

## The Relationship Between Intrinsic Religiosity and Resilience Among Tunisian Female University Students

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### Abstract

This study examines the relationship between intrinsic religiosity and resilience among Tunisian female university students. To achieve this objective, a sample of 244 participants was selected using a self-report method. Participants completed measures assessing intrinsic religiosity and resilience, and the data were analyzed using correlation and linear regression analyses. The results showed a statistically significant, albeit modest, positive correlation between intrinsic religiosity and resilience ( $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, linear regression analysis showed that intrinsic religiosity accounted for a small but meaningful proportion of the variance in resilience scores ( $R^2 = 0.055$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Based on these findings, it is reasonable to conclude that an increase in intrinsic religiosity contributes to fostering resilience, although this relationship remains modest and is influenced by other unexamined factors. The implications of these findings are discussed in light of the cultural and religious contexts in Tunisia, highlighting the need for further research to explore additional psychological and social factors that may influence this relationship. Finally, this study contributes to the growing body of research on psychological resilience in non-Western, predominantly Muslim contexts, where religiosity may function as a culturally relevant coping mechanism.

**Keywords:** Intrinsic religiosity, resilience, Tunisia, female students

## **Introduction**

The ability to cope with adversity can be enhanced by turning to religion and spirituality. A particular manifestation of spirituality, characterised by recurrent references to God and faith in a supreme being deemed responsible for one's fate, has been observed to fortify the resilience of young adults grappling with exceedingly stressful situations (Abdel-Khalek & Tekke, 2019; Dolcos et al., 2021; Javanmard, 2013). The concept of placing one's burdens upon a "divine and supreme power" and maintaining unwavering faith in its guidance throughout one's lifetime is a hallmark of this belief system. Consequently, this outlook engenders a sense of optimism, a resilience that is evident in their ability to face life's challenges without trepidation.

The concept of spirituality is frequently associated with that of religion, as it incorporates spiritual components that are integral to religious belief and practice. However, the converse is not true, i.e. spirituality does not necessarily indicate religiosity. Koenig et al. (2001) posit that spirituality encompasses a personal quest to comprehend end-of-life concerns, their connotations, and their connection with the sacred and transcendent. Puchalski et al. (2009) delineate an aspect of human nature characterised by the pursuit of meaning and purpose in life, as well as the establishment of connections with the present, oneself, others, nature, and one's surroundings. It is noteworthy that this pursuit of significance does not necessitate the involvement of religious practices or the establishment of religious groups (Koenig et al., 2001; Puchalski et al., 2009).

The concept of religiosity, on the other hand, pertains to behaviours, feelings, thoughts, and experiences stemming from the aspiration to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform one's relationship with a divine being or entity, a reality, or the ultimate truth. The definition of patterns of behaviour and the encouragement of overt religious expression are hallmarks of this phenomenon (Hill et al., 2000). Consequently, rituals and overt practices represent significant components of religion's construction. Finally, it is important to note that religious affiliations indicate membership of a community that shares the same beliefs and practices.

Allport's (1963) seminal work distinguished between "mature" and "immature" religious orientations, which have since become synonymous with the contemporary terms "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" religious orientations, respectively. The principal characteristic of intrinsic religiosity, as initially proposed, involves practising religion sincerely and intentionally. In contrast, extrinsic religiosity, which involves the utilisation of religion for instrumental purposes, particularly for maintaining social relationships, has been defined by Allport and Ross (1967). Research by Cohen et al. (2005) has consistently demonstrated that intrinsic religiosity is regarded as more normative than

extrinsic religiosity. Numerous studies have indicated a positive correlation between intrinsic religiosity orientation and improved physical and mental well-being (Smith, Richards & Maglio, 2004; Masters et al., 2005; Salsman & Carlson, 2005).

