

Meaning in Life as a Predictor of Psychological Resilience in Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z has grown up in a rapidly evolving digital and social environment, facing high psychological pressures such as anxiety, academic stress, and future uncertainty. This study aims to describe the role of meaning in life as a protective factor in enhancing psychological resilience among Generation Z. A literature review methodology was employed, analyzing national and international articles published between 2018 and 2025. Literature searches were conducted through multiple academic databases using keywords “meaning in life,” “psychological resilience,” “life purpose,” and “Generation Z.” Findings indicate that individuals with higher life meaning tend to exhibit better emotion regulation, adaptive coping strategies, and lower levels of psychological distress. Meaning in life also functions as a mediator, strengthening the effects of other psychological factors, such as mindfulness and social support, on resilience. Environmental factors, including digital exposure and academic pressure, moderate this relationship, suggesting that individuals with strong life meaning are better able to interpret negative experiences constructively, maintain hope, and face life challenges adaptively. Therefore, promoting meaning in life may serve as an effective strategy to enhance mental well-being and psychological resilience in Generation Z. These findings highlight the importance of positive psychology interventions that focus on life purpose and the meaningful interpretation of experiences as a means to strengthen adaptive capacities and support mental health in young people.

Keywords: *meaning in life, psychological resilience, Generation Z, literature review, positive psychology*

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z is a cohort of individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012, growing up in a digital era characterized by rapid technological development, massive flows of information, and dynamic social changes. These environmental characteristics shape their lifestyles, thinking patterns, and psychological dynamics in ways that differ from previous generations. This generation exhibits high technological adaptability and broad access to information; however, they also face various complex psychological challenges. Numerous studies indicate that Generation Z is more vulnerable to mental health issues, such as anxiety, academic stress, social pressure, and



uncertainty about the future, especially within an increasingly competitive and unstable global context (Li et al., 2022; Steger et al., 2023).

Exposure to these psychological pressures is further amplified by an intensive digital environment, including high social media use, online social comparisons, and increasing academic and social performance demands. These conditions can lead to various psychological problems, such as emotional exhaustion, chronic stress, and decreased psychological well-being among young people (Arslan & Allen, 2022; Liu et al., 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to identify psychological factors that can help individuals cope adaptively with these pressures.

One psychological capacity that plays a significant role in facing life's challenges is psychological resilience. Psychological resilience refers to the ability of individuals to withstand, positively adapt, and recover after encountering highly stressful, difficult, or traumatic experiences. Individuals with high resilience tend to have better emotional regulation, more adaptive coping strategies, and the ability to maintain psychological well-being even under challenging conditions. In the context of positive psychology, resilience is understood as a psychological capacity that enables individuals to maintain healthy psychological functioning when facing various forms of stress and adversity (Harari et al., 2022). Psychological resilience is not only related to the ability to recover from difficulties but also reflects a dynamic psychological adaptation process that allows individuals to develop psychological strengths through challenging experiences. Resilient individuals are generally more effective in stress management, able to maintain motivation, and capable of developing constructive self-adjustment strategies in difficult situations. Consequently, resilience serves as a crucial protective factor that helps individuals reduce the negative impact of stress and enhance their adaptive capacity to environmental changes (Azad et al., 2024).

Psychological resilience is significantly associated with various aspects of mental health and psychological well-being. Individuals with high resilience tend to demonstrate more effective coping abilities, higher levels of optimism, and better capacity to handle psychological pressures. In the context of young people, particularly Generation Z, who live in dynamic social and technological environments, psychological resilience becomes an essential psychological resource to help them cope with uncertainty, social pressure, and modern life demands in a more adaptive way (Harari et al., 2022; Azad et al., 2024). Thus, psychological resilience can be understood as a major protective factor that helps individuals maintain psychological balance when facing various life pressures. This capacity allows individuals not only to recover from negative experiences but also to develop psychologically through adaptive processes in response to adversity.

