Journey from Helplessness to Resilience and Post-Traumatic Growth: A Phenomenological Research among a Group of Vietnamese during the Pandemic

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to explore the in-depth understanding of participants' journeys from helplessness to resilience and post-traumatic growth during COVID-19. The participants' experiences are taken into consideration and examined in depth.   To do so, we employ a phenomenological methodology which is concerned particularly with individual experiences and is exploratory. 90 participants (17 males, 72 females, and the other 1, aged 18-52) were invited to participate in the survey with two self-report questions. The participants' levels of education include: graduate (n=66), postgraduate (n=18), college (n=1), and others (n=3) were willingly shared their experiences focusing on two self-report questions on personal diaries and 1) Naming an incident during the COVID-19 pandemic that has impacted you? 2) What is your greatest support to overcome adversity during the pandemic? We found four key themes: (1) feelings of helplessness, including confusion, meaninglessness, and disconnection; (2)Theme 2: Finding Inner Strength and Personal Resources (e.g., awareness of self-efficacy); (3) Theme 3: Having Family and Community Support (e,g., appreciation of others, ability for adaptation); and (4) Theme 4: Belief in the Divine Presence (e.g., attunement to priorities). These findings offer valuable implications for the field of Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture.

Keywords: Helplessness, Resilience, Post-Traumatic Growth, Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19).

1. Introduction

Context of the problem

The COVID-19 has been reported as the most disruptive event of the 21st century. It has claimed the lives of over seven million people and led to experiences of loss and loneliness due to lockdowns, significantly impacting global public health (Rhodes & Bryant, 2024). This situation

has resulted in increased stress, anxiety, and depression (Kshirsagar et al., 2021; Mari & Oquendo, 2020). The unpredictable transmission and dangerous spread of COVID-19 have frightened people from reaching out, leading to feelings of loss and fear of uncertainty that render them vulnerable to helplessness (WHO, 2020; Panchal et al., 2021). As a result, Giri and Dubey (2023) found that feelings of loneliness increased during COVID-19 lockdowns. These feelings are likely to continue, with experts concerned about loneliness potentially becoming a chronic issue.

In the context of loss and helplessness due to the pandemic, it is reported that a lack of a sense of control over environmental events may also lead to learned helplessness (Fassett-Carman et al., 2018; Overmier and Seligman, 1967); specifically, uncontrollability of the aversive events, rather than the aversive event itself, leads to learned helplessness (Wanke & Schwabe, 2019). It referred to "one's response has no effect on the outcome and has a tendency to expect negative consequences that are uncontrollable" which would result in confusion, meaninglessness, psychosomatic complaints, and disconnection. Helplessness is related to the impacts of the pandemic on participants' experiences of loss, fear of uncertainty, of isolation in the quarantine (Silva et al., 2017).

Despite the existence of helplessness in such a stressful situation, some people strove to seek meaning in life, they somehow walked through adversity with extraordinary resilience (Denckla et al., 2020). Consequently, they have navigated adversity with extraordinary courage, leading to recovery, resilience, and post-traumatic growth (Fernández-Alonso et al., 2023). On one hand, loss and helplessness are found when a person experiences her response does not affect the outcome, such as feelings of (1) helplessness and confusion, (2) psychosomatic complaints, and (3) doubt and disconnection. On the other hand, Tedeschi et al. (2017) found that persons who went through adversity and transformed by their struggles with adversity. In this current research studying the pandemic, helplessness includes confusion, meaninglessness, psychosomatic complaints, doubt, and disconnection.

Although there is a sense of helplessness experienced during the pandemic, post-traumatic growth emerges as a pathway for humanity to enhance (1) awareness of personal strength (such as self-efficacy and shifts in self-perception); (2) appreciation of others (including adaptation and interpersonal relationships); and (3) attunement to priorities (reflected in purpose in life, resourcefulness, and changes in one's philosophy of life) (Tedeschi, 1996; Connor & Davidson, 2003). Consequently, in this study, resilience and post-traumatic growth are used interchangeably.

