Protective Factors in Resilience of Aceh Tsunami Survivors

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Aceh in the northern part of Sumatra island - Indonesia has experienced the most severe destruction by tsunami in December 2004. This study aims to find out whether there are differences in the resilience of Acehnese young adults and late adolescent survivors, as well as to identify the protective factors underlying the resilience of Aceh young adult survivors. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were conducted to identify the resilience of tsunami survivors using the characteristics of resilience proposed by Wagnild (2009). Results showed that resilience score of young adults were higher than resilience score of late adolescents. The meaningfulness, equanimity, existential aloneness, and perseverance were growing to support the resilience of young adult survivors. Moreover, Aceh cultural values were also identified as protective factors contributing to the participants' resilience. The implication of this study is important for the healing programs for the tsunami survivors.

Keywords: Acehnese culture, resilience, tsunami, young adult survivors

Aceh di bagian Utara pulau Sumatra-Indonesia telah mengalami kerusakan yang paling parah oleh tsunami Desember 2004. Tujuan studi ini adalah menemukan apakah ada perbedaan dalam daya pulih antara penyintas tsunami dewasa muda Aceh dan penyintas tsunami remaja akhir, demikian pula untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor pelindung yang mendasari ketabahan para dewasa muda Aceh. Pendekatan kuantitatif maupun kualitatif dipakai untuk mengidentifikasi ketabahan para penyintas tsunami dengan mengacu pada karakteristik daya pulih yang dikemukankan oleh Wagnild (2009). Hasil-hasil menunjukkan bahwa skor daya pulih para penyintas dewasa Aceh lebih tinggi daripada skor daya pulih para penyintas remaja akhir. Kebermaknaan, ketenangan hati, kesendirian eksistensial, dan ketekunan bertumbuh untuk mendukung daya pemulihan para penyintas dewasa muda Selain itu nilai-nilai budaya Aceh juga diidentifikasi sebagai factor-faktor pelindung yang berkontribusi terhadap daya pemulihan para partisipan. Implikasi studi ini penting untuk program-progran penyembuhan para penyintas tsunami.

Kata kunci: budaya Aceh, daya pulih, tsunami, penyintas dewasa muda

Geographically, Indonesia is located in the Pacific ring of fire and Alpide Belt, and located between three hyperactive continental plates as well: Indoaustralia, Eurasia, and Pacific. Related to it locations, Indonesia has many volcanoes that potentially bring earthquakes and tsunamis. One area most affected by earthquakes

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and tsunamis is Aceh which was hit by a 8.9 Richter scale earthquake which occured in December 2004. Compared to areas also swiped by the same tsunami, Aceh suffered the most with more than 100,000 deaths and several hundred thousands buildings struck down. Moreover, hundred thousands of individuals were left by themselves without any family member nor belongings. Generally speaking, people need to have resilience, the ability to anticipate the disaster mitigation and to bounce back after disaster struck.

Resilience is affected by protective factors that come from both internal and external (Everall, Altrows, & Paulson, 2006; McCubbin, 2001). Internal factors include individual characteristics such as personality, age,

personal qualities, while external factors include social support from family, community, and other significant figures. Culture is also an important factor influencing individual resilience. Mandleco and Peery (2000) state that culture becomes one of the external factors influencing resilience, whereas according to Masten and Obradovic (2006), culture becomes a context that influencing the quality of resilience. Values, norms, and/or practices are the important elements that might positively contribute to resilience, thus functioning as protective factors or, they can hamper the development of resilience, thus functioning as risk factors.

Most research on resilience focus on the level of resilience status, and were conducted in western countries, such as United States of America after September 11, 2001 (Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarellie, & Vlahov, 2007). In addition, age is also important in resilience. Meanwhile, the cultural elements as a component of risk factors and protective factors for resilience have not been identified yet, especially in Indonesia.

According to Neill (2006), resilience is found in individuals who are accustomed to be tough, have good cognition, and have strong emotion to overcome difficulties. From the developmental perspective, the qualities mentioned by Neill can be found in young adults, but not in late adolescents. Usually late adolescents have not known their strengths and weaknesses as they are still at the identity vs identity confusion phase (Erikson, 1966).

The understanding of young adults' resilience is important since they are expected to not only develop themselves, but also transfer important values to the younger generations.

