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## The Role of Resilience towards Altruism: Be Strong for Yourself before Anyone Else

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### Abstract

Professional psychologists provide services for clients to heal. Thus, it is important for professional psychology graduate students to have altruism, or a trait in which individuals are consistently more generous, helpful, and kind than the average people. To have altruism, students must have resilience, namely the ability to rise in the face of stressful situations with the following dimensions: (a) personal competence; (b) tolerance to adverse effects; (c) acceptance of changes; (d) control; and (e) spiritual beliefs. The purpose of this study was to examine the role of resilience to altruism. The research took data from 104 students, and data processing was done by linear regression. It was found that overall resilience played a role in altruism. If viewed per dimension, the only dimensions significantly impacting altruism were tolerance to adverse effects and control. Further research can explore the relationship between resilience and altruism in other service-providing professionals.

**Keywords:** Altruism, Resilience, Professional Psychology, Graduate Students

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### Introduction

A professional psychologist provides services to clients who experience mental problems, ranging from normal inconveniences to disorders that require intensive psychotherapies. A licensed professional psychologist has the right to do clinical practice and counseling. In addition, a professional psychologist can also conduct research, teach, host training, do supervision on junior psychologists or students, do community service, take part in formal policy development, execute social and clinical interventions, develop measurement instruments, do assessments, attend forensic activities, as well as administering and evaluating a program (Himpsa, 2010). Ideally, a professional psychologist always tries to prioritize the welfare of his clients and everyone involved in the profession, and upholds the principle of 'do no harm'. In other words, they need to be aware of every professional decision taken to not cause any problem to anyone involved,

especially the clients themselves (American Psychological Association, 2017).

Before being able to serve as a professional psychologist, one needs to first to take the professional Psychology Graduate Program (Himpsti, 2010). During their study, professional psychology graduate students will develop perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of prospective professional psychologists (Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020).

The way in which professional psychology graduate students interpret their profession during their study is determined by the passion to prosper other people, which motivates them to complete the whole learning process. Professional psychology graduate students will remember their desire to contribute for the welfare of society when they feel tired in adversity (VG., A., C., J., personal communication, 16 February 2021; R., personal communication, 20 February 2021; F., I., V., P., personal communication, 20 February 2021; N., personal communication, 16 February 2021; R., personal communication, 28 October 2020). The tendency or attitude to help and serve can be explained through a psychological concept called altruism. According to Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981), altruism is a trait in which individuals are consistently more generous, helpful, and kind than people in general. Previous studies have found that altruism has an impact on (a) subjective well-being; and (b) physical health.

The first impact of altruism is the emergence of subjective well-being (Feng & Guo, 2016; Wei, Roberts, Strickler, & Corbett, 2018). Hoffman, Gonzalez-Mujica, Acosta-Orozco & Compton (2017) found that altruistic behavior significantly changed individual views (on trust in others, appreciation for life, gratitude, self-confidence, feelings of respect, feelings of empathy, motivation to help, spiritual energy, enthusiasm, and confidence). On the contrary, Lockwood et al. (2017) found that people who are less motivated to benefit others has higher subclinical levels of social apathy and psychopathy, and is considered superficial on their daily helping behaviors. Limberg (2016) found that helping professionals who has lower level of altruism is more potential to experience depersonalization and higher level of burn out.

The second impact of altruism is optimal health and reduced pain. Wang, Ge, Zhang, and Xie

(2019) conducted an experiment using (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) MRI and demonstrated that individuals with altruism had significantly reduced activity in the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex and bilateral insula of the brain when they felt pain. This occurs because of the right insula activation mechanism mediated by nervous system activity in the ventral medial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC), and thus individuals also have more meaning in their altruistic behavior.

However, altruism can become maladaptive and cause burn out (Harris, 2018; Wong, 2020). Individuals with high levels of altruism may experience higher negative feelings (anxiety and depressive symptoms) than individuals with lower levels of altruism, especially when individuals perceive situational limitations that prevent them from helping (Feng, Zong, Yang, Gu, Dong, et al. & Qiao, 2020).

