The Interplay of Self and Spirit in Parental Resilience: A Theoretical and Evidence-based Review

[1]Maheshwari Chand, [2]Tosendra Dwivedi

Alliance School of Liberal Arts and Sciences (Dept. of Psychology), Alliance University, Bangalore

cmaheshwariPHD724@arts.alliance.edu.in | ORCID: 0009-0006-6114-9716

Abstract

Background: Resilience, often termed "ordinary magic", refers to the ability to adapt, recover and evolve through adversity. Within the parenting context, resilience is the enduring capacity of parents to nurture, cope and sustain well-being amid the challenges and demands of family life. Despite growing research on parental resilience, limited attention has been given to the dynamic interplay of *self* (intrinsic psychological resources of inner strength and self-efficacy) and *spirit* (existential resources of spiritual grounding, meaning making and connectedness).

Objectives: This systematic theoretical and evidence-based review (a) examines how *self* and *spirit* interplay in resilience among parents and (b) identifies overarching patterns emerging across existing studies.

Method: Searches across *ProQuest One Academic*, *Scopus* and *Shodhganga* identified 14 relevant peer-reviewed articles, doctoral dissertations, conceptual and theoretical papers published in English between 2010 and 2025. Inclusion criteria focused on key terms related to parental resilience, self, and spirit, excluding non-parental populations after screening 45 articles. Thematic synthesis was applied to extract recurring constructs and mechanisms that infuse resilience in parents.

Results: The key findings of the studies suggest -

-Parental resilience is co-shaped by self-efficacy and spiritual meaning as a protective pair.

-Resilience coherence emerges through the dynamic interplay of inner strength and

spiritual grounding under adversity, termed *self-spirit coherence*.

-Conceptual and measurement gaps indicate the need for coherence-based frameworks to capture self-spirit synergy in parental resilience.

Implications for Schools: Findings advocate integrating strengths-based, value-oriented, brief reflective prompts and peer-support exercises into psycho-spiritual education through school-parent workshops and counselling programs to strengthen parental self-efficacy and resilience.

Conclusion: The paper concludes by proposing self-spirit coherence framework, considering that uneven conceptual measures highlight the future need for mixed-method and longitudinal studies to validate this synergy, which is central to cultivating parental resilience and

relational resources.

Keywords: parental resilience, self, self-efficacy, spirit, spirituality.

Introduction

"I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become". This well-known quote by Carl Jung reminds us that life's adversities do not define us; rather, facing them helps us develop resilience, emerge stronger and redefine who we are. Hardships are inevitable, yet they often become the very ground on which resilience takes shape. Within the broad fields of developmental and health psychology, resilience has long been recognized as a core human capacity that enables growth, recovery and positive transformation.

Masten (2014) famously describes *resilience* as an "ordinary magic" that we all have within and demonstrate routinely (Aburn et al., 2016). It emphasizes that it is neither a rare nor an extraordinary ability, however a natural, everyday process found in individuals, families and communities. Etymologically the term originates from the Latin word *'resilio',* which means 'to bounce back', acknowledging that resilience helps magically stride past challenging times.

Parenting, although deeply fulfilling, is often challenging amid everyday demands of family life like health problems, financial hardships, behavioural difficulties or marital issues. These experiences require parents to draw upon their inner reserves to navigate adversity while continuing their caregiving role. The concept of resilience - broadly defined as "positive adaptation or ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity" (Herrman et al., 2011, p. 259), has therefore become central to understanding how parents cope, thrive and support their families under pressure. Extending this understanding, to parenting,

this definition underscores the ability to sustain caregiving even when circumstances are difficult. Gavidia-Payne et al. (2015) defines *parental resilience* as the "enduring capacity of parents to deliver a competent and quality parenting to children despite the presence of risk factors". Similarly, Sousa et al. (2025), in their scoping review of parental resilience in the context of political violence, emphasize that resilience is best understood as an adaptive, evolving process shaped by ongoing wars, armed conflicts and compromised parenting practices. Heiman (2002, as cited in Peer & Hillman, 2014) also notes that parental resilience is "the ability to withstand and rebound from crisis and distress". These perspectives across literature highlight that parental resilience is not merely a fixed trait (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Rutter, 2012; Masten et al., 2001, 2014) nor a set of coping skills, rather, it is a multifaceted process (Connor & Davidson, 2003) that develops over time as parents encounter and overcome various stressors during their parenting journey.

