

Resilience Experiences in Emerging Adulthood After Romantic Breakups

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Abstract. The goal of this study is to look at the resilience processes that emerging adults go through once they conclude a romantic commitment. The research included emerging people who had previously been in a romantic relationship and had terminated it. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed involving five emerging adults who had experienced emotional distress following the termination of a romantic relationship. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed through verbatim transcription, identification of meaningful statements, coding, categorization, and thematic analysis. Six interconnected themes were identified: the development of closeness and attachment in relationships, the emergence of tension and incompatibility, emotional impact and functional decline after a breakup, coping strategies and efforts at self-empowerment, social support, and acceptance, adaptation, and personal growth following the breakup. In conclusion, resilience during a romantic breakup is a complicated psychological adaptation process that comprises emotional regulation, meaning reconstruction, and personal capability augmentation after relational loss.

Keywords: *Coping, Emerging Adults, Romantic Breakup, Social Assistance, Toughness*

1 Introduction

Experiencing the loss of a romantic connection throughout the early stages of adulthood is a profoundly emotional event that typically results in significant changes in a variety of elements of individuals' lives. This stage of development is characterised by the formation of meaningful interpersonal relationships, the formation of a sense of self, and the decision-making process about a career path. The importance of romantic relationships in influencing psychological well-being is emphasised in this environment. When a relationship ends, many people endure emotional turbulence, which can have an impact on their mental health, productivity, and the quality of their social interactions. In recent years, several studies have shown that romantic breakups can cause emotional stress, a decrease in self-esteem, emotions of loss, and even depression symptoms (Gehl et al., 2024; Mancone et al., 2025). However, current study shows that some people may recover, adapt, and recreate a sense of purpose thru resilience.

Resilience is a dynamic and ever-changing process in which people may remain calm, learn from their experiences, and adjust constructively when confronted with major stress of change. This capacity allows people to retain their psychological well-being and operate successfully in their daily life (Wiig et al., 2020). Garmezy (1974) described resilience as the ability to preserve health or adapt to adversity (Denckla et al., 2020).

According to Purwandra et al. (2022), romantic breakups are a typical element of relationship dynamics; yet, in some situations, the end of a relationship can lead to self-harming behavior (Hikma et al., 2024). Divorce symbolizes the end of a romantic relationship and elicits an emotional response similar to bereavement, including tough decisions, psychological consequences, and self-evaluation (Subramaniam et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, research have mostly been focused on the negative psychological effects of romantic breakup or resilience in certain situations of partnerships, such as dysfunctional relationships. However, there has been little focus to how emerging adults themselves experience resilience as a progressive process across the several phases of relationship loss, from emotional attachment and interpersonal conflict to coping methods, social support, acceptance, and personal growth. By examining the connections between these experiences and the ways in which participants interpret the romantic breakup during their resilience, our study fills this gap. This study conceptualises resilience as an ongoing process that includes emotional control, self-adjustment, social adaptation, and the reconstruction of meaning after a romantic relationship loss, as opposed to seeing resilience only as an outcome.

By investigating the living experiences of emerging adults when a romantic relationship ends and analysing how resilience is perceived as a gradual and interrelated process, this study fills this gap. Rather than viewing resilience only as a byproduct of recovery, this study aims to better understand how individuals deal with emotional discomfort, use coping skills and social support, and rebuild personal meaning throughout the recovery process. This viewpoint helps to provide a more contextual understanding of resilience following the loss of a romantic relationship, particularly in Indonesian culture.

The goal of this study is to better understand how emerging adults gain resilience following a romantic breakup by focusing on psychological characteristics such as relationship development, coping strategies, social support, and acceptance and personal growth.

2 Methods

This study takes a qualitative method with a phenomenological design to investigate emerging adults' inner feelings after the end of a romantic engagement. This design was chosen because it can disclose how participants comprehend the emotional processes they go

thru, particularly how they restore their personal resilience after enduring psychological distress. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, allowing participants to freely and openly express their experiences. This allowed the researcher to identify the patterns of coping strategies, forms of adjustment, and resilience dynamics that evolved. The phenomenological approach was judged appropriate since it allowed the researcher to capture the essence of individual experiences holistically, rather than depending on numerical data.