Research Problems

There are two research problems which were: Is there any significant difference on resilience between Aceh tsunami 2004 survivors of young adults as compared to late adolescents? What were the Acehnese cultural norms, values and/or practices associcated with the survivors' conceptualization of their resilience?

Resilience can be understood as an ability to bounce back from stressful or hard conditions. Mancini and Bonanno (2009) defines resilience as "... an outcome following a highly stressful event" (p.1807). Another definition states resilience as "A dynamic process of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity" (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858), whereas Connor and Davidson (2003) link resilience with many things since it is "... a multi-dimensional characteristic that

varies with context, time, age, gender, and cultural origin, as well as within an individual subject to different life circumstances" (p. 10). The main difference between people who have good resilience and those who do not is on the ability to manage their sadness on the right way without interfering their ability to function normally. For this study, resilience is defined as the ability to adapt and bounce back from stressful condition in a healthy way.

Characteristics of Resilience

Wagnild (2009) from his research concluded that resilience consists of five basic characteristics as followed. 1) Meaningfulness. Meaningfulness refers to awareness that life has meaning and goals where effort is needed to reach those goals. Life without goals will make a person feels that life is useless. Thus, meaningfulness gives support to stay alive. 2) Perseverance. This characteristic refers to the willingness to keep survive until the end. When an individual says that h/she will do something, even though it is hard and has many barriers, h/she will really do it. 3) Equanimity. Equanimity means balance and harmony. People have a balanced view about their lives and avoid extreme responses to everything that happens. Survivors stated that they were optimistic, because even though they were in difficult situation, they would see it in a different way so they would find chances to go forward. 4) Self-reliance. Self-reliance is feeling confidence with one's own strength and ability, and has a clear knowledge about one's own abilities and limits as well. This characteristic will support the individual to use his/her achievement in the past to plan his/her act in the future. 5) Existential aloneness. Existential aloneness is being aware that one can live independently. This characteristic makes one able to get through many situations in one's lives without help or being dependent to someone else.

Factors Influencing Resilience

Resilience is influenced by two factors, risk factors and protective factors (Schoon, 2006; Werner, 2005). Both of these factors constitute dynamic interaction in forming resilience. Risk factors are factors that could bring out vulnerability to distress. Risk factors could come from genetic factors like an inborn disease, psychological factors, environment, and socioeconomic, like everyday's life pressures, traumatic events, or cumulative stress from a person or specific environment (Tusaie & Dyer, 2004).

From the studies on risk factors it is found that not all people who were in risk conditions suffer maladjustment. These studies also noted that a child who grew up in stressful condition or risk condition could grow and adapt positively (Schoon, 2006). This refers to the term protective factors. Werner (2005) stated that many things can become protective factors for survivors when they are facing a stressful condition. Three aspects included in protective factors are person, family, and external factor or community (Everall, Altrows, & Paulson, 2006). Personal factors consist of a variety of characteristics that are in an individual and these are personality characteristics, internal locus of control, self efficacy, self esteem, cognitive evalua-tion, and optimism (Hermann, Stewart, Granados, Jackson, & Yuen, 2011). Positive self concept and self esteem give positive contribution toward resilience. An important family factor that contributes to resilience is caregiving during childhood. For example, when a child whose anxiety level increased after facing stressful condition finds that s/he has a sensitive and supportive caregiver during difficult times, her/ his resilience would raise.

From the environment factors especially referring to macro-environmental stage, community factors, cultural factors, spirituality and religion are factors that contribute to resilience. Involvement in relationships and/or extracurricular activities outside home (such as activities with peers, sports, hobbies, or spiritual activities) can help individuals to improve his/her resilience. Delgado (cited in La Framboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006) also stated the importance of culture in understanding individual resilience. Identification with local culture will bring positive impact to one's resilience by way of increasing one's self-esteem (Phinney & Alipuria, as cited in La Frambois, et al., 2006).

An individual with a high level of resilience is able to stand a variety of situations. S/he is a person who has the ability to solve problems and uses coping strategy that focuses on problem (problem focused coping). The person who focuses on problems could face and contemplate problems, not avoiding problems; in addirion, h/she also is creative, and could plan a solution for the problems and reach other people to get help (Bernard, as cited in Everall, Altrows, & Paulson, 2006).

