



What has a year of covid, lockdowns, isolation and unexpected deaths taught us about the human trait of resilience?

Resilience is the ability to adjust and stay calm in the face of disaster. It's an 'ineffable quality'<sup>1</sup> that has allowed nations, communities, and individuals to cope with the coronavirus pandemic stresses. Having mistakenly believed ourselves to be beyond the reach of COVID-19, December 2019 marked an irreversible alteration to the lives of citizens internationally. Society had to create new opportunities for themselves and explore alternative ways to maintain their mental and physical health.

The imposition of restrictions changed adults' lives suddenly, with resilience being vital in overcoming the challenges they faced. Being told to work at home where possible placed an immense mental strain upon those unused to being confined. The line between work and home life became clouded, as many had to manage their children, their education, or the pressure of providing an income in the wake of a pandemic. People had to relieve their stresses or anxiety in new ways, taking comfort in daily walks, workouts, dancing and painting, most of which had to be done at home. Whilst these solutions may have been unimaginable and arguably 'alarmist'<sup>2</sup> many months ago, this unfamiliar routine has now turned into conventional practice. Following from this, the case could be made that the human trait of resilience has been accentuated throughout the pandemic. People showed great stability and fortitude by sculpting their lives differently, enabling them to endure such unheard of situations.

Additionally, key workers underwent a different type of anxiety: the fear of contracting the virus when leaving the house and the fear of the unthinkable number of deaths that occurred. However, by working cohesively to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds, they learnt to cope with a disconcerting amount of casualties. Many families lost relatives, which had a deleterious impact; new coping mechanisms had to be established. Displays of durability weren't scarce, especially as most had had to find a way to provide for themselves and their family, despite their mental struggles. Mental health campaigns were bolstered, and support groups were formed. Society learnt to rely on each other in new forms, using online platforms rather than in person, through spending time in green spaces and taking more time for themselves.

The younger generation has likewise been detrimentally impacted. Nevertheless, some would postulate that the pandemic has taught children in a way that parents never could, with one such parent stating that 'certain things cannot be taught - only lived'<sup>3</sup>. Having to transform from playing with friends outdoors and learning interactively to suddenly being stuck within four walls is no easy feat. Studying and making friends online reflects how children have learnt to endure unexpected events and overcome mental suffering, which is a striking illustration of the human capacity for rapid adaptation.

Additionally, In combination with the myriad of mental health issues people faced, many were also subject to acts of racism, specifically those of East-Asian origin. Whilst on walks, a relative of mine experienced more than a few intentional dirty glances, with people moving away from her when they saw her before the two-metre distancing rule was even introduced. Initially, she felt tremendously overwhelmed and thought herself to be a burden to society. However, eventually, she found her own ways to cope with others' misguided views, finding succour with friends, and taking

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<sup>1</sup> Courtney E. Ackerman, 'What is Resilience and Why is it Important to Bounce back?' (Positive Psychology, 22nd February 2021)

<<https://positivepsychology.com/what-is-resilience/>> accessed 23rd February 2021

<sup>2</sup> Lisa Schnirring, 'HHS hears community leaders' ideas on pandemic readiness', (CIDRAP, 14th June 2007)

<<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2007/06/hhs-hears-community-leaders-ideas-pandemic-readiness>> accessed 7th February 2021

<sup>3</sup> Michelle Brown, '3 Life Lessons Kids Are Learning From the Pandemic' (Forge, 4th April 2020)

<<https://forge.medium.com/3-things-the-coronavirus-taught-my-daughter-that-i-couldnt-4b459a085a7a>> accessed 28th January 2021



up various avocations, which she wouldn't have discovered had she not had to learn different ways of contending with her struggles.

In February alone, 64 incidents of racist hate crimes against 'Oriental' victims were recorded in the UK, more than twice the previous year<sup>4</sup>. People had to cope with the misinformed opinions of many and find ways to carry on. This effort is displayed by the creation of online support groups, blogs, and weekly zoom calls, for those suffering a similar predicament. Those with social media platforms began campaigns, thereby highlighting and informing others of the adversity and blatant xenophobia they were facing. Whilst this is not a solution to the upsetting treatment East-Asians have had to endure, it accentuates the resilience nature of many by adjusting to shocking situations. From this, researchers can see what lockdown has taught society about mental resilience. Usually, one would regard humankind as unable to go through as much adversity as we have in the past year. Nonetheless, as entire countries went into lockdown, people realised they weren't struggling independently, reinforcing the idea of communities joining forces to support one another.

Additionally, on the 25th of May 2020, George Floyd's cries echoed throughout Minneapolis as police officers restrained him, pinning him to the ground for a prolonged period whilst Floyd called out, "I can't breathe". This perturbing event shook the world, resulting in a life taken too soon, unjustly. News travelled quickly, videos circulated social media, and an uproar arose as millions worldwide demanded justice and police reform. This determination to stand up against injustice underlined the qualities of perseverance and resolve within humanity; many campaigned for justice for those who had suffered, undeterred by the constraints of a pandemic and other mental challenges they encountered.

Resilience is not just determination but also communities coming together despite the health crisis and weathering the odds to continue to protest during an epidemic politically. With thousands attending socially-distanced protests, despite lockdown restrictions, they were able to express their anger and combat institutionalised racism, an effort that gained global traction and media coverage. The population established different ways to come to terms with tragic events, highlighting the courage and fortitude society demonstrated; proof that people can arise stronger from setbacks, and call for change.

Ultimately, the pandemic has shown how humans can adapt to what confronts them and do not waver at unforeseen circumstances, instead finding a way to work around it. The pandemic has highlighted the idea that resilience is an innate characteristic within human beings and has equipped us with the tenacity necessary to overcome future obstacles in life, in a forward-thinking fashion.

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<sup>4</sup> Kate Ng, 'How British east and southeast Asians are fighting racism during the pandemic' (The Independent, 13th January 2021) <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-racism-hate-crime-south-east-asians-b1770177.htm>> accessed 16th February 2021