The interview subject for this study is someone who has suffered emotional suffering as a result of the end of a romantic relationship that lasted at least two months. The following criteria were used to choose the subject is 1). Be between the ages of 18-30; 2). Have been in a love relationship for longer than two months; 3). Having gone through a period of emotional distress as a result of the relationship’s end; 4). Being willing to share personal experiences, from the early stages of the relationship and the romantic breakup process to the efforts made to recover. Five people who fit these requirements took part in the study. In keeping with the qualitative and phenomenological nature of the study, the five individuals were chosen to allow for a thorough examination of individuals experiences.

Table 1. Characteristic Subject

Participant	Age	Gender	Relationship Duration	Time Since Breakup
S1	19	Female	6 months	1 months
S2	19	Female	3 years 2 months	7 months
S3	19	Male	2 years	1 years
S4	19	Female	2 years 3 months	1 year 4 months
S5	19	Female	10 months	8 months

Semi-structured interviews with 46 primary and follow-up questions were used to gather data. Participants were informed about the study and gave their informed consent prior to the interviews. Throughout the research process, participant information was kept private, and the appropriate ethics committee granted ethical permission. Data analysis was performed in a systematic way. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were reviewed again to comprehend the whole experience of each participant. Meaningful statements were then found and coded. Similar codes were classified into categories and groups were divided into bigger themes. Finally, we explored the linkages among these themes to determine how participants described the development of resilience throughout the separation and healing process.

3 Results

This section covers the study’s major findings, which were based on data collected from five emerging adult participants who have been through a romantic breakup. The data were transcribed word for word, coded, categorized, and grouped thematically. The results reveal patterns of resilience that emerged after the relationships ended, presented in a table showing the frequency of each category’s occurrence among the participants.

Overall, six main themes describe the dynamics of resilience following the end of a romantic relationship: 1) The Development of Closeness and Attachment in Relationships; 2) The Emergence of Tension and Incompatibility; 3) Emotional Impact and Functional Decline After a Breakup; 4) Coping Strategies and Efforts At Self-Empowerment; 5) Social Support; and 6) Acceptance, Adaptation, And Personal Growth Following the Breakup.

The six themes are not to be seen as separate parts of resilience. Rather, they are interrelated phases and contextual elements of the participants. The initial two themes delineate the rational context and origins of adversity that influenced the significance and

severity of the breakup. The third theme is the psychological and functional disruption after the romantic breakup; the fourth and fifth themes are the adaptive reactions of the individuals and the social resources they have access to. The last topic is the latter process of acceptance, adaptation, and personal growth.

Table 2. Interview Excerpt

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Participant Quote	Interpretation
The Development of Closeness and Attachment in Relationships	The Formation and Dynamics of Relationships	“I was attracted to him because at that time he kept showing his affection like that” (S1:I1:50)	Initial attraction arises due to the consistent expression of affection from the partner.
		“I kind of expressed my feelings—like, for example, I liked him, and it turned out he liked me too. As it happened, he liked me, so we ended up dating” (S2:I1:95)	The relationship was formed through emotional openness and mutual attachment.
		“It started with playing ML (Mobile Legend), that’s just how it was, you know—it started with playing ML, that’s just how it was, carrying each other around and all that... Oh, well, we’d play here and there; at first, we were just playing together.” (S3:I1:20)	Closeness develops through shared activities that are repeated over time.
		“He was my first experience, guys. Everything is in him. He was the first person I met through my parents, my first love, my first experience... e-e-everything about him is a first... everything to me...” (S4:I1:390)	The relationship is deeply meaningful because it is the first romantic experience.
The Emergence Of Tension And Incompatibility	Conflict and Disagreements in Relationships	“I met him because we were in the same class. That’s how I got to know him—in that class. As a friend. Then, I felt he had a good personality.” (S5:I1:20)	Closeness begins with everyday social interactions and a positive assessment of the partner’s personality.
		“When our relationship started to drift apart, it was initially just because he was busy” (S1:I1:120)	Changes in the intensity of affection trigger a feeling of being neglected.
		“He still doesn’t make enough time for me” (S2:I1:355)	Conflict arises due to an unbalanced division of time and poor communication.