First of all, while resilience has been mentioned by Connor & Davidson (2003) including self-efficacy, Tedeschi (1996) with PTG has enhanced personal positive change in self-perception. Both are reported to be linked to personal values where ones find their inner strength, and personal resources, to foster a sense of empowerment, take action for changes, reinforce confidence in one's abilities, increase motivation, and open to new possibilities, dreams, and goals (Raper, 2023; Popa-Velea et al., 2021; Ross, Scanes & Locke, 2023).

Secondly, interpersonal relationships would show one's ability to connect with family and community. On the one hand, According to Tedeschi (1996), participants' care for the

interpersonal dimension is one of the signs of post-traumatic growth. On the other hand, interpersonal relationships would be interwoven by adaptation and resources (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The researchers stated that this process strengthens social connections, improves communication skills, and fosters a willingness to reach out and reach in (Trzmielewska et al., 2019; Canevello et al., 2016).

Finally, if signs of resilience, according to Connor & Davidson (2003), include a dimension of purpose and meaning in life, then signs of PTG, as defined by Tedeschi (1997), enhance life priorities. Indeed, during times of crisis, researchers have found that people often turn to the Divine to search for help, meaning, strength, and purpose (Pargament & Park, 2019; Schnabel & Schieman, 2021). This would shed light on this study in the context of the pandemic, where suffering, uncertainty, helplessness, loss, disconnection, psychosomatic complaints, and feelings of meaninglessness can overwhelm human understanding. In such moments, one starts to rely on the Divine Presence, as Friedrich Nietzsche once said, "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how." indicating that in times of profound distress, people frequently seek solace and guidance beyond the confines of rational thought. This resourcefulness and purpose in life can foster resilience, providing a sense of hope and connection amidst adversity. Individuals sought spirituality and developed gratitude for life's fragility and beauty, recognizing that meaning is created through experiences and relationships (Frankl, 1979).

2. Purpose of The Study

The primary objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of how participants process their experiences of helplessness and loss during the pandemic, (e.g., naming an incident during the COVID-19 pandemic that has impacted one) as well as how signs of post-traumatic growth manifest in their self-report related to the context of COVID-19 (e.g., What is participant's greatest support to overcome adversity during the pandemic?). To achieve this, a qualitative phenomenological approach will be used, which is exploratory.

The second goal is to explore the signs of post-traumatic growth/ resilience grounded on the framework of Tedeschi (1996) and Connor & Davidson (2003) such as self-efficacy, adaptability, and purpose in life, and resource/optimism among participants who courageously faced the adversities of the pandemic. This study will specifically focus on participants' stories concerning their journey from helplessness to post-traumatic growth.

3. Methods

In this study, a phenomenological method was chosen that placed a special focus on discovering participants' perceptions, feelings, and experiences concerning the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth (Guest et al., 2012). The method allowed participants to share their experiences in their own words (Creswell, 2007). The researcher's involvement in each step of content analysis and her experience of the phenomenon required insight and objective interpretation (i.e. being aware of theories, biases, assumptions, or previous knowledge of the phenomenon being studied) (Sadala & De Camargo Ferreira Adorno, 2002). Phenomenological analysis was applied

to the current data collection. Results will be reported according to the two questions under investigation in this current study.

A Phenomenological Approach

Husserl (1983; 2012) introduced phenomenology as a method to explore individuals' subjective experiences and the meanings they assign to those experiences. This approach provides a framework for understanding those experiences by taking into account various contextual factors (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Additionally, phenomenology offers a structured method for analyzing and reporting participants' views in detail (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 15).

Frechette et al. (2020) propose five steps for conducting phenomenological research: (1) identify key phrases and statements within personal experiences or self-stories that directly relate to the phenomenon under study; (2) interpret the meanings of these phrases from the perspective of an informed reader; (3), if possible, obtain the participants' interpretations of these phrases; (4) examine the essential recurring features of the phenomenon being studied; and (5) present a tentative statement or definition of the phenomenon based on the identified essential features

