

PATIENCE, ITS ROLE IN OUR LIFE – A DEFINITION

ACADEMIC ARTICLE

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Abstract

This definition academic article focuses on understanding the role that patience plays in the decisions we make in daily life. Through the analysis of secondary data across various decades, the author assesses what patience is and what it is related to, followed by an evaluation and comparison of some of the most influential research studies related to patience, willpower, and self-control. The paper then continues with an examination of the outcomes of developing patience and other related virtues, and the combination of those virtues for career, relationship, and health success, as well as an exploration of techniques for cultivating patience, perseverance, and will-power and becoming better at those skills over time. Other points of view on patience and the concept of impatience are also assessed. After the secondary data have been thoroughly analyzed, the paper concludes with how research on these concepts can be applied to daily life, work environments, and policies that affect the individual and society. Patience, willpower, and self-control are terms that are usually used interchangeably in the literature and have been shown to be positively correlated to outcomes later in life. The challenging question remains: how do we find the balance between being too patient and not patient enough?

Keywords: patience, virtues, well-being, will-power, time

Introduction

“Patience is a vital mortal virtue in relation to our faith, our free agency, our attitude toward life, our humility, and our suffering. Moreover, patience will not be an obsolete attribute in the next world.” (Maxwell, 1979). How do we calm down when a negative outcome might happen? How do we focus on the present when the future seems so uncertain (Warren, 2019)? How do we remain hopeful when there is a possibility of losing someone or losing a fantastic opportunity we have, for so long, wished for? How do we keep going despite the challenges along the way? Why are we more patient with some people than with

others? How are we able to adapt when life does not provide what we think we need within the period we expect? How do we remain happy when our expectations are much higher than the reality we face? Do we look inside ourselves or do we blame others for the bad things that happen in our lives? These, among many others, might be the questions that arise when trying to overcome difficult circumstances in life that make us wonder how we are going to be able to continue trying, to be resilient, to get pass this, or to be able to be happy again. In summary, how do we cultivate our patience to allow us to enjoy every minute of our lives? The distance in time and the level of certainty play a role in decision-making that affects how patient people can be (Chesson & Viscusi, 2003; Ferecatu & Önçüler, 2016).

Patience and hope, patience and resilience, patience and faith, patience and strength, patience and compassion, patience and optimism, patience and generosity: what are the ingredients needed to achieve a balanced life, what allows us to enjoy the present at the same time as making wise decisions that will affect our future? “Very importantly, it is patience, when combined with love, which permits us “in process of time” to detoxify our disappointments” (Maxwell, 1979). Giving up on something or someone in the present, even if we really want it, might be beneficial to what we really aim to achieve in the future. Where is that sweet spot between past, present and future, and how do we find it? This definition academic article explores what patience means and how it might affect daily life from a scientific, philosophical and psychological point of view by describing, assessing and connecting ideas discussed by various authors over the decades. This paper is divided into different sections, starting with what patience is, followed by what it relates to, then some relevant studies to understand patience, the outcomes, consequences and benefits of cultivating patience and different perspectives for acting patiently and the importance of patience in daily life. Recommendations for further research are then given to continue exploring the virtue of patience through the collection of primary data to investigate the factors – internal and external – that might affect levels of patience.

What is patience and what is it related to?

There is no unique definition of what patience means. If each of us stops and thinks about the concept of patience, we will produce distinct explanations for it. Are we looking at patience from a psychological, behavioural, philosophical or scientific point of view? What do they all have in common, and how do they all differ? To define a concept, it is important to look at it from diverse perspectives aiming at a deeper comprehension of what this word – patience – entails.

Definitions of patience

Some describe ‘patience’ as a character trait, an attitude, a belief or a value (Li & Lin, 2014). Others define patience as a form of ‘capital,’ seeing it as an investment in our present and our future. As Hayashi (2020) has explained, one example of how patience can be understood as capital is through education. When investing in education, it takes time to see the returns on that investment – sometimes months, sometimes years or decades – and at other times, the return that we expect does not actually flourish the way we wanted. According to studies by Bourdieu (1973) and DiMaggio (1982), how much to invest in this form capital can be passed from one generation to another because it is based on family members and cultural expectations. This view on investment in patience can be similar to the investment in things that may take time to acquire, even if the outcome is not assured. Some have also argued that investing in actions that require time and patience involves a certain cost and degree of wealth, which is why it is considered an investment (Hayashi, 2020).

