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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY AND RESILIENCE AMONG THE TIBETAN REFUGEES IN EXILE (INDIA)

Vipasha Kashyap [1] and **Sunil Kumar Sharma** [2]

[1] Pursuing Doctorate, Department of Psychology, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla.
[2] Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla.

Abstract:

Introduction: *There has always been an acute need for understanding the difficulties of refugees. It is also necessary to focus on their coping resources, which gives them ability to go through the various negative situations on their way. Spirituality and resilience are two such resources. The current work attempts to study the role of spirituality and resilience as coping resources, in the Tibetan refugees in exile (India). It will also focus on how the Tibetan refugees born and raised (till their mid/ late teens) in Tibet vary from the ones born and raised in exile (India).* ***Methods:*** *A sample of ninety participants completed the measures of spirituality and resilience. Using correlation, relationship between the two variables was calculated. The difference between the Tibetans born and raised in exile and otherwise, was assessed by t-test analysis.* ***Results:*** *Resilience is showing a significant positive correlation with spirituality for the refugees who were born and raised in Tibet (.419**, p< .01). t-test results revealed a significant difference between the two groups for spirituality (2.685*, p<.05) and no significant difference for resilience, except for one of its dimensions (life purpose and satisfaction).* ***Discussion:*** *Spirituality and resilience interact and are significant factors influencing and fostering active coping processes leading to a positive psychological adaptation and adjustment. They contribute to the psychological integration of stressful experiences.*

KEY WORDS:

Spirituality, resilience and refugees.

INTRODUCTION

Every year thousands of people arrive in various countries seeking sanctuary. Over the centuries, societies have welcomed millions of refugees and internally displaced persons. Twentieth century was rife with examples of countries being torn apart. Many nations in Africa have suffered civil wars and ethnic strife, generating massive number of refugees. World War II also led to massive amounts of enforced migration. Dissolution of the British Raj, the partition of 1947 and independence of India is one of the largest examples of human movements in history. The fight between Taliban forces and other political factions in Afghanistan led to the displacement of millions of Afghans to the neighbouring countries. The United Nations convention relating to the status of Refugees (1951) defines a refugee as a person who "owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

World over, of the 43.7 million refugees and people displaced within their own country by events such as war and natural disasters, approximately 15.4 millions were refugees (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2004). There is a wide range of cognitive and behavioural responses and outcomes among trauma survivors. Researchers have shown a strong relationship between psychological trauma and the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Leskin, Kaloupek, & Keane, 1998), phobia (Magee, Eaton, Wittchen, McGonagle, & Kessler, 1996), somatoform disorder (Lamprecht & Sack, 2002), dissociative disorders (Ross et al., 1991), eating disorders (Tobin, Molteni, & Elin,1995), self-mutilation, suicide, high-risk behaviours, substance abuse (Marshall et al., 2001; Schinagle, 2002), and major depression (Neria, Bromet, & Marshall, 2002). The surroundings or conditions in which a person is born, lives and operates, the circumstances he/she faces has a marked effect on the behaviour and the ways in which one deals with the various problems of life.

Tibet

'Tibet' sits in the heart of Asia, where Buddhism is practiced. Surrounded by high altitude mountains, it is the source of great rivers like: Indus, Sutlej, Tsampo (Brahmaputra in India) and many more. India, China, Nepal, Myanmaar (Burma), Bhutan, Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan) are its neighbouring countries.

Before 1949, Tibet was an independent nation with its own government, economy, language and culture. Following the rise to power of the Communist party in China, the country prepared to engulf the nation of Tibet. By October 1950, the People's Republic of China (PRC) launched a full scale military invasion on Tibet. In establishing its power, the Chinese government imposed 'the 17-point agreement' on Tibet in 1951, in which Tibet would have become part of China but maintained its political and religious freedom (Corrigan, 2005). It was disregarded by Tibetans as an agreement forced upon the country, after following it from 1950-1959. In March, 1959 'His Holiness the Dalai Lama' got political asylum in India and since then the peaceful freedom movement of Tibetans is continuing. According to the International Campaign for Tibet (2009), about 130000 refugee population is living in exile today mostly in India, Nepal and Bhutan.

