



# An analysis of the Factors Influencing Psychological Resilience of Chinese Gay Men Based on Qualitative Research Perspectives

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**Abstract:** The mental health status of homosexuals has attracted more and more attention from the society. Based on the influence of factors such as the pressure of the current social environment, the group faces the pressure from itself, the family and the society, the mental health level is also affected. Psychological resilience plays an important protective factor in mental health, so this study explores the influencing factors of psychological resilience of Chinese gay men, to provide scientific basis for maintaining the mental health level of the group. In this study, 16 gay men were interviewed by qualitative interview method. The results show that the main factors affecting the psychological resilience of gay men are: external environmental resource factors (parental rearing style, social support), internal individual factors (self-esteem, self-efficacy, personality, coping style), and the interaction of all factors, so as to form individual psychological resilience. In the future, the corresponding psychological intervention plan can be designed according to these factors to intervene in the low resilience of the male gay group, so as to promote the harmonious development of their body and mind.

**Keywords:** gay, psychological resilience, influencing factors, psychological intervention

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## 1. Introduction

Homosexuality is a kind of sexual orientation and behavior, and also represents a sexual identity and behavior norm or role[1]. According to an study by Li Yinhe, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, homosexuality accounts for 3 to 4 percent of China's population, or 36 to 48 million people. According to a recent survey, the number of homosexuals in China has exceeded 70 million[2]. As society has become more inclusive, so has the acceptance of the gay community, but even in a relatively tolerant environment, there are still prejudices, discrimination and stigma against the gay community at home and abroad[3]. When faced with the environment of discrimination and stigma, the mental health level of gay groups will also be affected due to their identity. Therefore, in recent years, the research on gay people in the field of psychology has gradually increased, and the mental health level of gay people and the factors affecting mental health have become an important topic in the field of gay research. A study about gay men in China showed that the group scored above the norm in depression and seven other subscales, and concluded that the mental activity of gay men can be characterized by depression, anxiety, mania and other characteristics[4]. Another study of gay college students showed that many in this group had suicidal thoughts, suicide plans, and self-injures. [5]Gay people can suffer from mental health problems due to social pressures, and studies have found that external prejudice, discrimination can cause stress for sexual minorities, which can lead to negative mental health conditions[6]. Therefore, it is particularly important to develop a good level of psychological resilience in the face of stressful events for this group.

The concept of psychological resilience is generally interpreted in terms of three aspects: personal qualities or talents, positive outcomes of facing adversity, and adaptability[7]. Studies have shown that psychological resilience is significantly negatively correlated with depression and positively correlated with optimism and mental health[8]. People with high psychological resilience adopt more positive emotions and seek out resources around them in a more proactive manner. Other studies have found that the more psychological resilience, the higher the level of mental health; Psychological resilience can buffer the adverse effects of mental health problems on individual subjective well-being[9]. To sum up, psychological resilience is an important protective factor for mental health.

Some research results show that the psychological resilience scores of gay people are generally lower than that of straight people[10]. In the face of stressful events, some of them tend to use repression, escape and denial to deal with them, but this way often makes them difficult to cope with future challenges, and loss of psychological resilience. In China, there

are few researches on the psychological resilience of the gay group, and the research on the psychological resilience of the gay men are even less. The mental health level of gay men is lower than that of lesbian and straight people, because gay men are given more responsibilities and obligations by the society and the oppression brought by masculinity. There are few studies that focus on gay men and the factors that affect them, and the discussion is insufficient. Therefore, exploratory research on the influencing factors of psychological resilience of gay men can provide a variety of ideas for improving their mental health level, and can also provide a scientific basis for clinical psychological counseling for this group.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study mainly selects gay men with high and low scores by using the psychological resilience scale, and conducts semi-structured interviews with them by using the interview method to explore the factors affecting the psychological resilience of gay men.

### **2.2 Research Objects**

This study recruited gay men by joining relevant groups on social network platforms such as Douban, Tieba and Weibo, and contacting PFLAG and other public welfare organizations to issue online questionnaires. A total of 30 questionnaires were distributed in this study, and 25 valid questionnaires were recovered. The gay men suitable for interview were selected according to the criteria: (1) at least 18 years old; (2) gender is male; (3) psychological resilience score less than 40 points or more than 60 points; (4) being exclusively gay.

