved sorting through possessions. p. 3

*“What to move? What not to move?”*

Moving involved letting go of her late husband’s belongings. p. 3

*“How do I get rid of all of his stuff?”*

Making decisions about what to move and what to get rid of was difficult. p. 3

*“It was tough just knowing what to, you know, what to bring and, and what's going to fit.”*

She thinks that keeping one’s possessions under control would support resilience during relocation because it would reduce stress. p. 10

*“Don't collect a bunch of stuff.”*

##### **Making decisions was a stressor during the moving process.**

Part of the stress of moving was making so many small decisions. p. 3

*“Making all those decisions about when they call you in and they start out with what color do you want your walls and then go from there. And after two hours I thought I don't give two hoots*

*what you do, just put it on.... Then you wonder all along, well did I choose the right thing? Will it go together?"*

As she was making decisions, she began moving ahead with confidence because there was no way to avoid those decisions. p. 4

*"You do what you think you have to do. And then you think, Yeah, I made the right decision because if you made the wrong one, what are you going to do about it?"*

Making decisions for the move was difficult because she had never had to make those decisions alone before. p. 4

*"I had never had to make decisions totally on my own."*

### **RESILIENCE TAKES TIME.**

#### **Time was an important component of resilience.**

Successful adaptation takes some time. p. 1

*"I think I've adapted well, but it's taken time."*

Time and autonomy are important to the resilience process. p. 11

*"I think you've got to give yourself time to adjust and kind of decide what you want to do yourself."*

The adjustment process took her about 6-9 months. p. 1

*"I've been here about a year and a half now. It probably took 6 to 9 months to really get in."*

#### **Arranging her home to meet her preferences has helped her adjust.**

Getting things like landscaping finished helped her feel settled and comfortable. p. 1

*"I think after, oh, six months, nine months, especially a year, I feel very comfortable here."*

Transplanting some of her hardier flowers from the old home to the new home supported her resilience during the relocation process. p. 3

*“I didn't want to give up all my flowers and stuff, but I knew I couldn't move them. So, I dug daylilies and thought, You can't kill a daylily. Well, they're blooming out there.”*

Her new home has become more desirable over time. p. 1

*“The longer I'm here, the better I like it.”*

### **Feeling safe was a sign of successful adjustment.**

Feeling safe in her new home has supported her resilience. p. 1

*“I love having the people around. And knowing, you know, if at my age, if I would fall or something. I know I have a list of various people I could call.”*

One sign of successful adjustment was feeling safe enough to forget to lock the doors. p. 1

*“Sometimes forget to lock my doors, you know, little things like that.”*

She chose to move because of safety concerns and isolation. p. 2

*“If I'd been outside and fallen or anything, no one would have known about it.”*

### **SOCIAL SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL TO RESILIENCE.**

#### **Pets can be a source of support during relocation.**

Her dog's successful adjustment was important to her own process of adjustment. p. 1

*“She's gotten acquainted. It was it was a challenge for her, too, because she'd never had a leash on. Had always been able to just, you know, run through the yard, the fields, whatever. But she does really well now and is in routine.”*

She was worried about how her dog would react to the new location and neighbor dogs, but her dog has adjusted and made friends with other dogs, which supported her own resilience. p. 5

*“I was just concerned about her not being able to be out and the freedom.... And she's gotten acquainted with some of the dogs. Some she looks for every time she goes out to see if they're around.”*



Her dog supported her resilience by helping her connect with her new neighbors. p. 2

*“And she was a big help too, because we would walk and other people would walk or she or she could tell she goes right to you and people would and still do know her name, but they don't know mine.”*

**Friends and family can support resilience through words, actions, and connections.**

Making an effort to maintain all of her resources and relationships through the move supported her resilience. p. 4

*“I didn't move people like that. It was just from a house to a little smaller house.”*

Family members and a neighbor supported her resilience through the move. p. 5

*“I have a couple of nieces that were wonderful and their husbands and, and a neighbor that was very supportive.”*

Meeting her neighbors as they moved in supported her resilience by helping her feel more connected within her close neighborhood. p. 2

*“And you know, had a good excuse to make myself known.”*

The overall positive feedback from others supported her resilience. p. 5

*“I never ran into anyone that wasn't supportive of my decision.”*

Her family and friends supported her resilience by offering practical help even after the initial move. p. 5

*“They helped move. They helped clean...and still come.”*

Her church family has been an important support for her resilience. p. 6

*“That church family has been important.”*

One of her neighbors has become a very good friend. p. 2

*“I have one really good friend that lives down the way that walks her dogs. And, um, we've become good friends, so it's been good.”*

A friend supported her by helping her find a new place to live and encouraging her to go ahead with the process. p. 2

*“I had a friend that lives in the neighborhood that went with me to the meeting, and she kind of had been through the same thing. And she said, if you think you like it, sign up now. Don't wait because you can always back out later on.”*

### **PERSONAL HABITS AND STRENGTHS SUPPORT RESILIENCE.**

#### **Being active and constructive supported resilience.**

Staying busy supports her resilience. p. 1

*“I still keep busy... you know, there's plenty to do.”*

Taking classes through the local YMCA has supported her resilience by keeping her physically active and socially connected. p. 6

*“I do go to the Y three days a week, take a class. Knew some people; have met some other wonderful people. Again, it's a way to, to move.”*

Meeting with a senior group for dinner and socializing has supported her resilience. p. 6

*“One Thursday a month, they have dinner. They play Euchre all afternoon. I love that. So, I've, you know, gotten involved with that.”*

Staying involved in her church and playing the organ for services has contributed to her resilience. p. 6

*“Always been involved in church. And I play the organ in our church. So that has stayed the same.”*

She has multiple hobbies that have supported her resilience. p. 8

*“I've gotten hooked on some TV serials, which I normally I don't watch TV during the day, but I'll read, and I like to sew. I like to knit. You know, I'm always just to sit down and sit, I can't do it.”*

Staying busy is important to her resilience. p. 8

*“Yeah, I do. I like to stay busy.”*

### **Personal strengths supported resilience.**

Faith in God has been a great support to her resilience through relocation. p. 7

*“Well, I think my faith in God, for one thing.”*

Accepting change is easier when a person believes that God is in charge of what happens. p. 12

*“I think, again, your faith has a lot to do with it. If, if you just realize that God is really in charge, I'm not in charge. He is. And, and let him do it.”*

She is not afraid to try new things and step into new adventures, and that bravery has supported her resilience. p. 8

*“I'm not afraid to jump in and go and, and try new things. Yeah, so I guess that's just kind of my makeup.”*

Hearing advice from other people is good, but doing what you think is best for yourself is essential to resilience. p. 11

*“And I think. You can listen to what people say, but that doesn't mean you have to agree with what they say.”*

Being able to embrace change and keep moving forward has supported her resilience. p. 11