Following the previous example of patience capital and education, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant once argued that the key ingredient of self-development is education. Education is believed to be at the centre of the human ability to improve, to become a better version of ourselves and to develop our moral compass. This is not a process which happens immediately and over a short period; instead, it progresses slowly and requires various insights. These insights are passed along generations, which, at the same time, are influenced by the insights they have also received; that is what makes the process complicated and time-consuming, where patience is essential (Wivestad, 2013). To better understand the concepts of patience capital and education, it is important to look at what ‘education’ in itself means in terms of philosophy and morality. Instead of thinking of education as a pure resource needed to achieve a successful future, it instead points towards the concept of ‘upbringing’ – that is, how to develop as a human being. This, as Kant argued, is “the greatest and most difficult problem that can be given to the human being” (Kant, 2007, p. 441; Wivestad, 2013, p. 56). Upbringing not only requires time but also dedication and persistence, elements which, without patience, would not be fruitful. The use of reason is also necessary for this form of self-development; rationality and individual freedom, through education, are necessary to develop a moral compass (Wivestad, 2013).

Some also argue that patience might be a form of will-power. Philosophers have defined will-power as a combination of virtues, including the ability to act using our reason instead of just succumbing to desires and impulses (Broadie, 1991; Szutta, 2020). Patience, self-control, persistence, moderation and being diligent, among others, are virtues necessary to exert will-power and

help individuals overcome psychological or situational limitations that might prevent them from achieving the goals they set (Steutel, 1999; Szutta, 2020). According to Aristotelian ethics, the development of these virtues should be codependent on each other. When trying to make the best decisions, the role of previous experiences and the learning progress throughout life play a major role, which is known as practical wisdom. For instance, when dealing with desires and emotions, a virtuous person will not ignore them, but will accept them and take them into consideration, in the right balance, so as not to be completely blinded by or oblivious to them, but as a tool in the rational decision-making process. When excelling at these virtues, the person's moral character is built in a progressive way by making decisions that are in accordance with their moral compass, values and commitments (Adams, 2006; Szutta, 2020). When it comes to the virtue of patience, in the case of will-power, a patient person is not the one who will wait forever and allow others to take advantage, but instead, a person who knows the right moment and the balance between rushing into a decision and waiting too long. Some authors argue virtues like patience and self-control are similar to skills. Practice is needed to excel at them, and there are techniques which contribute to becoming better at them (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011; Pinker, 2011; Szutta, 2020). Self-control, patience, perseverance and moderation, as the virtues that form will-power, are necessary to lead a balanced life (Szutta, 2020), and how to cultivate them will be discussed in the next sections.

What is patience related to?

From a philosophical point of view, patience is believed to be necessary, according to Buddhism, when practising mindfulness, as the act involves staying present and accepting what is taking place – such as emotions, feelings and thoughts – in the present moment. To be able to reach this state, patience must be exercised along with kindness, acceptance and tolerance (Grossman, 2015). According to Kabat-Zinn (2013), cultivating patience is one of the six required qualities of mindfulness to achieve the state of fully embracing the present moment in a non-judgemental manner. Compassion and courage can emerge even in difficult moments thanks to this quality, when letting go of analysis and judgements and just accepting things for the way they are (Grossman, 2015).

From a psychological and behavioural perspective, in situations where there is a clash, disagreement or potential conflict that requires the parties involved to listen to each other, develop empathy and negotiate, patience along with perseverance are two much needed skills (Perez Salgado et al., 2018). One of the reasons why misunderstandings and disagreements might arise is due to cultural differences. When trying to reach a common ground and compromise between people from diverse cultural backgrounds, the values of empathy and

patience are of significant importance (Heponiemi et al., 2018). Continuing from this perspective, patience is also involved when waiting for rewards or for a positive outcome that might be delayed or that might take longer than expected. This process of waiting varies from person to person (Angerer et al., 2015). According to studies done by Anderhub et al. (2001) and Bettinger and Slonim (2007), whether a person is a risk-taker or risk-averse, how old he/she is and their IQ results all have an effect on their level of patience (Angerer et al., 2015). According to Saxena and Andrews (2006), people seem to be in a constant hurry to try to stay up to date and to keep up with the latest trends; this kind of rushed behaviour usually hinders the development of patience. It seems like people fear missing out on things and this prevents them from practising the ability to wait, be patient and stay present.

Trying to understand what happens in our bodies and nervous systems when it comes to patience from a scientific and biological view, studies done with rats by Miyazaki et al. (2012) suggested that an increase in serotonergic neurons contributes to the development of patience and thus the ability to wait for rewards. Being able to wait for things relates to the concept of impulsivity: impulsive choices refer to the ones made between rewards that are given right away versus others that might take a bit longer. Impulsive actions usually prevent us from behaving in a desirable way, and this usually happens because of the lack of 'action inhibition'. It is believed that 5-HT neurons are involved in the inhibition regulating process and in impulsive tendencies, choices and actions related to predicting punishment or negative rewards (Miyazaki et al., 2012). Other authors connect patience and heroism and the ability to tolerate pain. According to studies done in the 19th century and at the beginning and end of the 20th century, women may be able to better withstand pain than men (Bourke, 2014).

