

*A Study of the Process of Resilience in the Face of Economic Crises in the Past:
A Case Study of Micro-Enterprise Entrepreneurs in Bangkok and Vicinity
Who Experiencing Repeated Economic Crises*

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Abstract

A micro-enterprise entrepreneur is particularly vulnerable to developing mental health issues due to the pressures of economic volatility. Although resilience is an important factor in helping a person maintain good mental health when faced with difficult situations, the findings of current research do not cover the knowledge needed to describe the process of resilience. This study aims to find an explanation for the process of resilience and understand the resilience from previous economic crises of micro-enterprise entrepreneurs, leading to enhancing characteristics of resilience in the face of repeated economic crises. The study uses a case study method and in-depth interviews with 8 entrepreneurs in Bangkok and surrounding areas who have experienced repeated economic crises. The results showed that resilience is a process caused by emotional mechanism, cognitive mechanism, and resources from networks mechanism. The study also found that past experiences with economic crises can lead to characteristics includes letting go, becoming indomitable, planning and adaptation which can help entrepreneurs deal with future crises. The findings of the study can be used as a guideline for micro-enterprise entrepreneurs and related agencies to promote resilience and as a basis for further research using other methods.

Keywords: Resilience Process, Micro-Enterprise Entrepreneur, Economic Crises

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Introduction

Economic crises do not only affect economic system but also people's mental health as seen from the increasing number of people with mental health problems, especially anxiety and depression, and successful suicide attempt (National Suicide Prevention Center, 2022; World Health Organization, 2022). Economic crisis is a situation influencing many sectors and entrepreneurs must be affected absolutely, in particular, micro-enterprise entrepreneurs basically have low liquidity and fewer channels of crowdfunding than large enterprises (Thailand Development Research Institute, 2021). According to the report of Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion (OSMEP), the spread of COVID-19 had an impact on sales decrease among micro enterprises. Some micro enterprise needed to close. The situation affected work and financial aspect of micro-enterprise entrepreneurs, contributing to stress since they needed to face various obstacles. Generally, entrepreneurs must confront uncertainty, have high responsibility, time pressure, and long working hours, considered stressors that have effects on mental health. Therefore, micro-enterprise entrepreneurs are classified as a risk group for mental problems (Naseub, 2020; Phantarak, 2019; Stephan et al., 2021). Mental resilience is an important variable that helps people to be able to adapt themselves to various situations and helps people to maintain good health though they have to confront difficulty (Department of Mental Health, 2020). Owing to the spread of COVID-19, Department of Mental Health published manuals as a guideline for promoting mental resilience among people. However, based on searching, a manual for enhancing mental resilience among micro-enterprise entrepreneurs, whose job characteristics are specific, is not available. The review of literature relevant to mental resilience revealed that previous studies were conducted on factors associated with mental resilience (Kooariyakul et al., 2019; Photipim et al., 2021; Toonsiri et al., 2019) but did not cover the knowledge describing the process of mental resilience. Moreover, based on the literature review, it has not been previous studies conducted on a case of persons who experienced repeated economic crises. Therefore, this study aimed to find an explanation for the process of resilience among micro-enterprise entrepreneurs and to understand mental resilience from economic crises in the past of micro-enterprise entrepreneurs, which shall lead to enhancing characteristics of persons with mental resilience when facing repeated economic crises. An in-depth interview was used with micro-enterprise entrepreneurs in Bangkok and vicinity who experienced repeated economic crises. The findings from this study can be a used as a guideline for micro-enterprise entrepreneurs and relevant agencies to enhance mental resilience, including being a guideline for building upon future research using other methods.

Research objectives

1. To describe the process of mental resilience of micro-enterprise entrepreneurs during the spread of COVID-19.
2. To understand mental resilience from economic crises in the past of micro-enterprise entrepreneurs that shall lead to enhancing characteristics of persons with mental resilience when facing repeated economic crises.

Method

This research was conducted on the basis of a case study research design. The study was granted ethical approval for research involving human subjects, number SWUEC-G-425/2565E. An in-depth interview was used for collecting data from key informants who are micro-enterprise entrepreneurs who experienced repeated economic crises, selected by

purposeful sampling method. The inclusion criterion is persons who have been micro-enterprise entrepreneurs at least 10 years and until now in Bangkok and vicinity. They must pass the evaluation of resilience scale introduced by Department of Mental Health, confirming that their resilience scores are higher than normal and experienced at least one time of economic crises in the past before the spread of COVID-19. The study was conducted among 8 micro-enterprise entrepreneurs. Content analysis was used for data analysis in response to the research objectives.