In the context of this self-report study, phenomenology can be variative such as: (1) Understanding lived experience: where phenomenological research focuses on how individuals perceive and interpret their lived experiences. Self-report methods, such as in-depth interviews or reflective journals, allow participants to convey their unique perspectives (Dodgson, 2023). (2) Describing essence where the goal of phenomenology is to capture the essence of experiences. Self-reports can help researchers identify commonalities and differences in experiences, contributing to a more profound understanding of a specific phenomenon. 3) In-depth exploration where self-report techniques can facilitate an in-depth exploration of complex emotions and perceptions. Researchers can use open-ended questions to encourage participants to articulate their feelings and thoughts more freely (Frechette et al., 2020). In summary, phenomenology enhances self-report research by prioritizing the subjective experiences of individuals, allowing for a deeper understanding of the meanings behind those experiences. This approach is particularly useful in fields such as psychology, sociology, and health sciences, where understanding personal experiences is essential (Giorgi et al., 2017).

Self-Report Techniques (Collect data)

The self-report research method is widely used in social sciences, psychology, health research, and other disciplines (Chan, 2010; Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). This technique involves collecting data by asking participants to share information about their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, or attitudes in response to a series of questions (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Self-reports offer valuable insights into internal psychological states that are often difficult to measure directly, as individuals have firsthand access to their own experiences, which can yield richer qualitative data than external observations (An & Zhang, 2018). Additionally, self-report methods, particularly questionnaires, are easy to administer and can quickly reach large populations. They can be conducted in various formats, including paper surveys, online questionnaires, or interviews, making this method versatile for data collection. Typically, self-reports incorporate closed or open-ended questions, such as multiple-choice items, Likert scales, or diaries designed to elicit personal responses.

Thanh Tu Nguyen, Mai Lien Le, So Nhu Tran, Phuong Thao Tran, Thi Lien Pham, Xuan Diep Ngo

In this study, under the guideline of phenomenology, we used data from personal diary and two self-report questionnaires along with a socio-demographic questionnaire and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Singh & Yu, 2010). Concretely, (1) the socio-demographic questionnaire collected information on participants' gender, age, education level, language proficiency, marital status, occupational status, annual income, cultural background, religion, and the type of loss they experienced during the pandemic. (2) Additionally, the CD-RISC, which consists of 25 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, assessed participants' resilience over the past month. Scores range from 1-100 and are obtained by considering higher scores as indicating higher resilience. The score obtained in this manner has been proven valid and reliable, with Cronbach alpha of 0.89 and test-retest correlation of 0.87 in American participants; The reliability of the coefficient of the Chinese version of CD–RISC was 0.91. Yet, in our study, the results showed a Cronbach's alpha of the four-factor groups of $0.755 \leq \alpha \leq 0.885$, which measured good reliability. This combination of data not only provided a comprehensive profile of the participants but also enriched our understanding of their journeys and experiences, illuminating the essence of their stories in the context of resilience and coping during challenging times.

Analytic Method

The participants' texts were analyzed to find significant statements, clusters, and emerging themes and then the essence of the phenomenon (Frechette et al., 2020). To minimize bias, the principal researcher invited two trained research assistants in the M.A program in Clinical Psychology to read through the 90 participants' data (i.e. answer- sheets and diaries) independently to find the significant statements, clusters of meaning (meaning units), emerging themes, and finally the essence underlying the experience of the phenomenon. This involved reading and re-reading each transcript until the essences of common data were identified. These were then grouped into categories of similar data, which informed the development of themes. During this process, the principal researcher discussed developing themes with the co-authors of this study and the research assistants team to ensure credibility and encourage them to give feedback. In the meeting to finalize themes, the participants' significant statements, themes, and the essence of the phenomenon were discussed (Creswell, 2007).

Participant Characteristics

Participants were recruited through an online survey posted on university websites, which received approval from the Ethics Council of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities-HCMC on August 4, 2021. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the study complied with relevant guidelines, including the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (WMA - the World Medical Association-Declaration of Helsinki, n.d.). Those who agreed to participate completed a socio-demographic questionnaire covering gender, age, education level, marital status, occupation, annual income, cultural background, religious affiliation, and the COVID-19 zones that affected them most.