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Participant Quote	Interpretation
Emotional Impact and Functional Decline After a Breakup		“For example, when they’re busy and don’t keep me updated, that becomes an issue” (S3:I1:295)	Tension is related to issues of communication and trust in the relationship.
		“We were close for about a month—well, maybe a month straight—but it turned out... he was also close with a lot of other girls.” (S4:I1:40)	Jealousy and ego were the main triggers of the conflict.
		“Our backgrounds are different. Like, he’s really into futsal—playing soccer and stuff. Well, I’m into the arts—dancing. But he didn’t like that. He was too possessive.” (S5:I1:140)	The partner’s possessive behavior causes emotional discomfort.
	Emotional Expression and Regulation	“But you’ve acted like this toward me before, so there’s nothing wrong with me acting like this too, right?” (S1:I1:290)	The presence of emotional expression as a form of self-justification to alleviate pain.
		“When we broke up, it felt like I just couldn’t believe it, right?” (S2:I1:825)	Participants experienced an initial emotional response of shock, indicating difficulty accepting the change in the relationship.
		“The atmosphere was just really happy—and then all of a sudden it was like that—I was surprised, you know” (S3:I1:395)	Reflects emotional dissonance, when changes in a situation trigger emotional instability.
		“I cried every day for a week.” (S4:I1:350)	Reflects intense and sustained emotions that indicate a process of emotional release.
		“So far, I’ve never really thought about it like that, never. But if it’s more of a trigger, then it’s the sound of a motorcycle.” (S5:I1:380)	Describes the presence of emotional regulation that is relatively stable but still influenced by certain triggers.
		Emotional and Academic Impacts	Emotional stress resulting from conflict and breakups has a direct impact on motivation to learn
		“Ever since my relationship with him was a struggle until we finally broke up, I just lost the motivation to do anything at all, you know, and that affected my academic motivation too—	

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Participant Quote	Interpretation
		it dropped a lot like that” (S1:I1:155)	
		“It’s so sad—it’s like I actually lost someone like that.” (S2:I1:845)	Experiencing deep sadness that reflects A significant emotional loss
		“At first I was fine, but toward the end, it was like, ‘Oh no, why have I become a different person? This isn’t going to feel good for long, is it?’” (S3:I1:340)	Feeling able to carry out activities, but still experiencing feelings of discomfort due to emotional changes.
		“But when I broke up with him, I really couldn’t handle it... I even skipped a week of classes.” (S4:I1:825)	The emotional stress following the breakup caused the participant to experience academic difficulties.
		“Because, you could say, 12th grade was also a struggle for me. It was a really tough time.” (S5:I1:465)	Participants viewed the experience of a breakup as part of a period of stress, which exacerbated their emotional state
Coping Strategies And Efforts At Self-Empowerment	Resilience and Coping Mechanisms	“But now it’s better because I don’t force myself to think that ‘life must go on,’ even though I’m still grieving” (S1:I1:175)	Participants use acceptance as a form of cognitive coping.
		“Making time for myself” (S2:I1:1065)	Participants manage social distance and activities as a coping strategy to stabilize their emotions.
		“I go out for myself, whether I invite my friends or not” (S2:I1:1485)	
		“Doing what I want. What makes me happy. So, because I do that, I end up enjoying everything” (S3:I1:525)	Participants focus on their personal needs and pleasures as a form of adaptive coping.
		“I hung out more... During the breakup, I was just hanging out all the time, then shopping, then spending money” (S4:I1:1675)	This behavior reflects the use of social and consumerist distractions as a way to reduce emotional stress.
		“Back then, I immediately kept myself busy preparing for the UTBK,” (S5:I1:565)	Participants shifted their focus to productive and creative activities as a way to strengthen themselves and manage their emotions.
		“Sometimes I practice—dancing... Sometimes I practice dancing. Sometimes I play music. So, sometimes I go to karaoke.” (S5:I1:635)	

