

Resilience as a Psychological Resource for Promoting Mental Health among School Students: A Systematic Literature Review

*Dr M Maria Antony Raj*¹, *Dr. Muthmainnah*²

¹ Postdoctoral Fellow, Lincoln University College, Malaysia; ² Assistant Professor, Universitas Al Asyariah Mandar, Indonesia

Email ID: mariaantonyraj@klu.ac.in

Abstract: Mental health challenges among school students have intensified globally, necessitating preventive and promotive approaches within educational systems. Resilience, conceptualized as a dynamic process enabling adaptive functioning despite adversity, has emerged as a significant protective factor. This systematic literature review synthesizes empirical evidence published between 2014 and 2026 examining the association between resilience and mental health outcomes among students aged 5–18 years. A structured search across major academic databases yielded 38 eligible studies, including randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental designs, and longitudinal cohort studies. Findings indicate a consistent inverse relationship between resilience and psychological distress, particularly depression and anxiety. School-based resilience interventions demonstrate small to moderate improvements in wellbeing, especially when employing multicomponent and cognitive-behavioral approaches. Emotional regulation and school connectedness emerge as critical mediating mechanisms. Although the evidence supports resilience as a modifiable and meaningful psychological resource, heterogeneity in intervention design and limited long-term follow-up constrain definitive conclusions. The review highlights implications for research, policy, and educational practice.

Keywords: Resilience; Mental health; School students; Systematic review; Wellbeing.

Introduction

Mental health disorders constitute a leading cause of disability among children and adolescents worldwide. Increasing exposure to academic pressure, social media influence, peer victimization, family instability, and broader societal uncertainty has intensified psychological vulnerability during formative developmental stages. Epidemiological estimates suggest that anxiety and depressive disorders are among the most prevalent mental health conditions in school-aged populations (World Health Organization, 2023). These trends underscore the urgency of implementing preventive strategies within school systems.

Historically, mental health services in educational settings have focused primarily on remediation and treatment. However, limitations in access, stigma, and workforce shortages necessitate alternative models emphasizing early intervention and strengths-based promotion. Resilience science offers such a framework by shifting attention from risk to protective processes.

Resilience is widely understood as a dynamic and contextually embedded capacity that enables individuals to adapt positively despite adversity (Masten, 2021; Ungar, 2023). Rather than representing an inherent personality trait, resilience involves interactions among individual competencies, relational supports, and environmental conditions. Within school contexts, resilience encompasses emotional regulation, coping flexibility, social competence, and perceived belongingness.

Given the expanding body of resilience-focused research and interventions, a systematic synthesis is necessary to clarify its protective role in promoting student mental health and to evaluate the effectiveness of school-based resilience initiatives.

Related work

Resilience is widely recognised as an important psychological resource for promoting mental health among schoolchildren. Ann S. Masten (2014) describes resilience as "ordinary magic," emphasising children's ability to adjust effectively in the face of hardship. Similarly, Michael Rutter (2012) characterises resilience as a dynamic process shaped by protective variables. Suniya S. Luthar et al. (2000) found that higher resilience is associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression among adolescents. Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatté (2002) emphasise the importance of resilience training for enhancing emotional regulation and coping skills. School-based interventions and supportive environments enhance resilience (Angela Duckworth, 2016). However, research has identified inadequacies in culturally appropriate techniques and long-term evaluation. Overall, resilience remains an important feature in improving students' mental health and wellbeing.

Key Contribution

The prevalence of psychological distress among school students continues to rise, yet preventive approaches within educational systems remain inconsistently evaluated and implemented. Although resilience is frequently cited as a protective factor, empirical findings are dispersed across diverse methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and measurement tools. Inconsistent operational definitions and variability in intervention design limit integrative understanding. Furthermore, questions remain regarding the sustainability of resilience-based interventions and the mechanisms through which resilience influences mental health outcomes. This systematic review is consolidated the current evidence, identify methodological gaps, and updated evidence-based educational policy and practice.