The concept of psychological resilience was initially intrinsic in nature, with individual characteristics enabling a person to overcome difficulties (Matsen, 2001). This initial phase of resilience has been referred to as the 'first wave' of resilience, as described by Richardson (2002). More recently, however, there has been an increase in studies of community resilience, which considers the influence of an individual's social environment on resilience. Research has identified religion and spirituality as contributing factors to enhanced community resilience (Frounfelker et al., 2020).

Resilience is currently defined as the capability to deal with, adjust to, and grow in the face of adversity in a manner that safeguards one's health, well-being, and quality of life (Connor & Davison, 2003; Luthar et al., 2000; Manning & Miles, 2018; Rutter, 2012; Tay & Lim, 2020). It is also defined as successful adaptation and healing following a disruptive life event, as well as psychological growth in the aftermath of a significant source of stress (Luthar et al., 2000; Manciaux, 2001; Rutten et al., 2013). It encompasses the ability to swiftly recover from illness and setbacks and requires the capacity to adapt to significant stressors, such as tragedy, trauma, and adversity.

In summary, the scientific literature approaches the concept of resilience either as a dynamic process influenced by life events and challenges or as an individual personality trait. Whilst the binary approach to determining the presence or absence of resilience may be tempting, the study of resilience remains complex. Indeed, as Helmreich et al. (2017) have demonstrated, the determination of resilience is influenced by numerous factors such as coping skills, self-efficacy, optimism, social support, flexibility, positive emotions, self-esteem and confidence, meaning and purpose in life and religious and spiritual beliefs.

Manning and Miles (2018) posit that religion exerts a twofold influence on the process of resilience. On the one hand, at an intrinsic level, religion offers individuals beliefs that give meaning to their trials and establish a relationship with the divine. This is achieved through active coping strategies, where the negative event is perceived as a divine lesson and an opportunity for growth, and passive coping strategies, where the event is accepted as God's will. On the other hand, at an extrinsic level, being part of a religious community has been shown to reinforce psychosocial resources such as self-confidence, self-esteem and a sense of self-efficacy (Schieman, 2008), which have been shown to be resilience resources that effectively strengthen the ability to cope with negative events.

The primary objective of this investigation is to examine the correlation and linear relationship between intrinsic religiosity and resilience among a group of Tunisian female students of a young age. Intrinsic religiosity is defined as an orientation in which individuals are wholeheartedly devoted to their religious beliefs, which provide significance and enrichment to their lives. In contrast, extrinsic religiosity is described as an orientation in which individuals use religion to fulfill personal or social needs (Allport & Ross, 1967; Kirkpatrick & Hood, 1990).

## **Methods**

### **Participants and Procedure**

Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling method among undergraduate students from the University of Tunis and the University of Jendouba. All the participants were recruited voluntarily, and all provided informed consent before data collection. Inclusion criteria required participants to be enrolled in psychology or education sciences, fall within the defined age range (18-26 years), and be present during data collection. However, as the selection was based on accessibility criteria, the generalisability of the findings to the broader student population may be limited.

The scales were administered in groups, under the supervision of the examiners. The assessment lasted approximately 15 minutes, following an explanation of the instructions. The research relies solely on the secondary use of anonymized data, with no possibility of identifying participants, even after data linkage.

Analysis was conducted on data collected from 244 female students aged between 19 and 26 years ( $M = 20.75$ ,  $SD = 1.93$ ). Our sample size is considered adequate and capable of producing reliable estimates of the associations between the variables in our investigation. Furthermore, studies using comparable techniques have used larger or similar sample sizes (Dolcos et al., 202; Llewellyn et al., 2013; Luberto et al., 2014).

Sample size and effect size were estimated prior to data collection using G\*Power 3.1 to ensure sufficient power for the statistical tests employed. Based on the expected effect size and the statistical methods used, a required sample size of 226 participants was calculated to achieve a statistical power of 0.95 with  $\alpha = 0.05$ . With 244 participants, the study met this requirement, ensuring sufficient statistical power.

