

Investigating the impact of volunteering on resilience in paramedic students

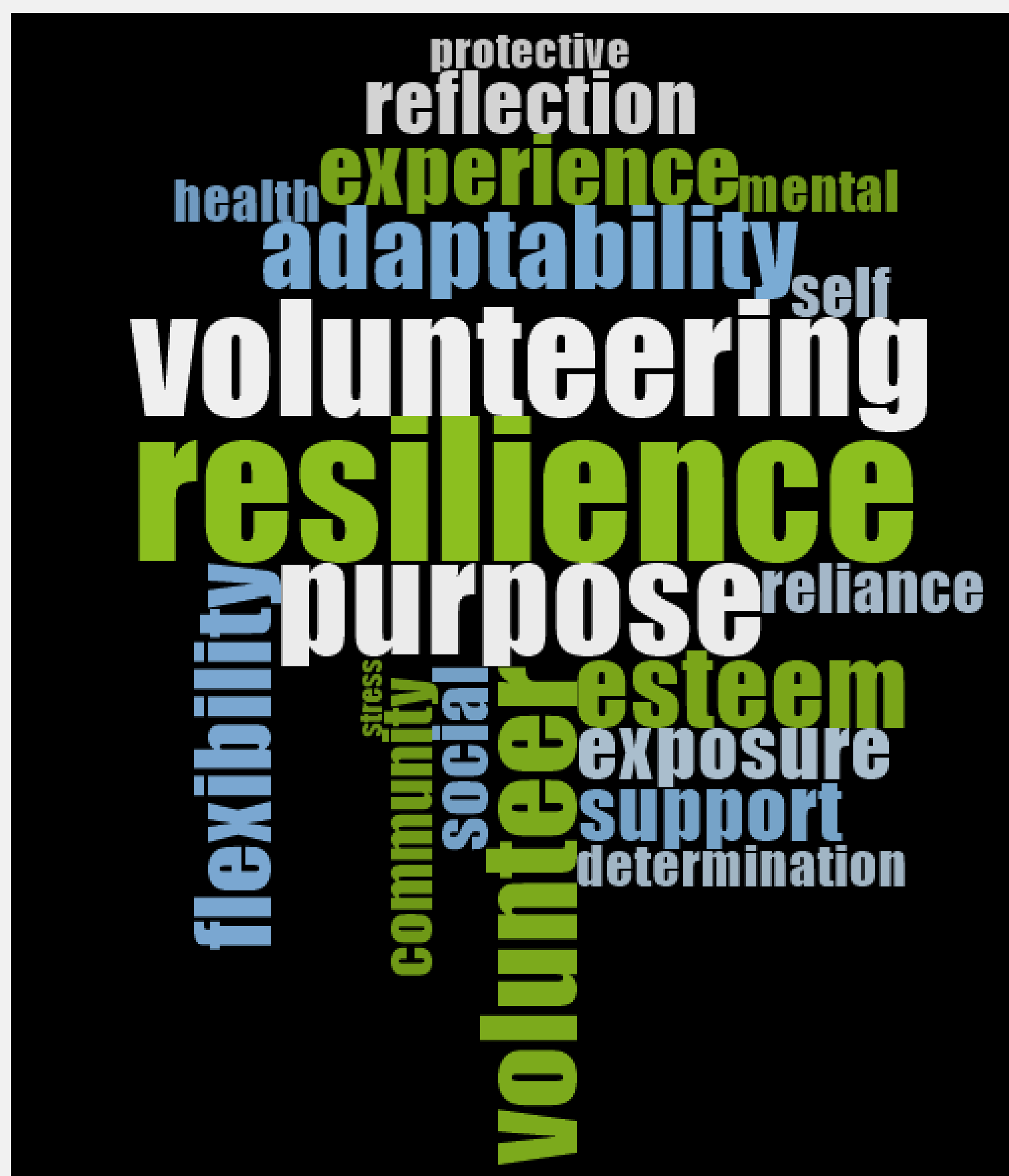
Clare Sutton (PhD Candidate), Dr Patricia Logan and Professor Russell Roberts
Charles Sturt University, Australia



Introduction & Aims

Introduction: Paramedics have a higher incidence of mental illness than the general population with especially high rates of stress, burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to the cumulative impact of exposure events inherent to the occupation ^{1,2,3,4,5}. Preliminary research on student paramedics has identified high levels of anxiety, burnout and fatigue similar to their qualified counterparts ⁶. Resilience has been identified as a protective factor increases coping strategies to mitigate negative impacts of exposure to traumatic events or organisational stressors ^{7,8,9}. This correlation between resilience and improved mental health has been found in student populations as well as in health care professionals ¹⁰. Participation in volunteering has many reported positive health benefits, both physical and psychological and while there has been no explicit link to resilience, it promotes social connectedness through integration, support and a sense of purpose ^{11,12,13}.

Aims: 1. to investigate the impact of volunteering on resilience in student paramedics; 2. to explore what factors play a part in developing resilience; and, 3. to contribute knowledge of factors influencing the development of resilience in student paramedics.



Methods & Analysis

Methods: Mixed methods: Voluntary online survey and interview. The survey comprised eight validated psychometric questionnaires related to coping and resilience, social support, approaches to stress, and wellbeing (CD-RISC, RSA, MPSSS, MOS, Brief COPE, PHQ-9, K10, GAD-7). Participants upon completing the survey were invited to undertake a semi-structured interview. Interviews explored the impact of volunteering on resilience, coping strategies and peer support as well as gathering information concerning the type and duration of volunteering activity.

Human Research Ethics approval H20240.

Data analysis: Descriptive analysis was applied to quantitative data. Qualitative data was analysed using constant comparative analysis in line with a constructivist grounded theory methodological approach to allow the identification of patterns, themes and connections between core concepts which is then synthesized to support an inductive approach to theory generation ¹⁴.

Results & Conclusion

Results: 22 participants were interviewed with diverse volunteering experiences represented. Participants identified a number of attributes developed or enhanced through volunteering: sense of purpose and self-esteem; social support; self-reliance and determination; importance of reflection, adaptability and flexibility; and benefits of exposure and experience.

Conclusion: Paramedic students participating in a diverse range of volunteer activities indicated numerous attributes associated with developing resilience. Developing our understanding of resilience as a protective mechanism and promoting activities that support the development of resilience may help graduates to be better prepared to cope with the mental health and workforce wellbeing challenges associated with their chosen career in paramedicine.

References:

