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Exploring the Psychological Well-Being, Resilience and Decision-Making Styles of Siblings of Children with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT:
This study investigates the psychological well-being, resilience, and decision-making styles of siblings of children with special needs. Specifically, it examines the levels of psychological well-being in terms of autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and personal growth; resilience in terms of personal competence, adaptability, and positive acceptance; and decision-making styles in terms of rational, dependent, and intuitive approaches. It further explores the relationships among these variables. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, with data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to the respondents. Findings indicate that respondents exhibit high level of psychological well-being, with personal growth emerging as the strongest dimension. Similarly, resilience was found to be high, particularly in adaptability, while decision-making styles were also highly developed, with rational and intuitive approaches being most dominant. Correlational analysis revealed no significant relationships between psychological well-being and resilience, nor between resilience and decision-making. However, a significant relationship was identified between self-acceptance and rational decision-making. These results suggest that while psychological well-being, resilience, and decision-making coexist at high levels, they largely function independently. Nonetheless, self-acceptance appears to play a critical role in shaping rational decision-making. The study recommends that educational institutions develop targeted interventions aimed at enhancing self-awareness and decision-making competencies among students, particularly those with siblings who have special needs.

Keywords: psychological well-being; resilience; decision-making; siblings of children with special needs

INTRODUCTION

The presence of a child with special needs in the family profoundly influences the developmental experiences, emotional adjustment, and social functioning of other family member most notably the siblings. Contemporary research consistently demonstrates that siblings of children with disabilities navigate complex emotional, relational, and social dynamics that influence identity formation, coping strategies, and long-term psychological outcomes (Reyes and Aquino, 2020). These experiences often involve a dual emotional trajectory characterized by pride, empathy, and a heightened sense of purpose alongside stress, emotional burden, and role ambiguity especially when siblings assume caregiving responsibilities at an early age (Tsibidaki, 2020).

Recent developmental and family systems literature emphasizes that sibling roles in disability-affected families are not static but evolve across the lifespan, shaped by family structure, severity of disability, and

sociocultural context (Hastings et. al., 2021; Van Heeke et al., 2022; Mchale et al., 2021). As such, siblings represent a critical yet often overlooked subgroup within the broader discourse on disability, family resilience, and psychosocial adaptation.

In the Philippine context, sibling experiences are uniquely mediated by deeply embedded cultural values such as *pag-aaruga* (nurturance), *pagmamalasakit* (compassion), and *pakikisama* (social harmony), which emphasize collective caregiving emotional interdependence, and familial obligation (Alampay & Jocson, 2020; Medina, 2021; Tuliao & Liwag, 2022). Within this collectivist framework, Filipino siblings frequently assume expanded roles that extend beyond normative sibling interactions to include direct caregiving, emotional regulation within the household, household labor, and participation in family decision-making related to the child with special needs (Garcia & de Guzman, 2023; Ramos et al., 2024; Cruz et al., 2025).

Gendered and birth-order expectations further shape these caregiving patterns, with older siblings particularly females more likely to internalize caregiving roles as moral obligations rather than optional responsibilities (Alampay et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2021). These culturally reinforced expectations significantly influence siblings' decision-making styles, educational aspirations, emotional self-regulation, and perceptions of personal autonomy.

Scholars have identified both developmental benefits and psychosocial challenges associated with sustained sibling caregiving. On the positive spectrum, studies suggest that caregiving involvement may foster empathy, prosocial behavior, emotional intelligence, resilience, and moral reasoning among siblings of children with disabilities (Giallo & Roberts, 2020; Chen et al., 2023; Nguyen & Walsh, 2024). These adaptive outcomes are often strengthened when families provide emotional validation and when external social supports are present.

Conversely, empirical evidence also links prolonged caregiving responsibilities to heightened psychological distress, reduced peer engagement, academic strain, decision fatigue, and increased vulnerability to anxiety and depressive symptoms particularly in contexts where caregiving demands are normalized and external support systems are limited (Flores et al., 2021; Van Hecke et al., 2022; Orsmond et al., 2023; Park & Lee, 2024). In collectivist societies such as the Philippines, these risks may be intensified by cultural expectations of self-sacrifice, emotional restraint, and unquestioned family loyalty (Alampay & Jocson, 2020).