Relevant research on patience and related topics

In the previous section, patience has been defined and analysed from the points of view of philosophy, psychology and science/biology. In this section, relevant studies are discussed to better understand the factors that affect patience. How does our level of patience affect our individual decisions? How do our personal decisions affect a larger group and potentially the world? How does patience affect global warming, public policy and other global concerns?

We start by discussing results showing the role of patience in individual decisions. Studies on self-control started to gain research attention after the well-known Marshmallow Experiment by Walter Mischel (Mischel, 1974; Mischel et al., 1988) that related self-control with the ability to wait for rewards, to delay a positive outcome with the possibility of receiving a better one by waiting a bit

longer. The results from this study done with children showed that those who were able to be patient and wait for later rewards instead of choosing the immediate rewards did better later in life in terms of school grades, career choices and salaries, among other measures (Szutta, 2020). These results were consistent with other studies done by Baumeister and Tierney (2011) and Mischel (2014) assessing the positive correlation between self-control and success in life (Pinker, 2011). Self-control could be argued to be the opposite of impulsivity. This is in line with the findings of Miyazaki et al. (2012) discussed above. Other studies related to delayed rewards were interested in the subjective value that people associate with the reward itself. For instance, in the daily consumption of goods such as drinks, a study done by Estle et al. (2007) found that when these goods are delayed up to six months, the subjective value associated with soda drinks decreased by half, but this varied when the reward was monetary. In the case of money, it took three times longer for the subjective value to decrease to the same levels. The kind of reward makes a significant difference for people; however, the difference in certainty – whether the reward is a possibility or not – does not make that much of a difference in the decision-making process (Jimura et al., 2009; Lagorio & Madden, 2005; Odum & Rainaud, 2003).

A study by Ferecatu and Öngüler (2016) found that there is a positive correlation between being a risk-taker and having lower levels of patience, while those who are more risk-averse tend to be more patient. In another study published by Adan et al. (2018), the severity and the complexity of the action itself might influence the level of patience. For instance, people were willing to wait a bit longer when calling a bank call center to find out about a fraud versus checking their account balance. Such information helps to determine how call centers prioritize and answer calls, although this point might be argued from the point of view of fairness and whether a first-come, first-served basis is used.

Other studies have shown an effect on the role of patience in how individual decisions affect others around us. Barron et al. (2014) suggested that when collecting data from patients regarding the kind of care they had received, patience and persistence were necessary for accuracy and the number of responses, giving the respondents time to think (patience) and also reminding them of the survey (persistence), with a combination of these two being successful for the purpose of the research study. Patience and persistence are also needed when working in teams. In a study about team work in the health-care industry by Heponiemi et al. (2018), patience and cross-cultural empathy and language skills, among others, were shown to be very important to achieve an atmosphere of good team-work in which health-care employees who were born abroad felt more integrated and part of the team completing their abilities with others.

Regarding the sense of urgency and immediacy that characterize some of the younger generations, a study by Krishnan and Sitaraman (2012) showed that variance in the level of patience for watching videos or loading webpages on the internet. Two seconds was the threshold that viewers gave the page/video to load. After that, each additional second translated to over 5% abandonment. The results of this study also found that viewers seemed to be more patient when loading longer videos such as films, than for shorter videos. Similar studies regarding the type of content and the ability to wait were calculated by Amazon and Google. In the case of Amazon, they found that if their webpages took longer than one second to load, this would mean a potential loss of over US\$1.5 billion per year in sales. In the case of Google, if the search results took four tenths of a second longer to appear, this could translate to around eight million lost searches per day, which would cascade in the revenue from the respective advertisements (Eaton, 2012).

