Social Resilience: A Critical Synopsis of Existing Definitions

Qamar, Azher Hameed

FORUM

SOCIAL RESILIENCE:
A CRITICAL SYNOPSIS OF DEFINITIONS

AZHER HAMEED QAMAR[1]

ABSTRACT: *Social resilience is a relatively new concept that has recently attracted researchers in the social sciences. In the 21st century, it is becoming significant in sustainability studies in the context of social well-being and its impact on quality of life. Cultural adherence, informal social networking, local knowledge and belief practices, the social value of relationships and community members, and interdependence all contribute to complex, coherent, and holistic social resilience. This article presents a critical synopsis of definitions of social resilience to comprehend the concept and its key characteristics. After selecting the common definitions, I examined them to identify the keywords and verbs used to define social resilience and its key aspects. Almost all definitions relate to social resilience as the ability or capacity to withstand, recover, and maintain. A description of social resilience following these definitions provides an understanding of social resilience as a multifaceted, dynamic, and complex social construct that extends its scope to individual, group, or community dynamics, adaptability, and a variety of other environmental factors. The synthesis of the definitions supports the concept of an 'agency-oriented' framework of social resilience and an interdisciplinary approach to studying social experiences and practices during crises, including the interaction with (social, cultural, political, and economic) environmental factors.*

KEYWORDS: *social resilience, capacity, agency, vulnerability, sustainability*

---

1 *Azher Hameed Qamar* is Post-doctoral Researcher at the School of Social Work of Lund University, Lund, Sweden; email address: azher.hameed@live.com.

INTRODUCTION

Over time, the concept of resilience has evolved into a multidisciplinary concept. The concept of resilience was explored and expanded in psychology and ecology in the social sciences; however, the dominant psychological paradigm initially limited the conceptualization of resilience to an individual trait or personal capacity to cope, recover, and adapt through negative experiences and stress (Luthar et al. 2000; Ungar 2012). There is no single definition of resilience, and it has been associated with personal capacity or coping process, or behavioral responses to challenging situations (Yeager–Dweck 2012), positive outcomes (Masten 2001), the ability to integrate personal experience and contextual factors (Ungar 2008), and a process of bouncing back using personal, interpersonal, and environmental resources (Smith-Osborne – Whitehill Bolton 2013; Windle 2011). With the recognition of the role of personal characteristics and environmental factors in 'resilience,' it has gradually been characterized as an innate and learned dynamic process.

The capacity of physical systems to maintain basic functionality while absorbing internal or external disruption was recognized as one of the first defining characteristics of resilience. The notion of resilience employed in contemporary physics (as "the balancing behavior of the forces") provides a metaphorical understanding of resilience in psychology, which is defined as "the ability of individuals to recover from chronic and acute stress" (Ungar 2012: 13). In this way, resilience became understood as individuals' psychological resilience, albeit the emphasis on individuals 'psychological fitness' has not been the dominant resilience paradigm since the mid-2000s. The pathway models shifted the understanding of resilience to process-oriented, person-environment interaction over time, representing resilience as a dynamic process (Burr et al. 1994; Giele–Elder 1998; Saja et al. 2019; Southwick et al. 2014).

Burton et al. (1993) explored the interplay of nature, technology, and society in resilience studies (especially regarding natural catastrophes), establishing the social dimensions of resilience and vulnerability. However, Adger made a significant contribution to the concept of social resilience at the beginning of the 21st century by emphasizing the role of change in socio-political contexts and dynamic structures of livelihood in shaping resilience (Adger 2000; Adger et al. 2002). Adger emphasized the important but underappreciated role of social resilience in sustainable development in his working paper *Sustainability and social resilience in coastal resource use*, defining social resilience as "the ability of the social system to withstand external shocks to the system." (Adger 1998: 34). Later, he elaborated this definition into a robust definition of general

social resilience (this will be discussed later) that is the most cited definition in the literature on social resilience.

Initially examining people's psychological stability and post-war (First World War) experiences, psychologists have been investigating resilience, shifting their focus away from the repercussions of adversity toward individuals' reactions to adversity. Previously, two psychological frameworks for studying resilience in diversity characterized resilience as an "outcome" and a "capacity." Resilience is viewed as a key developmental outcome stemming from interactions between psychological, environmental, and individual experiences. It is important to understand how each of these accounts for the desired positive developmental outcome according to various dimensions. This approach oversimplifies resilience by interpreting it as 'static,' undermining the various interrelated and dynamic characteristics of resilience (Garmezy et al. 1984; Masten 2001).
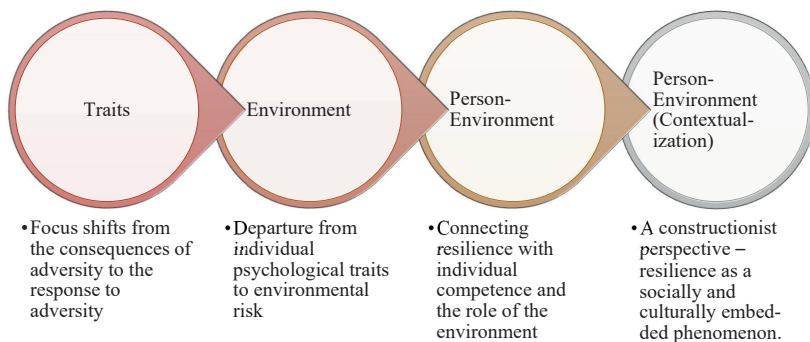
Another viewpoint considers resilience to be a significant human resource or capacity. Human capital, according to this viewpoint, refers to an individual's assets, such as self-esteem, temperament, cognitive abilities, and coping capabilities, which are recognized as protective elements (Ogińska-Bulik – Juczyński 2011). Individual resilience as a capacity emphasizes one's 'psychological wellness' and inherent ability to deal with adversity. Hence, the 'resilient' individual is capable of employing his or her internal resources to overcome stress. An overemphasis on individual traits, on the other hand, undermines the relationship between institutions and individuals or between social structures and social practices (Estêvão et al. 2017). When defining resilience as an outcome or personal resource, the terms "capacity" and "ability" may hinder our understanding of the complex social dimensions of resilience that are significant in situations like forced migration and displacement. Considering the influence of external factors on individual resilience, resilience has been described as a process consistent with the psychosocial approach that involves person-environment interaction (Pangallo et al. 2015). As a result, a variety of disciplines in the social sciences used the concept of "social resilience," leading to its varied definitions.