Despite growing national and international attention to inclusive education and family-centered disability support, sibling experiences remain comparatively underexplored. In the Philippines, policy developments such as the enactment of the Inclusive Education Act (Republic Act No. 11650) and the Department of Education's initiatives to strengthen learner support systems significantly progress toward disability inclusion. However, these frameworks largely center on learners with disabilities, with limited attention to siblings who function as secondary caregivers and emotional stabilizers within the family system (Reyes & Manaig, 2022; Castillo & Ong, 2023' DepEd, 2024).

Emerging local studies acknowledge this gap, highlighting the scarcity of empirical data on how Filipino siblings develop resilience, regulate emotional well-being, and make life decisions within disability-affected households (Santos & Dizon, 2024; Bautista et al., 2025; Lim & Navarro, 2025).

Given this gap, there is a compelling need to investigate the psychological well-being, resilience, and decision-making styles of Filipino siblings of children with special needs. examining these interconnected constructs within a culturally grounded framework is essential for informing sibling-inclusive, family-centered, and school-linked interventions in Special Education and mental health services.

Moreover, the findings of this study may support the development of community-based and school-linked programs that reduce sibling stress, strengthen peer and emotional support networks, and promote inclusive family practices (UNICEF Philippines, 2023; World Health Organization, 2024). By focusing on a critical yet underrepresented population, this study contributes to the growing body of Philippine research in Special Education and psychology, positioning siblings not merely as auxiliary caregivers but as individuals whose well-being, resilience, and life decisions warrant recognition, support, and sustained scholarly attention.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationships among psychological well-being, resilience, and decision-making styles of siblings of children with special needs. The design was appropriate for identifying the strength and direction of naturally occurring associations without experimental manipulation. Data were collected from 100 sibling-respondents aged 15 to 25 years in Cabuyao City, Laguna, who have brothers or sisters diagnosed with conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, and sensory impairments. Respondents were selected from Special Education (SPED) centers, inclusive schools, and therapy institutions within the locality. Primary data were obtained through self-reported questionnaires, while secondary sources included related literature and prior studies that supported the theoretical framework of the research.

Standardized instruments were utilized to ensure reliability and validity of measurements. Psychological well-being was assessed using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, resilience through the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), and decision-making styles using an adapted version of the Scott and Bruce Decision-Making Style Inventory. All instruments underwent cultural and linguistic adaptation for Filipino respondents. Data were gathered following ethical protocols, including institutional approval, informed consent, and confidentiality assurance. Responses were measured using a 4-point Likert scale and analyzed using weighted mean to determine variable levels and Pearson's r correlation to examine relationships among variables. Data were encoded and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to ensure accurate statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents, analyzes, and interprets the data gathered to address the problems posed in this study. The discussion is supported by relevant literature and studies to strengthen the findings.

Table 1
Level of Psychological Well-Being

Indicators	**Weighted Mean**	**Verbal Interpretation**	**Rank**
A. Autonomy	3.53	High	3
B. Environmental Mastery	3.54	High	2
C. Self-Acceptance	3.48	High	4
D. Personal Growth	3.65	High	1
Average Weighted Mean	**3.55**	**High**	

As presented in Table 1, the overall weighted mean of 3.55 indicates that respondents exhibit a high level of psychological well-being. Across the four dimensions, personal growth (M = 3.65) obtained the highest rank, followed by environmental mastery (M = 3.54), autonomy (M = 3.53), and self-acceptance (M = 3.48). These results suggest that respondents generally demonstrate positive functioning, particularly in terms of self-development, adaptability, and effective life management.

The high score in personal growth implies that respondents are motivated to enhance their capabilities and pursue continuous self-improvement. This finding aligns with the framework of Ryff (2020), who conceptualized psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct encompassing autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, self-acceptance, purpose in life, and positive relations. Such dimensions are considered essential for achieving optimal psychological functioning. Similarly, Walsh et al. (2019) reported that individuals with higher levels of psychological well-being tend to experience greater life satisfaction and emotional stability, reinforcing the present findings.

Furthermore, Shivers (2020) emphasized that well-being is strongly associated with positive emotions, engagement, and meaning in life. These elements may explain the generally high levels of psychological well-being observed among the respondents, as they appear to be actively engaged in personal development and adaptive functioning.