Findings

In response to objective 1 - the explanation for the process of resilience of micro-enterprise entrepreneurs during the situation of Covid-19 spread, key informants explained their feelings when facing problems and methods they used to live their lives to get through difficulties. The process of resilience is caused by 1) emotional mechanism, 2) cognitive mechanism, and 3) resources from network mechanism. All 3 mechanisms are considered major themes while subthemes and quotes can be identified as seen in Table 1.

Themes	Subthemes	Quotes
1) Emotional mechanism	1.1.) Negative feelings	<i>"I'm a bit worried because I have no idea what the future will be, when it will be ended, whether I will have jobs at all times or not or how long I can support the office."</i> (M1).
	1.2) Reducing negative emotions	<i>"When I get stressed, I pray. There are many prayer books in my bedroom. I feel more relieved when praying."</i> (M4).
	1.3) Developing positive emotions.	<i>"I had to stop working. It looks like I take a rest because normally I work every day. During COVID-19, it seemed I took a break."</i> (M2).
2) Cognitive mechanism	2.1) Problem evaluation	<i>"Actually, the big flood is more serious than COVID-19 because I did not have products to deliver. During COVID-19, I could buy things to sell."</i> (M8).
	2.2) Problem Solving	<i>"I need to think what I can adjust. I cannot reduce the costs but need to adjust other parts."</i> (M6).
3) Resources from networks mechanism	3.1) Emotional support	<i>"If I get stressed very much, I will call my sister-in-law or my mom. They said things would last for a short time. They have positive words to cheer me up. I'm encouraged to work further by not being disappointed. They said it is just a beginning."</i> (M5).
	3.2) Instrumental support.	<i>"I have seen a problem about insufficient budget in the company, like payroll for employees, my husband took responsible for me, never complained, never asked what happened."</i> (M3).

Table 1: Themes, Subthemes and Quotes of the process of resilience

Based on the interview, these mechanisms did not occur step by step but partially overlapped as seen in Figure 1. Once entrepreneurs face business problems, they will have negative feelings. (1.1) Though they had negative feelings, all key informants responded to negative feelings by looking at the problems and finding a way to solve the problems. (2.2) While they

solved the problems, in the context of entrepreneurs, they must have operating expenses for business operating expenses which are fixed costs that they cannot postpone. As entrepreneurs have the family to be able to willingly give financial support, they could get through difficulties during the crises. (3.3) Besides, another mechanism occurring while entrepreneurs had negative feelings was problem evaluation. (2.1) Entrepreneurs identified that problem evaluation could help them though that they would get through the economic crisis caused by the spread of COVID-19. Since the spread of COVID-19 was a situation causing an economic impact for such a long time, based on the interview, it was found that entrepreneurs performed some activities to get themselves relaxed (1.2) and created positive emotions (1.3) to ensure they can live their lives under circumstances that they need to fight against business operation problems. In addition to coping with their own negative emotions, key informants said about receiving emotional support from their families and persons around them (3.1).