Professional psychologists can experience burnout (Cramer, Robert, Ireland, Louise, Hartley, Victoria, Long, Molly, Ireland, Carol, Wilkins, & Tracy, 2019; Laverdiere, Kealy, Ogrodniczuk, & Morin, 2018) triggered by emotional demands from clients (Yela et al., 2019; Brugneera et al., 2020). Throughout their study, professional psychology graduate students have various demands and challenges that need to be overcome. Association of Indonesian Psychological Higher Education Providers (Keputusan Asosiasi Penyelenggara Pendidikan Tinggi Psikologi Indonesia/AP2TPI, 2019) decides that the competencies that graduates need to acquire after completing professional psychology studies include assessment skills, psychological problem-solving abilities, and psychological intervention abilities. A professional psychologist is also required to always be careful, have empathy, understand and handle the dynamics experienced by clients during the therapy process (Brugneera et al., 2020).

Therefore, to achieve an optimal level of altruism, someone needs to be able to regulate stress properly. Previous studies have found that altruism is related to one's 'rising' in stressful situations (Bolton, Praetorius, & Smith-Osborne, 2016; Ruini, 2017; Wei, Roberts, Strickler, & Corbett, 2018). To be able to serve clients effectively and with sincerity, prospective psychologists need to be able to deal with and strive through the pressures and unpleasant conditions they experience.

Responses in dealing with obstacles can be explained through the concept of resilience, namely a person's ability to maintain and restore stable psychological and physical functions when faced with unpleasant and stressful life events (Bonanno, Westphal, & Mancini in Seiler & Jenewein, 2019). Connor and Davidson (2003) explain that resilience consists of various dimensions, including: (a) personal competence; (b) tolerance to adverse effects; (c) acceptance of changes; (d) control; and (e) spiritual beliefs.

According to Rushton (1982), those who are able to deal with emotional turmoil are the most inclined to help. Meanwhile, those who experience the process of learning from unpleasant experiences will have more strong standards of behavior and thus are more likely to help. In other words, someone who has resilience will be better able to serve and thus have better altruism.

Based on research conducted by Zhao et al. (2016) regarding resilience, peer caring, and subjective well-being, we argue that: (a) other than participants from the medical field, researchers need to focus on the psychological condition of participants from the mental health field, including professional psychology graduate students; (b) compared to peer caring of service-related professions, researchers need to focus more on altruism; (c) there are not many recent studies yet that focus on the impact of resilience towards altruism.

First, other than participants from the medical field, researchers need to focus on participants from the mental health field because of the important role of prospective professional psychologists (Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020) in the COVID-19 pandemic. Zhao et al. (2016) used medical and nursing students as participants. As an equalization of the characteristics of participants in the field of mental health, the participants that the writer can examine are prospective professional psychologists who are carrying out their study on the graduate program.

Second, compared to peer caring (in Zhao et al., 2016), research needs to focus more on altruism. Professional psychologists are obliged to prioritize improving one's mental condition without discrimination (Himpsa, 2010), and thus requires characteristics that are more than just

peer caring (caring for colleagues), namely altruism (willing to sacrifice for all those in need). It can be said that altruism in prospective professional psychologists needs to be investigated more than just peer caring because of the demands of a professional code of ethics that need to be upheld.

Third, to the researcher's knowledge, not many studies have focused on understanding the relationship between resilience and altruism. The most recent researches we found that examine those certain variables were conducted by Staub and Vollhardt (2006), Charney (2004), Leontopoulou (2010), and Vollhardt (2009). Staub and Vollhardt (2006) proposed a model of people who experience suffering (whether intentional or unintentional) who are more likely to experience healing, support, resulting in a stronger sense of self and greater awareness of others' suffering, thus leading to altruism. Charney (2004) concluded that resilient individuals have excellent interpersonal and leadership skills, and are often characterized by altruism. Leontopoulou (2010) found that altruism can be reliably predicted by resilience, where people who exhibit positive adaptation under adverse conditions show more unique prosocial behavior. Vollhardt (2009) stated that someone's experience of suffering may rise to shape specific motivations to help others in need. The concepts of resilience and altruism are very important to understand, especially for professionals that need to serve clients in physical and psychological health conditions. Situations will also get dynamic and could develop more complex adversities for professional psychology graduate students.