Through screening, the number of participants in this study was finally determined to be 16.

### **2.3 Research Tools**

#### **2.3.1 Chinese version of Psychological Resilience Scale**

The Chinese version of the Psychological Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) revised by Yu and Zhang [11] was adopted in this study. The scale is applicable to people between the ages of 20 and 60 years old, with a total of 25 items. Each item is scored on a 5-point scale (0-4), with the score indicating 0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, and 4 = always. A higher score indicates a higher level of psychological resilience. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient of the psychological resilience scale in this study was 0.82.

#### **2.3.2 Interview outline**

The interview outline used in the research is to draw up the first draft of the interview according to the research purpose and previous literature review. The interview outline is modified and adjusted through pre-interview with recruited subjects, feedback from the subjects and opinions of psychology professors, so as to ensure the applicability and effectiveness of the interview content, and finally form a formal interview outline. The interview outline was finally determined, including "In the face of stressful events, how do you understand it? What was your emotional state at the time of the event?" Etc.

### **2.4 Research process**

According to the scores of the psychological resilience scale, gay men with scores lower than 45 and higher than 65 were selected as low and high psychological resilience, respectively, in this study, to prepare for later interviews. The pre-interview was conducted before the formal interview. Since the interview is a semi-structured interview, it is necessary to pursue and supplement the unclear or important content in the interview process in detail, and make flexible adjustment to the questions that may be tailored to the different situations of each participant.

### **2.5 Collation and analysis of interview data**

After completing the questionnaire survey and in-depth interview, this study timely sorted out the data collected in the above research process. In addition to the questionnaire survey data, a total of about 150,000 words of interview text data were sorted out, which needed to be classified and sorted out. Through repeated reading of the original data, meaningful words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs repeatedly appeared in the text were marked to form code numbers. During the period, the original words of the parties are used as the code number as far as possible, so as to be close to the truth of the original data. Until the code number reached saturation, a total of 356 code numbers were registered. Through interpretative contact with texts and transcripts, the researchers gradually established themes and formed meaningful clusters to establish core genera.

### 3. Findings and discussions

#### 3.1 General demographic characteristics of the interviewees

In this study, 16 subjects were finally interviewed, ranging in age from 19 to 35 years old, with an average age of 25.8 years old (SD=5.02), and their educational level ranged from junior college to postgraduate. The specific information of the interviewees is shown in the following table (Table 1) :

**Table 1. Basic information of interviewees**

ID	Age	Literacy	Occupation	Psychological resilience score	Location
1	21	Junior college	Student	25	Qinghai
2	27	Undergrad	Corporate staff	31	Chungking
3	22	Undergrad	Student	34	Xi 'an
4	22	Undergrad	Student	36	Henan
5	32	Graduate student	Bank clerk	39	Shanghai
6	30	Graduate student	Freelance work	39	Guangxi
7	25	Undergrad	Civil service	40	Shanghai
8	30	Graduate student	Middle school teacher	41	Zhejiang
9	20	Undergrad	Student	42	Canton
10	33	Undergrad	Educational institution	44	Fujian
11	35	Graduate student	Agency boss	67	Shandong
12	28	Undergrad	Photographer	73	Pekin
13	27	Undergrad	Soe employees	76	Shanghai
14	20	Undergrad	Student	78	Liaoning
15	21	Undergrad	Student	80	Pekin
16	19	Undergrad	Student	81	Anhui

#### 3.2 Influencing factors of gay men with high psychological resilience

Through coding and in-depth analysis of the text data collected in the interview, the research results show that the factors affecting gay men with high psychological resilience are mainly including: openness, self-efficacy, extroversion and helpfulness (Table 2) :

**Table 2. Coding table of influencing factors of high psychological resilience of gay men**

Core Genera	Subordinate genera	Examples
Openness	Acceptance of feelings	Be able to see the positive side of negative emotions Pay attention to your emotions
	Try new things	Be open to meeting new people Stay in a big city and experience life different from your hometown
	Have Expectations	Trust your parents to understand Look forward to a wonderful life in the future Believe in stable love
	Problem solving skills	Be confident in your ability to handle things Make adequate plans for your future life
Self-efficacy	Ability to regulate emotions	Coping with emotions after failure Regulation of emotions in the face of discrimination
	Core self-evaluation	I think I'm brave and courageous Always trying to be better
Extroversion	Interpersonal support	Have a regular circle of friends When you are not happy, you will talk to friends
	Positive emotions	Positive feelings about life Willing to share pleasant experiences