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Participant Quote	Interpretation
Social Support	Social Support	“The next day, my friend invited me to hang out. Since my friend knew I’d just broken up, maybe they didn’t want me to be alone, and they wanted to keep me company so I wouldn’t get too down.” (S1:I1:460)	Receiving emotional support from close friends who actively spend time with me.
		“it just so happened that a friend of mine was there” (S2:I1:1510)	The presence of a close friend became the main source of support for the participant.
		“As for my family, it’s like, ‘Oh well, it’s okay—they’re just encouraging me, like, ‘It’s okay, and if you can, really make a choice; don’t just go for the pretty one’” (S3:I1:445) “Friend—luckily, the friends I left behind, even though I don’t hang out with them, they still accept me well—they welcome me and support me” (S3:I1:450)	Participants received support from both family and old friends to boost their morale.
		“Support from my parents” (S4:I1:2295) “Friends, too” (S4:I1:2300)	Social support for the participants comes from their immediate circle.
		“My friends... their support.” (S5:I1:585) “My family’s support” (S5:I1:590)	Participants felt consistent support from friends and family through their presence and interactions, which helped reduce their emotional burden.
Acceptance, Adaptation, And Personal Growth Following the Breakup.	Recovery, Personal Growth, and a Shift in Perspective	“I know myself; I’m the kind of person who absolutely cannot stand it if my self-respect is even slightly trampled on or bruised—I just can’t,” (S1:I1:425) “Don’t let all your goals and dreams be destroyed just because of that person” (S1:I1:740)	Participants began to realize the importance of maintaining their self-respect.
		“A lot of changes in myself” (S2:I1:1770) “It turns out I can actually manage without him” (S2:I1:1775)	The experience of breaking up encouraged participants to see positive changes in their lives.

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Participant Quote	Interpretation
		“I have to stay positive—there’s still a long road ahead” (S2:I1:2115)	
		“First, I went back to being myself; naturally, I started enjoying my days more, and then I was able to do things I couldn’t do before” (S3:I1:475)	Participants experienced a recovery process marked by the restoration of their sense of self as well as the ability to live freely.
		“We shouldn’t let ourselves change into someone other than who we really are” (S3:I1:515)	
		“I’m actually grateful—it’s not the same with him anymore.” (S4:I1:2330)	Participants demonstrated a mature acceptance of the breakup, marked by feelings of gratitude and relief.
		“I’ve been able to accept everything with an open heart.” (S4:I1:2680)	
		“I prioritize myself more.” (S5:I1:535)	Participants experienced personal growth through increased self-confidence, closeness with their families, and the courage to express themselves.
		“Since then, I’ve been closer to my parents.” (S5:I1:605)	
		“So there are no limits with my parents. I used to keep things from them, but now I don’t.” (S5:I1:610)	
		“I’m happier, um... and I’m braver about wearing what I like.” (S5:I1:660) “The difference is that I’m more confident.” (S5:I1:665)	

4 Discussions

The results of this study indicate that the experience of resilience among emerging adults following a breakup unfolds through a complex and gradual process, involving the formation of intimacy, the emergence of incompatibility, the emotional impact of the breakup, coping strategies, social support, and the process of acceptance and personal growth. Each theme shows interconnected psychological dynamics that are consistent with theories of relationship development and contemporary models of resilience.

Participants in the early phases of a relationship reported a great sense of security, comfort, and emotional intimacy. This is congruent with the attachment hypothesis espoused by Jonh Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, which states that romantic relationship in adults are a continuation in adults are a continuation of the attachment pattern developed during childhood (Rajecki et al., 1978). Strong attachments cause people to see the relationship as a source of emotional support and relational identity; as a result, when the relationship ends, the sense of loss is more severe. Furthermore, the closeness that develops can be understood using Strenberg’s Triangular Theory of Love, which highlights the function of intimacy

(which covers feelings of closeness, attachment, and interpersonal emotional depth) in increasing the quality of a relationship (Sternberg, 1986). These findings suggest that romantic relationships characterized by strong intimacy are more likely to cause distress when they end (Gehl et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, this closeness did not prevent tensions from arising in the relationship. Participants experienced a decline in the quality of communication, unresolved conflicts, jealousy, a lack of time, and unstable emotional dynamics. These findings align with Relational Turbulence Theory, which explains that relationships can experience instability due to change, uncertainty, and negative interaction patterns that affect how partners communicate—especially during vulnerable periods when the relationship is unstable (Solomon et al., 2016). Unhealthy interaction patterns can also be explained through Gottman's "Four Horsemen" concept, which addresses negative communication techniques in relationships—such as criticism, defensiveness, and withdrawal (Hooper et al., 2017). These findings are consistent with research conducted by Dailey et al., (2020), which shows that couples who are unable to manage ambivalence in their relationship are more likely to break up (Dailey et al., 2020).

