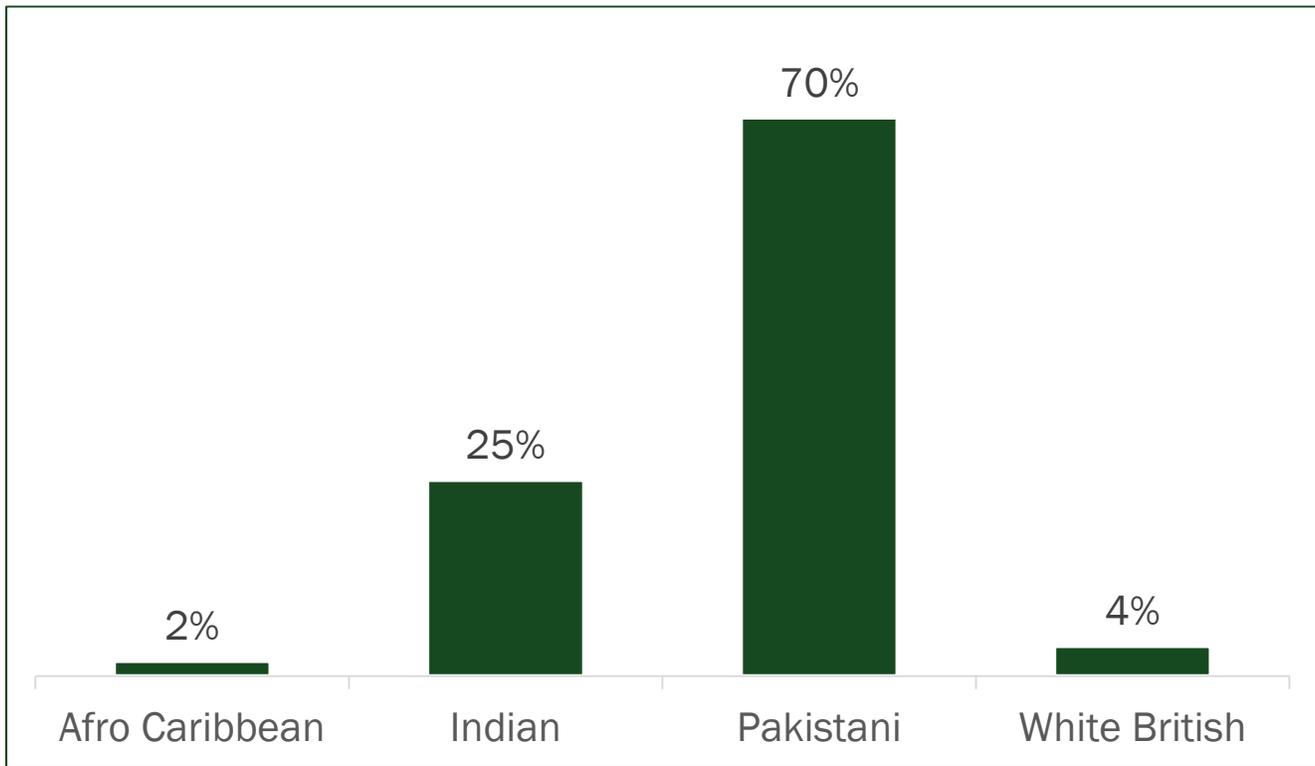


DEVELOPING RESILIENCE FROM A QUR'ANIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

DECEMBER 2025

Ethnicity of Participants – 53 Attendees



Introduction

This report explores the concept of resilience from both psychological and Qur'anic perspectives, drawing on the professional insights of Dr Razia Bhatti-Ali. It examines how individuals experience and navigate hardship, and how faith, meaning, patience, gratitude, and trust in Allah contribute to emotional strength and recovery. The report integrates psychological theory, lived experience, and Islamic teachings to provide a holistic understanding of resilience and wellbeing.



Professional Background

Dr Razia Bhatti-Ali is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist with over 30 years of experience across physical and mental health settings. She is also a published author in both academic literature and children's fiction. Dr Bhatti-Ali has developed a unique faith-based therapeutic approach tailored for Muslim service users, which has been formally published as a therapy guide for clinicians. Her work has been presented at national and international conferences, where she has advocated for culturally and religiously inclusive mental health care for Muslim communities.

Understanding Resilience

Resilience refers to the capacity to recover and adapt in the face of adversity. It acknowledges that hardship is an inevitable part of life but focuses on how individuals respond to and move through difficulties. A powerful metaphor used to illustrate resilience is the comparison between the oak tree and the palm tree. The oak tree appears strong and rigid, yet during severe storms it is more likely to break. The palm tree, though seemingly less robust, bends with the wind and returns to its centre once the storm passes. True resilience lies in flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to regain balance after hardship.

Research and lived experience show that resilience is strengthened through supportive and trusting relationships, as well as having a clear sense of purpose. Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, described this as the "search for meaning." His survival during extreme suffering was sustained by his hope of reuniting with his wife. His work highlights



that meaning allows individuals not only to endure adversity, but to grow through it.