Experiences of dislocation and exile, both are highly distressing. Hunt (2001) while working with the South Asian refugees documented stressful experiences faced by them such as killings, material loss, physical and mental abuse, detention, life in camps, deprivations, uncertainty over the future, disruption of community and social support networks and loss of community and life projects. Jovic et al. (2005) in their work on Yugoslavian refugees posited that they face psychological difficulties and some may even develop psychiatric disorders that hinder adjustment to the new environment.

However, the bright side of the entire picture highlights the various coping resources which are utilized by the refugees. Coping has to do with the approaches that allow people to face and manage life's difficulties to prevent and minimize stress related issues. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as a constantly changing cognitive and behavioural effort, to manage specific external and/or internal demands which are assessed as challenging or exceeding the resources of an individual. Two of them, namely: resilience and spirituality have been taken up in this work.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to 'rebound and regain' original shape following trauma or shock (Oxford, 1989). In 1994, Masten defined resilience in this manner: "Resilience in an individual refers to successful adaptation despite risk and adversity." Ungar (2004) has defined resilience as follows - "In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain well being and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways."

Multidimensional approach towards resilience

Resilience is a 'multidimensional' and ever changing product of individual (Ungar and Waller, 2001). Dimensions of resilience are: resistance which is the ability of not being affected by the stressful event, recovery that is the ability to successfully overcome adversity and reconfiguration which means capacity to become stronger and more resourceful following adversity, so that one is better equipped to face and cope with additional stressors in future (Lepore and Revenson, 2006; Walsh, 1998). Cognitive functions also play a significant role over here as Peres et al. (2005) found that a decisive factor in developing resilience is how the individuals perceive and process an experience. Nisbett et al. (2003) also

reported that perception and memory are linked to the formation of adaptive behaviour. The most significant inner resource that we have is our own world view, our attitudes about life. If our world view is resilient, we can respond to a crisis constructively. A resilient world view is characterized by feelings of 'confidence in self and life.' This means in times of crisis we feel confident and connected to a sense of purpose in our life. A resilient world view is empowering (Kass and Kass, 1990, 1996, 2000). Agaibi and Wilson (2001) reported that positive personal attitudes, skills and interaction with others were common manifestations promoting resilience as a response to stress and its long term positive adaptation.

Patterns of resilience

Polk (1997) synthesized four patterns of resilience from the resilience literature:

1.Dispositional pattern: It entails those aspects of an individual that promote a resilient disposition towards life stressors and can include a sense of autonomy or self reliance, a sense of basic self-worth, good physical health and appearance.
2.Relational pattern: Concerned with an individual's role in society and relationships with others. These roles range from close relationships to those with the wider societal system.
3.Situational pattern: Addresses the aspects which involves links between an individual and a stressful situation. It includes an individual's problem solving ability, the ability to evaluate situations and responses and the capacity to take action in response to a situation.
4.Philosophical pattern: It refers to an individual's worldview or life paradigm. Includes various beliefs that promote resilience, such as the belief that positive meaning can be found in all experiences, self-development is important and life is purposeful.

Refugees often possess remarkable resilience, including a determination to adapt as well as possible, to the most challenging of circumstances. It is evident in the development of community organizations and structures that permit some degree of re-establishment of normality and collective coping. It is also evident in the remarkable adaptation of some individuals who despite significant hardships, master the many challenges facing them and become leaders in their communities (Miller & Rasco, 2004).

Spirituality

Spiritual or religious beliefs and practices are important components of almost all cultures. Religiosity and spirituality are strongly based on a personal quest to understand the ultimate questions about life, meaning, and relationships with the sacred or transcendent (Moreira-Almeida & Koenig, 2006). Paloutzian and Ellison (1982) defined spirituality in terms of two components, religious well being (achieving harmony with higher power) and existential well being (finding meaning and purpose in one's life).
Kass (1998) emphasized on an essential feature of spirituality that is 'connection.' It is important to recognize that the developmental path through which connective awareness is acquired is different for each individual. The development of internalized spirituality does not always begin with a sense of connection to God. For some, internalized spirituality begins with a sense of connection to others or the creative self or to the nature. Spirituality refers to personal beliefs that help people make meaning in their lives. Such a personal sense of life and its meaning can be considered a person's spirituality (Lewis, 2006).