Core Genera	Subordinate genera	Examples
Helpfulness	Honesty	Come out to trusted friends around you Rarely cover up in your relationships
	Altruistic behavior	Being more sensitive to vulnerable people around you Participate in pro-bono organizations such as PFLAG

### 3.2.1 Openness of gay men with high psychological resilience

The results of the study found that gay men with higher psychological resilience tended to have higher levels of openness. During the interview, some interviewees showed their awareness of their feelings and acceptance of negative feelings:

"I was actually prepared for the possibility of disappointment when I met the above-mentioned setbacks. I think it is normal for me to be disappointed or even pessimistic before I have the ability to do it." (Interviewee 11)

Openness describes a person's cognitive style, which is an attempt to understand unknown experiences and an active exploration of unfamiliar environments that may arise. Some studies have found that openness can significantly positively predict psychological resilience[12]. The more open and receptive an individual is to objective things, the better able they are to cope with stressful life events.

### 3.2.2 Self-efficacy of gay men with high psychological resilience

Self-efficacy is an important factor affecting psychological resilience, and research shows that self-efficacy can improve individual psychological resilience[13]. When an individual is in a high level of self-confidence, the ability to regulate emotions is also better. In the interview, it was found that gay men with high psychological resilience were more confident and thought they had a good ability to deal with problems and regulate emotions. Some respondents said:

"I feel confident that I have a detailed plan for marriage problem, work and even retirement. Although coming out is my first attempt, I am confident that I will succeed in the end." (Interviewee 15)

### 3.2.3 Extraversion in gay men with high psychological resilience

In the interview, it is found that gay men with high psychological resilience tend to have sufficient interpersonal density, and they can obtain a certain degree of release and emotional ease and pleasure from interpersonal relationships. This can further help them to adjust negative emotions when coping with setbacks, and to seek help from others in a timely manner to obtain support at the interpersonal level. Some interviewees mentioned that:

"I will have my own social circle. I will have gay friends and straight friends. For different friends I talk to them about different things. For example, on the love issue side, I prefer to complain that with my friends in the gay circle. I feel comfortable socializing in this way." (Interviewee 11)

### 3.2.4 The trait of helpfulness of gay men with high psychological resilience

In interviews with gay men with high psychological resilience, it was found that they were more compassionate and willing to participate in charitable organizations such as orphanages or PFLAG to help people in distress. In some cases, they even gave up their own interests to help others:

"Gay people are treated unfairly in the workplace. When I was at PFLAG in Hangzhou, I discussed the issue with a male student who came to me for help. We talked about how to deal with the situation and gave a public lecture on it." (Interviewee 16)

## 3.3 Influencing factors of gay men with low psychological resilience

Through in-depth interviews with gay men with low psychological resilience, text analysis and coding of the interview materials, factors affecting low psychological resilience of gay men are mainly extracted into four dimensions: parental rearing style, self-esteem, social support and coping style (Table 3) :

**Table 3. Coding table of influencing factors of low psychological resilience of gay men**

Core genus	Subordinate genera	Examples
Parenting	Authoritarian type	Strict parents
	Alienated type	Ignored by parents
Self-esteem	Negative comments	Describe yourself as sensitive and having low self-esteem
	Self-loathing	Dislike and loathing yourself

Core genus	Subordinate genera	Examples
Social support	Peer support	Friendless and lonely Distrust others
	Family support	Parents don't understand themselves Refuse to communicate with your parents
	Emotional regulation	Insensitivity to emotional detection Emotions tend to generalize Inability to deal with negative emotions
Coping styles	Cognitive regulation	Internal attribution of failure Ignoring Success
	Behavioral coping	Giving in Avoidance Overwhelmed