Emerging literature suggests that the development of resilient parenting is as much as about understanding and strengthening the self, as it is about drawing from spiritual resources. Accordingly, two broad dimensions - *self* and *spirit*, has emerged as foundational to understanding resilience within the parenting context.

The '*self*' dimension in parental resilience encompasses intrinsic psychological resources such as inner strength and self-efficacy. Inner strength reflects one's sense of coping and ability to influence life circumstances, while self-efficacy echoes parents' belief in their ability to successfully manage parenting demands (Bandura, 1997). Having optimism, i.e., positive view of life (Seligman, 2011), self-awareness and emotional regulation mark a strong sense of self-efficacy that result in increased resilience. Lyubomirsky & Layous (2013) explain that most people have the capacity to be resilient in the face of negative life experiences. These attributes collectively empower parents to respond rather than react, make deliberate choices and maintain a sense of competence and stability.

The '*Spirit*' dimension refers to the existential resources such as spiritual grounding, meaning making and connectedness. Spiritual grounding involves being rooted in values, beliefs and practices by anchoring oneself in the present moment, connecting with the inner self and centering oneself amidst chaos. Meaning making, influenced by Frankl's (1963) existential theory, entails the search for meaning from life experiences, especially those involving suffering or sacrifice. Connectedness denotes a sense of belonging to something larger - family, community, nature or the divine. The American Psychological Association recommends connecting with friends, family and community as a way to increase resilience (APA, 2013, as cited in Choudhari, 2020), underscoring the role of spiritual connectedness. All

religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam recognize that people have the ability to be resilient even in times of sorrow, which are inevitable experiences of human life (Wolin et al., 2009, as cited in Choudhari, 2020). These spiritual elements foster hope, compassion, self-reflection and clarity of purpose guiding personal growth and transformation.

Although research on parental resilience continues to expand, the *dynamic interplay of self and spirit* remains less explored. Much of the existing literature tends to treat psychological and spiritual components separately, however emerging evidence suggests that their synergy may offer a more holistic understanding of how parents sustain caregiving over time. Thus, this review paper aims to address two key questions: (a) How *self* and *spirit* interplay in resilience among parents? and (b) What overarching patterns emerge across existing studies? By synthesizing theoretical or conceptual models and empirical findings, this paper seeks to offer a more integrated understanding of parental resilience that recognizes parents not only as caregivers navigating external challenges, but as individuals accessing rich inner resources shaped by both self and spirit.

Methodology

This paper presents a theoretical and evidence-based review of literature that attempts to understand the interplay of self and spirit in parental resilience. This study systematically analyzes existing scholarly sources to identify theoretical frameworks, conceptual models and empirical evidence that highlight self and spiritual related dimensions contributing to resilience among parents.

Search Strategy: A focused search of the literature was conducted across *ProQuest One Academic* journal, *Scopus* and *Shodhganga* databases to include both international and Indian scholarly contributions. The search strategy included combinations of key terms related to parental resilience, self, spirit and theoretical framework. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, doctoral dissertations, conceptual and theoretical papers published in English between 2010 and 2025.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: Studies were included if they a) explicitly examined parental resilience, b) incorporated constructs related to self or self-efficacy or spirit or spirituality or meaning or connectedness and c) provided theoretical or empirical evidence on resilience mechanisms among parents. Studies were excluded if they focused on non-parental populations or solely focused on resilience among children or adolescents or source type as

wire feeds in database search. After initial screening of 368 total search results, 45 articles were reviewed based on title, abstract and inclusion criteria, of which 14 studies were included for detailed analysis.