This study will focus on the role of resilience towards altruism from professional psychology graduate students. We hope that this study can contribute input for the organizers of the professional psychology graduate programs. Therefore, the hypotheses we propose are:

H<sub>1</sub>: Resilience plays a role in the altruism of professional psychology graduate students.

H<sub>2</sub>: All dimensions of resilience play a role in the altruism of professional psychology graduate students.

## **Method**

### *Procedure*

Data collection was done by distributing surveys through online media such as WhatsApp. Participants in this study were recruited intentionally and purposefully (purposive sampling), with the belief that the subject would represent the characteristics of the intended population (Cohen et al., 2010).

### *Participants*

In this study, data were obtained from 104 participants, namely, students who are actively studying in Professional Psychology Graduate Program at University X. Research participants were recruited through social media, email and WhatsApp. We collected data through an online form, which required participants to give consent by signing an online checklist to the written statement.

### *Measurement*

Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981) developed a measuring instrument entitled Self Report Altruism Scale (SRAS), which is a unidimensional scale and consists of 20 items, where one example of the item is "*I have offered my seat on a bus or train to a stranger who was standing*". This measuring tool is answered through 5 choices, namely: (1) Never; (2) Once; (3) More Than Once; (4) Often; (5) Very Often. In this study, SRAS has a Cronbach Alpha of 0.820. However, there are several items that have low level of corrected item-total correlation (below 0.2 according to the standard in Lerbin & Aritonang, 2008), namely "*I have donated blood*" (item 8, with corrected item-total correlation of 0.025), "*I have allowed someone to go ahead of me in a lineup (in the supermarket, at a copy machine, at a fast-food restaurant)*" (item 11, with corrected item-total correlation of 0.121), "*I have given a stranger a lift in my car.*" (item 12, corrected item-total correlation of 0.155). These points were not included in the data processing (resulting in a better Cronbach Alpha of 0.841) and will be discussed in the research's discussion.

Resilience was measured using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) developed by Connor and Davidson (2003). CD-RISC consists of five dimensions, namely: (a) personal

competence; (b) tolerance to adverse effects; (c) acceptance of changes; (d) control; and (e) spiritual beliefs. Measuring instruments were answered using a Likert scale format from 0 (Highly Disagree) to 4 (Highly Agree). In this study, CD-RISC has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.932 with a corrected item-total correlation greater than 0.2 and is considered reliable.

### *Data analysis*

The statistical analysis was processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25. This study used descriptive analysis to describe the level of resilience and altruism of participants. Data were categorized by implementing hypothetical statistics approach. Testing the relationship between resilience and altruism was carried out through correlation and linear regression tests.

### **Result**

Based on participants' demographic data, the majority of participants in this study were women (88.5%), aged 23 to 24 years (31.7%), with a Grade Point Average in the range of 3.9-4 (44.8%), and live in a large family (71.2%). Subject demographic data can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Participants' Demographic Data*

	Category	N	Percentage
Sex	Female	92	88.5%
	Male	12	11.5%
Age	21-22	7	6.7
	23-24	33	31.7
	25-26	31	29.8
	27-28	16	15.4
	29-30	2	1.9
	>30	15	14.4
Grade Point Average (GPA) Range	3.9-4	43	41.3
	3.8-3.89	17	16.3
	3.7-3.79	13	12.5
	3.6-3.69	5	4.8
	3.5-3.59	3	2.9



	Category	N	Percentage
	<3.5	15	14.4
Residence	Living with Nuclear Family (Father, Mother, Siblings)	8	7.7
	Living with Extended Family (Uncle, Aunt, Cousin)	74	71.2
	Liinge alone (Boarding/Rented House)	22	21.2

We also categorize based on the comparison of the empirical mean and the hypothetical mean. The following is an overview of the overall research descriptive results.