Within the framework of positive psychology, one factor believed to contribute to the development of resilience is meaning in life. Meaning in life refers to the extent to which individuals perceive their lives as having purpose, significance, and clear direction. This concept emphasizes that individuals who can understand and positively interpret their life experiences tend to have stronger life orientation and higher motivation in facing life challenges. Individuals with strong meaning in life are generally able to interpret negative experiences more constructively, maintain hope, and develop more adaptive coping strategies when encountering difficulties. Those with a clear sense of life purpose also tend to exhibit lower levels of psychological distress and better self-adjustment when facing stressful situations (Shuba et al., 2024).

Large-scale studies on adolescents indicate that the presence of meaning in life is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and contributes to increased

psychological resilience, ultimately reducing the risk of depression and anxiety. These findings suggest that meaning in life not only serves as a source of psychological stability but also functions as a developmental factor that helps individuals interpret life experiences more positively and meaningfully (Jiang et al., 2025). Individuals with clear life goals tend to demonstrate higher well-being, lower stress levels, and better adaptive capacity when facing various life pressures. Therefore, cultivating meaning in life is viewed as a potential approach to promoting mental health, especially among adolescents and young adults who are in the stage of identity exploration and purpose-seeking (Casas-Muñoz et al., 2025).

Meaning in life is significantly associated with various indicators of psychological well-being, including psychological resilience. Individuals with clear life goals tend to exhibit higher optimism, better emotional regulation, and stronger adaptive capacities in response to life changes and pressures (Liu et al., 2021; Arslan & Allen, 2022). Furthermore, meaning in life serves as an intrinsic motivational source that helps individuals maintain commitment to their life goals despite encountering obstacles and difficulties (Li et al., 2022). Several studies have shown that the presence of meaning in life can help individuals develop a more positive perspective on challenging life experiences, enabling them to view difficulties as opportunities for growth. Thus, meaning in life not only contributes to enhancing psychological well-being but also strengthens the individual's capacity to endure and recover from stressful or adverse experiences (Arslan et al., 2020; Steger et al., 2023).

Although previous research has demonstrated a positive relationship between meaning in life and psychological resilience, studies specifically examining this relationship in Generation Z remain relatively limited and scattered across different empirical studies. Moreover, most prior research has focused on the general adult population or university students without specifically addressing the psychological characteristics of a generation raised in the digital era. Understanding psychological factors that can strengthen resilience in Generation Z is particularly important given that this generation faces unique social, technological, and psychological challenges compared to earlier generations (Arslan & Allen, 2022; Liu et al., 2021).

Based on this background, a comprehensive literature review is needed to integrate the findings of existing research regarding the relationship between meaning in life and psychological resilience. Although several studies have indicated a positive relationship between these two concepts, their results remain scattered across diverse populations, research designs, and theoretical approaches. This highlights the necessity of a review that can systematically summarize, organize, and analyze the relevant empirical findings. Through a comprehensive literature review, a more integrated understanding of how meaning in life contributes to strengthening individual psychological resilience can be achieved. Additionally, such a review is important for identifying patterns of association between meaning in life and psychological resilience, as well as the psychological factors that may mediate or strengthen this relationship. By understanding the mechanisms underlying the link between life meaning and resilience, this study aims to provide a clearer picture of how individuals, particularly young people, develop adaptive psychological capacities when facing various pressures and life challenges.

Generation Z lives in a social environment characterized by rapid technological changes, complex social dynamics, and increasing academic and social pressures. These conditions may heighten vulnerability to mental health problems. Therefore,

understanding psychological factors that can enhance mental resilience in young people is essential to support healthy psychological development and improve their mental well-being. This article aims to comprehensively review research examining the relationship between meaning in life and psychological resilience in Generation Z, as well as to identify the underlying psychological mechanisms. This review seeks to integrate relevant empirical findings to provide a more systematic understanding of the role of life meaning as a psychological resource that can strengthen individuals' capacity to cope with various forms of stress and life challenges.