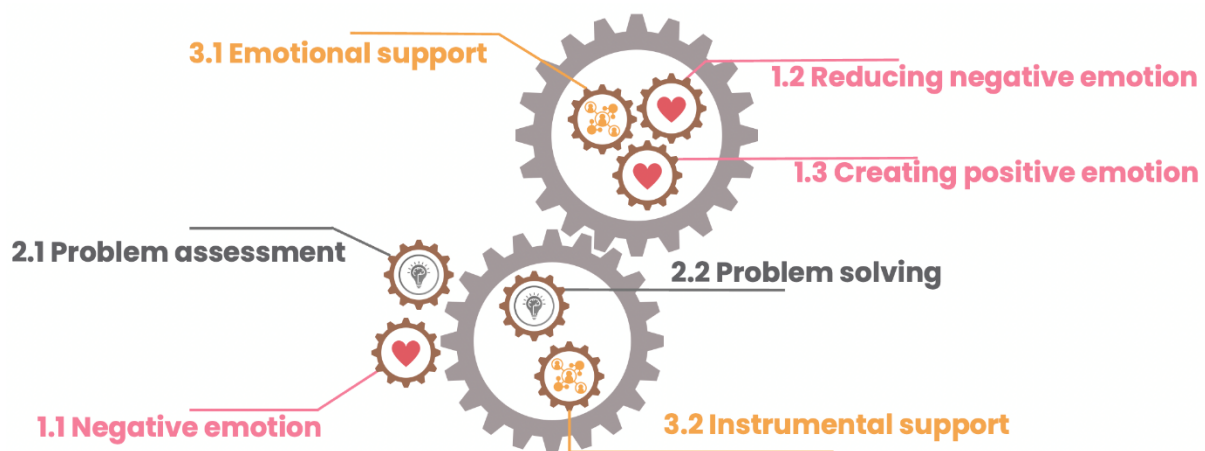


Figure 1: The process of resilience

In response to objective 2 - understanding resilience from economic crises in the past of micro-enterprise entrepreneurs, leading to enhancing characteristics of persons with resilience when facing repeated economic crises, according to the interview, all 8 key informants absorbed the lessons from economic crises in the past and crystallized an idea to become their characteristics to use when facing the economic crisis caused by the spread of COVID-19. Such characteristics can be divided into 2 types as 1) mental characteristics and 2) skills characteristics. The details of subthemes and quotes of each characteristic are shown in Table 2.

Themes	Subthemes	Quotes	
		Past crisis	COVID-19
1) Mental Characteristics	1.1) Letting go	<i>“I don’t think about that too much, I don’t think or do something repeatedly. I focus on my job.” (M2).</i>	<i>“It is a global problem. I just let it go, don’t pay attention to it at all times. I find something else to do so that I will not focus on the same thing.” (M2).</i>
	1.2) Becoming indomitable	<i>“I need to find customers. If I know that this house owner raises a dog, I give him free</i>	<i>“If customers are afraid to go out, I deliver it to them. If I don’t fix a problem, customers will not get in a shop. As I told</i>

Themes	Subthemes	Quotes	
		Past crisis	COVID-19
		<i>samples of dog food. I don't know if he will buy or not but if he buys, he will come to the shop, and I will have a chance to sell something else.” (M3).</i>	<i>you, our location is not good, I need to try harder than others.” (M3).</i>
2) Skills Characteristics	2.1) Planning	<i>“I need to have a plan b since this is not my place, I rent it from someone. Change can occur at any time. I need to have a way to solve a problem.” (M7).</i>	<i>“The ways I think about how to solve the problems are costs must be cheaper. There should be a wider variety of reasonable price products to let new customers get in a shop to compensate income from expensive products. A plan should be made and changed, a plan b is necessary.” (M7).</i>
	2.2) Adaptation	<i>“I must get ready for changing myself. I have changed a lot, I changed from spending money too much as I used to buy unnecessary things. I changed almost 100%.” (M6).</i>	<i>“If I stay at home and feel lonely, I will watch a movie I like, no need to go out to spend a lot of money on gasoline, socializing, etc.” (M6).</i>

Table 2: Themes, Subthemes and Quotes, characteristics of persons with resilience when facing repeated economic crises

Conclusions

The findings about the process of resilience indicated that resilience of micro-enterprise entrepreneurs when facing the economic crisis caused by the spread of COVID-19 was generated from the interaction of emotional mechanism, cognitive mechanism, and resources from network mechanism. All these 3 mechanisms did not occur step by step but each mechanism was driven to have interaction with each other and partially overlapped with each other, consistent with the idea of Garrett & Zettel (2021) identifying that resilience is the process generated from 1) emotional mechanism – persons intentionally create positive emotions when facing adversity, 2) cognitive mechanism – persons interpret that the problem they are facing is a challenge rather than adversity and 3) mechanisms linking social ties – persons are given advice, financial support, and encouragement from their families. Characteristics of key informants during economic crises in the past appeared again when they had to face the economic crisis caused by the spread of COVID-19, consistent with an idea of Zimmerman et al. (2013) who made a comparison of challenge model, a model of the process of resilience, that it is similar to getting vaccinated, namely, persons who could get through difficulties in the past shall be able to overcome problems in the future.

Limitations

This was a small study of 8 participants and the findings are not generalizable; however, they may be applicable to similar cases and raise relevant topics for discussion among other micro-enterprise entrepreneurs. The participants were from Bangkok and vicinity only and thus comparisons could not be made with the culture of other provinces of Thailand.

Further Studies

Firstly, based upon the findings about the process of resilience, an additional study should be conducted on how variables in each mechanism perform their duty as mediator variables and moderator variables to resilience. Secondly, the informant scoping in this research did not cover business cycles, therefore it was recommended to explore processes of resilience in different business cycle contexts.

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