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Result of Resilience, and Altruism*

Number	Total Items	Variable/Dimension	Min.	Max.	Hypothetical Mean	Empirical Mean	Total Mean	SD	Category
Resilience									
1	25	Resilience (Overall)	36	100	2	2.98	74.73	13.57	High
2	8	Personal Competence	10	32	2	2.99	23.94	5.10	High
3	7	Tolerance of Adverse Effects	10	28	2	2.72	19.10	4.32	High
4	5	Acceptance of Changes	7	20	2	3.15	15.75	2.87	Very High
5	3	Control	3	12	2	2.97	8.92	2.09	High
6	2	Spiritual Beliefs	3	8	2	3.5	7	1.19	Very High
Altruism									
7	17	Altruism	36	73	3	3.02	51.55	8.55	Moderate

Based on the correlation test (Table 3), it was found that resilience, in general, was correlated with altruism. Dimensions of resilience, namely tolerance to adverse effects and control were significantly correlated with altruism.

**Table 3**  
*Result of Correlation of Resilience and Altruism*

Number	Dimension	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Resilience (Overall)	74.73	13.57	1						
2	Personal Competence	23.94	5.1	0.949**	1					
3	Tolerance of Adverse Effects	19.1	4.32	0.883**	0.763**	1				
4	Acceptance of Changes	15.75	2.87	0.888**	0.829**	0.685**	1			
5	Correlation	8.92	2.09	0.807**	0.703**	0.674**	0.655**	1		
6	Spiritual Beliefs	7	1.19	0.566**	0.529**	0.332**	0.525**	0.404**	1	
7	Altruism	51.55	8.55	0.244*	0.183	0.295**	0.129	0.247*	0.174	1

Remarks: \*\* significance below 0.01; \*significance below 0.05

## Hypothesis Test I

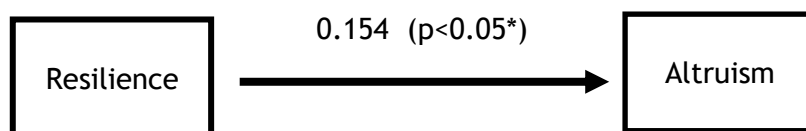
The following is a regression test of resilience (overall) towards altruism.

**Table 4**  
*Regression Test of Resilience towards Altruism*

Predictor	F	B	P	R	R Square
Resilience	6.434	0.154	0.013	0.244	0.059

Based on the regression test, the F value was 6.434 with a significance (p) of 0.13 ( $<0.05$ ). This shows that resilience plays a role in altruism. Based on the processing results, the value of r square is 0.059. This shows that the role of resilience to altruism is 5.9%.

A positive B value indicates a congruent relationship between resilience and altruism. The higher the level of resilience, the higher the level of altruism in professional psychology graduate students.



*Figure 1. The Role of Resilience to Altruism.*

(Noted: Values on the chart is based on unstandardized coefficient (B). \* $p<0.05$  \*\* $p<0.01$ )

## Hypothesis Test 2

The following is a regression test per dimension of resilience towards altruism.

Table 5

*Regression Test of Personal Competence towards Altruism*

Predictor	F	B	P	R	R Square
Personal Competence	3.552	0.308	0.062	0.183	0.034

Based on the regression test, the F value was 3.552 with a significance (p) of 0.062 ( $> 0.05$ ).

This shows that the dimension of personal competence does not play a role in altruism.

The higher the level of the dimension of personal competence, does not necessarily contribute to the level of altruism in professional psychology graduate students.

**Table 6**

*Regression Test of Tolerance to Adverse Effects towards Altruism*

Predictor	F	B	P	R	R Square
Tolerance to Adverse Effects	9.724	0.584	0.002	0.295	0.087

Based on the regression test, the F value was 9.724 with a significance (p) of 0.002 (<0.05). This shows that the dimension of tolerance for adverse effects plays a role in altruism. Based on the processing results, the value of r square is 0.087. This shows that the role of the tolerance dimension to the adverse effects of altruism is 8.7%.

A positive B value indicates a congruent relationship between the dimensions of tolerance for adverse effects and altruism. The higher the level of the dimension of tolerance for adverse effects, the higher the level of altruism in professional psychology graduate students.