Theoretical frameworks of spiritual coping

1.Cognitive model: It has been argued that spirituality operates as a part of general orienting framework (Pargment, 1997) or as a super-ordinate schema (Dull & Shokan,1995) that determines how a situation will be appraised, which resources will be activated and which coping methods will be implemented in response to a stressor. Dull and Shokan (1995) proposed that as a cognitive schema, spiritual factors can have an impact on a person's illusions (perception) about an event.
2.Transactional model: This model of stress and coping, explains religious/ spiritual coping. In this model, the impact of life event stress is mediated by a person's cognitive appraisal of a situation and the selection of coping behaviors (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Gall et al. (2005) posited that religious or spiritual factors can function at the level of person or dispositional factors (belief in God), primary and secondary appraisal (God attributions), coping behavior (prayer), coping resources (religious support) and meaning making (spiritual appraisal). Religion and spirituality can also emerge at the points of cognitive

appraisal and coping. Individuals can use a variety of coping strategies that can be public (e.g. religious service attendance), private (e.g. prayer) or non-traditional (e.g. meditation) in nature (Harrison et al., 2001). Spirituality and religion can function at the level of situational meaning or reappraisal (Park & Folkman, 1997). Stressful events can be reframed as spiritual opportunities that offer benefits (Pargament, 1997) or a chance to rearrange priorities (Angen, 2000), gain insights, (Pryds et al., 2000) or learn lessons (Ersek & Ferrell, 1994).

3.Spiritual process model: Pargament (2007) emphasizes on the development of a relationship with one particular form of significance: the sacred. An individual may draw on religious beliefs and teachings as a means to identify the sacred. As a sense of sacred emerges and consolidates into identity, individuals enter a phase of conservation wherein they engage in religious or spiritual beliefs and practices, to protect that which they hold to be sacred. The sense of sacred can be disrupted by negative events or challenged by exposure to different beliefs or teachings. These events trigger a spiritual struggle, followed by a phase of spiritual transformation, which can involve growth or disengagement. As a result of this struggle, those who transform, redefine their spiritual identity, while those who disengage may abandon their spiritual quest permanently or until a time of new discovery. Spiegel (2005) posited that spirituality helps in healing as it serves to forge an emotional connection that, emphasizes particular over the general and emotional over the intellectual.

Tibetan healing system consists of Buddhist spirituality as one of the most significant abilities to cope with stress (Schwartz ,2005). Neff (2003) reported that Buddhist philosophy has an alternative conception of an individual achieving functional attitude towards himself. 'Self-compassion' involves being discerning and gentle towards oneself in the face of hardship or perceived inadequacy and entails acknowledging that suffering and inadequacies are part of the human condition, and all people oneself included are worthy of compassion (Rude et al.,2007).

Brune et al. (2002) while working with the refugees in Germany and Sweden, found that those with strongest religious convictions dealt better with their traumas and new life. Religion, spirituality and related practices have been found to be important coping resources in dealing with day-to-day living and traumas (Pragament et al., 2000; Tarakeshwar et al., 2003). Schweitzer et al. (2007) while working with the Sudanese refugees found that spirituality and religious faith are one of the resources that promote resilience and allow them to cope with the migration stressors. Overland and Yenn (2005) also reported in their work on Khmer refugees in Norway that, religious and spiritual beliefs played a role in building resilience among them.