It is important to note that the decision to focus exclusively on a female population was not an intentional methodological choice; rather, it was a result of field constraints, as the majority of students at the targeted universities were female. Moreover, a review of the extant literature indicated the potential for a gender effect on resilience (Erdogan et al., 2015; Lowe et al., 2022; Yalcin-

Siedentopf et al., 2021), thereby reinforcing the decision to exclude male students from the study.

### **Self-report measures**

The Tunisian Resilience Scale (TRS), devised by Derouiche-El Kamel and Hentati (2021) assesses two personal characteristics that reflect the degree of resilience, notably “positive adaptation” in the face of significant hardship and the “ability to recuperate” from it. The scale takes into account a resilience model that incorporates two dimensions present in almost all explanations of resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Lee & Cranford, 2008; Leipold & Greve, 2009; Smith et al., 2010). Ten statements were introduced as items, each rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all true to 5 = almost always true). The collective score on the scale ranged from 10 to 50, with higher scores representing greater resilience. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, demonstrating adequate internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha of .70 (N = 554).

The Arabic Scale of Intrinsic Religiosity (ASIR), developed by Abdel-Khalek (2017), assesses intrinsic religiosity without bias towards any particular religion or belief system. The scale consists of 15 statements, each rated on a five-point intensity scale (ranging from 1, indicating 'strongly disagree', to 5, indicating 'strongly agree'). The total score can range from 15 to 75, with higher scores indicating greater religiosity. The ASIR scale exhibited high internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .91 (N = 155).

### **Analysis**

The data exhibited a normal distribution. No missing data was observed, as all participants completed the scales in full, ensuring a complete dataset for analysis. The bivariate relationships with the target variables were evaluated using Pearson's correlation test. The assumptions of the linear regression model were tested, and coefficients were estimated with ordinary least squares (OLS). The significance of the coefficients was assessed using the Student's t-test, and model fit was evaluated with the R<sup>2</sup> coefficient and residual analysis. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS for Windows (IBM, version 20).

### **Results**

In our study, the female participants' age ranged from 19 to 26 years, with a mean age of 20.75 years and a standard deviation of approximately 1.93 years. The mean score on the Resilience scale among the participants was 34.81, with a standard deviation of 6.17. The information was presented logically with causal connections between statements. The mean score on the Religiosity scale was 54.68, with a standard deviation of 13.73 (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Descriptive findings of the research sample

Variable	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D
Age	244	19	26	20.75	1.93
Religiosity score	244	15	75	54.68	13.73
Resilience score	244	16	48	34.81	6.17

In order to examine the association between resilience and religiosity among all students, we conducted a correlation analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to ascertain the relationship between the religiosity variable and the resilience variable (refer to Table 2). Despite a small positive correlation coefficient, the result was statistically significant ( $p < 0.000$ ).

**Table 2:** Pearson’s correlation coefficient between religious beliefs and resilience

Variables	1	2
Religiosity	–	0.234***
Resilience	0.234***	–

\*\*\* $p < 0.000$

The purpose of conducting a linear regression analysis was to evaluate the predictability of the religiosity variable on the resilience variable (refer to Table 3). The results in Table 3 indicate that a correlation coefficient of  $R = 0.234$  exists between these two variables. The coefficient of determination, signifying the proportion of variability in the resilience variable explained by regression, is roughly  $R^2 = 0.055$ . In other words, our sample shows that intrinsic religiosity scores account for only 5.5% of the variance in the resilience score ( $R^2 = 0.055$ ). Therefore, religiosity has a comparatively limited impact on resilience. The adjusted coefficient of determination stands at around 0.051. This small difference from the coefficient of determination may be due to other factors or the sample size. Therefore, religiosity only partly explains the variation in resilience, as other unmeasured variables or contextual factors may have a more significant impact on explaining such variation.

**Table 3:** Summary of linear regression analysis model

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Estimated standard error
1	0.234	0.055	0.051	6.011

Table 4 shows that there is a linear correlation between the variables, as confirmed by the regression analysis. The results of the variance analysis (see Table 4) support the hypothesis of a linear association between the variables, with  $F_{1 \text{ \& } 242} = 14.078$  and  $p < 0.000$ .