Qur'anic Themes of Resilience

The Qur'an presents life as a test, affirming that Allah does not burden a soul with more than it can bear. Central to this understanding is the concept of Sabr (patience), which represents steadfastness, perseverance, and moral integrity during times of hardship. Patience in Islam is not passive resignation, but an active commitment to faith and right action despite suffering.

The life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) provides profound examples of resilience. He experienced intense grief, loss, persecution, and a period in which he felt abandoned by Allah. This was followed by the revelation of Surah Ad-Duha, which uses the imagery of morning light dispelling darkness. The Surah reassures the Prophet that he has not been forsaken and that hardship will always be followed by ease. This message reinforces hope, renewal, and the understanding that suffering is temporary.

Surah Ad-Duha also calls for compassion, generosity, and gratitude, instructing believers not to oppress orphans, not to turn away those in need, and to openly acknowledge Allah’s blessings. These teachings emphasise that resilience is not only personal but relational, encouraging kindness towards others as a response to one’s own trials.

Growth Through Adversity

Adversity often becomes a catalyst for profound transformation. Sometimes it takes a major crisis to bring clarity and purpose. The example of Ali Banat illustrates this, as he shifted from a life of material wealth to one of service and generosity after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. His response to hardship left a lasting legacy and demonstrated how meaning can be redefined through suffering.

Another important framework discussed is the “two arrows” concept. The first arrow represents the hardship itself, such as illness or loss, which is beyond an individual’s control. The second arrow refers to how a person responds emotionally and behaviourally to that hardship. While pain and difficult emotions are unavoidable, the second arrow is within one’s control. Sabr (patience) and Shukr (gratitude) work together to shape this response.



Patience, Gratitude, and Agency

Patience and gratitude are described as complementary practices that counteract a victim mentality. The Qur'an promises immeasurable reward for those who persevere with patience. Acceptance of what is beyond one's control allows individuals to redirect their energy toward constructive action and emotional regulation.

A symbolic example is the cactus plant, known in Arabic as Sabr. The cactus does not wait for conditions to improve but pushes its roots deep into barren soil to find nourishment. This metaphor encourages proactive resilience even in difficult circumstances. Similarly, the story of Hajar, the wife of Prophet Ibrahim, demonstrates active perseverance. Her search for water in the desert, rather than passive despair, became enshrined as a sacred ritual of Hajj.

Gratitude, even during hardship, plays a powerful role in emotional wellbeing. Regularly acknowledging blessings, such as reflecting on three things to be grateful for each day, can help rewire the brain toward positivity. This practice fosters resilience, emotional balance, and a deeper sense of contentment, even when circumstances are challenging.



Trust in Allah and Emotional Regulation

Tawakkul (trust in Allah) is presented as the fuel that sustains patience. Trust does not imply inaction; rather, it requires effort alongside reliance on Allah's guidance and support. The Islamic principle of "tying one's camel" reinforces the balance between personal responsibility and faith. From a psychological perspective, this aligns with cognitive restructuring and mindfulness practices. Trust in Allah can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting calm and emotional regulation. However, for individuals who have experienced trauma, trust may be disrupted. This does not reflect weak faith but rather the impact of trauma on the nervous system. In such cases, emotional regulation skills must be developed before fully practicing letting go.

Practices such as dhikr (remembrance of Allah) can be particularly effective in regulating emotions, calming the nervous system, and grounding individuals in the present moment. Repetition helps create a sense of safety and stability, reinforcing the understanding that no state of suffering is permanent.

Managing Trauma and Moving Forward

Traumatic responses often involve feeling as though a past event is happening again in the present. Grounding techniques can help reconnect individuals to the here and now. One effective method involves engaging the senses by identifying things that can be seen, felt, and heard, gradually counting down to anchor the mind in the present moment. This process helps the brain recognise safety and regain emotional balance.



The session concluded with a deep breathing exercise, reinforcing the importance of physiological regulation alongside spiritual and cognitive practices. Healing and resilience are presented as ongoing journeys, requiring patience, self-compassion, and continuous reflection.

Conclusion

Resilience is a dynamic process that integrates psychological strength, faith, and meaning. Through the combined practices of patience, gratitude, trust in Allah, and active effort, individuals can navigate hardship with hope and purpose. Both psychological theory and Qur'anic teachings emphasise that adversity is not the end, but an opportunity for growth, compassion, and spiritual development.

Key Arabic and Qur'anic Terms

Allah – The Arabic word for God in Islam.

Sabr – Patience, perseverance, and steadfastness in faith and conduct during hardship. It involves enduring difficulties while continuing to act rightly.

Shukr – Gratitude and thankfulness to Allah, expressed through words, actions, and attitudes, even during times of difficulty.

Tawakkul – Trust and reliance upon Allah while continuing to make personal effort and take responsibility.

Dhikr (Zikr) – The remembrance of Allah through repeated phrases, prayers, or reflection, used to cultivate calm, focus, and spiritual connection.

Surah – A chapter of the Qur'an.

Surah Ad-Duha – A chapter of the Qur'an revealed to reassure Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) during a period of distress, emphasising hope, divine support, and relief after hardship.

Hajj – The annual Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah, one of the five pillars of Islam.

Alhamdulillah – An Arabic phrase meaning “All praise and thanks are due to Allah,” commonly used to express gratitude in all circumstances.

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