Social resilience

Beginning in the 1960s with a trait perspective, concepts of resilience (in the social sciences) were gradually understood in the context of environment, person-environment interaction, and then a constructionist perspective on social resilience in which resilience was seen as a socially and culturally embedded phenomenon (Figure 1). A constructionist perspective on social resilience

provides an understanding of resilience as a dynamic context-specific social process comprised of social, political, and economic environmental factors that shape person-environment interactions (Qamar 2023b, 2023c). Hence, the constructionist perspective provides a socio-ecological explanation of resilience as a socially and culturally embedded phenomenon. The concept of social resilience refers to the social aspects of human resilience. It comes into focus, however, when we shift from individual psychological characteristics to person-environment interaction and from 'I' to 'we, us, and them.' Meanwhile, in resilience studies, the social constructionist method has opened the door to in-depth, ground-up research.

Figure 1. *The concept of resilience (as it has evolved over time in the social sciences)*

Traits	Environment	Person-Environment	Person-Environment (Contextualization)
•Focus shifts from the consequences of adversity to the response to adversity	•Departure from *i*ndividual psychological traits to environmental risk	•Connecting resilience with individual competence and the role of the environment	•A constructionist *p*erspective – resilience as a socially and culturally embedded phenomenon.

When combined with other words (such as security, welfare, network, status, work, etc.), the word "social" can have several meanings, but it always refers to a social context where people live together and where the impact of crises and coping strategies can be seen as connecting people and resources for the purpose of recovery and growth. When combined with the term "resilience," it is clear that the social dimensions of resilience should guide the empirical investigation related to social resilience. The 'social' aspects of resilience and the emphasis on ability/capacity to respond to crisis connect individuals with their social, political, economic, and cultural environment. Hence, the definitions of social resilience involve individuals as social actors emphasizing their interactions with institutions, social structure, and the multifaceted environment.

Rutter and Garmezy's research on children extended the scope of studies on resilience beyond the individual's life and development to include relationships, attachment, and socio-cultural environment. Rutter's (1979, 2007) research on children's resilience is regarded as an important framework for resilience theory. His shift from individual psychological traits to environmental risk

opened up a new avenue for resilience research. While Rutter emphasized mental characteristics in addressing change, he made an important contribution in his research to supporting the relevance and impact of social relationships. In this way, the family (as an institution) is perceived as functioning as a political, cultural, and psychological unit within its wider social context. Several interconnected aspects influence the family's strength and stability (as an institution in its collectivity and as an experience for the individuals in the family). Garmezy's (1987) study on children linked resilience to individual competency as well as the role of the environment that influences individual experience and response to stress. He broadened the ecological concept of resilience to include the familial and external support systems (supporting substitutes/institutions) that surround children and families and provide structural assistance. In collectivist societies, social values of relationships revolve around interdependence and interconnectedness. Hence, the extended family system's hierarchical ties, substitute support, and interdependence provide psycho-social resources to deal with stress. The role of grandparents and family adults, for example, in resolving marital conflicts, the sharing of material resources during tough times, the contribution of family members to supporting the family, socially valued relationships, and an extended social network all contribute to social resilience (see Qamar 2018, 2022). Nonetheless, the variety of interrelated contextual factors complicates the understanding of social resilience.

Social resilience is a novel and understudied concept that is complex, dynamic, and multidimensional. The majority of definitions are disaster-focused and related to community resilience, where social resilience is part of community resilience during a crisis (Cutter–Derakhshan 2019; Henly-Shepard et al. 2015; Keck–Sakdapolrak 2013). Most studies use top-down methodologies to examine social resilience as a measurable construct, which has resulted in a neglect of participant-centered, ground-up conceptualizations of social resilience (Gaillard–Mercer 2013). There is a scarcity of bottom-up evidence to comprehend the complexity and interconnectedness of several aspects of social resilience contained in the socio-cultural context and temporality of the phenomenon. Considering the multidimensionality of social resilience (encompassing social, political, cultural, and economic factors), a qualitative content analysis of existing definitions is useful for understanding the concept and common features that constitute the definition. The main objective of this article is to analyze pre-existing definitions of social resilience and provide a critical synopsis of the selected definitions to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the concept.