The standardised and non-standardised regression coefficients reveal a substantial correlation between resilience and intrinsic religiosity ( $\beta = 0.234$ ) at the 99% confidence level (see Table 5). The findings indicate that intrinsic religiosity is a reliable predictor of resilience.

Regarding the significance test, since the test set at zero produces a value greater than 0.05, the hypothesis of the coefficient being equal to zero should not be discarded and should be excluded from the regression equation. As a result, the equation for the regression in this study is  $y = 0.105x$ , which means that, while keeping all other variables constant, a unit change in intrinsic religiosity will lead to a 0.234 shift in student resilience ( $\beta = 0.234$ ).

**Table 4:** Regression variance analysis of the predictor variable of religiosity and dependant variable of resilience

Model	Sum of squares	d.f	Mean of Squares	F	Sig.
<b>Regression</b>	508.637	1	508.637	14.078	.000
<b>Remaining</b>	8743.309	242	36.129		
<b>Total</b>	9251.947	243			

**Table 5:** Summary of the resultants of standardized and non-standardized regression of resilience variable prediction by the predictor variable of religiosity

Model	A	$\beta$	T	Sig.
<b>Fixed value</b>	29.045		18.343	0.000
<b>Religiosity</b>	.105	.234	3.752	

Note. Dependent variable: resilience

## Discussion

The current investigation reveals a weak but noteworthy association between intrinsic religiosity and resilience. It is important to note that resilience is not an immutable characteristic, but rather an evolving process that can be cultivated and strengthened over time (Foster et al., 2019). This process encompasses the development of problem-solving skills, the utilisation of support from others, the adoption of a positive attitude, and the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances (Ungar & Theron, 2020).

The findings of this study suggest that, while religiosity may have a role to play in the development of resilience, other significant factors must also be considered when attempting to understand the full picture. Thus, religiosity seems to have a defensive role in alleviating physical and mental distress, thereby aligning with Koenig's (2009) hypothesis. This suggests that intrinsic religiosity contributes to an individual's resilience; however, it is not the only predictor. The study focuses on religiosity as a value internalized by individuals, without ethnocentrism or dogmatism (Allport, 1969, 1971).

This is in line with prior academic research which has linked religiosity to several factors, including mental health (Koenig, 2007, 2009; Mosqueiro et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2003), happiness, and well-being (Francis et al., 2003; Francis et al., 2016; French & Joseph, 1999; Myers & Diener, 1995; Rusman et al., 2023). Daclos et al. (2021) conducted a study that indicated that religious adaptation protects against emotional distress and promotes resilience.

Nevertheless, outcomes from research into the relationship between religiosity and resilience can be inconsistent. Schwalm et al. (2022) conducted

a thorough review of 2468 articles, including 34 observational studies, investigating the association between Spirituality/Religiosity (S/R) and resilience. The analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between S/R and resilience. However, some studies did not find any evidence of a positive relationship between religious or spiritual practices and resilience (Burnett & Helm, 2013; Connor et al., 2003). Furthermore, a study undertaken on a sample of 185 Singaporean pupils during the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the absence of a link between religiosity and resilience, whilst revealing a distinct affirmative correlation between religiosity and well-being (Gan et al., 2023).

Based on the findings of this study, religiosity is identified as a prognostic factor for resilience. Religions often promote the idea of divine justice and an afterlife, with many world faiths – whether monotheistic or not – offering the promise of redemption and a second chance in the afterlife. Such beliefs resonate strongly among people worldwide, especially those living in poverty and hardship. Whilst the separation of the Church and the State, as demonstrated in Christian societies, has led to the dissociation between religion and public life, Arab-Muslim culture maintains a strong correlation between these two domains. A key teaching in the Qur'an emphasizes that the soul returns to its Creator after death, promising abundant rewards for the most steadfast and courageous believers. As Allah says in the Qur'an: 'O ye My servants who believe, fear your Lord. It is good for those who do good in this life. And Allah's earth is spacious. Verily the steadfast will have their reward without measure (Sher Ali, 2021, Qur'an 39:11). These teachings can offer comfort and alleviate feelings of injustice, fostering resilience in the face of adversity.