Procedure: A thematic synthesis approach was adopted to identify and interpret the core themes of (i) self (ii) spirit (iii) self-spirit coherence in relation to parental resilience. Subthemes emerged as inner strength, self-efficacy under the self- dimension and spiritual grounding, meaning making and connectedness under the spirit dimension, explaining how resilience is strengthened among parents.

Rationale: This integrative synthesis offers a deeper understanding of how intrinsic psychological and spiritual reserves co-exist and dynamically interplay to reinforce adaptive resilience in parents while facing adversity.

As this review used secondary data of publicly available published literature, ethical approval was not required.

Results

The review of fourteen studies revealed a broad and multi-dimensional understanding of parental resilience across diverse cultural, social and adversity contexts, including caregiving for children with chronic illnesses or disabilities, transition to parenthood, political violence and general parenting. These studies were grounded in a range of theoretical and conceptual frameworks such as self-efficacy theory (Albanese et al., 2019), ecological and trauma-informed models (Sousa et al., 2025), protective factor models (Widyawati et al., 2023), resilience theories (Young et al., 2019), religiosity well-being model (Hlondo, 2024) and faith-based or spiritual parenting models (Bensaid, 2021; Campbell & Bauer, 2021). These frameworks reveal that parents rely on personal strengths, beliefs, meaning-making processes and relational connections to cope, adapt and maintain caregiving. Across these frameworks, resilience appears not as a static trait but as an evolving capacity shaped by internal beliefs, external-cultural views, suggesting that parental resilience is influenced by multiple interacting systems.

Several studies identify parental belief in the ability to manage challenges as a core predictor of adaptive functioning (Rajan et al., 2018; Albanese et al., 2019; Dong et al., 2025), a concept grounded in self-efficacy theory. Among parents of children with intellectual disabilities, an internal locus of control act as a protective mechanism supporting persistent caregiving, acceptance and optimism (Rajan et al., 2018). This parental locus of control boosts

their caregiving ability and perseverance which in turn reduces emotional burden and shifts focus from inadequacies. Similarly, spiritual grounding, faith practices and meaning making processes consistently supports hope, positive coping, compassion and a sense of purpose among parents (Bensaid, 2021; Campbell & Bauer, 2021; Widyawati et al., 2023). Research on students report that resilient students who had a strong spiritual approach in their lives display higher levels of psychological well-being (Burns et al., 2011). Hlondo (2024) restates that spirituality is widely regarded as a path to resilience (Manning, 2013, as cited in Amin et al., 2024) and it strengthens coping style. Long's (2011, as cited in Gibbs et al., 2020) research showed that spiritual experiences, values, beliefs, forgiveness, religious practices, positive coping and support were related to resilience. Thus, these findings indicate that spiritual and existential beliefs support parents to maintain emotional balance and caregiving despite adverse circumstances.

Notably, Amin et al. (2024) provides direct evidence that spirituality strengthens the link between self-efficacy and resilience in parents of children with newly diagnosed diabetes. Another study report that community spiritual networks improve quality of life for parents of children with developmental disabilities (Widyawati et al., 2023). Spirituality acts as a buffering force in stressful caregiving contexts, giving them emotional strength and hope while caring for stroke survivors (Gibbs et al., 2020). Intervention study by Yuan-hui et al. (2021) indicate that cognitive reframing combined with meaning-making components enhances resilience in parents facing cancer-related stress. Qualitative evidence echoes similar patterns, showing how the resilience programme through structured reflection and learning, fostered emotional awareness, inner strength and meaning, resulting in empowered parenting (Wolfe, 2014). Collectively, these studies highlight self-efficacy and spiritual meaning as a protective pair that co-shapes parental resilience.

Thematic Synthesis

The thematic synthesis of the studies resulted in three overarching themes:
(1) self- dimension, (2) spirit dimension, and (3) self-spirit interplay. These themes illustrate how parental resilience is shaped by both self and spirit dimensions and more significantly by their interplay.