However, despite the overall high level, self-acceptance recorded the lowest mean score among the indicators. This suggests that some respondents may still experience internal conflicts, self-doubt, or difficulties in fully embracing their personal strengths and limitations. Supporting this observation, Neff and Germer (2021) highlighted that self-acceptance and self-compassion are critical components of psychological well-being, as they enable individuals to cope effectively with negative experiences and reduce self-criticism. Therefore, interventions aimed at enhancing self-compassion may further strengthen the overall psychological well-being of respondents.

Table 2
Level of Resilience

Indicators	**Weighted Mean**	**Verbal Interpretation**	**Rank**
A. Personal Competence	3.63	High	2
B. Adaptability	3.69	High	1
C. Positive Acceptance	3.58	High	3
Average Weighted Mean	**3.63**	**High**	

Table 2 presents the overall weighted mean of 3.63 indicates that respondents demonstrate a high level of resilience. Among the indicators, adaptability (M = 3.69) ranked highest, followed by personal competence (M = 3.63), and positive acceptance (M = 3.58). These findings suggest that respondents possess a strong capacity to cope with adversity, adjust to changing circumstances, and maintain psychological stability in the face of challenges.

The high score in adaptability reflects the respondents' flexibility and ability to respond effectively to stressful or uncertain situations. This result is consistent with previous literature, which defines resilience as the capacity to achieve positive adaptation despite adversity (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). The respondents' strong adaptability indicates that they are able to navigate life challenges successfully, demonstrating a core component of resilience.

Similarly, adaptability has been identified as a significant predictor of resilience, particularly among individuals experiencing academic and social pressures (Jeong et al., 2021). This supports the present findings, as respondents appear to effectively manage stressors through adaptive coping mechanisms. Furthermore, resilience is strengthened through the development of coping strategies and emotional regulation skills (Fung, 2023). The high overall resilience score suggests that respondents are likely utilizing such strategies to maintain emotional balance and recover from difficulties.

Moreover, positive acceptance obtained the lowest mean among the indicators. This may indicate that some respondents still encounter difficulties in fully accepting challenging life circumstances or maintaining a consistently positive outlook during adversity. Strengthening acceptance-based coping and cognitive reframing strategies may further enhance their resilience capacity.

Table 3
Level of Decision-Making

Indicators	**Weighted Mean**	**Verbal Interpretation**	**Rank**
A. Rational Decision-Making	3.57	High	1.5
B. Intuitive Decision-Making	3.53	High	3
C. Dependent Decision-Making	3.57	High	1.5
Average Weighted Mean	**3.55**	**High**	

Table 3 shows, the overall weighted mean of 3.55 indicates that respondents demonstrate a high level of decision-making ability. Among the indicators, rational decision-making (M = 3.57) and dependent decision-making (M = 3.57) are tied for the highest rank, while intuitive decision-making (M = 3.53) ranked lowest. These findings suggest that respondents utilize a combination of analytical reasoning and social consultation when making decisions, while also demonstrating the capacity for intuitive judgment.

The high scores in rational and dependent decision-making indicate that respondents tend to carefully evaluate information and, at the same time, seek input or guidance from others when necessary. This implies a balanced and collaborative approach to decision-making, which may enhance the quality and effectiveness of their choices.

Decision-making can be understood through dual-process theories, which propose the existence of two cognitive systems: a fast, intuitive system and a slower, more deliberate analytical system (Kahneman, 2021). The present findings suggest that respondents are capable of engaging both systems, allowing them to respond appropriately across different situations.

Furthermore, effective decision-making is often the result of the interaction between intuitive and analytical thinking processes (Evans & Stanovich, 2021). The respondents' high scores across all indicators support this perspective, indicating that they are able to integrate different cognitive strategies when making decisions.

In addition, individuals who demonstrate a balanced decision-making style are more likely to perform effectively in problem-solving and adapt to complex or uncertain situations (Phillips et al., 2022). This reinforces the implication that the respondents' high level of decision-making ability may contribute positively to their overall functioning.

Consequently, intuitive decision-making obtained the lowest mean among the indicators. This suggests that respondents may rely slightly less on instinct compared to analytical reasoning and external input.