Outcomes of developing patience and related virtues

In the previous section, data from research studies over the last decades were discussed showing factors that influence levels of patience in people and that play a role in individual decisions which may have an effect on the future and other people's lives. The following section focuses on the potential outcomes of adopting a patient attitude at a personal and societal level. Something important to point out about the virtues of will-power, perseverance and patience is that they cannot be considered ethical or morally right on their own, but rather as morally neutral. Moral and immoral behaviours can be performed by people with high levels of will-power and patience because, for instance, just like great and successful strategies take time to shape, so too do evil master plans. Only when these virtues are combined with 'substantial virtues', those which are good in themselves, such as honesty, benevolence and justice, can patience, will-power and perseverance have positive outcomes (Szutta, 2020). When these two kinds of virtues are combined, studies have shown better results for financial decisions, overcoming addictions and staying motivated even when difficult times arise (Baumeister & Tierney 2011; Pinker, 2011; Szutta, 2020). Studies on self-control have shown that training this virtue/skill has positive effects on other aspects of life, such as when controlling/moderating or giving up smoking or drinking habits, reducing violent behaviour, controlling expenditure and perseverance in sports (Cranwell et al., 2014; Muraven, 2010; Szutta, 2020). However, one aspect to consider of related findings showed that some people exhibit elevated levels of will-power in some areas of their lives while succumbing to emotions and desires in others. For example, some famous successful individuals have engaged in cases of unfaithfulness or addiction (Szutta, 2020).

The positive outcomes of patience have been reported in both adults and children. According to Meier and Sprenger (2010), adults who are patient have lower credit card debt; as Burks et al. (2009) reported, they tend to achieve better job performance; as Dohmen et al. (2007) documented, they seem to have higher cognitive skills; and as shown in other several studies, patient people tend to prefer to live healthier lives (Angerer et al., 2015; Bickel et al., 1999; Chabris et al., 2008; Kirby & Petry, 2004). In the case of children and adolescents, studies by Golsteyn et al. (2014) and Sutter et al. (2013) found that developing patience at an early stage in life has a positive impact on school performance, prosocial behaviour, health and future career (Angerer et al., 2015; Zimbardo, 2009).

Mastering self-control is believed to bring many positive outcomes and also may allow us to experience things we might think of as impossible. Studies by Baumeister and Tierney (2011) and Mischel (2014) showed the beneficial impact self-control has on life success related to grades and wages (Pinker, 2011). Patience has also been positively correlated to achieving long-term goals and wealth. One of the reasons for this is the sense of reciprocity in the long-run, developing strategies that highlight and focus on the benefit of all parties involved. Rational human beings who have this sense of pro-social behaviour become very trustworthy, and one of the ingredients to develop this attitude is patience (Anomaly, 2017; Anomaly & Jones, 2020; Bowles & Gintis, 2011). Patience and consciousness are very important qualities in developing healthy and successful human interactions, while also having a positive impact as independent factors in the economic outcomes of societies (Anomaly & Jones, 2020; Dohmen et al., 2007). Related to career development and socio-economic status, Hayashi (2020) showed that investment in patience capital has a positive outcome in the economic future because people tend to save more, so consumption levels increase in the long-term. Investing in education, time-preference and the development of patience has also been documented in studies done by Alan and Ertac (2018) and Perez-Arce (2017) (Hayashi, 2020).

Lieberman et al. (2007) suggested that when people have enough time to make decisions and thus exercise patience, they tend to adhere more to moral standards than if a decision is made very abruptly following only action-reaction and emotions in the moment. By allowing ourselves the necessary time to calm down, to sleep on it, to look at things from a different perspective, to be patient and to take time to decide, our moral character is shaped little by little (Cermer & Vandekerckhove, 2017). This same concept was discussed by Higgin (2018) in her TED Talk when she said, “Before making a big decision, have faith, be self-aware, practise patience and breathe” (minute 08:36–08:46), and by Matsusaka (2015) in her TED Talk when she discussed her experience and opinion on the importance of patience in decision-making and how being

impatient may lead to anxiety, depression and obesity. This is in line with the study previously mentioned on serotonergic neurons, and further studies on the 5-HT neurons in the dorsal raphe nucleus (DRN) to regulate patience in individuals, showed possible positive outcomes with people who, for instance, have hyperactivity disorders, attention deficit disorders or addictions (Miyazaki et al., 2012).

The development of training in patience and cross-cultural understanding might lead to more positive and cohesive teamwork with less discrimination and clashes between employees (Heponiemi et al., 2018). Adan et al. (2018) investigated callers and the correlation between service times and patience times along with how they might affect performance indicators and evaluation and revenue management. They found “that in a system where customers’ service times and patience times are positively correlated, increasing traffic can actually decrease throughput” (p. 136).