(1)   Across studies, the '*self*' dimension is the intrinsic psychological resources, that clusters around sub themes of *inner strength* and *self-efficacy*. Inner strength reflects in parents' reliance on optimism, self-awareness, cognitive reframing and coping ability across contexts

of political violence, disability care and transition into parenthood (Peer & Hillman, 2014; Rajan et al., 2018; Young et al., 2019; Yuan-hui et al., 2021; Widyawati et al., 2023; Sousa et al., 2025). Parents who believe they can manage challenges and adapt well demonstrate self-efficacy, reinforcing its role as a protective factor in resilience (Wolfe, 2014; Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015; Albanese et al., 2019; Amin et al., 2024; Dong et al., 2025). Thus, '*self*' represents the psychological backbone of parental resilience.

(2)   Key subthemes of *spiritual grounding*, *meaning making* and *connectedness* emerge within '*existential* or *spiritual*' resources. Evidence shows that spiritual grounding through faith, prayer and religious practices aided parents' emotional regulation during adversity (Bensaid, 2021; Campbell & Bauer, 2021; Hlondo, 2024). Meaning making enables parents to value and have purpose which further reduce stress and strengthen resilience (Wolfe, 2014; Bensaid, 2021; Yuan-hui et al., 2021; Dong et al., 2025; Sousa et al., 2025). Connectedness through supportive spiritual communities and families, foster emotional support and belonging, further reinforcing relational or family resilience (Wolfe, 2014; Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015; Young et al., 2019; Widyawati et al., 2023; Dong et al., 2025). Choudhari (2020) reviewed studies that reported significant positive correlations between resilience and spirituality, as well as between resilience and psychological well-being (Manning, 2012; Mehrinejad, et al., 2015; Faisai & Mathai, 2017, as cited in Choudhari, 2020), indicating students with higher levels of spirituality show greater resilience and that spirituality is present in everyone and need some effort and practice. Spirituality has consistently emerged as an existential pillar in resilient caregiving. For many parents, spiritual practices provided frameworks for acceptance, reinterpreting suffering and sustaining optimism (Campbell & Bauer, 2021; Gibbs et al., 2020). Choudhari (2020) further shows that such spiritual practice enhances happiness and stress resilience, while maternal religiosity positively influences children's resilience and well-being (Hlondo, 2024). Thus, '*spirit*' anchors parents in meaning, purpose and a sense of something larger than the looming challenges, representing the spiritual essence of parental resilience.

(3)   Studies identified third overarching theme of '*dynamic interplay between self and spirit*' dimensions, which amplifies parental resilience. Gavidia-Payne et al. (2015) proposed a conceptual model wherein parental psychological well-being, self-efficacy, family functioning and social connectedness play important role in parents' ability to deliver high-quality parenting. Evidence from mediation studies demonstrated that spirituality strengthened the effect of self-efficacy on resilience outcomes (Amin et al., 2024), while serial mediation models highlighted that self-efficacy, meaning and social support form interconnected

pathways that shape parental resilience (Dong et al., 2025). This interplay or synergy, described as *self-spirit coherence*, underscores that resilience coherence arises not just from isolated dimensions but from their dynamic integration. Thus, this interplay suggests that psychological strength gains depth and sustainability when aligned with spiritual belief systems and spiritual resources gain direction when rooted in inner strength and self-efficacy.

This review also identified conceptual and measurement gaps, particularly in how self and spirit related resources were defined and represented. Most existing models addressed these dimensions separately, illustrating the fragmented nature of the concept of resilience thus indicating the need for coherence-based frameworks to effectively capture the self-spirit synergy in parental resilience. Future models may benefit from incorporating holistic, culturally sensitive measures that capture the fluid interplay between self and spirit dimensions.