Strengthening intuitive confidence, particularly in situations requiring rapid decisions, may further enhance their overall decision-making competence.

Table 4
Relationship Between: Psychological Well-Being and Resilience

Relationship between	Autonomy	Environment Mastery	Self-acceptance	Personal Growth
Personal Competence	Pearson r value .001 p-value .990 Not significant	Pearson r value .090 p-value .375 Not significant	Pearson r value -.011 p-value -.913 Not significant	Pearson r value -.095 p-value .346 Not significant
Adaptability	Pearson r value -.037 p-value .717 Not significant	Pearson r value -.035 p-value .733 Not significant	Pearson r value -.159 p-value .113 Not significant	Pearson r value -.024 p-value .811 Not significant
Positive Acceptance	Pearson r value .051 p-value .612 Not significant	Pearson r value .114 p-value .257 Not significant	Pearson r value .071 p-value .484 Not significant	Pearson r value -.018 p-value .860 Not significant

As presented in Table 4, all computed p-values are greater than 0.05, indicating that there is no statistically significant relationship between the dimensions of psychological well-being (autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and personal growth) and the components of resilience (personal competence, adaptability, and positive acceptance). Furthermore, the Pearson r values are generally close to zero, suggesting very weak or negligible correlations between the variables.

These findings imply that a high level of psychological well-being does not necessarily correspond to a higher level of resilience among the respondents. In other words, although both constructs are individually high, they appear to operate independently rather than being directly associated in this sample.

This result is consistent with the perspective that psychological well-being and resilience, while related, are conceptually distinct constructs that may not always exhibit a direct relationship (Keyes, 2020). Psychological well-being primarily reflects an individual's overall functioning, life satisfaction, and personal development, whereas resilience focuses more on the ability to adapt and recover from adversity. Similarly, resilience has been found to be influenced more strongly by situational, environmental, and contextual factors rather than general levels of well-being (Smith et al., 2022). This may explain why respondents who report high psychological well-being do not necessarily demonstrate correspondingly higher resilience.

Moreover, resilience is considered a dynamic and context-dependent process that can vary across different life situations and stressors (Bonanno & Diminich, 2021). This variability may further account for the absence of a significant relationship in the present findings, as resilience may manifest differently depending on specific challenges rather than general psychological states.

Overall, the results suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing psychological well-being may not automatically improve resilience, and vice versa. Therefore, both constructs should be addressed independently in programs designed to support individuals' mental health and adaptive functioning.

Table 5
Relationship Between: Resilience and Decision- Making

Relationship between	**Personal Competence**	**Adaptability**	**Positive Acceptance**
Rational Decision-making	Pearson r value -.021 p-value .842 Not significant	Pearson r value .033 p-value .747 Not significant	Pearson r value -.023 p-value .821 Not significant
Dependent Decision-Making	Pearson r value .040 p-value .696 Not significant	Pearson r value .117 p-value .245 Not significant	Pearson r value .049 p-value .630 Not significant
Initiative Decision-Making	Pearson r value .026 p-value .797 Not significant	Pearson r value .028 p-value .786 Not significant	Pearson r value -.012 p-value .930 Not significant

As shown in Table 5, all computed p-values exceed the 0.05 level of significance, indicating that there is no statistically significant relationship between resilience (personal competence, adaptability, and positive acceptance) and decision-making (rational, dependent, and intuitive decision-making). Moreover, the Pearson r values are very close to zero, suggesting negligible correlations among the variables.

These findings imply that the level of resilience of the respondents does not significantly influence their decision-making styles. Although respondents demonstrate high levels of both resilience and decision-making, the absence of a significant relationship suggests that these constructs function independently within the context of this study.

This result aligns with the view that decision-making is largely influenced by cognitive processes such as reasoning ability, analytical thinking, and information processing rather than emotional or adaptive traits (Stanovich, 2021). Thus, even individuals with high resilience may not necessarily exhibit distinct decision-making patterns compared to others.

Furthermore, decision-making is often shaped by cognitive biases and heuristics, which operate independently of resilience-related traits (Milkman et al., 2021). These cognitive shortcuts can influence how individuals evaluate options and make choices, regardless of their capacity to cope with stress or adversity.