SOCIAL RESILIENCE: A CRITICAL SYNOPSIS OF POPULAR DEFINITIONS

The concept of social resilience is relatively new, and it illuminates the social dimensions of resilience, including the sociological examination of person-environment interaction and social behaviors that contribute to the resilience experience (Qamar 2023b). Working on social resilience in the context of migration, my scholarly journey to conceptualizing social resilience led me to examine and unfold the concept as represented in pre-existing definitions. This article provides a critical synopsis of the definitions to improve insight into the concept, which is useful for the theoretical framing of social resilience in multidisciplinary social science research. I did a quick search on the *Web of Science* to find articles (excluding reports, working papers, and conference papers) with the words "social resilience" in their titles. I assumed that articles that did so would provide a definition of social resilience. As this article exclusively focuses on the definitions of 'social resilience' as used in the research articles, I intended to find the definitions in the articles where the authors explicitly framed or used social resilience as a standalone concept.

The search identified 166 articles/papers that appeared in different research areas since 1994. The oldest article was *Social resilience in individual worker ants and its role in division of labor*. This article is from the biological sciences and explains the organization of social insect colonies. Authors conceptualized social resilience as a phenomenon (among worker ants) that they demonstrate by working in different colonies while readopting to new positions and learning to maintain their role for the efficient division of labor (Sendova-Franks – Franks 1994). Though not related to the human social world, the authors present social resilience as a phenomenon of learning and adaptation in the face of a changed environment. In this article, I focus on the definitions of social resilience in the social sciences. In social sciences, Adger is seen as the first author to define social resilience (Adger 2000; Adger et al. 2002; Qamar 2023a).

From 1994 to 2006, only five articles were published with the words "social resilience" in their title, whereas in the last five years (2018–2022), there has been a significant increase, and 100 such articles were published. Fifty-seven (out of 166) articles define social resilience. These definitions were either pre-existing or derived definitions. Other articles did not include a specific definition of social resilience, and the concept was either left unaddressed or was based on existing definitions of resilience (in psychology). I read 57 articles to examine the specific definitions of social resilience used in the articles. The definitions that referred to other sources were also verified using cited sources. Following the collection of all definitions, duplicates were removed to leave 16 definitions

of social resilience (Table 1). I used content analysis to examine the definitions following the study objectives, identifying the keywords and verbs used to conceptualize social resilience, as well as its key characteristics.

Table 1. *Definitions of social resilience*

No.	Authors	Definitions
1	Adger (2000) and Adger et al. (2002)	Social resilience is the ability of communities to absorb external changes and stresses while maintaining the sustainability of their livelihoods (2002: 358). The ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political, and environmental change (2000: 347).
2	Bruneau et al. (2003: 735)	Social resilience is the ability of social units (e.g., organizations, communities) to mitigate hazards, contain the effects of disasters when they occur, and conduct recovery activities in ways that minimize social disruption and mitigate the effects of future earthquakes.
3	Bradley–Grainger (2004: 452)	Social resilience is the ability of groups and individuals to tolerate and respond to environmental and socio-economic constraints through adaptive strategies.
4	Maguire–Hagan (2007: 16)	Social resilience is the capacity of social groups and communities to recover from or respond positively to crises.
5	Cuthill et al. (2008: 146)	Social resilience is the way in which individuals, communities, and societies adapt, transform, and potentially become stronger when faced with environmental, social, economic, or political challenges.
6	Marshall–Marshall (2007: 904)	Social resilience comprises four key characteristics: (1) the perception of risk associated with change; (2) the ability to plan, learn, and reorganize; (3) the proximity to the thresholds of coping; and (4) the level of interest in change.
7	Obrist et al. (2010: 289)	Social resilience is the capacity of actors to access capital in order to not only cope with and adjust to adverse conditions (that is, reactive capacity) but also search for and create options (that is, proactive capacity) and thus develop increased competence (that is, positive outcomes) in dealing with a threat.
8	Magis (2010: 401)	Social resilience is the existence, development, and engagement of community resources by community members to thrive in an environment characterized by change, uncertainty, unpredictability, and surprise.
9	Cacioppo et al. (2011: 44)	Social resilience is the capacity to foster, engage in, and sustain positive relationships and to endure and recover from life stressors and social isolation.
10	Broch (2013:1)	Social resilience is the ability of a significant number of local dwellers to respond viably to surprising or unpredicted changes in natural and social environments.

No.	Authors	Definitions
11	Hall–Lamont (2013: 13)	Social resilience refers to "an outcome in which the members of a group sustain their well-being in the face of challenges to it."
12	Keck–Sakdapolrak (2013: 10)	Social resilience is comprised of three dimensions: (1) *Coping capacities* – the ability of social actors to cope with and overcome all kinds of adversities; (2) *Adaptive capacities* – their ability to learn from past experiences and adjust themselves to future challenges in their everyday lives; (3) *Transformative capacities* – their ability to craft sets of institutions that foster individual welfare and sustainable societal robustness towards future crises.
13	Pincus (2014: 1)	Social resilience is the ability of individuals and groups to withstand the pressures of conflict and to 'bounce back' and adapt through conflict resolution.
14	Cutter (2016: 742)	Social resilience is the ability to prepare and plan for, absorb, recover from, or more successfully adapt to actual or potential adverse events.
15	Kwok et al. (2016: 198)	Social resilience is the resilience of the social environment: social resilience refers to a social unit or a group collectively coping with or responding to external stresses and disturbances resulting from social, political, and environmental changes.
16	Saja et al. (2019: 3)	Social resilience is the ability of social entities and social mechanisms to effectively anticipate, mitigate, and cope with disasters and implement recovery activities that minimize social disruptions and reduce the impact of future disasters.