**Table 7**

*Regression Test of Acceptance of Changes towards Altruism*

Predictor	F	B	P	R	R Square
Acceptance of Changes	1.721	0.384	0.193	0.129	0.017

Based on the regression test, the F value is 1.721 with a significance (p) of 0.193 (> 0.05). This shows that the dimension of acceptance of change does not play a role in altruism. The higher the level of acceptance of change, does not necessarily contribute to the level of altruism in professional psychology graduate students.

**Table 8**

*Regression Test of Control towards Altruism*

Predictor	F	B	P	R	R Square
Control	6.648	1.009	0.011	0.247	0.061

Based on the regression test, the F value was 6648 with a significance (p) of 0.011 (<0.05). This shows that the control dimension plays a role in altruism. Based on the processing results, the value of r square is 0.061. This shows that the role of control to altruism is 6.1%.

A positive B value indicates a congruent relationship between the control and altruism dimensions. The higher the level of control dimension, the higher the level of altruism in professional psychology graduate students.

**Table 9**  
*Regression Test of Spiritual Beliefs towards Altruism*

Predictor	F	B	P	R	R Square
Spiritual Beliefs	3.199	1.253	0.077	0.174	0.030

Based on the regression test, the F value was 3.199 with a significance (p) of 0.077 (> 0.05). This shows that the dimension of spiritual belief does not play a role in altruism.

The higher the level of the spiritual belief dimension, does not necessarily contribute to the level of altruism in professional psychology graduate students.