*“I know a lot of people dread to think about moving someplace, or they can't leave this, and they can't leave that. That's never been a problem with me. It's just. You do it. Go on. Life goes on.”*

Facing problems and figuring out a solution is an important resilience skill. p. 13

*“You've got to meet some adversity along the way and figure it out. I think too many people today face adversity and give up and don't try to solve their problems.”*

Resilience is supported by letting go of things that are beyond one's control. p. 14

*“You can't worry about it. I know. I've got a couple of friends that. Oh, they just can't think about. I can't do this. I can't do that. Well, what are you going to do about it? You have no control over it.”*

### **Group Experiential Themes**

The group experiential themes (GETs) included three themes that answered research question one: moving involves challenges and stress, resilience takes time, and signs of successful adjustment. Research question one was, “How do older adults who have recently (within three years) relocated describe resilience after relocation?” The GETs included two themes that answered research question two: positive social connections support resilience, and personal strengths support resilience. Research questions two was, “How do recently relocated older adults describe strengths and resources that contributed to experiencing resilience surrounding a move?” The GETs showed strong underlying similarities between cases, as many of the subthemes included evidence from all six participants. Although each theme was strongly represented across cases, presenting the GETs in the following table format allows the reader to identify the unique perspective of each participant within each theme and subtheme. As in the personal experiential themes tables, the following table shows group experiential themes in bold, uppercase font followed by subthemes in bold font. Each subtheme is followed by supporting experiential statements including participant names and page numbers and italicized direct quotations to tie each subtheme back to the original transcripts.

### **MOVING INVOLVES CHALLENGES AND STRESS**

**Sorting through and getting rid of sentimental items is difficult. (3 of 6 participants represented)**

Downsizing and going through things was a difficult process leading up to the move. (Katherine, p. 2)

*“I was stressed. I mean, because oh, I had to get rid of things.”*

Downsizing and getting rid of meaningful items was difficult. (Rae, pp. 4 and 6)

*“Sorry, I might cry. I had to sell things that meant something to me.”*

*“It's very hard to just watch your stuff go to strangers.”*

Moving involved sorting through possessions. (Christine, p. 3)

*“What to move? What not to move?”*

**All the decisions that must be made during a relocation can become overwhelming. (3 of 6 participants represented)**

One stressor during the resilience process is making decisions about so many things. (Katherine, p. 5)

*“How I had to adapt or mainly is taking care of the business myself.”*

Making all the decisions about what to keep and what to let go of was tough (Rae, p. 4)

*“Then was the decision of what to what to get rid of and what to keep.”*

Making decisions for the move was difficult because she had never had to make those decisions alone before. (Christine, p. 4)

*“I had never had to make decisions totally on my own.”*

**Moving away from a home can cause feelings of loss and grief to resurface. (4 of 6 participants represented)**

The moving process forced her to deal with unresolved grief from her husband's passing. (Pat, p. 7)

*"I think it did help me realize that no, I can buy whatever I want or go wherever I want, but I just have to accept some things. And quit searching for something to fill that void because nothing's going to."*

Selling her late husband's things was stressful. (Katherine, p. 2)

*"I had to have an auction because he had tractors and motorcycles and a jet ski and all this."*

Moving out of state meant leaving her husband's grave behind. (Rae, p. 6)

*"Hardest thing I ever had to do in my whole entire adult life was leave him at the cemetery. But the next hardest thing I ever had to do was sell my home and move."*

Moving involved letting go of her late husband's belongings. (Christine, p. 3)

*"How do I get rid of all of his stuff?"*

**\*Note that Mary described her moving experience as "perfect," and she claimed that adjustment happened almost immediately.**

The move seemed to be a very easy and positive process overall. (Mary, p. 1)

*"It went perfect."*

## **RESILIENCE TAKES TIME**

**Time is an important component of the resilience process. (5 of 6 participants represented)**

The adjustment process takes time. (Pat, p. 7)

*"I am very content now and. But it did take a while."*

Even though the move went well and felt easy, it was still a big adjustment. (Mary, p. 2)

*"It was still a change."*

The resilience process took time and is still in progress. (Katherine, p. 4)

*“It took a little while and it's still there's times I'm like, what in the world have I done?”*

The resilience process takes time. (Rae, p. 10)

*“It's just taken me a while to get adjusted.”*

The adjustment process took her about 6-9 months. (Christine, p. 1)

*“I've been here about a year and a half now. It probably took 6 to 9 months to really get in.”*

Time and autonomy are important to the resilience process. (Christine, p. 11)

*“I think you've got to give yourself time to adjust and kind of decide what you want to do yourself.”*

**The resilience process sometimes involves working through doubts, but arranging a home to one's preferences over time supports resilience. (3 of 6 participants represented)**

Second thoughts are part of the adjustment process. (Pat, p. 2)

*“There are days when I think, Oh, Pat, you should have never built this house.”*

Sometimes resilience involves acknowledging second thoughts. (Katherine, p. 4)

*“There's times where I, I second guess myself.”*

The adjustment was not immediate, but it did happen. (Pat, p. 7)

*“There were times when I cried and I thought, what have I done? But once I got settled and everything was the way I hoped it would be, I was like, okay, you got this.”*

Transplanting some of her hardier flowers from the old home to the new home supported her resilience during the relocation process. (Christine, p. 3)

*“I didn't want to give up all my flowers and stuff, but I knew I couldn't move them. So I dug daylilies and thought, You can't kill a daylily. Well, they're blooming out there.”*

**Resilience can be an interactive process for people who do not live alone.**

**(3 of 6 participants represented)**

The move helped her husband become more active and social. Seeing her loved one happy and involved supported her resilience process. (Mary, p. 4)

*“The move helped us because now my husband, he DoorDashes and he Ubers and he, he, he keeps busy, and he has become friends with an elderly person that lives out in the country.”*

Her husband’s positive reaction to the move made resilience much easier for her. (Sara, p. 4)

*“It did. It really did. Because I didn't know what he'd do.”*

Her dog’s successful adjustment was important to her own process of adjustment. (Christine, p. 1)

*“She's gotten acquainted. It was it was a challenge for her, too, because she'd never had a leash on. Had always been able to just, you know, run through the yard, the fields, whatever. But she does really well now and is in routine.”*

## **SIGNS OF SUCCESSFUL ADJUSTMENT**

### **Feeling safe in one’s new home (5 of 6 participants represented)**

Feeling safe and relaxed in the new home is one sign of successful adjustment. (Pat, p. 3)

*“After I got used to the house, good neighbors moved in and everything, then I felt more relaxed with it.”*

Moving was good because the property is quiet and other people do the maintenance work, which immediately decreased her stress. (Mary, p. 2)

*“It's quiet and, and it's finally, you can breathe and not have to worry about anything.”*

Feeling safe in the new home and neighborhood is one sign of healthy adjustment. (Katherine, p. 1)

*“One thing is safety I feel.”*



Moving immediately reduced her daily concern for her husband's safety, which made her happy.