Acehnese Cultural Values

Culture is the entire system of ideas, acts and people's work, to accomplish their lives. All of these are found in societal life (Widaghdo, 2010). The foundation of Acehnesse culture is Islam as the only religion in Aceh.

Since the 17th century, the Islamic law has been enforced in Aceh society (Alibasjah, 1994). Acehnese customs and cultural activities can be traced back to Islamic teaching, especially Islamic doctrine, morality and values. Every behavior related to custom has to get its legitimate from Islamic religion before being socialized or practiced in daily life (Alibasjah). Hadi (2010) states that Acehnese society is identical with Islam since Islamic religion is the main personal identity of Acehnese people. For Acehnese society, religion, custom and culture become an integral part of their daily spiritual lives. Religion gives anvil and guidance for human life, whereas culture has a function as a filter and as a package of magnanimity manners of human or society who embraces it (Alibasjah). For example, a ceremony which is full with cultural diversity and theaterical festivity was allowed as long as it is not conflicted with Islamic principal and religion values. All doctrines and community systems in Aceh are going hand in hand with Islamic doctrines as long as they are not in conflict with Pancasila (= Five Principles; Indonesian State Ideology) and the Constitution. The strong Acehnese customs and cultural identity as Islami are reflected in many labels that were given to this area, such as Aceh Serambi Mekah (Aceh the veranda of Mecca), Aceh Tanah Rencong (Aceh Land of Rencong = exclusive Acehnese dagger with curved handle). Furthermore, the key of the existence of customary in society was expressed as "Gadoh adat ngon meupakat" (a tradition could be replaced by a concensus) and it dramatically pictures how sacred a commitment should be kept. From this local wisdom, another motto was born, namely "Meunyo ka meupakat, lampoh jirat ta peugala" (meaning once we agree upon something, we will carry it forever and fulfill it) (Alibasjah, 1994).

In addition to having customs that were based on religion, Acehnese society also has living values that were full of the spirit for struggle which imitates struggling values of Acehnese heroes who were known as valiant. The persistent spirit of struggling of Acehnese heroes was strong determination and spirit, self-sacrifice, hard work, discipline, bravery, pious, never give up, diligent, ductile, aware and could think strategically, which are really soul, spirit and noble values, that are very useful for society, and are needed to continue the construction of society which is full of trials and challenges. Those values have always waged and surged in Acehnese young generations and Indonesian young generations in general, for positive and constructive goals for Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia's glory (Alibasjah, 1994).

Another philosophy of life (hadih maja) in Aceh was called pungo. Pungo means hard, for example,

singet bek, ro bah meuruah. Hadih maja suggests that the character of people of Aceh is very hard. Also on the other hadih maja, haroh ta udep, wajeb ta mate (we have to live, we have to survive and work hard, but we also have to die), meaning that Acehnese people are not afraid of anything, even of death penalty (Alibasjah, 1994).

Tsunami Disaster in Aceh at 2004

At least 116.000 houses in Aceh were destroyed and about 12% of the population have to be evacuated. Moreover, about 100.000 low and middle businesses were destroyed, and about 60.000 farmers were evacuated because of huge damages of lands and farmer tools (Doocy, Gorokhovich, Burnham, Balk, & Robinson, 2007; Pelupessy, Bretherton, & Ride, 2011). Because of the tsunami, the survivors were struck with many psychological breakdowns, like distress, disorders, and behavior that have healthy risks (Chandra, Panday, & Bhugra, 2006). About 500.000 people become internally displaced person (IDP) and lived in evacuation, where children and teenagers were vulnerable to have stress in evacuation context, because there were no access to school and playground (Pelupessy, et al, 2001). To keep going despite all difficulties and pain caused by the disaster, the survivors need resilience.

Method

Type of Research

Based on the objective of the study, this study was classified as a mixed design study. To achieve this objective, two research strategies were used, a quantitative and a qualitative strategy. Quantitative strategy was used to test the differences of resilience ability between young adult and adolescence survivors, whereas the qualitative strategy was used to discover the dimensions of resilience, cultural norms, values and/or practices of Aceh tsunami survivors in their relation to resilience ability.