Discussion

The review examined how parents tap into both internal psychological strengths and existential or spiritual reserves to stay resilient during adversity. Across the fourteen included studies, the findings show that parental resilience is a dynamic process shaped by inner strength, coping skills, faith, meaning and relational support. The key findings indicate that such intrinsic psychological resources consistently appear as the core foundation of resilience across diverse caregiving contexts. Parents of children with developmental or intellectual disabilities or chronic conditions describe resilience as emerging from the ability to maintain optimism, reframe cognitively, draw upon inner strength, hold an internal locus of control and continue caregiving despite odds. Studies grounded in psychological frameworks (Peer & Hillman, 2014; Rajan et al., 2018; Albanese et al., 2019) showed that self-efficacy was one of the key predictors of parental well-being and adaptive parenting behaviours. Intervention-based research (Yuan-hui et al., 2021) further demonstrated that when parents are supported to enhance their self-beliefs through structured psychological skills training, resilience outcomes improved markedly. Thus, the evidence supports conceptualizing the 'self' as an inner psychological resource that empowers parents to interpret constructively and act with confidence. It thereby, reinforces that the self operates as the psychological backbone of parental resilience, enabling parents to cope through demanding situations.

In the contexts of chronic stress or trauma, spirituality surfaced as an existential layer of resilience. Spiritual grounding through prayer, religious rituals, surrender, faith (Choudhari, 2020; Bensaid, 2021; Campbell & Bauer, 2021) offered distressed parents a sense of coping

support and existential stability. Studies show that drawing meaning, value and purpose from caregiving, enabled parents to reconstruct traumatic realities into narratives of growth (Gibbs et al., 2020; Sousa et al., 2025). Connectedness with the divine, family and spiritual communities, reinforced social belonging and moral support. Hlondo (2024) further demonstrated that maternal religiosity benefited children's resilience, emphasising the spiritual-connected parenting. The ways parents adapt to adversity and find meaning in their everyday family lives are considered important for understanding parental resilience (Gavidia-Payne et al., 2015). These findings suggest that spirituality functions as an existential anchor of hope, purpose and stability even in adversity.

Spirituality and intrinsic psychological resources functioned as a protective pair, amplifying strengths. The most explicit evidence emerged from Amin et al. (2024) study where spirituality mediated the association between self-efficacy and resilience. This stabilizes parents' sense of competence, enabling them to access inner strength more. Similarly, Dong et al. (2025) demonstrated an integrated pathway where social support enhanced meaning-making (spiritual process), which subsequently strengthened parental self-efficacy (self-process). Parents who relied on personal competence along with spiritual meaning demonstrated higher resilience and healthier parent-child relationships (Young et al., 2019). Thus, these patterns highlight that parental resilience is a result of *'self-spirit coherence'*, a *reciprocal relationship between self and spirit*, each enriching the other to enable sustained, meaningful caregiving. This synthesis reflects the fluid interplay consistently noted across studies reinforce self and spirit reinforce each other across cultural and caregiving contexts. Parents are therefore coping with situations and also reshaping their caregiving identities through integrated meaning systems that balance strength, belief, faith, optimism, purpose and connection.

Despite these insights, the review reveal conceptual gaps due to inconsistent definitions and measurements. The absence of mixed-method designs restricts insights into how the interplay of self-spirit influences day-to-day caregiving behaviours and parent-child relationships. Few frameworks explicitly explain how both dimensions interplay in parental resilience, this emphasizes the need to use integrated and culturally sensitive models more consistently which, recognize resilience as a synergy of both inner psychological and spiritual reserves. In addition, most studies focus on mothers, limiting understanding of fathers' experiences. The evidence also highlight limited longitudinal and intervention-based research, pointing gap in understanding how psychological and spiritual resources evolve together over time.

In essence, this review highlights that parental resilience is best understood as a dynamic, multifaceted process with intrinsic psychological resources providing structure and spiritual resources adding depth and meaning. Together, these dimensions create an integrated pathway supporting meaningful coping and sustained caregiving. Future research and interventions should therefore adopt an interwoven psychological-spiritual framework to foster empowered and resilient parenting.