A total of 90 participants, aged 18 to 52, were recruited based on their responses to the questions about significant incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic and their sources of support in overcoming adverse pandemic. (See Table 1)

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of research participants

Sex	Male	17	18,9%
	Female	72	80.0%
	Others	1	1,1%
Religion	Atheism	37	41,1%
	Buddhism	26	28,9%
	Catholicism	21	23,3%
	Ancestor veneration	3	3.3%
	Protestantism	1	1,1%
	Brahmanism	1	1,1%
	Caodaism	1	1,1%
Level of Education	Graduate	66	73,3%
	Postgraduate	18	20,0%
	College	1	1,1%
	Others	3	3,3%
Marital Status	Single	70	77,8%
	Married	18	20,0%
	Divorced/Separated	2	2,2%

*N=90

4. Results

The meaning units were grouped into clusters in the light of phenomenological methodology, where four themes emerged from the self-reports and personal experiences of 90 participants' transcripts. The results of the study have been grounded in the related literature. (See Table 2)

Table 2 Descriptive analysis results on two self-report questions

Question 1: Naming an incident during the COVID-19 pandemic that has impacted you?	
Participant's psycho-somatic reactions	Number of respondents
Helplessness and confusion	67
Psycho-somatic complaints and meaninglessness	10
Disconnection	13
Question 2: What is your greatest support to overcome adversity during the pandemic?	
Inner strength & personal resource (Self-efficacy)	43
Family and community support (Adaptation) Believe in the divine presence (Resourcefulness/ purpose of life)	18
	29

*N=90

1. Responding to The Question on Naming an Event That Most Impacted During The Pandemic, That Resulted in Helplessness and Somatization

Theme 1: Helplessness Includes Confusion, Meaninglessness Psychosomatic Complaints, Doubt, and Disconnection

In the study, participants' self-reports illustrate different facets of helplessness, such as chaos

and confusion, meaninglessness and psycho-somatic reactions, and doubt, and disconnection, all of which are common emotional responses to adversity (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Ejdemyr et al., 2021).

1.1. Chaos and Confusion.

The outbreak of the pandemic and its associated effects have brought fear of loss in uncertainty (Riccioni et al, 2024). The unsafe conditions that participants faced during the pandemic included witnessing or hearing about the rising death toll, which caused horror and helplessness. Loss of life was described by the participants, such as, "Too many people have died, died from difficulty breathing." (Code #0472), or "My loved one passed away due to Covid-19." (Code #0850), "A loved one passed away suddenly." (Code #0847), "A pregnant friend passed away due to COVID." (Code #0252), and even "Several relatives contracted COVID-19 and did not receive timely support." (Code #0836).

Chaos exacerbates the confusion and sense of powerlessness experienced by individuals, manifesting prominently through the media and within everyday life. Participants reported as follows:

I read the news online, watched clips, heard friends talk about people they knew who got COVID-19 and passed away. I feel scared if I suddenly lose a loved one or if I get sick and die. Everything is out of my control and I can't predict anything. (Code #0829)

One after another, people close to me have passed away: first, my boyfriend's father, followed by my father, and then a dear friend. Additionally, at least three of my neighbors have succumbed to Covid. My foster father is currently seeking emergency treatment due to a poor prognosis. (Code #1023)

Several described the chaotic situation, noting, "The neighbor's son next door passed away due to Covid. The young boy was 21. It's shocking to witness the departure of someone you know, especially at such a young age!" (Code #0461), and "Our neighbor passed away due to COVID only a week after testing positive." (Code #1252), without any controllability, "During the COVID-19 pandemic, I faced the death of relatives, unemployment for a period, economic hardship, and living alone in an epicenter." (Code #0878).

The profound sense of helplessness led to significant physical, cognitive, and emotional reactions, manifested through psycho-somatic complaints and feelings of meaninglessness.