Adger's definition (Adger 2000; Adger et al. 2002) was the most commonly cited, followed by those of Keck–Sakdapolrak (2013), Obrist et al. (2010), and Marshall–Marshall (2007). Almost all the definitions are consistent in defining social resilience as the capacity/ability of individuals, groups, or communities to face and overcome adversity or crises. The terms "risk," "adversity," and "vulnerability" are used in resilience studies to describe distressing situations/ conditions with a range of diverse stressors affecting wellbeing (Kohli–Mather 2003). Besides conditions or situations located in time and space, vulnerability is also associated with the characteristics of individuals or groups who may be exposed to risk due to their age (such as being very young or very old), physical or mental health, economic status (such as poverty and limited access to resources), marginalized status (such as ethnic background), and level of dependence and support. There may be several reasons for an individual or group being more vulnerable to particular risks than another, making the idea of vulnerability complicated, nuanced, and context-specific (Buckle 2006).

The definition of social resilience includes two key components. First, consideration of the unpleasant or stressful circumstance, state, or situation. Different terms are used to describe adversity, and these words may be viewed as defining aspects of the latter. Some of these words are used as alternatives to

adversity, while others are used to describe adversity. In addition to the word "adversity," the following words are used to characterize environmental (natural or societal) stressors:

Challenges, Changes, Crises, Stresses, Hazards, Disasters, Threats

Some other words used to describe the characteristics of "adversity" are:

Conflicts, Disruption, Uncertainty, Unpredictability, Surprises

Stressors, in other words, cause changes that pressurize and threaten the social structure, livelihood, and resources. Adversity also determines and tests vulnerability, which describes the limitations of agency and power to face adversity. Social resilience, in this sense, is the ability to respond to adversity (Adger et al. 2002). Overall, there is consensus (it appears in all these definitions) that social resilience is best understood when it is tested by events or situations that are not normal and lead to changes or challenges to individuals, groups, or communities. Changes in the natural environment (e.g., natural catastrophes) or the social environment (e.g., socioeconomic and political crises) are not always anticipated; hence, humans (as individuals or groups) are prone to environmental risks. The concept of social resilience refers to how people deal with and overcome adversity.

The second component is the resources that individuals, groups, or communities utilize to overcome adversity. These resources are conceptualized as capacities and/or abilities that increase the likelihood of a positive outcome. Specific verbs are used in the definitions to reflect on these capacities/abilities. In this critical analysis of definitions of social resilience, I will discuss social resilience as capacity or ability and key action verbs that define the act of social resilience.

DISCUSSION

The definitions of social resilience share conceptual similarities. They refer to the evolution from coping and adaptive capacities to transformative capacities, including learning to plan, create, participate, and flourish in situations of uncertainty and unpredictability. Using qualitative content analysis of the selected definitions, I will discuss social resilience as capacity/ability and the key action verbs that define the act of social resilience in these definitions.

Social resilience as capacity or ability

To describe social resilience, almost every definition (Table 1) used the terms "capacity" and/or "ability." When defining resilience as an outcome or personal resource, the terms "capacity" and "ability" are typically used to convey the sense that resilience can be measured. Considering the early leadership of psychology in resilience studies (in the social and behavioral sciences), it is reasonable to assume that resilience as a measurable construct is prominent in resilience and vulnerability research in psychology. Hence, I am not surprised that the concept of "resilience" in any of these definitions implies "capacity" or "ability."

The online etymology dictionary defines capacity as "the ability to contain" and ability as "the capacity to do or act" (Capacity n.d.; Ability n.d.). The American Psychological Association's *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (VandenBos 2015) defines capacity as "inborn potential" (as opposed to "developmental potential") and "maximum ability" to retain, receive, and function in mental or physical tasks (Capacity n.d.). The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* defines ability as "existing competence or skill (innate or developed) to perform mental and physical tasks" (Ability n.d.). In cognitive psychology, the two terms are intertwined and thought to function in tandem. For example, human cognitive ability is crucial for our survival and adaptation and includes the ability to think in complicated ways, reason, and learn via experience (Plomin 1999). An effort to draw a line between capacity and ability, in this case, may confound the definitions of both terms. I can see the scope of ability within the concept of capacity. Within capacity, ability may be improved (through exposure and experience). For example, I have the capacity (vocal range) to sing. My vocal range does not support me singing high notes with comfort. This refers to the capacity of my vocal range. A music instructor can help me develop my ability to sing low notes like a pro. Hence, by combining internal and external resources, I can improve my abilities to the best of my capacities. In this way, social resilience as an ability may be learned and developed to the extent that one's capacity supports it.