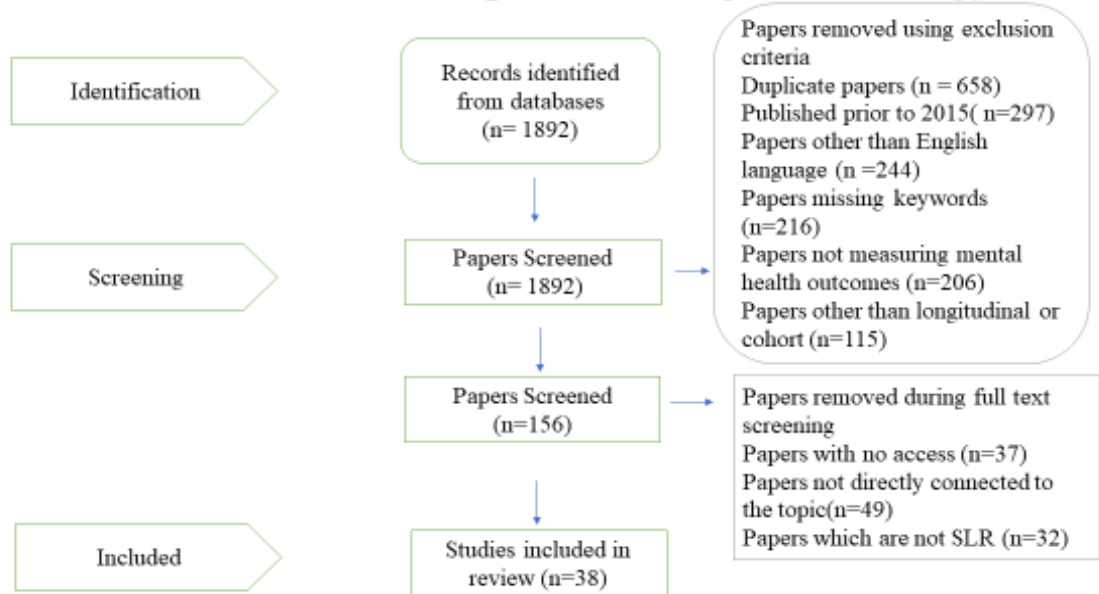
Method, Experiments and Results

This systematic literature review followed structured eligibility criteria aligned with contemporary review standards. Electronic databases including PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, Embase, and Google Scholar were searched for peer-reviewed studies published between 2014 and 2026. Search terms combined keywords related to resilience, school students, adolescents, mental health, depression, anxiety, and intervention. Studies were included if they examined school students aged 5–18 years, investigated resilience as either an exposure or intervention focus, measured mental health outcomes using validated instruments, and employed randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental, or longitudinal cohort designs. Additionally, only studies published in English in peer-reviewed journals were considered. Studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on adult populations, university students, non-empirical reports, qualitative-only designs, or contexts outside of school settings.

Study Selection

The search yielded 1,892 records. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, 156 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Thirty-eight studies met the final inclusion criteria.

Visual Presentation of Paper Screening Methodology



Results

Across correlational and longitudinal studies, resilience demonstrated a moderate inverse association with depression and anxiety symptoms (Dray et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2023). Students with higher resilience reported greater life satisfaction, emotional stability, and stress tolerance. Longitudinal findings suggest that resilience predicts reduced psychological distress over time, indicating a protective trajectory.

Emotional regulation and self-efficacy emerged as consistent mediators linking resilience to improved wellbeing (Kalisch et al., 2024). School connectedness also played a significant buffering role (Hartley, 2022).

Intervention studies indicated small to moderate improvements in resilience and mental health outcomes. Multicomponent programs incorporating cognitive-behavioral techniques, social-emotional learning, and peer interaction demonstrated stronger effects compared to single-component interventions (Fenwick-Smith et al., 2018; Domhardt et al., 2021). Short-term gains were common; however, long-term sustainability beyond one year was less frequently examined.

Universal school-based interventions appeared effective for general student populations, while targeted interventions benefited high-risk groups more substantially.

Results were influenced by age, gender, socioeconomic background, and school climate. Perhaps as a result of developmental flexibility, younger students tended to make more progress. The association between resilience and mental health was consistently mediated by emotional control and perceived social support.

Discussions

The findings reinforce resilience as a meaningful psychological resource within educational contexts. Evidence indicates that resilience mitigates internalizing symptoms and promotes adaptive functioning. Importantly, resilience is modifiable through structured programs, supporting its inclusion in preventive school mental health frameworks.

However, heterogeneity in intervention duration, content, and measurement limits direct comparison across studies. Many interventions rely on self-report measures and short follow-up periods, restricting inference regarding sustained impact. Moreover, most studies originate from high-income countries, highlighting the need for culturally responsive research.

Despite these limitations, resilience promotion represents a promising avenue for strengthening student wellbeing at a population level. Integrating resilience-building strategies into whole-school systems, teacher training, and policy initiatives may enhance long-term outcomes.

Conclusions

This systematic review demonstrates that resilience functions as a protective psychological factor associated with improved mental health outcomes among school students. School-based interventions can enhance resilience and reduce psychological distress, although sustained impact requires longitudinal evaluation and systemic integration. Future research should prioritize culturally diverse samples, standardized measurement tools, and long-term follow-up designs to strengthen the evidence base for resilience-informed educational practice.

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