### 3.3.1 Parental rearing style

Through the interviews, it is found that parental education has different degrees of influence on the psychological resilience of gay men, which can be divided into authoritarian parents and alienated parents. Under the authoritarian parenting style, individuals will experience a sense of oppression and often adopt the ways of "self-abandonment" and "lack of interest in other things" to deal with the negative emotions that are difficult to deal with. For example, some interviewees mentioned:

"I have a self-defeating feeling about myself, and I have no interest in anything around me. The reason is that my parents have great restrictions on me. I was pressured to get married when I was 20 because my family is Hakka, and they put a lot of emphasis on continuing the family line. My parents kept forcing me to do things I didn't want to do." (Interviewee 8)

In addition to the influence of authoritarian parents, alienated parents are unable to respond to their children in a timely manner when they need emotional response, and also make their children choose to pile up or suppress negative emotions when they appear, such as respondents said:

"I feel that our family relationship is so alienated, very forbearance and restraint, what thoughts will not be directly expressed. So now as I get older, I can't express my feelings. I don't think it's a good idea, but there's nothing I can do." (Interviewee 4)

Therefore, the parenting style plays an important role in the formation of an individual's psychological resilience. Some studies have found that parenting can affect the development of individual psychological resilience. When parents adopt different parenting styles, there are significant differences in the development of children's psychological resilience[14].

### 3.3.2 Self-esteem

According to the interview content, when answering the questions about self-evaluation and self-preferences, most interviewees will have negative evaluation of themselves and express self-loathing, showing low self-esteem. For example, some interviewees mentioned:

"If I have to say self-evaluation, I will give myself a bad evaluation. I would think that I'm not a people person. It's not that I'm an introvert that makes me unsociable. On the contrary, I'm a talkative person. But even so, I still think I'm an awkward person." (Interviewee 5)

The above interview results show that the group with low psychological resilience has a common feature in that they have lower self-evaluation and lower degree of self-preference, and these two characteristics will constitute the interviewees' lower self-esteem. Some studies have found that self-esteem can significantly improve individual psychological resilience and is an internal protective factor of psychological resilience[15]. People with high self-esteem tend to see things in a positive light and seek help to regulate their emotions, and they tend to have a higher resistance to frustration.

### 3.3.3 Social support

There was a general lack of social support among the interviewed subjects with low psychological resilience, which was reflected in the lack of peer support and family support. Respondents generally said that it was difficult for them to establish a safe and stable relationship, they did not know how to ask people around them for help, and it was difficult to get social support. For example, some interviewees mentioned:

"I keep a distance from my classmates around me, and at most I may tease and vent my emotions, but I think in my heart I just use them as a tool to talk, and there is no emotional link. I don't trust my roommates, including my classmates, and I worry that they will reveal some of my secrets." (Interviewee 9)

Studies have found that good social support can significantly improve the level of psychological resilience of individuals[16]. Having a group of close friends who give enough sense of security and trust can make individuals feel respected, supported and understood. When there are more such emotional experiences, individuals are more inclined to

take the initiative to talk when they encounter pressure or difficulties, and learn from the example of interpersonal support to improve psychological resilience.

### 3.3.4 Coping styles

The interview results show that when facing difficulties, they will inevitably have negative emotions such as anxiety, confusion and grumpiness, but they are often unable to deal with these emotions, and will expand the negative emotions to their daily life and work. For example, interviewees mentioned:

"At the end of high school, I was still a less confident person because I realized the gap between myself and others. I was pessimistic and depressed when I was in high school because my grades stayed the same. This kind of intense study pressure made me anxious every day and afraid of falling behind. Gradually, I began to struggle with my studies in chemistry and biology, and later I even wanted to drop out of school, feeling weak." (Interviewee 9)

It can be seen from the interviews that coping styles have an impact on psychological resilience. Studies have shown that the level of psychological resilience is positively correlated with positive coping styles and negatively correlated with negative coping styles [17]. People with high levels of psychological resilience are more able to cope with difficulties in a positive state and show stronger psychological resilience. On the contrary, often positive coping with difficulties can also appropriately improve the level of psychological resilience.