However, capacity is also related to agency (Keck–Sakdapolrak 2013), which Obrist et al. (2010) and Peth and Sakdapolrak (2020) refer to as actors' capacity to cope with adversity (reactive agency) and build competence (proactive agency). According to Estêvão et al. (2017), social resilience is reflexive agency that individuals exercise in response to changing situations. In the context of social resilience, agency refers to the interactive response to threats (Obrist 2016), and this agentic response manifests itself as coping, adaptation, and transformation shaped by and within the context (Dagdeviren–Donoghue 2019). This conceptualization of social resilience (as agency) views resilience as a dynamic social process rather than a static, fixed, and objectively measurable

capacity (Bohle et al. 2009). To understand social resilience, the term "social" should be highlighted in its multidimensional and process-oriented sense, which defines "resilience" as capability exercised, learned, and practiced in changing social, political, and economic contexts.

## Key action verbs defining the act of social resilience

The act of social resilience is defined by 21 (physical and mental) action verbs (as identified in all 16 definitions) (Table 2).

Table 2. Key action verbs defining the act of social resilience.

No.		Verbs	Scope
1	Resistance	Withstand	the pressures of conflict
2		Mitigate	the effects of hazards
3		Absorb	external changes and stresses
4		Respond	to surprising or unpredicted environmental and socio-economic constraints, stresses, and disturbances
5		Overcome	all kinds of adversities (particularly immediate adversities)
6		Bounce back	to an improved functional state
7	Learning	Perceive	the risk associated with change
8		Anticipate	change, disasters, and crisis
9		Learn	from experiences facing change and challenges
10		Prepare	for actual or potential adverse events
11		Plan	for actual or potential threats
12	Adjustment	Reorganize	while undergoing change and disturbances
13		Adjust	adjust to adverse conditions and future challenges
14		Engage	in positive relationships
15		Create	options and opportunities
16		Implement	recovery activities to minimize social disruptions and the impact of future disasters
17	Sustainability	Sustain	well-being in the face of challenges to it, and positive relationships to recover from life stressors and social isolation
18		Maintain	the sustainability of livelihoods
19		Thrive	in an environment characterized by change, uncertainty, unpredictability, and surprise
20		Craft	sets of institutions (for collective capacity)
21		Foster	individual welfare and sustainable societal robustness in relation to future crises

These verbs present the defining characteristics of social resilience; however, they are used in different contexts depending on the authors' research area. Overall, after synthesizing the definitions of social resilience, I discovered that these action verbs fulfilled the four key characteristics of social resilience: resistance (to absorb distress – Geis 2000), learning (from experiences in the face of challenges – van der Merwe et al. 2019), adjustment (to maintain social and psychological status during crises – Morton–Lurie 2013), and sustainability (to sustain efficiently over time – Adger et al. 2002). These characteristics also determine the course of social resilience through recovery, flexibility, and growth to acquire adaptive and transformative capacities. Human beings connect with their social world through interdependence that shapes their lives over time; their transitory experiences cannot be interpreted following linear pathways (Hareven 2018; Hutchison 2010). Hence, social resilience is not a linear process, and having continuity of life through changes and challenges helps humans reorient themselves during an ever-changing life (Qamar 2023a, 2023c). The following figure (Figure 2) illustrates the concept of social resilience that I derived from the synthesis of definitions.

Figure 2. *Defining characteristics of social resilience*
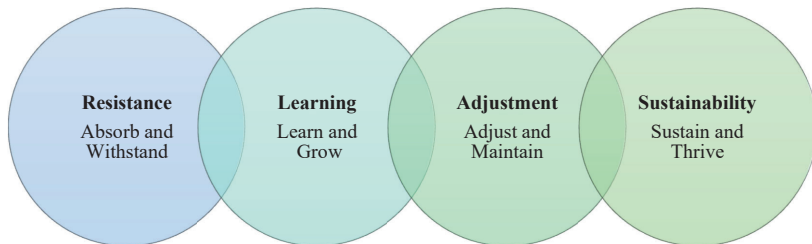
Note: Author's illustration derived from the definitions.

As a coping capacity, resistance is an instant response that activates the reactive agency that supports the individual, group, or community in recovery and adjustment. Coping (albeit with a short-term focus) helps with going forward while reflecting on risk perception (with acceptance and readiness) and having strategic support to learn from experience to progress toward recovery and stability. This reactive agency enables adaptive capacities to create a flexible but stable status, laying the groundwork for transformative capacity through proactive agency. The successful execution of reactive agency is determined by the actor's response to change and challenges, which in turn determines the successful execution of proactive agency, defining the path to sustainability through adaptation and transformation.

Among the three key capacities (coping, adaptive, and transformative), coping capacity is associated with risk perception and the sense of the ability to cope (Marshall–Marshall 2007). While sensitivity and vulnerability play a significant role in risk perception, other factors embedded in the social and environmental context of the risk (e.g., marginalization, limited social interaction, access to resources, and political visibility) may affect risk perception and coping capacity. Adaptive capacity represents a zone of learning and adjustment that connects reactive and proactive agencies simultaneously. The pathway from resistance to sustainability may be described by action verbs, which represent the human capacity to act, also known as human agency (Obrist 2016). This is how Maguire and Hagan (2007) concisely describe social resilience: as comprised of resistance, recovery, and creativity. Agencies are exercised, learned, developed, and practiced, assisting social resilience as a social phenomenon. While the concept of 'resilience' is rarely conceptualized as an 'action verb,' definitions of social resilience appear to fall short of capturing the totality of 'social' and 'agency,' even though the abilities mentioned in these definitions highlight the agentic nature of social resilience. The experience of living, surviving, and thriving is related to the phenomenon of lived experiences "characterized by social experiences and practices, marked by uncertainty and turning points embedded in the political, economic, cultural, and social environments" (Qamar 2023a: 1). In connection with this, it is important to understand and apply the concept of 'social resilience' as individuals or groups experiencing and practicing in their lives through adversity. The notions of 'social' and 'resilience' together constitute social resilience as a social phenomenon characterized by social experiences and interactions that occur during crises.