1.2. Meaninglessness and Psycho-Somatic Complaints.

In this sub-theme, participants revealed their reactions to adversity: shock, disassociation, and turbulence that disturbed people emotionally and psychologically, some people appeared frustrated and emotionally cut off and suffered physical pain and nightmares arising from the trauma and distress that they had gone through. Feelings of meaninglessness and psycho-somatic complaints emerged from the words of the following participants attached by their code numbers:

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone rushed to stock up on supplies, face masks, and hand sanitizer, and prices skyrocketed. I went to buy some and was shocked by the fearful feeling that the disease had come so close to me. (Code #0180)

One day, I logged onto Facebook and saw that nearly all the profile pictures had turned black. I probably couldn't sleep for over a month afterward, fearing going to bed, so I would often stay awake until 4-5 AM and then sleep until noon. (Code #0773)

… I still felt trapped by these pressures. Recently, my routine has been disrupted; I had trouble sleeping at night and woke up later in the morning. I felt both stifled from being stuck at home and fearful that life would return to normal. (Code #1276)

"These past few days I've been dreaming about strange images. Unlike previous dreams, I encountered many characters and bizarre situations in these recent dreams. These included the pandemic, COVID-19, new infections, etc.", and "I felt choked up." (Code #0517)

Other participants also made psycho-somatic complaints as follows:

Code #1043: "I had sleep disturbances, feeling tired, losing jobs, getting angry when seeing mom.", and "I experienced loss of appetite, sleep disturbances, feeling tired."

Code #0802: "I realized I was not working effectively, having poor concentration, giving up quickly, being less creative and lazy."

Code #0250: "My tears flow suddenly."

#0988: "My mother worked in military medicine and had to go fight the pandemic, so I took her place and did all the housework. Sometimes I was very stressed because I didn't receive help from my father and younger brother."

Code #0461: "I was haunted and afraid of COVID-19 symptoms, so I was afraid and deluded myself that I was infected."

Not only that, the pandemic deepened the sense of helplessness by fostering doubt and disconnection.

1.3. Doubt and Disconnection.

The researchers found that The profound physical isolation experienced by many during the pandemic caused widespread struggle with detachment on a large scale. It was revealed through participants' descriptions as follows.

Code #0820: "I had to live in a lockdown area."

Code #0614: "Direct communication is not possible."

Code #0878: "I lived alone in a pandemic-stricken area."

Code #1337: "My grandmother passed away during the pandemic, not due to Covid, but we couldn't see her for the last time, because of the quarantine."

Code #0099: "I was away from my parents and unable to reunite with my family due to COVID-19 restrictions."

Code #0878: "I lived alone in an isolated area for pandemic patients."

In addition, feelings of being isolated and discriminated during the early stages of the pandemic were confirmed by participants:

Code #0769: "My family member was infected with COVID-19 and there was discrimination from those around me."

Code #0082: "A close relative got infected by COVID-19, so I was tested and became (F1), I had been worried, isolated at home, facing discrimination from others."

The evidence also confirms feelings of doubtful and disconnected during the pandemic:

Code #0833: "Both my parents contracted COVID-19, and family conflicts were escalating."

Code #0124: "I often found myself in conflicts with my older sister, arguing and having significantly differing opinions", and "The relationship with my parents also felt strained... that made it hard to communicate."

Code #0825: "I experience difficulty affirming my self-worth."

Code #1276: "I was unsure of what I truly enjoyed, what I wanted, what I was good at… I constantly felt unprepared, unwilling to initiate anything… I was caught in a bind, unable to leave my house, yet fearful of life returning to normalcy, where I'd have to resume the pressure of self-worth, the job I desired, and sustaining myself.

Code #0517: "There would likely be many unfortunate events occurring."

Despite the existence of the above symptoms in such a stressful situation, some people strove to seek meaning in life, they somehow walked through adversity with extraordinary courage to bounce forward toward recovery/resilience (Fernández-Alonso et al., 2023).

2. Self-Reports on Participants' Signs of Resilience About The Question What Is Your Greatest Support to Overcome Adversity during The Pandemic (Table 2)

Theme 2: Finding Inner Strength and Personal Resources/ Awareness of Personal Resources (45 participants/ total 90 reported caring for his/her values)

Through this theme, people started being aware of what had sustained them throughout the journey, in their search for personal resources, and meaning, and in their making strong efforts to regain life and to move on. They realized that they could formulate their life stories as they choose; they could then find ways to change the meaning of the past, shed light on the present, and take ownership of a different life course (Anderson & Hiersteiner, 2008). Testimonies reflected this shift: "I'm also tired of many restrictions during the pandemic, but what makes me overcome it is that I just feel like I can't end up here" (Code #0124, Resilience score 56/100). Materials collected showed that the resources reviewed in collected stories highlight individuals' ability to mobilize internal resources, such as "But I think the important thing is still my optimism." (Code #0833, Resilience score 88/100), or "It's the belief in myself" and wanted to "Do something different and bold to change my life" (Code #0802, Resilience score 64/100).