Implications

As per included studies, parental resilience is dynamic, adaptive, relational and meaning-driven process, suggesting the need for more holistic conceptual models, that support interplay of self-spirit in parental resilience. Interventions for parents and parent-support programs should integrate inner competencies with culturally appropriate spiritual or existential resources of faith, purpose, meaning based reflection. Healthcare, social work and mental health practitioners may improve parental outcomes by including spiritual assessment into routine support, acknowledging that spirituality is a coping resource for many parents or families. Multicultural societies should encourage culturally sensitive, spiritually inclusive programs, especially where faith plays a central role. For schools, incorporating strengths-based and value-oriented activities into psycho-spiritual education can boost parents' self-efficacy. Brief-reflective prompts and peer-support exercises embedded within school-parent workshops and counselling programs can be beneficial in building parents' emotional resources. Such initiatives can strengthen parent-school collaboration, improve parents' sense of belonging and support-nurture their children's holistic development.

Schools and parent-education programs can create workshops that are rooted in strengthening parental self-efficacy while promoting reflective practices and value-based coping. Community and faith-based organizations may incorporate the self-spirit coherence model to better support families facing chronic stress or caregiving challenges. For researchers, the review highlights conceptual gaps and offers a foundation for developing integrated, theory-driven models and measurement tools that capture the combined influence of self and spirit in parental resilience.

Limitations

This review paper has some limitations. As the studies include different methods thus results are hard to compare and show clear cause and effect links between self and spirit. There

is no consistent way to measure self and spirit related resources with varied terms used in different ways. Varied theoretical concepts have been inconsistently used across studies limiting the direct comparison and inferences. Empirical evidence is limited with most research relying on small sample size. It lacks longitudinal studies with more reliance on cross-sectional designs. There is over-reliance on self-report measures with limited attention to fathers and diverse family structures. Highlights lack of intervention studies. In addition, there is limited mixed-method studies to assess the parental resilience basis the dynamic interplay of self-spirit. Thus, these point to the need for theoretically coherent and extensive methodological research for understanding parental resilience across varied family contexts.

Conclusion

The review concludes by proposing *self-spirit coherence framework* for understanding parental resilience. Evidence from several studies indicates that parental resilience develops through confluence of the 'self' and the 'spirit', making it an integrated and evolving process shaped by the continuous interplay between self-based psychological strengths and spirit-based spiritual or existential resources. The self-dimension reflected through inner strength and self-efficacy, enables parents to navigate challenges with optimism, confidence and adaptive coping while managing caregiving demands. Complementing this, the spirit-dimension encompassing spiritual grounding, faith practices, meaning making and connectedness, offers parents a deeper sense of purpose, belonging, stability, support and hope during periods of chronic illness, trauma, uncertainty or everyday stress.

Importantly, the review highlights that these two dimensions of resilience do not operate in isolation. Instead, their synergy termed as *self*-spirit *coherence*, amplifies resilience outcomes by allowing parents to draw on psychological strengths and deeper spiritual resources simultaneously. Evidence from mediation and pathway studies further shows how spiritual processes can enhance the effects of self-efficacy, affirming that resilience coherence arises from this dynamic interplay.

The uneven conceptual measures across existing studies highlight the need for future mixed-methods and longitudinal research to empirically validate this coherence across different parenting contexts. School-parent interventions and counselling programs that embed inner skill building with relevant meaning-oriented practices may effectively nurture resilient parenting. This emphasizes the need for interventions involving integrated, culturally sensitive frameworks that capture both self and spirit in fostering parental resilience.

Overall, this perspective offers a holistic lens to better understand and support resilient parenting across diverse cultural and adversity contexts. Engaging with this body of research work deepens the understanding of resilience as a human and relational phenomenon, which is far beyond psychological constructs or spiritual resources alone. Furthermore, resilience in parenting is not only about coping but also about inner alignment, where inner strength, faith, meaning and purpose converge. These experiences are shaped by beliefs and connection. These insights clarify how parental resilience is nurtured not only through what parents 'can do' but also through what they 'deeply believe', value and find purpose in their daily lives and particularly during challenging times.

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