Indeed, Islamic beliefs provide an interpretative framework for people experiencing difficulties, enabling them to make sense of their experiences and better cope with adversity. The practice of prayer and engagement in spiritual activities have been identified as integral components of the resilience process. An in-depth study by Koenig & Al-Shohaib (2019) has demonstrated that practising Islam through activities such as reading and reciting the Qur'an, regular prayer, genuine faith, strict adherence to Qur'anic teachings and belonging to a supportive community, alleviates stress and promotes mental health, general well-being and happiness. It is imperative to emphasise that the influence of religiosity and spirituality varies based on an individual's interpretation, which is shaped by their cultural background. Tunisia's rich and diverse heritage, blending Arab, African, and Mediterranean influences and shaped by historical interactions with both Eastern and Western traditions, offers a distinctive perspective on religiosity. Unlike many other Muslim nations in the Middle East and Gulf regions, Tunisian religiosity is



characterized by a pluralistic belief system rather than religious fundamentalism.

In this context, the belief in fate, which is a fundamental component of Tunisian and Arab-Muslim culture in general, is an element to be taken into consideration as a factor in predicting the level of resilience. Fortier (2005) has highlighted the significance of religious texts as a primary source of these beliefs, asserting that fate (*maktûb*), which is determined for each individual prior to birth, supersedes actions. However, Islamic teachings do not perceive fate as an inevitable outcome, but rather as a developmental path that prepares an individual to cope with challenges such as loss or illness. This does not, however, negate the capacity to overcome adversity.

This notion aligns with the concept of negotiable fate, which posits that while individuals' actions are influenced by divine will, they retain the capacity for autonomous action. A study by Li and Zhu (2024) demonstrates that this concept of a malleable fate, as a positive belief in destiny, exerts a significant positive influence on self-esteem, positive psychological capital and life satisfaction. Despite the emphasis on divine predetermination within Islamic principles, the notion of individual responsibility remains a central tenet.

The study indicates a statistically significant yet weak correlation between intrinsic religiosity and resilience, suggesting that the relationship between these factors is variable. This weak correlation can be explained by the age group of the sample (19 to 26). Indeed, other studies which have examined the link between religiosity/spirituality and perceived control, viewed as resilience, adaptation and well-being resources, have shown that in a young population, religiosity had no significant impact on subjective well-being (Fiori et al., 2006; Jackson & Bergeman, 2011). Furthermore, research has demonstrated an absence of a positive correlation between R/S indicators and perceived control in young adults (Fiori et al., 2006; Jackson & Bergeman, 2011).

The absence of data on male students warrants attention, as our sample was limited to those studying psychology and education sciences-fields that traditionally attract a higher proportion of women. Despite the limitations inherent in the study's methodology, which precludes the generalisation of its results, this study contributes to the existing body of literature by exploring the relationship between resilience and intrinsic religiosity among Tunisian female students from North African and Arab Muslim backgrounds, addressing a significant research gap on the African continent (Schwalm et al., 2022).

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**Data sharing statement:** The current article is accompanied by the relevant raw data generated during and/or analysed during the study, including files detailing the analyses and either the complete database or other relevant raw data. These files are available in the Figshare repository and accessible as Supplemental Material. Ethics approval, participant permissions, and all other relevant approvals were granted for this data sharing.

**Declaration for Human Participants:** This study was approved by the Scientific and Ethical Research Committee of the Clinical Psychology Laboratory: Intersubjectivity and Culture (LR16ES01) on April 4, 2024, and the principles of the Helsinki Declaration were followed.

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