One person noted their personal growth as a result of personal efforts "needing to expand the tent within" and learning to forgive others, stating "We must learn to let go of others, which is

essentially letting go of ourselves" (Code #0413, 82/100). Another recognized resilience through inner changes, noting, "being more relaxed with myself, whether I tense up or not, it still has meaning," and believed they could "try to do something different, for example, call and tell my parents, 'I love you, I am very worried about COVID and I need you to stay healthy and be with me.'" (Code #0472, Resilience score: 79/100).

Code #1023, with a newfound self-awareness, the respondent described her experience as:

I also feel more compassion towards myself. I want to "allow" myself to be exactly who I am in the present moment, at least for now, I won't view myself through past mistakes, and adversities. At this moment I turn inward for my Resources. (Resilience score: 69/100)

I understand that the ugly parts of oneself, the old wounds, should be faced and accepted as they are instead of trying to deny them. Learning to embrace and comfort those wounds! I recognize the inherent values of oneself that have not been cared about or have been forgotten. I find strength in my resources. (Code #0850, Resilience score: 68/100)

Code #0247: "I have got more positive thinking, started to value and pay attention to the small things around me." (Resilience score: 70/100)

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) stated that PTG showed that the way people choose to change their way of thinking and of relating positively, may be related to post-traumatic growth through adaptation.

Theme 3: Having Family and Community Support - Adaptation & Resources (19 Participants/ Total 90 Reported Caring For Family And Community Support)

The experiences shared by the participants reflect a significant shift in interpersonal relationships, with an increased appreciation for others and the realization that support from family, friends, and community is essential in times of crisis. This theme highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of social bonds and mutual reliance, which contributed to the participants' resilience and growth.

Code #0833, with a resilience score of 88/100, attributing her resilience to a sense of life purpose, she detailed it as an outcome of connections: "I found resources from myself, love, sharing from friends, people around me, and the media I approach." As a result of significant support from the community, the individual demonstrates growth in a deeper and more meaningful interpersonal relationship, noting

I am very happy to be able to empathize, want to encourage others, and in return, also receive energy and comfort from everyone. I need to practice gratitude more. That's how I uplift my spirit. A word of encouragement, or a kind word is already a form of giving.

 One can acknowledge an increased appreciation of others and acceptance of being able to rely upon others in times of trouble. "My external resources were family, close friends, and social bonds formed in the art therapy group." (Code #0847, Resilience score 67/100). Another found her resources in "My family, especially my mother and my sister." (Code #0887, Resilience score of 76/100)

With a better sense of belonging, they found resilience through engaging in helping those around them. Observing participants' adaptation suggests that families and communities have a supportive role in the adaptive process.

Adaptation with the help of community and family support, an individual can find components of growth through the dimension of connection between themselves and the world (Herman et al., 2015).

Theme 4: Belief in the Divine Presence (30 Participants/ Total 90 Reported Believing the Divine Presence in Times of Pandemic)

Turning to Nature and the Creator/God occupies the third position in the responses of the focus group. In the face of adversity, people seek a higher power to stay strong. Some explained their perspectives of the cluster by affirming their beliefs, such as "My faith in God" (Code #0836, Resilience score 90/100), "Optimism and faith" (Code #0820, Resilience score 63/100), and other found her strength in God, stating,

My greatest resource is perhaps the personal relationship between me and God. The phrase from God's word that resonates with me the most during this time is "My grace is sufficient for you." Indeed, I have always been supported both physically and spiritually in a mysterious way. (Code #1337, Resilience score 78/100)

In this sense, the experiences of searching for and believing in the Beyond of Frankl (1979) ("What does not kill you make you strong") would shed light on the participants who turned to meaning, and spirituality for the struggling journey. For instance, #0836 stated, "I am determined to live better each day and treat my family better. We should express our thoughts to feel more comfortable in spirit." (Resilience score 90/100). Another individual also found their purpose in life through "Spirituality and loved ones" (Code #0139, Resilience score 87/100).