This work, aims to study the role of spirituality and resilience among the Tibetan refugees in exile.
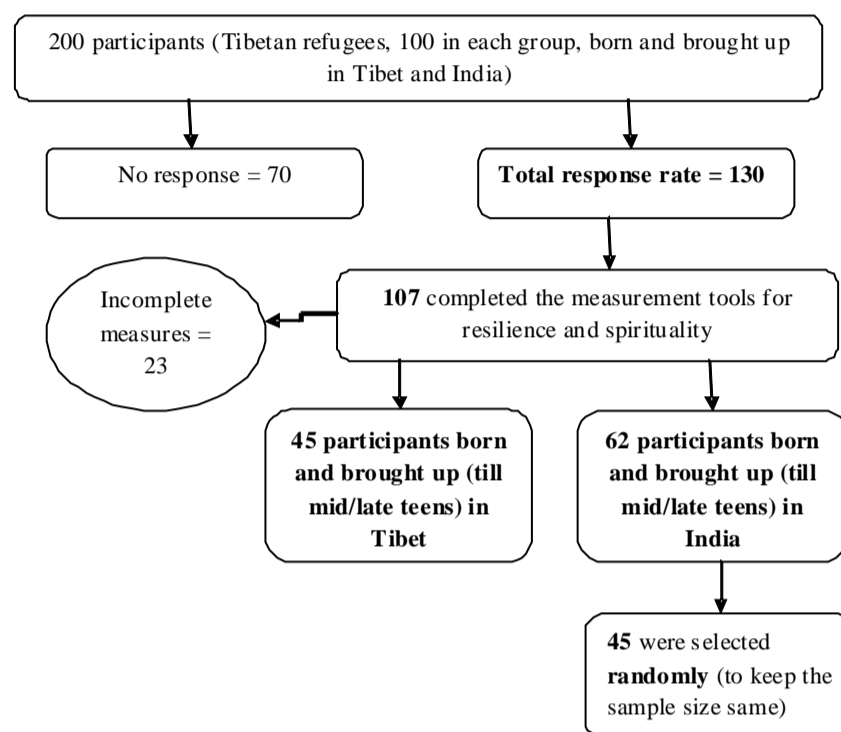
OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

To see the relationship of resilience and spirituality as coping resources utilized by the Tibetan refugees.
To see the difference among Tibetans born and nurtured (till their mid/ teens) in exile (India) and in Tibet, on the variables: resilience and spirituality.

METHODOLOGY

Participants:

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  200 participants (Tibetan refugees, 100 in   │
│  each group, born and brought up              │
│  in Tibet and India)                          │
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        │                          │
        ▼                          ▼
┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────┐
│ No response = 70 │      │ Total response rate = 130 │
└──────────────────┘      └──────────────────────┘
                                   │
     ┌──────────┐                  ▼
     │ Incomplete│◄─────┌──────────────────────────┐
     │ measures =│      │ 107 completed the measurement tools for │
     │    23     │      │ resilience and spirituality │
     └──────────┘      └──────────────────────────┘
                          │              │
                          ▼              ▼
              ┌──────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
              │ 45 participants born│  │ 62 participants born│
              │ and brought up (till│  │ and brought up (till│
              │ mid/late teens) in │  │ mid/late teens) in │
              │      Tibet         │  │      India         │
              └──────────────────┘  └──────────────────┘
                                            │
                                            ▼
                                  ┌──────────────────┐
                                  │ 45 were selected  │
                                  │ randomly (to keep the│
                                  │ sample size same) │
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The measurement tools were given to the Tibetan refugees, who were born and raised in India (exile), residing in Shimla and Dharamsala in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh (India) and in Tibet (who migrated to India during their mid or late teens and were residing in Tibetan Transit School Kanyara (Dharamsala). The final sample consisted of ninety participants (45 in each group) within the age range of twenty to thirty five (20-35). 'Snowball' sampling technique was used for selection of the participants.

Research Design: Correlation design was utilized in order to observe the relationship between coping resources: resilience and spirituality among Tibetan refugees born and raised in exile (India) and in Tibet. Finally, t-test was applied to see the difference between the participants born in Tibet and in exile (India) on these variables.

Measures: An Inventory of Positive Psychological Attitudes (Kass and Kass, 1997) was used for the assessment of resilience and spirituality with a reliability ranging between .84 to .94 and construct validity was evaluated by comparing this scale with other recognized scales and by using it on populations where the attitudinal domains for this variable differed.

Procedure: Data was collected in English language mostly, where ever the participants had difficulty in understanding, help of their language was taken up. All participants were informed of the goal of the study, given assurance of confidentiality and were also informed to withdraw at any time and not to answer any question that might be distressing and inappropriate for them. Initially some time was spent for building rapport in both the groups especially with the ones who were born in Tibet, who migrated later to exile (India).