When a relationship ends, participants exhibit strong emotional reactions—such as deep sadness, decreased motivation, difficulty concentrating, and behavioral changes. These responses align with Kübler-Ross's stages of grief model, which states that the end of a relationship can trigger reactions similar to the grieving process (Field, 2011). Participants who struggled with emotional control expressed more extreme distress, corroborating prior research findings that difficulties managing emotions can aggravate the impact of a romantic breakup.

Participants utilized a combination of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies, including remaining busy, engaging in productive activities, adjusting routines, and fostering self-compassion. These findings confirm research indicating that adaptive coping techniques play an important role in the process of emotional healing (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). The observed self-enhancement tactics are also compatible with resilience theory, which says that resilience is not an uncommon skill but rather a positive adaptive process anchored in psychological, biological, and social systems shared by all individuals (Masten, 2001).

Social support appeared as a critical component in the participants' emotional recovery. This supports the Buffering Hypothesis, which claims that social support can reduce the effects of stress and promote emotional regulation. The involvement of family and friends as sources of validation and emotional comfort in this study is similar to Lee and Robbins (2000) results on the impact of social networks in recovering self-esteem after a relationship ends. The data also show that social support was a significant resource in the resilience process. Participants reported on the companionship, conversation, and emotional encouragement they received from friends and relatives. This results is in line with the stress-buffering perspective, where social support may mitigate the psychological consequences of stressful experiences.

In the last step, individuals displayed acceptance and personal growth, indicating the development of holistic resilience. Participants learned to see their romantic breakups as a learning experience, where they discovered new meaning and gained a better understanding of themselves. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun's theory of post-traumatic growth, which argues that a person can experience positive development after going thru an emotionally painful incident, this is consistent with their theory (Calhoun, 2023). Over the course of the program, participants improved their ability to prioritize themselves, establish boundaries, and regain their feeling of self-confidence and sense of direction in life. These findings are in line with the findings of research conducted by Tashiro and Frazier, who discovered that

many people reported discovering positive qualities, experiencing personal growth, and obtaining enhanced self-confidence after a romantic breakup (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003).

Taking everything into consideration, the results of this study not only increase our understanding of resilience among emerging adults after a romantic breakup, but they also mainly support our understanding of past research. Existing theoretical models and empirical data are consistent with the processes that have been discovered, particularly with regard to emotional attachment, interpersonal conflict, emotional stress, adaptive coping strategies, and personal development. This study adds a further contribution by showing a gradual and integrated process of resilience. It demonstrates that rehabilitation after a romantic breakup is not only an emotional process, but also entails continuing cognitive and social reconstruction. This is a significant contribution.

5 Conclusions

According to the findings of this study, the resilience of emerging adults who have experienced the disappointment of the termination of a romantic relationship is influenced by a number of psychological processes that are interconnected. Understanding the link that has been built, addressing incompatibilities within the relationship, and managing the emotional impact of the romantic breakup are all steps that an individual must do in order to develop resilience. Resilience is not something that is instantaneously developed; rather, it is something that gradually develops over time. According to the findings of the study, participating in the healing process requires making an effort to control one's emotions, selecting appropriate coping techniques, and making use of social support as a secure environment in which to recover completely. To the end of the day, people arrive to a point of acceptance and uncover a new form of personal development. Throughout the entirety of this process, the research objectives are addressed by demonstrating that resilience in the context of romantic breakups is a process of self-reconstruction and the reinterpretation of personal meaning. This study also makes a contribution to the area of psychology by improving our understanding of how emerging adults might regain psychological equilibrium after the loss of a relationship. This is accomplished thru a mix of emotional regulation, meaning-making, and a shift toward greater personal maturity.

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