(Sara, p. 5)

*"I was happy. Because I didn't have to worry about him so much anymore."*

One sign of successful adjustment was feeling safe enough to forget to lock the doors. (Christine, p. 1)

*"Sometimes forget to lock my doors, you know, little things like that."*

### **Identifying the new house as "home" (4 of 6 participants represented)**

Part of successful adjustment means feeling settled and recognizing the new house as "home."

(Pat, p. 2)

*"I'm here, been here long enough where I'm settled and it's home."*

Church family, personal prayer, and attending church services have supported her resilience and fast adjustment because they make the new house feel like home. (Mary, pp. 3-4)

*"That's helped me...in a tremendous way because we felt a part, but the, the travel was so hard on us that and now it's like we're finally home."*

Her new home felt like the right place for her from the first time she saw it because it fit her needs better than the previous home. (Katherine, p. 2)

*"When I saw this, it just clicked. It was just like, this is it. Because it's small enough, I can. I can take care of it for a while."*

She knew at first sight that the new home was right because it had grass and trees for her husband to look at. (Katherine, p. 3)

*"And I said, this is it. I said, because he's got this whole back yard of, of trees and grass."*

Her sign of adjustment was feeling like Shelbyville was home and her former home was a place to visit. (Rae, p. 10)

*“And I said, I'm glad to go down there. But I said. Shelbyville is my home now.”*

## **POSITIVE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS SUPPORT RESILIENCE**

### **Support through affirmation (5 of 6 participants represented)**

Verbal support from family and friends is essential to resilience. (Pat, p. 9)

*“I really think you need the support of your family or your friends. Because if you don't have that, if they're saying negative things, that will bring you down quicker than anything if you don't have the support.”*

She has had a health scare since moving and felt very supported by her network. (Katherine, p. 11)

*“But, you know, I had a good support.”*

One of her friends has been a mutual support for over 60 years. They even successfully supported each other to quit smoking, which is typically a very stressful process! (Sara, p. 15)

*“We quit smoking together.”*

People in her new community accepted her right away, and that helped a lot. (Rae, p. 6)

*“And they just accepted me like they've known me all my life. And that means a lot because I was scared.”*

Previous church family and friends supported her decision to move. (Rae, p. 11)

*“I had a lot of positive support.”*

The overall positive feedback from others supported her resilience. (Christine, p. 5)

*“I never ran into anyone that wasn't supportive of my decision.”*

### **Support through practical help (5 of 6 participants represented)**

Family and friends supported her resilience through practical help. (Pat, p. 4)

*“Anything I needed, you know, sometimes even before I ask, they had it taken care of.”*

Many people were helpful, which supported her resilience. (Mary, p. 2)

*“And it helped me that a lot of people was involved and, and I had a lot of help.”*

A friend in real estate supported her resilience by listing her rental properties. (Katherine, p. 3)

*“So, she had helped me a lot. And so that was a support thing, you know, because I was really stressed out about getting rid of everything.”*

Friends are an important component of her support system, and they show support through offering help. (Sara, p. 14)

*“I have wonderful friends, you know, who are willing to help us do anything that needs to be done.”*

Since she loves people, having many people support her during the move was extra helpful.

(Sara, p. 14)

*“I like to be around people. So having a bunch of people helping me was wonderful.”*

Her family and friends supported her resilience by offering practical help even after the initial move. (Christine, p. 5)

*“They helped move. They helped clean...and still come.”*

### **Support through intentional connectivity (4 of 6 participants represented)**

Resilience during relocation is supported by strengthening social relationships. (Mary, p. 4)

*“And as you move, create bonding relationships.”*

She has arranged for other caregivers for her husband during the week so she can get out and socialize. (Sara, p. 2)

*“I have some people stay with him on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday so that I can go out.”*

Joining in on the regular activities provided by her new community has supported her resilience.

(Rae, p. 13)

*“Most of the activities that they have, I do.”*

Making an effort to maintain all of her resources and relationships through the move supported her resilience. (Christine, p. 4)

*“I didn't move people like that. It was just from a house to a little smaller house.”*

Taking classes through the local YMCA has supported her resilience by keeping her physically active and socially connected. (Christine, p. 6)

*“I do go to the Y three days a week, take a class. Knew some people; have met some other wonderful people. Again, it's a way to, to move.”*

### **Support through volunteering and helping others (3 of 6 participants represented)**

Volunteering to make quilts for others supports her resilience by providing a creative outlet and a source of joy and social connection. (Mary, p. 5)

*“It's a ministry that always remembers.”*

Volunteering, focusing on others, and feeling needed helped her adjust to the move and supported her resilience. (Katherine, p. 9)

*“It helps you, you know, to feel like you're needed.”*

Staying involved in her church and playing the organ for services has contributed to her resilience. (Christine, p. 6)

*“Always been involved in church. And I play the organ in our church. So that has stayed the same.”*

### **PERSONAL STRENGTHS SUPPORT RESILIENCE**

#### **Positive focus (6 of 6 participants represented)**

People with a positive outlook tend to be the most resilient, even if that resilience takes time.

(Pat, p. 9)

*“The ones that look at it half full are going to say, yeah, I’m just fine it took me a while. I had some struggles, but I did it.”*

Even though moving involves challenges and some sense of loss, resilience is supported by focusing on involvement at the new place. (Mary, p. 6)

*“You do still miss that area. But, but you’re looking and you’re involved in another one.”*

Positive self-talk and positive thinking are important to build resilience. (Katherine, p. 11)

*“Just self-positive thinking.”*

Choosing to make relocation fun will help it go more smoothly and support the resilience process. (Sara, p. 17)

*“Don’t make it a draggy thing, you know. It’s fun. We’re going to do it, and we’re going to enjoy it.”*

She chooses to keep a relaxed attitude toward incomplete tasks because she will have time to do them later if they don’t get done immediately. That attitude reduces her stress and supports resilience. (Sara, p. 7)

*“If I don’t get it done that day, I don’t worry about it.... Tomorrow is another day, so I’ll get it done.”*

Positive self-talk supports resilience. (Rae, p. 14)

*“I also talk to myself and get myself straightened up, too.”*

Resilience involves learning from the past and moving forward. (Rae, p. 15)

*“I look back. There’s things I would change if I could. But you can’t change the past, so you just learn and go on.”*

Resilience is supported by letting go of things that are beyond one's control. (Christine, p. 14)

*"You can't worry about it. I know. I've got a couple of friends that. Oh, they just can't think about. I can't do this. I can't do that. Well, what are you going to do about it? You have no control over it."*

### **Spirituality and faith (5 of 6 participants represented)**

Believing that God had a plan for her relocation made her relocation experience meaningful.