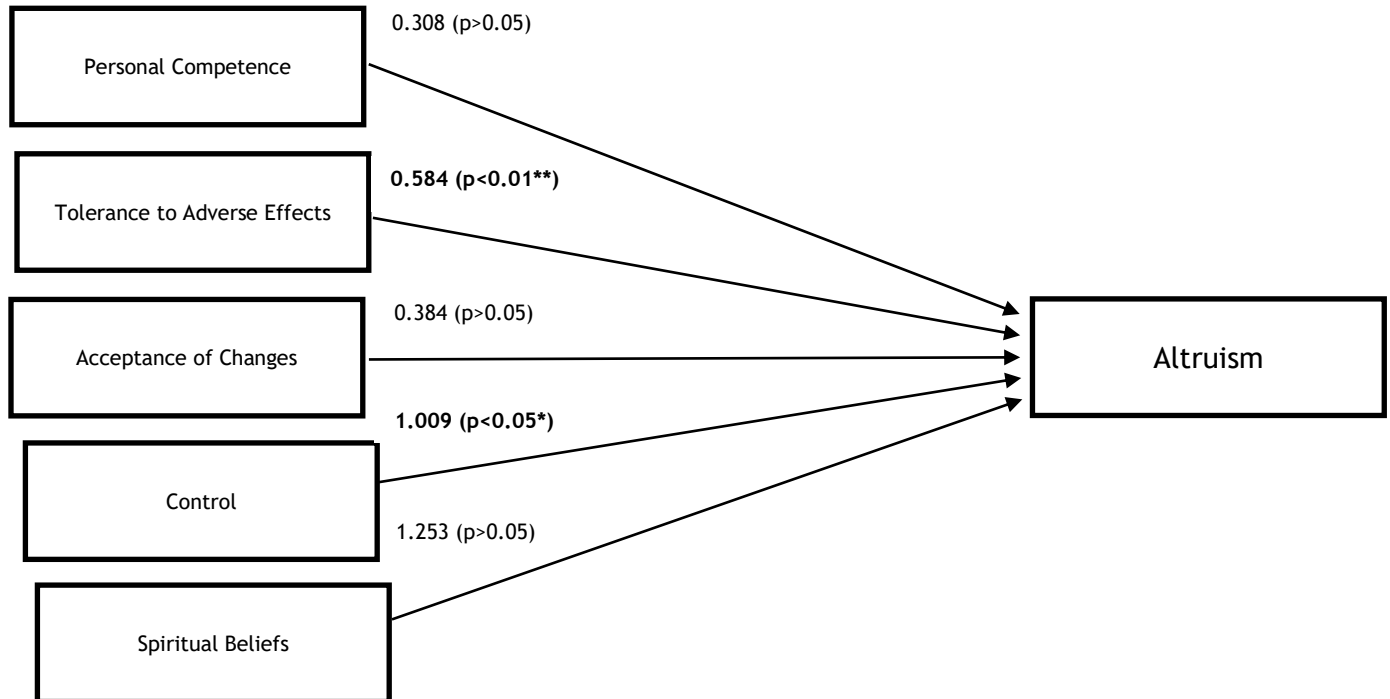


Figure 2. The Role of Dimensions of Resilience toward Altruism.

(Noted: Values on the chart is based on unstandardized coefficient (B).  $*p < 0.05$   $**p < 0.01$ )

## Discussion

The first finding of this study is that resilience has a direct role on altruism of professional psychology graduate students, which is 5.9% ( $F = 6.434$ ,  $B = 0.154$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In other words, the higher the level of resilience, the higher the level of altruism in professional psychology graduate students.

According to Ruini (2017), professionals that focus on services (including psychologists and counselors) are prone to burnout by having to continuously listen and assist clients (through altruism) in the recovery process. However, this altruism helps clients experience growth and thus is the most satisfying reward for the profession itself. In addition, Staub and Vollhardt (2008) state that individuals who experience unpleasant experiences and manage to bounce through them (resilience), will understand the uncomfortable feelings experienced by themselves and others, and thus are more inclined to help others (altruism).

The second finding of this study is that the dimensions of resilience, namely tolerance to adverse effects and control play a role in altruism. The dimension of tolerance for adverse effects plays a role in altruism. Individuals rationalize thoughts, accept their situation, seek emotional coping instead of complaining, and thus reduce their negative feelings. Emotional coping is done to accept change in the form of a mindset that focuses on adaptation, realizing that the individual is not alone, accepting that stress and pressure do occur in life, and also acquiring the willingness to rise in the face of it. The existence of coping through tolerance for adverse effects helps professional psychology graduate students accept uncomfortable conditions to focus on their desire to serve as psychologists, and thus contribute to altruism.

In the control dimension, the individual is aware of the ability to seek help, has belief in the goals to be achieved, and understands the ability to control all processes that occur. If it is associated with the explanation of the locus of control (Johanna et al., 2019), the significance of the control dimension shows the tendency of the internal Locus of Control. That is, professional psychology graduate students perceive that all academic challenges and performance are influenced by attitudes and behavior (under personal control). The perception that he is able to control makes him more convinced of the purpose of life serving as a psychologist, namely through altruism.

Vearrier (2020) explains that service professions need to make altruism the basis of what they do for their long-term career satisfaction. Thus, altruism is perceived as a reward or incentive in the profession (Limberg, 2013; Karns, Moore, & Mayr, 2017). Altruism is very important professional psychology graduate students and can be stated as an indicator of success for undergraduate students of Professional Psychology. Limberg (2013) found that counselors who do not have high levels of altruism are more likely to experience mental exhaustion, while counselors who have high levels of altruism may experience well-being. So, ideally, the level of altruism possessed by professional psychology graduate students should be high, but not in the excessive category, and really needs to be accompanied by resilience to regulate stress and minimize the risk of burnout.

In this study, the level of participants' altruism was at a moderate level. This shows that there

has been a concern for their clients' well-being, but not fully and sincerely. One example of what can happen to professional psychology graduate students because of the moderate level of altruism is the lack of initiative (passiveness) and having certain priorities in helping. However, this level of altruism tends to lead to a high level, and thus has a good prognosis for the future if it continues to be developed and directed through their study.

One factor that contributes to the moderate level could be because altruism as a unidimensional trait proposed by Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981). Thus, the unidimensional attitude has not discriminated against the level of altruism which may be different in certain contexts.