Participants

Twenty five late adolescents (Sarwono, 2006) (21-24 years old) and 27 young adults (Sarwono) (25-40 years old) participated in the quantitative study. They were direct victims (injured victims, victims of material damage, loss of family member) or indirect victims that were witnesses of Aceh tsunami in the year 2004.

Furthermore, three young adult survivors who were participating in the quantitative study were also involved in the qualitative study. They were interviewed to identify the cultural values that were associated with their resilience. Participants were recommended by Yayasan Pulih Aceh, an NGO in Banda Aceh. The study was conducted in Banda Aceh, a city that was chosen by the survivors to live since they did not want to go back to their previous village that had been struck by tsunami.

Instruments

CD-RISC 10 (Connor Davidson-Resilience Scale, index reliability using Cronbach Alpha was .813; index validity item range from .408 to .809) was used to get the data on resilience ability of Aceh's survivor. The interview guide was developed by the authors and team based on five characteristics of resilience proposed by Wagnild (2009), namely meaningfulness, perseverance, equanimity, self reliance, and existential aloneness. In addition, the interview was also targeted to identify Acehnese cultural values that were associated with the resilience ability.

Data analysis

Data CD-RISC 10 (Connor Davidson-Resilience Scale) from the participants were analyzed using descriptive statistics and comparative analysis whereas transcript data achieved from individual interviews were analyzed by finding the themes related to the research topics, and followed by intra-subjects (participants) analysis and inter-subject (participant).

Results

From CD-RISC 10

Table 1 shows that the mean score of resilience ability of young adult participants are significantly higher than the mean score of the late adolescence participants.

Based on the distribution of scores, group norms – using z-scores- was used to classify the resiliency status of all participants. The result shows that the majority of the adolescence and adult participants were categorized as moderate (see Table 2). However, there were more young adults who have higher states of resiliency than the late adolescents (four survivors versus two survivors).

Table 1
Resilience Scores of Adolescence and Young Adult Participants

	n	М	Minimum	Maximum	SD	t	Sig.
			score	score			
Adolescence	25	3.58	3.0	4.7	.41		
Adult	27	4.01	1.9	4.9	.62	2.892	.006**
All Participants	52	3.81	1.9	4.9	.57		

Tabel 2
Category of Resilience Ability of the Participants by Age Group

	High	Moderate	Low	Total
Adolescence	1	21	0	25
Adult	4	24	2	27
Total	5	45	2	52
	9.6%	86.5%	3.8%	100%

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of Young Adult Interviewees

Characteristics	Participant D	Participant S	Participant M	
Sex	Female	Male	Male	
Age	37	27	30	
Marital Status	Married with 5 children	Single	Married with 2 children	
Level of education	Finished college	Senior High School Graduate	Senior High School Graduate	
Job before tsunami	Teacher	Student	Social Worker	
Job after tsunami	Teacher (art subject) Entrepreneur	Social Worker Art worker Entrepreneur	Social worker Art worker	
Residential status	Own house	Own house	Own house	
Length of stay in Banda Aceh	37 years	27 years	13 years	
The number of family members who live with interviewee	3	1	4	
Religion	Islam	Islam	Islam	
Resilience score and categorization	4.9 (high)	2.9 (low)	3.9 (moderate)	

From Individual Interviews

Since the scores of young adults are higher compared to the late adolescents, the qualitative analyses are then focused on young adults. From 27 young adults participants, three were interviewed individually, chosen randomly. Their demoraphic characteristics are shown in Table 3.

Condition When Tsunami Struck

When tsunami occured in their area, D and S were not struck directly. D was not in her home when it was swiped away by the flood. S was inside his house but was able to run away to a safer place. M was in his office when the waves came and pushed him into the

ocean before sending him back to the beach. All these participants lost their belongings, money, and important letters in addition to their job. M seemed to suffer the most since tsunami ruined his leg and arm.

All three lost their family members and significant others. D lost her grandmother who took care of her since she was six months old. S felt so much pain for losing both his father and mother. M lost his students from the art studio. The death of family members and significant others meant a lot for each of the participants.

The Resilience Characteristics

Below were the description of resilience characteristics from the interviewees.

Meaningfulness. Both D and M want to be a person who could be beneficial to many others, especially their own family. In their words,

D: "My goal is how I can be meaningful and useful to people around me especially the people I love ... So I have to finance as many people as possible."