(Pat, p. 4)

*"I am a firm believer that God works in mysterious ways.... I just feel like everything happens for a reason."*

Her resilience was supported by more consistent social and spiritual connections. (Mary, p. 3)

*"The church is open seven days a week and, and a group of people meet together every morning at 6:30 and pray."*

Scriptural promises and personal prayer help her connect with God for His support. (Katherine, p. 8)

*"And I take everything to him in prayer."*

She felt that God led her through the moving process and confirmed specific prayers. (Rae, p. 3)

*"Big or little, I do nothing without praying about it. I think God just led me and I just followed."*

Accepting change is easier when a person believes that God is in charge of what happens.

(Christine, p. 12)

*"I think, again, your faith has a lot to do with it. If if you just realize that God is really in charge, I'm not in charge. He is. And. And let him do it."*

### **Personality traits (5 of 6 participants represented)**

Humor was a great coping strategy that helped through the most stressful moments of the move.

(Pat, p. 5)

*“So, I think I think at times like that, you just have to, you know.”*

Claiming a family identity of strength and independence supported resilience. (Pat, p. 5)

*“I come from a long line of on both sides of my family of independent, determined strong women and, and my daughters and my granddaughters all have the same characteristic.”*

Having an independent personality supported her resilience during the adjustment period.

(Katherine, p. 7)

*“I have a need to be around people to a certain extent. But I do enjoy being by myself. So that's just kind of my personality, I guess.”*

A stable personality is helpful when adjusting to changes. (Katherine, p. 13)

*“I have a friend, she's either way up or she's way down, you know? And I'm not that way. So that helps, I guess, with. Um, when you have to make changes.”*

Her positive personality supported her resilience through the relocation process. (Sara, p. 14)

*“I'm just a happy person.”*

The interpersonal strengths required to make new friends and maintain long-term relationships supported her resilience. (Sara, p. 14)

*“I like people and I make friends really easily because I do like people.”*

The experience of resilience through relocation was difficult, but achievable. (Rae, p. 15)

*It's been kind of a tough journey, but I'm a tough person, so I made it.*

Determination and strength of will have supported lifelong resilience. (Rae, p. 14)

*“Determination and being strong willed has helped me a lot. It's helped me through my life, really.”*

Being able to embrace change and keep moving forward has supported her resilience. (Christine, p. 11)

*“I know a lot of people dread to think about moving someplace or they can't leave this and they can't leave that. That's never been a problem with me. It's just. You do it. Go on. Life goes on.”*

### **Hobbies (3 of 6 participants represented)**

Staying busy (active and social) is essential to overall wellbeing and supported her resilience during the relocation process! (Sara, p. 7)

*“You got to stay busy if you want to live. Yeah, you really do.”*

Staying busy supports her resilience. (Christine, p. 1)

*“I still keep busy... you know, there's plenty to do.”*

Reading and playing the piano supported her resilience after the move by helping her cope when she was feeling lonely. (Katherine, p. 5)

*“I like to read. I spend a lot of time playing the piano.”*

Growing flowers is a hobby that has supported her resilience. (Sara, p. 11)

*“I've got my window boxes out there. Uh, I planted those.”*

She has multiple hobbies that have supported her resilience. (Christine, p. 8)

*“I've gotten hooked on some TV serials, which I normally I don't watch TV during the day, but I'll read, and I like to sew. I like to knit. You know, I'm always just to sit down and sit, I can't do it.”*

### **Summary**

An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the data yielded personal experiential themes and subthemes for each of the six participants. The personal experiential themes and subthemes were then analyzed for commonalities, and group experiential themes and subthemes



emerged. Analysis of the participants' personal experiential themes revealed five group experiential themes and 16 subthemes, which are discussed thoroughly in Chapter Five. The group experiential themes included three primary themes that answered research question one: moving involves challenges and stress, resilience takes time, and signs of successful adjustment. Two of the group experiential themes answered research question two: positive social connections support resilience, and personal strengths support resilience. The group experiential themes explored the experience of resilience through relocation with a focus on how each common theme was expressed by individual participants. The individuality of the participants' experiences was honored and reflected by presenting the personal experiential themes of each participant in this chapter before shifting the focus to group experiential themes. The group experiential themes and subthemes will be further discussed in Chapter Five along with implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

**Overview**

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis was to explore the lived experience of resilience and its relationship to strengths and resources through relocation in older adulthood. Resilience is an important factor in older adulthood, because it contributes to general well-being, physical health, quality of life, and longevity (Banyard et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2019; Matérne et al., 2022; Phillips et al., 2016). This study was designed to address three gaps in the research literature. First, the study focused on the developmental stage of older adulthood because older adults are an understudied population in coping and resilience literature (Ross et al., 2022; Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019). Older adults have been respected for their wisdom and life experience for centuries, according to Scriptures such as Proverbs 16:31 and Job 12:12 (*ESV*, 2001/2016), and this study aimed to gather and analyze knowledge from the older adult population. Second, relocation in older adulthood is a common, stressful life event that is understudied within resilience literature (van der Pers et al., 2018). Third, most of the literature that addresses resilience and relocation in older adulthood focuses only on samples of older adults who have relocated into long-term care (O'Neill et al., 2022). To address that gap, all six participants in this study were living independently and not receiving daily support for activities of daily living such as dressing and grooming.

The Group Experiential Themes and Subthemes revealed that moving is a significant stressor and that resilience, the process and outcome of successful adjustment to a stressor, takes time. The study participants recognized feeling safe and at home in the new house as important signs of successful adjustment. Analysis further revealed that positive social connections and personal strengths support resilience during relocation in older adulthood. The results of this

study are important empirically, theoretically, and practically, though further research is needed for a complete understanding of resilience through relocation in older adulthood. This chapter will discuss the study findings, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

An interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted, which revealed five group experiential themes (GETs) and 16 subthemes. Three of the GETs and eight of the subthemes answered research question one: How do older adults who have recently (within three years) relocated describe resilience after relocation? Two GETs and eight subthemes answered research question two: How do recently relocated older adults describe strengths and resources that contributed to experiencing resilience surrounding a move?

In the first group experiential theme, the study participants described resilience after relocation as challenging and stressful. Katherine, Rae, Christine, and Pat reported that moving involves challenges and stress for three reasons: sorting through and getting rid of sentimental items is difficult; all the decisions that must be made during a relocation can become overwhelming; and moving away from a home can cause feelings of loss and grief to resurface. However, the challenges and stress of relocation did not emerge as themes for Sara and Mary. Interestingly, Sara and Mary were the only two participants who were not widowed. It is possible that having a living spouse alleviated some of the challenges and stress of relocation.