### 3.4 Mechanism of influencing factors on psychological resilience of gay men

In the interview with gay men with high and low scores of psychological resilience, it is found that there are many factors affecting their psychological resilience, and the factors will interact and influence each other. The factors that generally affect the psychological resilience of gay men include eight dimensions: openness, extroversion, helpfulness, self-efficacy, parenting, self-esteem, coping style and social support, among which, Openness, extroversion and helpfulness can be summarized as individual personality characteristics. In the process of the formation and development of psychological resilience, these influencing factors may have successively acted on the development. Therefore, by sorting out the development process of psychological resilience, a model of how six dimensions of influencing factors promote the development of psychological resilience is formed (as shown in Figure 1) :

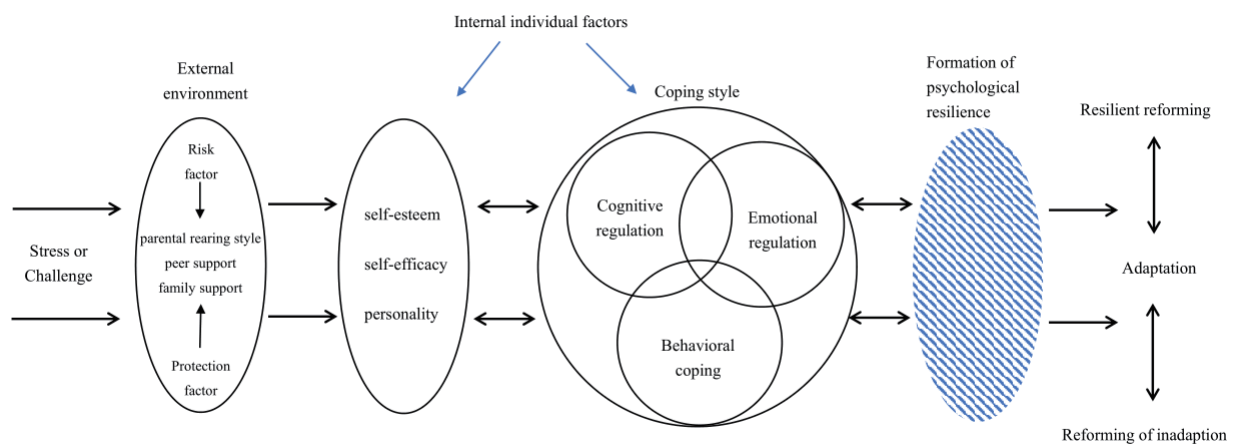


Figure 1. Structure chart of influencing factors of psychological resilience

This model references the personal-process-environment model proposed by Kumper. The model proposes that when external stressful events occur, individuals need to mobilize both external environmental resources and individual internal resources to cope with them. External environmental resources include the parenting style of parents and the social support system. There are both risk factors and protection factors in the external environment system. The risk factors include negative parenting style, lack of social support system; And protective factors include positive parenting styles and good social support systems. External environmental resources also affect the formation of individual internal factors. Internal factors include self-esteem, general self-efficacy, personality, and coping styles. An individual's self-esteem and self-efficacy are related to the parenting style of the primary caregiver, such as: Some interviewees suggested that when parents demanded themselves in a strict way and blamed and ignored them when they failed, they would gradually develop a strict ego, and he would also learn to criticize himself harshly, be more discouraged or think that he is not capable enough when difficulties



arise, and be more inclined to inward attribution when failure occurs, and outward attribution for achievements, which lead to the formation of inferiority, withdrawal, hesitation character. Studies have shown that self-esteem can significantly positively predict positive coping styles and negatively predict negative coping styles[18]. This indicates that people with lower self-esteem are more willing to deal with problems by avoiding or compromising them. But at the same time, they are unable to deal with the negative emotions such as anxiety, fear and guilt caused by the difficulty of compromise and solving problems, thus forming a low level of psychological resilience. Therefore, various factors interact with each other and influence each other to form the development and formation of individual psychological resilience.

## 4. Conclusion

It can be found from the study that the factors affecting the psychological resilience of gay men mainly include external environmental resource factors (parenting style, social support) and internal individual factors (self-esteem, self-efficacy, personality, coping style). The above factors play a key role in the improvement of psychological resilience. Therefore, it is of great significance for follow-up studies to explore how to intervene in gay groups with low psychological resilience through psychological counseling techniques, so as to improve their psychological resilience level and mental health.

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