This theme manifests not only through growth in spiritual values but also through a better understanding of the meaning/ purpose of life, and an improved sense of priority (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Connor & Davidson, 2003).

Respondent code #0847 (Resilience score 67/100) remained resilient as she found meaning in life, explaining "Hope for good things to come in the future." (Code #0461, Resilience score 66/100). Post-traumatic growth was revealed in participants' ability to accept and be grateful for whatever arrived in their lives (Vernon et al., 2009) during the pandemic. For instance, "Inner wounds are like friends that help us open up and see the beauty in life." (Code #0836, Resilience score 90/100).

5. Conclusion

During the epidemic outbreak, Vietnamese people's positive and negative emotions intermingled and coexisted. In the light of the phenomenological frameworks, this study builds on the foundation by Harvey et al. (2017) in the field of post-traumatic recovery, and we found that the participants had gone through extremely difficult moments and slowly processed their struggle through theme one of helplessness including confusion, meaninglessness, and psychosomatic

complaints, doubt, and disconnection; theme two of awareness of personal strength, encompassing positive changes in self-perception(e.g., , self-efficacy, and resourcefulness), theme three of appreciation of others, indicating shifts in interpersonal relationships and adaptation; and theme four of belief in the Divine Presence, attunement to priorities, highlighting changes in life philosophy, spiritual values, and purpose.

On one hand, the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, where a locked-down and quarantine would be unable for people to reach out for social support. So, they learned to turn inward to find their strength. This was consistent with the context of the pandemic situation, and it was an exceptional finding about the collective culture. Those who have purposes in life showed their highest scores on resilience regardless of the experiences of living in lockdown and loss during the pandemic. The experience of overcoming suffering personally and communally during the pandemic may have led them to take into consideration more focus on the personal resources and purpose of life. Therefore constructs of harmony and collaboration as components of collective culture (Singh & Yu, 2010) may need to be interpreted differently; or perhaps more focus is to be placed on self-efficacy/ autonomy.

 On the other hand, seven participants out of 90 who are tuned into spiritual values, and a sense of purpose in life, are those who have the highest scores in resilience (total CD-RISC scores > 88/100). For instance, these 7 participants gone through experiences of severe hardships during the pandemic, such as witnessing a person pass away due to COVID-19 (Code #0139), living in a lockdown zone (Code #0820), enduring prolonged social distancing and home confinement (Code #0060), and facing financial difficulties because his mother and he couldn't work, and his father, who went back to his hometown to visit a sick relative, got quarantined there and hasn't been able to return home (Code #0180). Even so, the participant reported, "I am determined to live better each day and treat my family better. We should express our thoughts to feel more comfortable in spirit." (Code #0836, with a resilience score of 90/100). The participants' experiences revealed caring for spiritual values and the Divine Presence appears relevant with Tedeschi (1996) và Connor & Davidson (2003).

6. Implications

Participants' resources and having a purpose in life in this study sustained throughout their uncertain pandemic journey. The principal researcher came to realize that people may express themselves in contextually different ways, yet the universal truth is that personal resources and having purpose in life are part of human wholeness (Chen et al., 2020). It is also useful to explore personal resources and the purpose of life in which the spiritual dimensions would foster adaptation together with self-efficacy in times of adversity and of the Pandemic. Spiritual components were incorporated by Connor-Davidson (2003) "Faith sometimes can help" (CD-RISC, 2003), as revealed by the participants: "My greatest resource is perhaps the personal relationship between me and God. The phrase from God's word that resonates with me the most during this time is 'My grace is sufficient for you'. Indeed, I have always been supported both physically and spiritually in a mysterious way." (Code #1337, with a resilience score of 87/100). It is therefore recommended that researchers and practitioners be aware of the existence of

spirituality/ religion that would incorporate into the theory and practice of meeting clients' spiritual needs.

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