RESULTS

The results of the Tibetan refugees born and raised in exile, India (N = 45) show that there is no significant relationship between resilience and spirituality (Shown in table 1). The results reveal a positive and significant correlation between spirituality and resilience for the Tibetan refugees (N=45) born and brought up in Tibet. (Results are shown in table 2). The results depict the significant difference between the Tibetan refugees born and brought- up in exile and in Tibet on spirituality (t= 2.585* P<.01) and no significant difference amongst the two groups for resilience except for one of its dimensions, 'life purpose and satisfaction' (r= 2.327* P<.01). The mean values were higher in the Tibetan refugees born and nurtured in Tibet for spirituality (24.333).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Results show that spirituality and resilience are positively and significantly correlated in the refugees born and brought up in Tibet. Similar results were found in a work on Tibetan refugees, residing in the state of Himachal Pradesh (Hussain and Bhushan, 2010). This work reported that Buddhism has exerted a strong influence in almost every aspect of their life and culture. Factors that promote healthy coping amongst them are: protective hand of the Dalai Lama and other lamas, Buddhist philosophy and practices, historical exemplars of strength and resilience. These factors were more prevalent among the refugees who were born in Tibet and who later migrated to exile.

Pargament et al. (2004) documented that religious coping involves several cognitive aspects, like: seeking spiritual support (searching for comfort and reassurance through God's love and care), doing what one can and then putting the rest in the hands of a greater force, seeking spiritual connection (thinking about how life is part of a larger spiritual force), seeking direction (to find a new reason to live). After working with the Tibetan refugees on the variables (resilience and spirituality), it is evident that spirituality for the Tibetans is associated with religiosity to a great extent, and these cognitive aspects of religious coping are present in them, which helps them to overcome the various adversities they face. Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) in their studies investigated the association between religious coping and psychological adjustment to stress and found that positive religious coping has a positive relationship with positive psychological adjustment. In this work, positive psychological adjustment refers to resilience among the refugees against the various stressors which they face

Results are not showing a significant positive relationship for the refugees born and raised in exile (India) between spirituality and resilience (Life purpose and satisfaction and Confidence in self during stress). This might have been a result of acculturation to some extent. On the basis of Berry's model (2000) of acculturation which has four stages of: Separation, Marginalization, Assimilation and Integration, it can be inferred that Tibetan refugees who were or are born in exile adopt the integration strategy (when an individual maintains interest in culture of origin while keeping daily contacts with individuals from the host or dominant culture) which has shown its impact on their spirituality – resilience relationship (in this sample). Berry et al. (1998) asserted that immigrants go through changes as a result of acculturation process. Acculturation is the response to the host culture at two levels – population (political, economic etc.) and individual (attitudes, beliefs etc.). They also grouped the changes into: physical, biological, social, linguistic, cultural (which incorporates differences in political, economic and religious ideologies) and psychological adaptation (consisting of challenges to already held attitudes and values). Mayer (2007) highlights that, refugees during migration and resettlement experience ambiguity and indeterminacy because of the loss of identity. This often makes people turn to faith, either religious or another belief, as a source of emotional support with which to cope with uncertainty and difficulties by addressing the dilemma of being caught between two worlds. This loss of identity, feeling of ambiguity and the dilemma of caught between the two worlds is experienced by the refugees born in exile as well, because the tag of being born as a refugee in exile affects their sense of belongingness more as compared to the ones who are born in their motherland. This feeling of lack of belongingness affects their coping abilities.

The t-test results are showing significant difference in the means of two groups for spirituality but not resilience except for one of its dimension (Life purpose and satisfaction).The results also show that the Tibetan refugees born and brought up in Tibet (mean= 24.333) are more spiritual than the ones who were born and raised in India (mean=22.578). Reich et al. (2010) in their work have documented three resource indices of resilience: Individual (eg: experiences and characteristics of the child), interpersonal (eg: qualities in close relationships) and societal characteristics (eg: presence of environmental hazards, green space, engaging in natural environment, satisfying work life etc.). All the three factors have contributed their share in a negative way, in the refugees who migrated alone to the exile (in this sample) during adolescence than the ones who were born and nurtured in exile and are living with their families. Experiences of childhood in Tibet, absence of close relationships (as most of the participants moved into exile alone or with some relatives or were resettled at different places after reaching the exile), inadequate interpersonal interactions and a drastic change in the characteristics of the social environment, hampers their resilience building capacity. The Tibetans who were born and nurtured in exile and are living with families, also face some distressing issues like: uncertainty over the future, employment, acculturation, discrimination etc. The difference between the Tibetan refugees born and raised in their homeland from the ones who were born in exile (India) could be attributed to the different content in which they were raised.