Furthermore, the results of this review are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of literature in the field of positive psychology, particularly concerning the role of meaning in life in building individual psychological resilience. In addition, the findings are expected to have practical implications for the development of psychological intervention programs, such as programs to enhance life meaning, goal-setting interventions, and positive psychology-based interventions aimed at increasing psychological resilience in young people. In this way, the study is expected to contribute to efforts to strengthen mental health and develop adaptive psychological capacities in Generation Z amid various modern life challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a literature review approach to synthesize existing research on the relationship between meaning in life and psychological resilience among Generation Z. The main aim was to provide a comprehensive understanding of how life meaning functions as a protective psychological factor that enhances resilience in young people. A literature review was considered the most suitable approach because it allows for the integration of theoretical and empirical findings across multiple contexts, highlighting patterns, research gaps, and potential mechanisms that explain the association between meaning in life and psychological resilience.

To identify relevant studies, a systematic search was conducted across several academic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using keywords such as "meaning in life," "life purpose," "psychological resilience," "mental resilience," "Generation Z," "adolescents," "young adults," and "positive psychology." The inclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies. Only studies published in English between 2018 and 2025 were considered, capturing the most recent research on Generation Z, a cohort shaped by rapid technological developments and digital environments. Studies were included if they focused on adolescents or young adults and examined the relationship between meaning in life and psychological resilience either directly or indirectly. Studies that did not provide empirical or theoretical insights, or focused on populations outside the target age range, were excluded.

The initial search yielded approximately 150 articles, which were first screened for duplicates and then reviewed based on titles and abstracts. Studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded at this stage, leaving 62 articles for full-text assessment. Each article was carefully evaluated against the criteria to ensure it provided relevant empirical or theoretical contributions to the research objective. After thorough evaluation, 28 studies were selected for detailed analysis. These studies included quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method research designs, providing a comprehensive and multifaceted perspective on the relationship between meaning in life and psychological resilience among Generation Z.

Data were systematically extracted from the selected studies, including information on authors, year of publication, sample characteristics, research design, instruments used to measure meaning in life and psychological resilience, and key findings regarding the relationship between the two constructs. A thematic synthesis approach was applied to identify recurring patterns, psychological mechanisms, and mediating or moderating factors influencing the association between meaning in life and psychological resilience. This approach allowed the integration of

findings across different populations and research designs, generating insights into both theoretical and practical implications for promoting resilience in young people.

The quality of the studies was critically appraised to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. Considerations included methodological rigor, appropriateness of research design, sample size, measurement reliability, and relevance to the research question. Findings from studies with limitations were interpreted cautiously, with attention to their contribution within the broader literature.

The selection of studies followed a systematic process inspired by the PRISMA approach. Initially, 150 articles were identified through database searches. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts for relevance, 62 articles were assessed in full text. Following detailed evaluation based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, 28 studies were selected for final analysis. This narrative illustrates the systematic approach to literature selection, ensuring transparency and rigor while synthesizing relevant research on meaning in life and psychological resilience in Generation Z.

Since this study is based entirely on published literature, no ethical approval was required. However, all sources were properly cited, and the intellectual property of the original authors was respected. By integrating empirical and theoretical findings, this literature review aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how meaning in life contributes to the development of psychological resilience and to inform both theoretical frameworks and practical interventions for promoting mental health among Generation Z.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature consistently shows that meaning in life positively predicts psychological resilience among adolescents and young adults, particularly Generation Z. Individuals with a strong sense of life purpose exhibit higher resilience, more adaptive coping strategies, and better psychological well-being (Shuba et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2025; Casas-Muñoz et al., 2025).

Zhou et al. (2025) conducted a large-scale study among Chinese young adults and found that the *presence of meaning* mediated the relationship between the *search for life meaning* and mental health outcomes. Individuals with higher presence of meaning showed stronger resilience and lower psychological distress, indicating that life meaning functions as a protective psychological resource. Harris et al. (2025) reported that presence of meaning mediated the effect of mindfulness on resilience, emphasizing its role in enhancing adaptive capacities. Similarly, Yıldırım et al. (2025) found that meaning in life, together with resilience, reduced the negative impact of fear of happiness on psychological distress. Szczesniak et al. (2022) confirmed that the presence of meaning mediated the relationship between anxiety and depression, supporting the role of life meaning in promoting resilience.