In the second and third group experiential themes, the data revealed that resilience takes time and can be recognized through signs of successful adjustment. All six participants were represented in the group experiential theme, resilience takes time, making it a particularly strong theme. Within this GET, three subthemes emerged. First, time is an important component of the

resilience process. According to Christine, “I've been here about a year and a half now. It probably took 6 to 9 months to really get in” (Christine, p. 1). Second, the resilience process sometimes involves working through doubts, but arranging a home to one’s preferences over time supports resilience. One participant reported, “There were times when I cried and I thought, what have I done? But once I got settled and everything was the way I hoped it would be, I was like, okay, you got this” (Pat, p. 7). The emphasis on time as a factor in the resilience process is an important consideration for future research. Third, resilience can be an interactive process for people who do not live alone. Participants with a living spouse or a household pet reported that the successful adjustment of other members in the household supported their own resilience.

The third group experiential theme revealed signs of successful adjustment through two subthemes: feeling safe in one’s new home and identifying the new house as “home.” Both of the subthemes were strongly represented. Feeling safe in one’s new home was a sign of successful adjustment that was identified by five of the six participants. One participant reported that she recognized that her resilience process was moving toward successful adjustment because she felt safe enough to forget to lock her doors (Christine, p. 1). As the sample was comprised exclusively of female participants, the theme of safety may have been different or not as strong if males had been included. It is possible that men would not feel as vulnerable as women in an unfamiliar house. Alternatively, future studies including the male perspective might uncover other signs of successful adjustment that are unique to men. The second subtheme, identifying the new house as “home,” included representation from four of the six participants. One participant reported telling her daughter about this sign of successful adjustment: “and I said, I'm glad to go down there. But I said, Shelbyville is my home now” (Rae, p. 10). Another participant

echoed that sentiment by saying, “I'm here, been here long enough where I'm settled and it's home” (Pat, p. 2).

The final two GETs and eight subthemes answered the second research question, regarding how recently relocated older adults describe strengths and resources that contributed to experiencing resilience surrounding a move. The resource of positive social connections was found to support resilience through relocation in older adulthood as exemplified through four subthemes: support through affirmation, support through practical help, support through intentional connectivity, and support through volunteering and helping others. Two subthemes (support through affirmation and support through practical help) focused on how family and friends can support the relocator through positive social connections, and the other two subthemes (support through intentional connectivity and support through volunteering and helping others) focused on how the relocator can support their own resilience through positive social connections.

Five of the six participants revealed that support through affirmation such as verbal support from family and friends was important to their resilience, making support through affirmation a very strong subtheme. “I really think you need the support of your family or your friends. Because if you don't have that, if they're saying negative things, that will bring you down quicker than anything if you don't have the support” (Pat, p. 9). In the subtheme, support through practical help, five of the six participants reported that positive social connections were a resource that supported their resilience through practical help throughout the relocation process. Family and friends who showed up to help with cleaning, packing, moving, and other tasks supported the participants' resilience during the move. “Anything I needed, you know, sometimes even before I ask, they had it taken care of” (Pat, p. 4).

The resource of positive social connections is one that can be intentionally nurtured and developed throughout the lifespan, as exemplified through the subthemes of support through intentional connectivity and support through volunteering and helping others. Mary advised, “And as you move, create bonding relationships” (Mary, p. 4). Christine, Sara, and Rae reported that they prioritized social activities throughout the relocation experience to support their resilience. “I do go to the Y three days a week, take a class. Knew some people; have met some other wonderful people” (Christine, p. 6). The final subtheme represented within the GET Positive Social Connections Support Resilience focused on support through volunteering and helping others. Half of the participants in the study were represented in this subtheme. Katherine said that volunteering, focusing on others, and feeling needed helped her adjust to the move and supported her resilience: “It helps you, you know, to feel like you're needed” (Katherine, p. 9). The subthemes of support through intentional connectivity and support through volunteering and helping others could have been influenced by the fact that all members of the sample were female. It is possible that a study including men would have emphasized supports other than intentional connectivity and helping others due to gender differences. However, further study is needed to fully understand the role that gender might play in resilience through relocation among older adults.

The final group experiential theme that emerged during data analysis was Personal Strengths Support Resilience. Personal strengths were found to support resilience through relocation in older adulthood as exemplified through four subthemes: positive focus, spirituality and faith, personality traits, and hobbies. Positive focus was the strongest subtheme to emerge in the study, with all six participants represented, and each participant expressed the concept in a unique way. All participants in the study identified positive focus as a personal strength that

supported their experience of resilience through relocation in older adulthood. Spirituality and faith were important personal strengths that supported resilience for five of the six participants. Pat said, “I am a firm believer that God works in mysterious ways.... I just feel like everything happens for a reason” (Pat, p. 4). Personality traits also emerged as a subtheme. Specifically, humor, strength, determination, independence, stability, positivity, interpersonal strengths, and the ability to embrace change were all identified as being supportive of resilience during relocation in older adulthood. The final subtheme that emerged during data analysis centered around hobbies. Three participants reported that staying busy with hobbies such as gardening and reading supported their resilience during the move. “You got to stay busy if you want to live. Yeah, you really do” (Sara, p. 7). The subthemes represented within this group experiential theme may have been different if males had enrolled in the study. It is possible that males would have focused more on personal strengths such as personality traits and hobbies and less on spirituality and faith. Though gender differences may appear in future studies, it is likely that those gender differences would influence subthemes more than group experiential themes. The overarching group experiential themes are more likely to be repeated regardless of gender, but individuality and diversity of future participants may affect how those main themes are represented in the subthemes of future studies.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The results of data analysis found that moving involves stress and that resilience takes time. For recently relocated older adults, signs of successful adjustment include feeling safe in the new home and identifying the new house as “home.” These key findings answered research question one regarding how resilience is experienced and described by adults aged 65 and older who have recently relocated to independent living situations.

Further, the interpretative phenomenological analysis found that a combination of positive social connections and personal strengths support resilience. Positive social connections were the most important resource that supported resilience, and supportive personal strengths included positive focus, spirituality and faith, personality traits, and hobbies. These key findings answered research question two regarding how strengths and resources contribute to resilience through relocation in older adulthood.

The findings were meaningful because they aligned with the present empirical research literature reviewed in chapter two. The findings of this study advanced empirical knowledge by addressing resilience in an understudied population, older adults, and in an understudied situation, relocation. Further, the present findings are meaningful because they addressed resilience in older adults who had relocated to independent living situations rather than to long-term care facilities.

## **Comparison to the Research Literature**

### ***Stress and Relocation***

Relocation is a common experience in older adulthood (van der Pers et al., 2018). Li et al. (2022a) studied relocation patterns of older adults in the United States and discovered that relocation in older adulthood is trending upward but is understudied. Several studies detailed in Chapter Two recognized that relocation in older adulthood is a stressor; however, those studies were primarily conducted with older adults who relocated to long-term care rather than independent living situations (Johnson & Bibbo, 2014; Koppitz et al., 2017; Lan et al., 2020; O'Neill et al., 2022). Relocation as a stressor was heavily supported by the results of the present study. The first Group Experiential Theme was Moving Involves Challenges and Stress. Of the six participants, only Mary felt that her move was “perfect,” but even she admitted, “It was still a



change” (Mary, p. 2). The common stressors that emerged within the study came from sorting and eliminating sentimental items, making many decisions, and feelings of loss and grief associated with leaving the previous home.