In addition, it was also found that the concept of self compassion, which involves being discerning and gentle towards oneself in the face of hardship or perceived inadequacy, was evident among the Tibetan refugees. It enhances their resilience, as they choose self compassion as an alternate to achieve functional attitude towards oneself. When they see hardships and inadequacies as part of common humanity, it

ultimately enhances their collective coping or collective resilience. This was observed while establishing rapport or during the discussions, after the participants completed the assessment tool.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

Gender was not considered as a variable.
Few direct supportive studies have been mentioned as most of the work, have not used comparison groups. The instruments used were not normed to the population that was studied (that is the refugees) as appropriate scales prepared especially for this population were not available.

The strength of this research is that it emphasizes on those positive aspects, which gives way to psycho – social health amongst the refugees.

Table: 1   Showing correlation of the Tibetan refugees born and raised in exile (India) on the variables

Variables	LPS	CS	R	S
LPS	1	0.383**	0.848**	0.281
CS		1	0.591**	0.169
R			1	0.259
S				1

**P<.01   *P<.05

Abbreviations: LPS: Life purpose and satisfaction, CS: Confidence in self during stress, R: Resilience, S: Spirituality

Table: 2   Showing correlation of the Tibetan refugees born and raised in Tibet on the variables

Variables	LPS	CS	R	S
LPS	1	0.795**	0.799**	0.434**
CS		1	0.887**	0.455**
R			1	0.419**
S				1

**P<.01   *P<.05

Abbreviations: LPS: Life purpose and satisfaction, CS: Confidence in self during stress, R: Resilience, S: Spirituality

Table: 3   Showing t-test results of the entire sample (Tibetan refugees born and raised in exile and Tibet) on the variables

VARIABLES	EXILE (INDIA)		TIBET		t-value of both the groups
	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	
LIFE PURPOSE AND SATISFACTION	4.422	0.745	4.8	0.777	2.327*
CONFIDENCE IN SELF	4.022	0.745	4.311	0.784	1.772
RESILIENCE	4.222	0.696	4.467	0.686	1.659
SPIRITUALITY	22.5778	3.605	24.333	2.699	2.685*

**P<.01   *P<.05

Figure: 1 Showing the t – test results in terms of mean of the two groups (Tibetan refugees born and raised in exile (India) and in Tibet) for resilience and spirituality
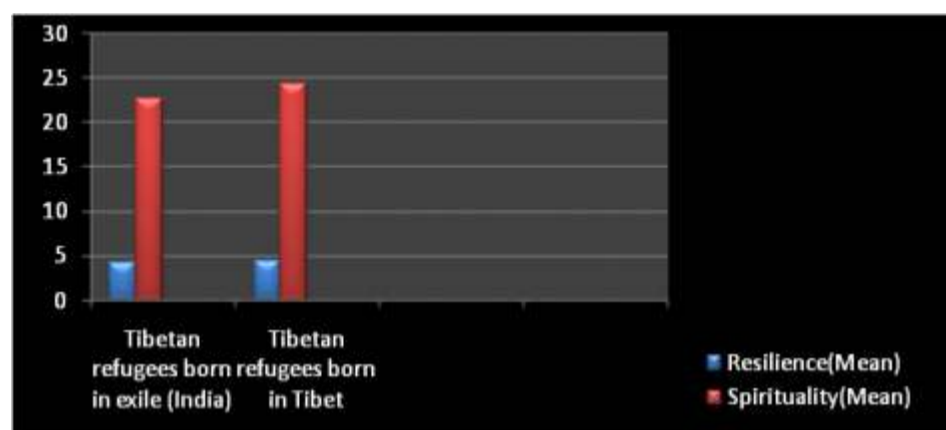
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Vipasha Kashyap
Pursuing Doctorate, Department of Psychology, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla.

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