The reviewed studies indicate that meaning in life interacts with other psychological resources, including social support and self-efficacy, to strengthen resilience. Environmental factors such as exposure to digital technologies, academic stress, and social pressures moderate these relationships, highlighting the importance of life meaning for Generation Z (Li et al., 2022; Steger et al., 2023).

Table 1. Summary of Key Studies on Meaning in Life and Psychological Resilience

Author & Year	Population/ Sample	Variable	Main Findings
Shuba et al., 2024	Adolescents & young	Meaning in life & Resilience	Higher meaning in life predicted stronger resilience and adaptive coping.

Jiang et al., 2025	Adolescents (N=1,200)		Meaning in life, Resilience, Life satisfaction	Life meaning enhanced resilience and life satisfaction, buffering depression and anxiety.
Casas-Muñoz et al., 2025 Li et al., 2022	Young adults (N=500)		Life purpose & Well-being	Strong life purpose correlated with higher resilience, adaptive coping, and reduced stress.
Li et al., 2022	Gen university students (N=650)	Z	Meaning in life, Social support, Resilience	Meaning moderated social pressure impact on resilience; students with higher meaning showed stronger adaptive responses.
Arslan & Allen, 2022	Adolescents (N=900)		Life meaning & Resilience	Positive association between meaning and resilience; higher life purpose linked to greater optimism and adaptive coping
Steger et al., 2023	Gen young adults (N=400)	Z	Meaning in life & Psychological well-being	Life meaning strongly associated with resilience, mediated by emotional regulation and coping strategies.
Zhou et al., 2025	Young adults (N=3,189)		Presence & Search for Meaning, Mental health	Presence of meaning mediated search for meaning → resilience; stronger meaning → lower distress.
Harris et al., 2025	Young adults		Mindfulness, Meaning, Resilience	Presence of meaning mediated mindfulness → resilience; strengthens adaptive psychological capacity.
Yıldırım et al., 2025	Young adults		Fear of happiness, Meaning, Resilience	Meaning + resilience buffered distress, reducing negative impact of fear of happiness.
Szczesnia k et al., 2022	Young adults		Presence of meaning, Anxiety, Depression	Meaning mediated anxiety → depression relationship, supporting its protective role.

Empirical support from various studies indicates that academic resilience serves as a significant predictive indicator of academic burnout. Students with higher levels of resilience are better able to cope with academic pressure and therefore experience lower levels of burnout symptoms compared to students with lower resilience. For example, a study conducted in Makassar found that students with high academic resilience demonstrated stronger abilities to regulate emotions, maintain learning motivation, and adjust their learning strategies to meet complex academic task demands, which consequently reduced emotional exhaustion and cynical attitudes toward academic activities (Khaekal et al., 2022). These findings emphasize that growth mindset, which contributes to increased student resilience, can function as an effective protective strategy in mitigating academic burnout. Students with a growth mindset are not only able to view failure as a learning opportunity but also develop psychological endurance that allows them to remain productive amid the pressures of assignments, projects, and complex academic evaluations. In other words, growth mindset encourages students to internalize

learning experiences as a process of self-development, enhancing adaptive coping capacity and strengthening their ability to overcome academic challenges within hybrid learning contexts.