### ***Resilience and The Resilience Portfolio Model***

According to the American Psychological Association (2023), resilience is both the process and the outcome of successful adaptation to challenging or demanding circumstances. This definition was supported by the Group Experiential Theme: Resilience Takes Time and the Group Experiential Theme: Signs of Successful Adjustment. The experience of resilience through relocation in older adulthood was described by the study participants as a dynamic process of adjustment which took time. They identified the process as being mostly complete when they felt safe and at home in the new house. However, some participants admitted that the resilience process was still ongoing at the time of the interview. For example, Katherine said, “It took a little while and it's still there's times I'm like, what in the world have I done?” (Katherine, p. 4).

The Resilience Portfolio Model posits that each person has a unique constellation, or portfolio, of strengths (self-regulation, meaning-making, sociability) and resources (environmental factors and supportive relationships) (Grych et al., 2015). This model is sometimes referred to as a poly-strengths theory because it claims that a higher number (density) of different (diversity) strengths and resources creates a higher capacity for resilience (Hamby et al., 2018). The poly-strengths theory within the Resilience Portfolio Model was strongly supported by many of the studies detailed in Chapter Two. The underlying concept of the Resilience Portfolio is that the combination of a person’s strengths and resources is more essential for successful adaptation than any one strength (Grych et al., 2015). This idea was

strongly supported by the results of the present study. Each of the participants reported that their experience of resilience through relocation in older adulthood was supported by a variety of strengths and resources rather than focusing mainly on one strength. All six participants reported that a mixture of positive social connections (a resource) and personal strengths were supportive of their resilience experience. However, further study would be required to determine to what extent the strengths and resources that support resilience through relocation in older adulthood align with those listed in the Resilience Portfolio Model.

### *Coping*

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral skills used to manage the demands of a stressful situation or regulate negative emotions caused by stress (Folkman et al., 1987; Tennen & Litt, 2010). According to the Resilience Portfolio Model, successful coping plays a large role in resilience alongside one's unique constellation of strengths and resources (Grych et al., 2015). Coping can include active or problem-focused coping in which the individual focuses on balancing the person-environment relationship (Folkman et al., 1987). For example, participants in this study reported arranging the new home to suit their preferences and intentionally reaching out for social connection. Coping can also include emotion-focused coping or cognitive coping in which an individual focuses on balancing a negative emotional reaction (Folkman et al., 1987). For example, the subtheme Positive Focus emerged in the present study as an important personal strength to support resilience.

Several studies detailed in Chapter Two found religious coping and spirituality to be important supports for resilience (Aten et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2020; Skalisky et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2020). The findings from the present study supported that finding, as five of the six participants were represented in the Group Experiential Subtheme: Spirituality and Faith. As

expected from the literature review, a combination of effective coping, resources, and strengths were found to support resilience in recently relocated older adults.

### **Contributions to Research Theory**

Three theoretical underpinnings created the foundation of the literature review and this dissertation study: older adulthood as a developmental stage, The Resilience Portfolio Model, and a biblical perspective. These theoretical foundations were discussed thoroughly in Chapters One and Two. Acknowledging each of these theories in light of the study findings is important because the theoretical foundation provided a framework for each step of the study including the initial conceptualization, the literature review, and the research design. In the spirit of qualitative research, I attempted to set aside all outside pre-conceptualizations before and during data analysis, and the data analysis was presented in its purest form in chapter four. However, the data analysis clearly aligned with the literature review detailed in Chapter Two, especially the Resilience Portfolio Model.

The primary research questions of this study focused on how participants describe both resilience through relocation and the strengths and resources that contributed to experiencing resilience. The answers to the primary research questions in an IPA study can sometimes lead to a secondary, theory-driven research question, which can be addressed during the interpretative phase of the study (Smith et al., 2022). As mentioned in Chapter Three, a secondary research question may emerge, such as: To what extent are the strengths and resources listed in the resilience portfolio model perceived as supportive of resilience by older adults who have recently relocated? Although the results of this study aligned with many aspects of Grych et al.'s (2015) Resilience Portfolio Model, the results were not overwhelming enough or specific enough to merit engaging a secondary research question.

Erikson's (1950) psychosocial development theory purported that the developmental stage of older adulthood is marked by the final identity crisis, ego integrity versus despair, which involves a process of reflection through which older adults try to assign meaning to their experiences to reach ego integrity. This process of meaning making aligns with the Resilience Portfolio Model, which designates meaning making as being one of three categories of personal strengths that support resilience. Meaning making did not emerge as an important or prevalent theme in data analysis, but it was present as a subtheme in Pat's PET: Inner Strengths. However, the Resilience Portfolio Model promotes the idea that meaning making can occur best in those who have clear goals and values along with the belief that life holds purpose and meaning (Grych et al., 2015). Religion and spirituality can provide the kind of scaffolding that supports meaning-making (Grych et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick & Tzouvara, 2019; Jones et al., 2018). One of the Group Experiential Subthemes that emerged in this study was Spirituality and Faith, in which five of the six participants were represented. Though meaning making was not strongly supported as a theme in this study, the supportive framework provided by religion and spirituality was found to be important to resilience through relocation. Further, one could argue that the interview process itself was a way for the older adults involved in this study to make meaning from their experiences of resilience through relocation. Many of the participants appeared to feel increased confidence as each interview progressed, which could have been a result of the reflection process catalyzed by the interview process.

### **Biblical Foundations**

One of the underlying biblical ideas in this study was the idea that older adults have wisdom gained through life experience. Job 12:12 says, "Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Most adults aged 65 and older have

experienced resilience (successful adjustment to a stressor) in several different situations throughout their lives. That life experience, earned over time, is valuable and worthy of study. Another underlying biblical idea that was foundational in the creation of this study was that older adults are capable to share the wisdom gained through life experience with others of all ages. I Peter 5:1-5 encapsulates this concept:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (*ESV*, 2001/2016, I Peter 5:1-5).

Each of the participants in this study capably shared wisdom in their interviews, which supported this biblical idea. The idea of sharing knowledge with peers and other generations through teaching (Psalm 145:4), mentorship (Psalm 71:18; Titus 2:3-5), and friendship (Proverbs 27:17) is present throughout Scripture (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

### **Implications**

The results of this dissertation study have implications within empirical and theoretical research, as the study addressed three literature gaps: an understudied population (older adults), an understudied topic (resilience through relocation), and an understudied context (relocation to independent living). Further, the results of this dissertation study have implications for practice (interventions and self-help). First, the results of this study extend the current body of knowledge

on resilience by exploring the experiences of an understudied population, older adults, and by examining the phenomenon of resilience in relocation to independent living situations, an understudied stressor. The results of this dissertation study extend current empirical knowledge by investigating resilience through relocation to situations other than long-term care. Although relocation to independent living situations is common in older adulthood, it is widely understudied in favor of older adults moving into long-term care (Li et al., 2022a).