In addition, the findings suggest that resilience, while essential for coping and adaptation, may not directly translate into differences in how decisions are made. This supports the notion that resilience is more closely associated with emotional regulation and recovery from challenges, whereas decision-making involves cognitive evaluation and judgment processes.

Overall, the results indicate that enhancing resilience alone may not be sufficient to improve decision-making skills. Therefore, interventions aimed at strengthening decision-making should focus more on developing critical thinking, reasoning skills, and awareness of cognitive biases, alongside resilience-building strategies.

Table 6
Relationship Between: Psychological Well-Being and Decision -Making

Relationship between	Autonomy	Environment Mastery	Self-acceptance	Personal Growth
Rational Decision-making	Pearson r value -.122 p-value .226 Not significant	Pearson r value -.057 p-value .571 Not significant	Pearson r value .224 p-value .025 Not significant	Pearson r value -.092 p-value .345 Not significant
Dependent Decision-Making	Pearson r value -.196 p-value .092 Not significant	Pearson r value -.084 p-value .405 Not significant	Pearson r value -.077 p-value .449 Not significant	Pearson r value -.068 p-value .500 Not significant
Initiative Decision-Making	Pearson r value .194 p-value .053 Not significant	Pearson r value -.041 p-value .687 Not significant	Pearson r value -.013 p-value .901 Not significant	Pearson r value -.075 p-value .459 Not significant

As presented in Table 6, most of the computed p-values are greater than 0.05, indicating that there is no statistically significant relationship between the majority of psychological well-being dimensions (autonomy, environmental mastery, and personal growth) and decision-making styles (rational, dependent, and intuitive decision-making). The Pearson r values are generally weak, suggesting negligible to low correlations among these variables.

However, an exception is observed between self-acceptance and rational decision-making, which yielded a Pearson r value of 0.224 with a p-value of 0.025. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, this indicates a

statistically significant relationship. This finding suggests that respondents with higher levels of self-acceptance are more likely to engage in logical, analytical, and well-reasoned decision-making.

This result supports the idea that self-acceptance contributes to greater self-awareness and emotional stability, which are important factors in effective decision-making (Neff, 2021). Individuals who accept themselves are more likely to evaluate situations objectively and make decisions with confidence, reducing the influence of self-doubt or internal conflict.

Moreover, self-perception plays a crucial role in shaping cognitive processes and behavior (Walsh et al., 2019). Individuals with higher self-acceptance tend to possess stronger self-efficacy, allowing them to assess alternatives more effectively and make sound judgments. This may explain the positive relationship between self-acceptance and rational decision-making observed in the study.

In addition, empirical evidence suggests that individuals with higher self-acceptance demonstrate improved decision-making abilities due to increased clarity, confidence, and reduced cognitive interference (Zhang et al., 2023). This reinforces the present finding that self-acceptance is a key psychological factor influencing rational decision-making.

On the other hand, the absence of significant relationships among the other variables indicates that not all dimensions of psychological well-being directly influence decision-making styles. This suggests that while psychological well-being is generally high among respondents, only specific components—particularly self-acceptance—play a meaningful role in shaping rational cognitive processes.

Generally, the findings highlight the importance of self-acceptance as a contributing factor to effective decision-making. Interventions aimed at enhancing self-acceptance may therefore help improve individuals' ability to make logical and well-informed decisions.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that psychological well-being, resilience, and decision-making represent independent constructs that contribute differently to an individual's functioning. The lack of significant relationships between psychological well-being and resilience, as well as between resilience and decision-making, indicates that these variables are influenced by separate mechanisms. Psychological well-being reflects an individual's overall positive functioning and development, while resilience is shaped by situational and contextual factors related to coping and adaptation. In contrast, decision-making is primarily governed by cognitive processes such as reasoning, analysis, and judgment rather than emotional or adaptive capacities alone.

Furthermore, the findings establish that self-acceptance is a significant factor influencing rational decision-making, underscoring its importance in cognitive and behavioral processes. Individuals with higher levels of self-acceptance tend to demonstrate greater confidence, clarity, and objectivity when evaluating choices, leading to more logical and effective decisions. This highlights the critical role of self-perception in shaping decision-making outcomes and suggests that enhancing self-acceptance may serve as a key pathway in improving individuals' rational thinking and overall decision-making competence.

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