In measuring the altruism variable, the measuring instrument adapted from the Self Report Altruism Scale (Rushton, Chrisjohn, & Fekken, 1981) has three items with the corrected item-total correlation value below 0.2 (according to the standard in Lerbin & Aritonang, 2008), and thus not involved in data testing, which were: (a) Item 8. "*I have donated blood*"; (b) Item 11. "*I have allowed someone to go ahead of me in a lineup (in the supermarket, at a copy machine, at a fast-food restaurant)*"; and (c) Item 12. "*I have given a stranger a lift in my car.*".

Three items from the measurement tool adapted from Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981) were judged to lack adaptability to the context in Indonesia. For items related to blood donation, Wardati, Nur'aini, and Hadi (2019) stated that the factors that influence a person to donate blood are attitudes and knowledge. Kumala and Rahayu (2019) found that the higher students' knowledge of regional donors, the higher the level of altruism behavior. Situmorang, Sihotang, and Novitarum (2020) stated that the main requirements for donating blood are adequate body weight and hemoglobin status. The existence of individual differences in both knowledge and physical condition can be the cause of the non-use of these items. For items related to queues, Mahessya, Mardianti, and Sovia (2017) found that a person's behavior in a queue depends on the crowd and the length of the queue. Daga (2021) states that other factors that influence attitudes towards queuing are the state of the service room, technology and queuing system, system direction, orderliness, and also available facilities. The number of factors and various queuing conditions that differ between places can



be the cause of not being able to use these items. For the item related to giving a ride, Sulisrudatin (2015) states that in big cities in Indonesia, cases of motorbike robbery (robbery in a cruel way) are very common and increasingly worrying. In addition, Akbar (2020) explained that there were cases of a robbery that began with the mode of riding in the victim's vehicle. This can cause people to hesitate to give rides in vehicles for safety reasons, and not necessarily because they don't have altruism. These reasons may explain how this item cannot be used.

Overall, it can be implied that this study confirmed the previous researches about the role of resilience towards altruism (Staub & Vollhardt, 2006; Charney, 2004; Leontopoulou, 2010; Vollhardt, 2009). The aspect of stronger sense of self (Staub & Vollhard, 2006) can be considered as equal as the personal competence dimension. The aspect of highly interpersonal and leadership skill in resilient people stated by Charney (2004) is equal to the acceptance of change dimension. The aspect of positive adaptation under adverse conditions (Leontopoulou, 2010) can be seen as equal as control and tolerance to adverse effect dimensions. The aspect of reframing meaning through the experience of suffering (Vollhard, 2009) can be seen as equal as the spirituality dimension. Researches about the connection between resilience and altruism has not been significantly updated in the past 5 years, and this study confirms that the concept is still relatable these days, specifically on the dimensions of tolerance to adverse effects and control.

This study has limitations, where the characteristics of the sample are limited, the data are in the form of self-reports, and also limited literature related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic happening during this study. Participants in this study were professional psychology graduate students at University X, where the learning conditions at University X might differ from other universities. The data obtained is also a personal report, and is vulnerable to social desirability. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has occurred since 2020, and thus the number of credible references related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is still limited.

## **Conclusion**

Professional psychology graduate students were found to have moderate level of altruism. This means that professional psychology graduate students have a passive concern with certain priorities, which can be developed further. The existence of altruism is impacted by the level of resilience, where students believe that they are competent and strong, have strategies to deal with stress effectively, are able to accept discomfort, have meaningful goals, perceive that they are able to control their conditions, and expect wisdom in each experience to be more sincere in serving people. other. This means that professional psychology graduate students need to be able to strengthen themselves first before they can focus on serving clients optimally and sincerely.

It can be stated that the Professional Psychology Graduate Program at University X has facilitated the students' learning process so that stress and changes in methods experienced can be handled well through resilience and thus have a significant impact on altruism. The program needs to continue to maintain student resilience, and provide regular surveys to evaluate learning methods so that they can be more adapted to the needs and challenges experienced. In addition, the involvement of lecturers and education staff in maintaining resilience and altruism is also important to note, namely by continuing to provide appropriate materials and information, as well as emphasizing the meaning of serving as a psychologist profession as a form of maintaining the level of altruism.

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