Second, the results of this dissertation study have implications for the advancement of theory. Some resilience theories, including the Resilience Portfolio Model, are built on research surrounding resilience in the face of trauma, violence, or disaster rather than more ordinary and mundane stressors such as relocation (Grych et al., 2015; Park et al., 2021; Stafford & Gulwadi, 2019). However, the present study began to bridge the research gap by exploring resilience through relocation in older adulthood. The results suggest that the Resilience Portfolio Model may be applicable to more routine stressors such as relocation, but further study should be conducted.

Third, the knowledge gained from this study can be used for further research, as detailed later in this chapter, and for formal interventions aimed at supporting resilience in older adults who are relocating. Formal interventions could be offered by churches, counselors, or communities to support resilience during relocation in older adulthood. For example, the narrative intervention suggested by Mager (2019) could be adapted to include a focus on the strengths and resources that support one's resilience as found in this study. Self-help resources could be created using plain language to share the results of this study with older adults who are considering relocation. These self-help resources could also guide family and friends of relocating older adults to understand how to best support their loved ones. Though further study

is needed, this study clearly showed that relocation to an independent living situation in older adulthood is a significant stressor and that the process and outcome of successful adjustment takes time. Also, this study showed that the affirmation and practical help offered through positive social connections are essential to resilience and that intentionally maintaining social connections and helping others are supportive of resilience. A positive focus, spirituality, various personality traits, and hobbies are also supportive of resilience through relocation. These results could present benefits to society including increased empirical knowledge, theoretical exploration, and practical application.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study have been discussed in Chapters One and Three, and no new limitations of the study were discovered during data collection and analysis. Limitations are found in every research study, and identifying those limitations is important to fully engage the study. In this dissertation study, the main limitations were subjectivity and a lack of diversity within the criterion sample. This study was designed to include gender diversity, but only females expressed interest in participating in the study. The lack of gender diversity should be recognized as an unexpected limitation within the present study.

Subjectivity is one of the most common limitations in qualitative study because qualitative studies are designed around the researcher's ability to interpret the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, phenomenological studies include the subjectivity of the participants' self-reported experiences, opinions, and perspectives (Smith et al., 2022). In this interpretative phenomenological analysis, the study data, gathered through semi-structured interview was subjective because it was comprised of self-reported experiences rather than independent observations. The data analysis was also subjective because the researcher acted as a research

instrument to interpret and analyze the data. Though subjectivity is a prevalent limitation in IPA studies, it is also the greatest strength of IPA studies. IPA studies allow for a deep, rich understanding of the studied phenomenon due to the uniqueness of human interpretation. In this study, the Group Experiential Themes and Subthemes identified several strong similarities between the experiences of the participants while also showcasing the unique perspectives represented by the individual participants within each theme and subtheme.

The limited diversity represented within the criterion sample was another limitation of this study. Homogeneity of the sample is important for interpretative phenomenological analysis because all participants must have experienced the same phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). To ensure a level of homogeneity, the sample was selected within the bounds of certain criteria. All participants for this study had to be age 65 or older, generally healthy, and resilient. All participants also had to be living independently in or near Shelbyville, Indiana and had to have relocated within the past three years. However, diversity of race, gender, marital status, and socioeconomic status within the sample would have increased the transferability of the results. The participants in this study were all White females who were either married or widowed at the time of the study. However, the sample showed some diversity of education level, with the highest level of education ranging from a GED to a master's degree.

The limited gender diversity of the sample should be considered an unexpected limitation of the study. If males had participated in the study, the results could have been different. Since the study only included women, it is unclear whether all of the results are transferrable to all older adults (male and female) or whether some of the study results are only applicable to females. For example, one of the group experiential themes was that feeling safe in the new home was a sign of successful adjustment. It is possible that feeling safe is a sign of adjustment



that is unique to females and that males would have reported a different sign of adjustment. It is likely that a study including both males and females would result in similar group experiential themes; however, the subthemes would likely be affected by gender differences. For example, subthemes such as “support through volunteering and helping others” and “faith and spirituality” may be more important to women than they are to men due to gender differences. It is possible that a study including men would have emphasized different supports and personal strengths that affect resilience during relocation due to gender differences. Further study should be undertaken to explore potential gender differences in resilience through relocation in older adulthood.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should be completed on the topic of resilience during relocation in older adulthood. This study explored a close, nuanced view of the experience of resilience through relocation in older adulthood. The results showed several strengths and resources that were supportive of resilience. The results also showed that resilience through relocation in older adulthood takes time. Future research on this topic should be structured to allow time for successful adjustment. For example, a study that is structured to study resilience for only three months after a relocation may not reveal the complete experience of resilience. Since this study was a qualitative study that revealed rich, nuanced data, a logical next step for research may be quantitative in nature. A quantitative study could be used to measure various aspects of resilience through relocation in older adulthood within a broader and more diverse sample.

The results of this study pointed toward alignment with the Resilience Portfolio Model, and further study could explore the Resilience Portfolio Model and how it relates specifically to relocation in older adulthood. For example, a survey could be administered to a larger and more diverse sample of adults aged 65 and older who have relocated within the last three years. The

survey could be designed to measure the extent to which participants experienced resilience during relocation along with the extent to which each of the categories of strengths and resources mentioned in the Resilience Portfolio Model were present.

Since the current study was comprised of only female participants, a similar study could be designed to focus on comparing the experiences of male and female participants. The present study could be replicated with six males, and the results could be compared to the present study to check for similarities and differences that may appear due to gender. Alternatively, a new study could be conducted with an equal number of male and female participants to see whether any major gender differences appear.

As discussed in Chapter Two, several resilience interventions show promise to increase resilience and the positive outcomes associated with it. However, no interventions have been specifically tested to support healthy relocation in older adulthood. Future research could explore the effects of one of the resilience interventions mentioned in Chapter Two within the context of relocation during older adulthood. For example, recently relocated older adults could participate in a resilience intervention, and their resilience levels could be compared to recently relocated older adults in a control group.

### **Summary**

The results of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis explored the lived experience of resilience and its relationship to strengths and resources after relocation in older adulthood. The analysis revealed several key findings. First, relocation to an independent living situation in older adulthood involves challenges and stress. Second, resilience takes time and can be recognized by feeling safe and at home in the new house. Third, strengths such as positive focus, spirituality and faith, various personality traits, and hobbies combine with positive social

connections (a resource) to support resilience. These key findings have implications for continued empirical research and could be used to guide self-help literature and formal interventions aimed at supporting resilience through relocation in older adulthood. Although limitations such as subjectivity and limited sample diversity must be considered, this study addressed gaps in resilience research by focusing on resilience an understudied population, older adults, in an understudied context, relocation to independent situations. The results of this study provide important insight into the importance of time in the resilience process. It also highlighted the importance of resources and strengths in supporting resilience during relocation in older adulthood.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. (Evaluative) Can you tell me how well you feel you have adapted to your recent move?