The definitions of social resilience used or applied in various contexts provide a broader understanding of resilience and describe the individual's or group's response to crisis through multiple interconnected processes that determine the pathway to sustainability. Hence, resistance itself is an experience of absorbing change by perceiving the risk inherent in it and bouncing back to functional status. This experience (which comes with several abilities) provides the learning required to go through the process of recovery, adjustment, and stability. This critical synopsis of definitions provides a road map for conceptualizing social resilience in contexts where individuals or groups are seen as social actors navigating change, challenge, and continuity while constructing meaning from their social experiences through interactions with the socio-political structure and institutional infrastructure.

CONCLUSIONS

Social resilience is not a static concept. It is dynamic in terms of its context and the social actors, agency, and continuous processes whereby individuals or groups struggle to face the change and challenges while sustaining the present and preparing for the future (Keck–Sakdapolrak 2013; Bohle et al. 2009; Yeager–Dweck 2012). Social resilience (as a dynamic, relational, and political process) involves the integration of coping, adaptive, and transformative agencies that are explicitly linked to empowerment and participation (Keck–Sakdapolrak 2013). The social experiences and practices involved in sustaining and developing are embedded in how resilience is socially and culturally shaped, internalized, and translated into adaptation and transformation. Hence, the concept of 'ability' or 'capacity' should not be used to limit the scope of social resilience, which should be conceptualized and studied as an interdisciplinary construct that includes community dynamics, adaptability, and a variety of other environmental factors (Qamar 2023b).

Social experience refers to a multilayered pattern of complex and interconnected person-environment interactions (including interactions of groups and communities with their environment). Cultural adherence, social networking, local knowledge and belief practices, the social value of relationships and community members, and interdependence all contribute to complex, holistic, and cohesive social resilience. Resilience, when theorized as a social construct, brings social aspects of resilience into the limelight, where the person or group's interactional patterns are socially, culturally, politically, and historically embedded in the environment. Hence, I argue that using a yardstick to 'measure' social resilience as a universal and generalized concept does not capture the layers of meaning in its environmental context and the process of meaning-making that emerges from interactive human experiences.

This article provides a critical content analysis of 16 definitions of social resilience. The action verbs describe the capacities of the individual, group, or community that are seen as resources for recognizing, responding, and flourishing in crises. Despite significant progress with resilience measurement models and techniques, participatory approaches to in-depth ground-up research are still in their infancy. Hence, the definitions are conceptually constrained to bridge the gap between top-down and bottom-up social resilience theory (Gaillard–Mercer 2013). The critical synopsis of the definitions presented in this article supports the concept of an 'agency-oriented' framework of social resilience and an interdisciplinary approach to studying social experiences and practices during crises, including interactions with (social, cultural, political, and economic) environmental factors.

Decontextualization of the concept of 'social resilience,' as well as any attempt to universalize resilience theories dominated by top-down psychological approaches, may undermine the broader socio-cultural context, indigenous understanding, and broader/deeper scope of social resilience as agency. Rethinking resilience from the bottom up using an interdisciplinary perspective would be beneficial for defining social resilience as a holistic social construct. The experience of going through (and getting through) crises determines the characteristics of social resilience and the internalization of adaptive and transformative abilities and capacities. Hence, any definition of social resilience should emphasize the 'social' as an interdisciplinary construct that broadens its scope to include community dynamics, interactions on several levels, and associated environmental factors.

REFERENCES

Adger, W. N. (1998) Sustainability and social resilience in coastal resource use. *Oceanographic Literature Review*, Vol. 9, No. 45., p. 1668.

Adger, W. N. (2000) Social and ecological resilience: Are they related? *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 24, No. 3., pp. 347–364, DOI:https://doi.org/10.1191/ 030913200701540465.

Adger, W. N. – P. M. Kelly – A. Winkels – L. Q. Huy – C. Locke (2002) Migration, remittances, livelihood trajectories, and social resilience. *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment*, Vol. 31, No. 4., pp. 358–366, DOI: 10.1579/0044-7447-31.4.358.

Bohle, H. G. – B. Etzold – M. Keck (2009) Resilience as agency. *IHDP Update*, No. 2., pp. 8–13.

Bradley, D. – A. Grainger (2004) Social resilience as a controlling influence on desertification in Senegal. *Land Degradation & Development*, Vol. 15, No. 5., pp. 451–470, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/ldr.628.

Broch, H. B. (2013) Social resilience-local responses to changes in social and natural environments. *Maritime Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 6., DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/2212-9790-12-6.

Bruneau, M. – S. E. Chang – R. T. Eguchi et al. (2003) A framework to quantitatively assess and enhance the seismic resilience of communities. *Earthquake Spectra*, Vol. 19, No. 4., pp. 733–752, DOI: 10.1193/1.1623497.