M: "I only want to be able to contribute to others."

On the other hand, S's life goal was to be able to take his parents to Mekkah for haj pilgrimage. However, since they were already died, S senses a lost of goal in life.

S: "Maybe not there, yet ... I told my friends that life is so short, we have to be grateful to what we have and to enjoy them."

Now S focuses on the future, to start a business and plans to get married.

All of the informants have their own way to achieve their life goal. S does a variety of things to have money for his future while M is active in several charity activities in addition to several music and acting activities. For M, art is the media through which he was able to implant living values and other meaningful messages. D is active in theatrical and poetry activities. He was also involved in *multilevel marketing* for traditional medicines. Through this business, he feels a meaningful life because he can help many people got healed from their sickness. D is happy to be able to share his knowledge and life meaning to many people.

It can be concluded that D and M have bigger life goals and they are also more excited to help many people compared to S who only focuses on his own future. According to Wagnild (2010), *meaningfulness* is the most important characteristic which functions as the foundation for the other four characteristics of resilience. People who have life goals are usually working toward achieving their goals.

Perseverance. Each of the interviewees has their own difficulties and coping strategies to overcome the difficulties. D has difficulties to express her feelings, opinions, and personal conditions openly. To overcome this, she needs some space to freely express herself, and she found this in art.

D: "I've got to have some space to express myself at that time, and I found out that through art I could express myself, and I wrote, I wrote poetries."

S is anxious if he became a useless person, even to himself. He is still confused and has difficulties handling his problems. He often compares his life with the life when his parents were still alive and gave much encourgement when he had problems.

M, on the other hand, mentioned that the most difficult situation he ever had was when he and his family were living in an area where there were intense conflicts between GAM and the Indonesian government. He often experienced stressfull situations during his childhood and this left scars in his life. For M, tsunami that swallowed thousands of people and ruined hundred of thousand lives was still acceptable compared to traumas he had since childhood.

For these three interviewees, the difficulties they experienced after tsunami were related to their living conditions and place. But fortunately these difficulties were already overcome through aids provided by NGO which help fulfilling not only the material needs but also psychological needs.

Equanimity. D and M have wide perspectives about life and can focus to positive instead of negative things in the difficulties they face. D views life from a positive perspective, and sees problems and difficulties as challenges to be better.

D: "Now I realize that through past experiences we can jump higher, and this can push us to our progress ... how positive thinking can appear within each person, and each can learn from misitakes..."

M keeps progressing in life even though he was faced by many difficulties such as the serious scars and disorientation caused by tsunami. He often got involved in group discussions where he was able to share experiences and feelings with other group members. Through group discussions, he received many supports and was motivated to live again.

S, on the other hand, mentioned that he was not able to respond well toward problems and difficulties. During interviews, he often had tears in his eyes especially when he talked about his families.

Self-reliance. Self-reliance is about beliefs and confidence one has about his or herself and about his or her capabilities. Individuals with this characteristic is able to know not only his or her abilities, but also his or her limitations. From these three interviewees, D and M were able to know their personal strengths and weaknesses. D mentioned that not every one would agree with her opinions. She saw that opinions from other people were important so that she could be a better person. Similar statement was mentioned by M who said that he learned a lot from his group members in addition to having life experiences from becoming

older and having children. Now he already has planning for his life.

S still cannot evaluate himself. When asked about this, he answered, "Until now, I am not able to do so."

Existential aloneness. The last characteristic is about the uniqueness and the bravity one has to be different from other people. All these three interviewees are brave enough to express their opinions; D and M tend to be vocal in expressing opinion and they even are quite bold in expressing opinions they believe were true. For S, being different in opinions with others was alright as long as it did not make other people and himself getting hurt.

It can be concluded that D and M who scored higher than the group average show resilience characteristics as offered by Wagnild and Young (2010), namely, *meaningfulness*, *perseverance*, *equanimity*, *self-reliance*, and *existential aloneness*. Another interviewee, S, who scored below group average, showed characteristics that did not allign with Wagnild and Young's (2010) resilience characteristics.