*Possible prompts:* Have you adjusted to your new home?

2. (Narrative) Before we continue, please tell me about your experience of relocation.

*Possible prompts:* What was moving like for you? How would you describe your recent move?

3. (Narrative) Resilience involves adjusting (or adapting) to challenging life events. How did you experience resilience in your recent move?

*Possible prompts:* What did the resilience process look like for you during this relocation? Was there a moment when you felt like you had achieved successful adjustment to the move?

4. (Descriptive) Did any resources or people influence your resilience during relocation and how?

*Possible prompts:* Which relationships helped you adjust? What kinds of activities did you find helpful for resilience?

5. (Descriptive) What personal strengths supported your resilience during the move?

*Possible prompts:* What aspects of your experience impacted your ability to adapt to the move?

6. (Comparative) If you ever have to move again, what do you think would be most helpful to support your resilience?

## APPENDIX B: ELIGIBILITY SURVEY

The survey will be administered over the phone or in person, and the answers will be recorded and maintained on a password-protected laptop.

**I am 65 years old or older.**

Yes

No

(Yes will move forward)

**My primary language is English.**

Yes

No

(Yes will move forward)

**I currently live in or near Shelbyville, Indiana.**

Yes

No

(Yes will move forward)

**I moved to a different residence within the last three years.**

Yes

No

(Yes will move forward)

**My current living situation is independent, meaning I do not need daily help with tasks like eating and grooming.**

Yes

No



Other (explain)

(Those in independent situations will move forward)

**Please rate your general mental and physical health over the last year.**

1 Very Poor

2 Poor

3 Fair

4 Good

5 Very Good

(3+ will move forward)

**Resilience is successfully adjusting to a challenging life event (American Psychological Association, 2023). To what extent do you feel you were resilient in your recent move?**

1 Not at All

2 Very Little

3 Somewhat

4 Very Much

5 Completely

(3+ will move forward)

## APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

**Gender:****Race:****Marital Status:**

Married	Cohabiting	Unmarried	Widowed
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**Education Level:**

High School	Some College	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree	Post-Graduate Degree
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**Job Status:**

Retired	Working Part-Time	Working Full-Time	Volunteer work
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## APPENDIX D: SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT

ATTENTION Adults: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Psychology at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to better understand how older adults experience resilience through relocation to independent living situations. To participate, you must meet the following inclusion criteria: 65 years of age or older, English-speaking, living in or near Shelbyville, Indiana, resilient, in stable health, and recently (within 36 months) relocated to an independent living situation.

Participants will be asked to participate in one audio-recorded in-person interview, which should take about 45 to 60 minutes to complete. Participants may check the written interview transcript for accuracy after it is completed if they wish, but it is not required. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

If you meet the study criteria and would like to participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] for more information. A consent document will be given to you at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign and return the consent form to me at the time of the interview.

## APPENDIX E: FLYER AND NEWSPAPER RECRUITMENT AD

ATTENTION Adults: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Psychology at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to better understand how older adults experience resilience through relocation to independent living situations. To participate, you must meet the following inclusion criteria: 65 years of age or older, English-speaking, living in or near Shelbyville, Indiana, resilient, in stable health, and recently (within 36 months) relocated to an independent living situation.

Participants will be asked to participate in one audio-recorded in-person interview, which should take about 45 to 60 minutes to complete. Participants may check the written interview transcript for accuracy after it is completed if they wish, but it is not required. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

If you meet the study criteria and would like to participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] for more information. A consent document will be given to you at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign and return the consent form to me at the time of the interview.

## APPENDIX F: STAMPED CONSENT FORM

**Consent**

**Title of the Project:** Resilience through Relocation in Older Adulthood  
**Principal Investigator:** Holly Walker, Doctoral Candidate, School of Behavioral Sciences,  
 Liberty University

**Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 65 years of age or older, living in or near Shelbyville, Indiana, resilient, in stable health, and recently (within 3 years) relocated to an independent living situation. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

**What is the study about and why is it being done?**

The purpose of the study is to better understand how older adults experience resilience through relocation to independent living situations.

**What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. You may check the written transcript of our interview for accuracy if you wish, but it is not required.

**How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include empirical knowledge, theoretical exploration, and practical application. The knowledge gained from this study can be used for further research and for future self-help or formal interventions aimed at supporting resilience in older adults who are relocating.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

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The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Although identifying information will be excluded, some direct quotes from the interview transcript will be used in the final report.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for five years and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

#### **How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision of whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Holly Walker. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Patricia Vann, at [REDACTED].

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is

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Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Subject Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature & Date

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## APPENDIX G

## Sample Transcript with Comments: Christine

Speaker	Verbatim Transcript	Comments/Exploratory Notes
<b>Holly</b>	Can you tell me how you feel you've adapted to your recent move?	
<b>Christine</b>	Um. I think I've adapted well, but it's taken time. Uh, I lived in the country. This is not country, but neither is it city. You know, which has been good for me. I love having the people around. And knowing, you know, if at my age, if I would fall or something. I know I have a list of various people I could call.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Successful adaptation takes time.</li> <li>- The new setting fits her needs.</li> <li>- She feels safe with people close by who can offer help and support.</li> </ul>
<b>Holly</b>	Oh, perfect.	
<b>Christine</b>	And they've been good in giving it to me. So I think, you know, and the longer I'm here, the better I like it. It's. It's handy. I like the people. It's close to the Y. It's good walking paths. There are problems, but there are any place you live. So, you know.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The longer she lives in the new place, the more she grows to like it.</li> <li>- The new place is convenient.</li> <li>- She likes her new community.</li> <li>- Her new home is close to amenities.</li> <li>- The new house has access to walking paths.</li> <li>- The new place has some issues, but any other place would have issues as well.</li> </ul>
<b>Holly</b>	Yeah. So that adjustment is going well, then.	
<b>Christine</b>	I think so, yeah. Yeah. I'm glad I made the move. And although I liked my home in the	- She is adjusting well and is happy she moved.



	country, this is. I still keep busy. Yeah. So, you know, there's plenty to do, so.	- She likes to stay busy in the new place.
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## APPENDIX H

**Experiential Statements Taken from Sample Transcript: Christine**

Successful adaptation takes some time. p. 1

*“I think I've adapted well, but it's taken time.”*

Feeling safe in her new home has supported her resilience. p. 1

*“I love having the people around. And knowing, you know, if at my age, if I would fall or something. I know I have a list of various people I could call.”*

Her new home has become more desirable over time. p. 1

*“The longer I'm here, the better I like it.”*

Staying busy supports her resilience. p. 1

*“I still keep busy... you know, there's plenty to do.”*