Buckle, P. (2006) Assessing Social Resilience. In: Paton, D. – D. Johnston (eds.): *Disaster Resilience: An Integrated Approach*. Springfield (IL, U.S.), Charles C. Thomas Publisher, pp. 88–104.

Burr, W. R. –S. R. Klein – R. G. Burr et al. (1994) *Reexamining Family Stress: New Theory and Research*. Thousand Oaks (CA, US), Sage Publications, Inc.

Burton, I. – R. W. Kates – G. F. White (1993) *The Environment as Hazard*. 2nd edition, New York: Guilford Press.

Cacioppo, J. T. – H. T. Reis – A. J. Zautra (2011) Social resilience: The value of social fitness with an application to the military. *American Psychologist*, Vol. 66, No. 1., pp. 43–51, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021419.

Cuthill, M. – H. Ross – K. Maclean et al. (2008) Reporting social outcomes of development: An analysis of diverse approaches. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 6., pp. 145–157, DOI: https://doi.org/10.18848/1833-1882/CGP/v03i06/52646.

Cutter, S. L. (2016) The landscape of disaster resilience indicators in the USA. *Natural Hazards*, Vol. 80, No. 2., pp. 741–758, DOI: 10.1007/s11069-015-1993-2.

Cutter, S. L. – S. Derakhshan (2019) Implementing disaster policy: Exploring scale and measurement schemes for disaster resilience. *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*, Vol. 16, No. 3., pp. 1–14, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/jhsem-2018-0029.

Dagdeviren, H. – M. Donoghue (2019) Resilience, agency and coping with hardship: Evidence from Europe during the Great Recession. *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 48, No. 3., pp. 547–567, DOI:10.1017/S0047279418000624.

Estêvão, P. – A. Calado – L. Capucha (2017) Resilience: Moving from a "heroic" notion to a sociological concept. *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas*, No. 85., pp. 9–25, DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.7458/SPP20178510115.

Gaillard, J. C. – J. Mercer (2013) From knowledge to action: Bridging gaps in disaster risk reduction. *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 37., pp. 93–114, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132512446717.

Garmezy, N. (1987) Stress, competence, and development: Continuities in the study of schizophrenic adults, children vulnerable to psychopathology, and the search for stress-resistant children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. 57., No. 2., pp. 159-174. DOI: 10.1111/j.1939-0025.1987.tb03526.x.

Garmezy, N. – A.S. Masten – A. Tellegen (1984) The study of stress and competence in children: A building block for developmental psychopathology. *Child Development*, Vol. 55, No. 1., pp. 97–111, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/1129837.

Geis, D. E. (2000) By design: The disaster resistant and quality-of-life community. *Natural Hazards Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3., pp. 151–160, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1061/ (ASCE)1527-6988(2000)1:3(151).

Giele, J. Z. – G. H. Elder (1998) Life Course Research: Development of a Field. In: Giele, J. – G. H. Elder (eds.) *Methods of Life Course Research: Qualitative*

and Quantitative Approaches. Thousand Oaks (CA, U.S.), Sage Publications, Inc. pp. 5–27, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483348919.n1.

Hall, P. A. – M. Lamont (2013) Introduction. In: Hall, P. A. – M. Lamont (eds.): *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era*. Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press. pp. 1–31, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139542425.

Hareven, T. K. (2018) *Families, History, and Social Change: Life Course and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. London (UK), Routledge.

Henly-Shepard, S. – C. Anderson – K. Burnett et al. (2015) Quantifying household social resilience: a place-based approach in a rapidly transforming community. *Natural Hazards: Journal of the International Society for the Prevention and Mitigation of Natural Hazards*, Vol. 75, No. 1., pp. 343–363, DOI: 10.1007/s11069-014-1328-8.

Hutchison, E. D. (2010) A Life Course Perspective. In: Hutchison, E. D. (ed.) *Dimensions of Human Behavior: The Changing Life Course*. 4th Edition. Thousand Oaks (CA, U.S.), Sage Publication Inc., Chapter 1, pp. 1–38.

Keck, M. – P. Sakdapolrak (2013) What is social resilience? Lessons learned and ways forward. *Erdkunde*, Vol. 67, No. 1., pp. 5–19, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2013.01.02.

Kohli, R. – R. Mather (2003) Promoting psychosocial well-being in unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people in the United Kingdom. *Child & Family Social Work*, Vol. 8, No. 3., pp. 201–212, DOI: https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1046/j.1365-2206.2003.00282.x.

Kwok, A. H. – E. E. Doyle – J. Becker – D. Johnston – D. Paton (2016) What is 'social resilience'? Perspectives of disaster researchers, emergency management practitioners, and policymakers in New Zealand. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, Vol. 19., pp. 197–211, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2016.08.013.

Luthar, S. – D. Cicchetti – B. Becker (2000) The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child Development*, Vol. 71, No. 3., pp. 543–562, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111%2F1467-8624.00164.

Magis, K. (2010) Community resilience: An indicator of social sustainability. *Society and Natural Resources*, Vol. 23, No. 5., pp. 401–416, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920903305674.

Maguire, B. – P. Hagan (2007) Disasters and communities: Understanding social resilience. *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, Vol. 22, No. 2., pp. 16–20.

Marshall, N. A. – P. A. Marshall (2007) Conceptualizing and operationalizing social resilience within commercial fisheries in Northern Australia. *Ecology and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 1., DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-01940-120101.