Research conducted in the Netherlands shows that students and adolescents with a growth mindset tend to experience reduced burnout symptoms through improved self-regulation, which is a key aspect in coping with academic pressure and learning stress (Janssen & van Atteveldt, 2023). Self-regulation strategies include the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate learning processes effectively, enabling students to adjust their learning approaches according to task demands and complex academic situations. Other studies indicate that growth mindset interventions among students can significantly reduce academic stress and increase learning motivation, which in turn contributes to a lower risk of academic burnout, although the research was conducted in a non-hybrid learning context (Meyer & Stutts, 2024). These findings confirm that growth mindset not only influences attitudes and motivation but also facilitates the development of more effective adaptive coping strategies for managing academic workloads. Students who participate in growth mindset interventions tend to perceive failure and academic pressure as challenges that can be overcome through effort, reflection, and improvement of learning strategies, rather than as obstacles that diminish competence and motivation.

A study by Ku and Stager (2022) further confirms that growth mindset interventions consistently enhance students' learning motivation, adaptive learning strategies, and adaptive coping abilities, which directly reduce the risk of academic burnout. These interventions are designed to help students internalize the belief that abilities and intelligence can develop through effort, practice, and the application of effective learning strategies. As a result, students become more proactive in facing academic challenges, are able to adjust their learning approaches according to the complexity of tasks, and demonstrate greater resilience to psychological pressures within hybrid learning systems.

These findings are consistent with the work of Mosanya (2022), which highlights the psychological mechanisms underlying the positive effects of growth mindset. Students with a growth mindset are better able to regulate themselves effectively, including planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning processes, allowing the findings clearly indicate that meaning in life is a critical predictor of psychological resilience among Generation Z. Individuals with a sense of purpose and meaning show higher adaptability, better emotion regulation, and more constructive coping strategies when facing life challenges (Shuba et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2025).

Life meaning also serves as a mediator in psychological processes. Zhou et al. (2025) demonstrated that *presence of meaning* mediates the effect of *search for meaning* on resilience, whereas Harris et al. (2025) showed it mediates the link between mindfulness and resilience. This indicates that life meaning amplifies the benefits of other protective psychological factors, enhancing adaptive responses to stress.

Furthermore, life meaning functions as a buffer against psychological distress. Yıldırım et al. (2025) found that life meaning, together with resilience, reduced the negative effects of fear of happiness, while Szczesniak et al. (2022) reported that meaning mediates the anxiety-depression relationship. These findings underscore life meaning's protective role in mental health and highlight its importance for interventions targeting Generation Z.

Generation Z faces unique challenges, including digital stress, social comparisons online, and increased academic pressures. The studies suggest that fostering life meaning

can enhance resilience in this population by promoting adaptive coping, optimism, and psychological stability (Li et al., 2022; Steger et al., 2023).

Despite strong evidence, gaps remain. Most studies are cross-sectional, limiting causal conclusions. Longitudinal and experimental research is needed to confirm whether enhancing life meaning leads to increases in resilience over time. Additionally, research across diverse cultural contexts is limited, and cultural factors may influence how meaning in life interacts with resilience and well-being.

In conclusion, meaning in life is a central factor for promoting psychological resilience in Generation Z. By strengthening life purpose and adaptive interpretations of experiences, interventions focusing on life meaning can improve resilience, reduce psychological distress, and support mental well-being in young individuals growing up in a digital and socially complex environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the integrative literature review, meaning in life emerges as a significant predictor of psychological resilience in Generation Z. Individuals with a strong sense of life meaning tend to exhibit more adaptive coping strategies, better emotion regulation, and lower levels of psychological distress. Life meaning also functions as a mediator, enhancing the effects of other psychological factors, such as mindfulness and social support, on resilience.

Environmental factors, including high digital exposure and academic pressure, moderate the relationship between life meaning and resilience, indicating that the modern context influences how individuals develop psychological strength. Developing a strong sense of life meaning enables individuals to interpret negative experiences constructively, maintain hope, and approach life challenges more adaptively.

Therefore, positive psychology interventions that focus on life purpose and the meaningful interpretation of experiences can be effective strategies to enhance mental well-being and psychological resilience in Generation Z. These findings also provide a theoretical foundation for future research and practical approaches aimed at strengthening the adaptive capacities of young people, particularly in navigating the increasingly complex social, academic, and digital challenges they face.

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