Interviewees' Description of Acehnese Culture

All three interviewees mentioned that Islam religion is the foundation of their life so that everything should be based on Islamic teachings. The majority of Acehnese people overcome their problems by coming close to God, doing rituals and pray because they believe in the power of prayer. Each condition is understood according to Islamic teaching. Thus, religion is an important factor toward the resilience ability of Acehnese people in overcoming their difficulties.

One interviewee, i.e. D added that Acehnese people are strong in character, so when they face stressful situation such as wars, conflicts, and disasters, the ability to rise again is also high. Strong character has been an Acehnese cultural value since long time ago, and this makes the people ready to face any condition. An Aceh term *Pungo*, meaning that Acehnese people have strong character, is used to label this characteristic (Alibasjah, 1994). This character is strongly related to the resilience of Acehnese people.

Another value, called *Meuseraya* and *Meuripe*, meaning everything is done together, is very meaningful for M who finds support and encouragement from the group he belongs to. This togetherness value is contributing toward the resilience process. Unfortunately, all three interviewees also admitted that this value started to diminish after tsunami. For instance, individuals show less caring toward other people and their environment, and they tend to measure everything by money.

After tsunami, Acehnese people were showered by aids so they tend to always expect receiving help. This made the independency of Acehnese society became less intense.

Related to conflicts that have been occured since the last decades, all three interviewees felt conflicts as barriers and the most difficult thing in their life. Togetherness as a community became less as all their actions were being watched and activities used to be done together were seldom carried out again.

Discussion

The research results show that the resilience scores of late adolescents were lower than those of the young adults. This is in line with Erikson's (1966) theory that late adolescents are still in the stage of identity and identity confusion so that often they got confused to what happened to their identity. In this stage, their understanding about their own ability is not complete, yet, while actually the understanding about one's own ability is an important characteristic of resilience. Danieli (1996) states that compared to younger people, older people are more able to overcome the stressful condition.

From the interviews with the young adult participants, it is known that Acehnese people are faithful toward Islamic teaching. Alibasjah (1994) stated that Acehnese people is very much influenced by the doctrines and teaching of Islam. A similar result of the influence of religion is mentioned in Meichenbaum (2005) who observed how North Americans cope to traumatic experiences, that is through faith and prayer. Islamic teaching to surrender to God seems to be an important factor in participants' resilience. Tsunami is perceived as God's way to change Acehnese society because after tsunami, conflicts between GAM and Indonesian government were reduced and even diminished. This means that the biggest problem the Acehnese people ever had since they were small had been ended.

Tsunami was experienced by every one, not only by the participants personally. This gave a sense of struggling and overcoming together. This togetherness, labelled *Meuseraya* and *Meuripe*, gave a sense of supporting together and rising together from the difficulties that they all experience together. However, participants who were interviewed expressed their concern that this togetherness value might have diminished.

Participants who have moderate and high score of resilience show the ability to recognize their strengths and weaknesses. Life is meaningful not only for an individual, but more importantly are for others. They were also able to express their feelings, opinions, and personal conditions openly. They were able to focus on the positives instead of the negatives when facing difficulties in life. This shows that they were not obsessed by the difficulties from the past, but keep looking forward for a better life. They perceived problems and weaknesses as challenges to be better. This is in line with Meichenbaum (2005) who argues that experiences from stressful conditions can give opportunities to learn something more important, that will be useful to set priorities up.

Acehnese value of strong character – *Pungo* - is found in M and D and this is related to their resilience. *Pungo* is philosophy of life (called *Hadih maja*) that is supportive to keep going even though there are barriers and difficulties

Conclusion

The majority of the participants have moderate resilience. Those who have moderate and high resilience also show good ability in five characteristics of resilience (*meaningfulness*, *equanimity*, *existential aloneness*, *perseverance* and *self reliance*). On the other hand, those who have low resilience only show good ability in three characteristics of resilience, namely meaningfulness, equanimity, and existential aloneness; they do not show good perseverance and self reliance.

Cultural aspects that were related to resilience was faith in God, worship, good attitude for struggle, striving to get the best despite of difficulties, and community support. Their living values of faith, motto *meuseraya* and *meurip*, strong character as Acehnese people became their power to struggle in difficult times. Considering the importance of the traditional norms, values, and/or practices as protective factors for resilience, a strategy to reserve these among the Acehnese younger generations should be implemented.

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