Masten, A. S. (2001) Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, Vol. 56, No. 3., pp. 227–238, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227.

Morton, M. J. – N. Lurie (2013) Community resilience and public health practice. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 103, No. 7., pp. 1158–1160. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2105%2FAJPH.2013.301354.

Obrist, B. (2016) Social resilience and agency. Perspectives on ageing and health from Tanzania. *Die Erde – Journal of the Geographical Society of Berlin*, Vol. 147, No. 4., pp. 266–274, DOI: https://doi.org/10.12854/erde-147-23.

Obrist, B. – C. Pfeiffer – R. Henley (2010) Multi-layered social resilience: A new approach in mitigation research. *Progress in Development Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4., pp. 283–293, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/146499340901000402.

Ogińska-Bulik, N. – Z. Juczyński (2011) Prężność u dzieci i młodzieży: charakterystyka i pomiar–polska skala SPP-18 [Resilience in children and adolescents: Characteristics and measurement – Polish SPP-18 scale]. *Polskie Forum Psychologiczne* [Polish Psychological Forum], Vol. 1, No. 16., pp. 7–28.

Pangallo, A. – L. Zibarras – R. Lewis – P. Flaxman (2015) Resilience through the lens of interactionism: A systematic review. *Psychological Assessment*, Vol. 27, No. 1., pp. 1–20, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000024.

Peth, S. A. – P. Sakdapolrak (2020) When the origin becomes the destination: Lost remittances and social resilience of return labour migrants in Thailand. *Area*, Vol. 52, No. 3., pp. 547–557, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12598.

Pincus, D. (2014) One bad apple: Experimental effects of psychological conflict on social resilience. *Interface Focus*, Vol. 4, No. 5., DOI: https://doi.org/10.1098%2Frsfs.2014.0003.

Plomin, R. (1999) Genetics and general cognitive ability. *Nature*, No. 402 (6761), C25–C29, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1038/35011520.

Qamar, A. H. (2018) The social value of the child and fear of childlessness among rural Punjabi women in Pakistan. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 46, No. 6., pp. 638–667.

Qamar, A. H. (2022) Social value of the child in the global south: A multifaceted concept. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, Vol. 20, No. 2., pp. 1–14. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X221089581.

Qamar, A. H. (2023a) Conceptualizing social resilience in the context of migrants' lived experiences. *Geoforum*, No. 139, Art. No. 103680, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2023.103680.

Qamar, A. H. (2023b) Social dimensions of resilience and climate change: A rapid review of theoretical approaches. *Present Environment & Sustainable Development*, Vol. 17, No. 1., pp. 139–153, DOI: https://doi.org/10.47743/pesd2023171010.

Qamar, A. (2023c) Researching social resilience in the context of migrants' life transition: A qualitative methodological mosaic. *Psychology. Journal of Higher School of Economics*, Vol. 20, No. 4., pp. 796–813, DOI: https://doi.org/10.17323/1813-8918-2023-4-796-813.

Rutter, M. (1979) Protective factors in children's responses to stress and disadvantage. *Annals of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore*, Vol. 8, No. 3., pp. 324–38.

Rutter, M. (2007) Resilience, competence, and coping. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Vol. 31, No. 3., pp. 205–209. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.02.001.

Saja, A. A. – A. Goonetilleke – M. Teo – A. M. Ziyath (2019) A critical review of social resilience assessment frameworks in disaster management. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, Vol. 35, Art. No. 101096, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2019.101096.

Sendova-Franks, A. B. – N. R. Franks (1994) Social resilience in individual worker ants and its role in division of labour. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series B: Biological Sciences*, Vol. 256, No. 1347., pp. 305–309, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.1994.0085.

Smith-Osborne, A. – K. Whitehill Bolton (2013) Assessing resilience: A review of measures across the life course. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, Vol. 10, No. 2., pp. 111–126, DOI: 10.1080/15433714.2011.597305.

Southwick, S. M. – G. A. Bonanno – A. S. Masten – C. Panter-Brick – R. Yehuda (2014) Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: Interdisciplinary perspectives. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, Vol. 5, No. 1., DOI: https://doi.org/10.3402%2Fejpt.v5.25338.

Ungar, M. (2008) Resilience across cultures. *The British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 38, No. 2., pp. 218–235, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl343.

Ungar, M. (2012) Social Ecologies and Their Contribution to Resilience. In: M. Ungar (ed.): *The Social Ecology of Resilience. A Handbook of Theory and Practice*. New York (NY, U.S.), Springer, pp. 13–31.

VandenBos, G. R. (ed. 2015) *APA Dictionary of Psychology 2nd Edition*. American Psychological Association, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1037/14646-000.

Van der Merwe, L. – R. Biggs – R. Preiser (2019) Building social resilience in socio-technical systems through a participatory and formative resilience approach. *Systemic Change Journal*, No. 2019/1, pp. 1–34.

Windle, G. (2011) What is resilience? A review and concept analysis. *Reviews in clinical Gerontology*, Vol. 21, No. 2., pp. 152–169, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0959259810000420.

Yeager, D. S. – C. S. Dweck (2012) Mindsets that promote resilience: When students believe that personal characteristics can be developed. *Educational Psychologist*, Vol. 47, No. 4., pp. 302–314, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2012.722805.