Although the previous paragraphs have shown the beneficial effects of cultivating patience, it is important to note that it might not be infinite in the process of exercising it or developing it. Baumeister et al. (1998) showed that will is not infinite and it gets ‘tired’ just as muscles do when exercising. The will has to be trained and ‘fed’ properly, otherwise, it might be at risk of being exhausted – a phenomenon known as ‘will depletion’ (Baumeister et al., 1998; Pinker, 2011; Szutta, 2020). When our will level is low, external and emotional factors seem to have a much stronger influence on the decisions we make, and virtues such as perseverance, patience and will-power may be negatively affected. When this happens, one decision after another, if will-power is constantly assessed, negative long-term effects might appear in terms of health choices, social activity, careers and law-abidingness (Mischel, 1974; Mischel et al., 1988). The role of self-control in numerous aspects of our lives has been shown to be primordial among psychologists and philosophers’ research (Szutta, 2020).

How to cultivate patience, self-control and will-power

In the section above, the outcomes of developing patience, will-power and self-control have been shown through numerous studies. When patience is combined with other virtues such as generosity, kindness and compassion, the positive effects are clear; however, for us to find a balance and maintain healthy levels of inner strength, it is important to train these virtues constantly and properly. The next paragraphs discuss how to cultivate patience, self-control and will-power while knowing their positive side effects. In combination with morally and intrinsically good virtues, how do we cultivate patience to avoid will depletion?

Muraven et al. (2007) and Schmeichel and Vohs (2009) have shown that there is a strong correlation between will-power and intrinsic motivation. People who are true to themselves, who have clearly defined goals and who stand by their values experience less loss of ego/will depletion because they are much less influenced by external factors (Szutta, 2020). In a related study, Baumeister et al. (1994) suggested that establishing habits increases will-power, so among students and workers habits translate into greater successes because it becomes easier to develop the inner motivation that contributes to achieving goals and establishing standards. In Kantian philosophy, cultivating beliefs and habits takes time: it is a process passed from generation to generation. Adults should thus act in a way that contributes positively to the community while remembering the obligations they have towards others. These behaviours are observed and passed on from adults to children. Adults who are responsible for others (i.e. children) should continue learning about morality and virtues to be able to pass the knowledge on to the next cohort (Wivestad, 2013).

In Buddhism, there are certain practices which are believed to enhance the qualities of patience, compassion, generosity and acceptance, among others. Meditation and mindfulness practices not only cultivate such virtues but also entertain them (Hofmann et al., 2011; Salzberg, 2011). There is a special focus on just trying such practices without any pressure, on taking a chance to be in the moment, not trying to analyse things, thoughts and emotions or applying adjectives to the experience, but just remaining neutral to the present moment by applying popular sentences such as ‘let go’ and ‘return your focus to your breathing’ (Grossman, 2015). On a related note, Warren (2019) has suggested that experiencing feelings of awe helps cultivate patience and feeling at ease when challenging times arise. Awe enhances positive emotions, which are believed to reduce stress, a factor that has a profound influence when waiting for something to happen or when living in uncertainty. Finding activities and experiences that open up this feeling of awe helps develop intrinsic motivation and will-power, thus reducing the possibility of succumbing to temptation.

How can one choose between the easier way following a temptation if this does not match what is considered the right course of action? Baumeister et al. (1994) and Baumeister and Tierney (2011) have suggested several steps believed to help in developing self-control and will-power. This process starts with defining objectives in life. These objectives need to be at a moderate level between being challenging enough and being realistic, because achieving milestones affects intrinsic motivation, which makes it possible to continue (Pinker, 2011). This, along with another technique known as ‘self-reinforcement’, will maintain the level of motivation needed not to give up. Methods of motivation vary from one person to another, such as in terms of the types of rewards one for sustaining inner motivation (Szutta, 2020). This is

followed by analysing our reactions, being true to ourselves and reflecting on experiences and decisions that may be more tempting to our desires or that will affect us emotionally more than others. This step requires a lot of self-honesty. The next step would be to identify which reactions are strong and work on them little by little to accomplish the defined objectives. When identifying reactions that need to be changed, setting boundaries and clear lines not to cross can help create that change (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2011). These techniques are used to work on our moral character and have a positive influence on other skills necessary to succeed in our health habits, career and social relationships (Szutta, 2020).

Shoukat (2016), in his TED Talk, mentioned “The more we are forced to wait, the better we will be at it” (minute 11:35–11:37); he explained the different practices across generations such as writing letters to communicate versus instant messages. He noted, “my generation especially, the society as a whole as well, has lost the patience we once regarded as an indispensable virtue” (minute 02:26–02:35). The urgency and immediacy that characterize some current and modern societies have a significant impact on our ability to wait. He then discussed how differences in cultures, in this case differences between Pakistan and the United States, and cultural traditions, also influence our capabilities to cultivate patience and the relation between impatience and anger. When we have more situations in our daily lives that somehow ‘force us’ to wait, the more we become accustomed to it. This relates to the concepts previously explained of will depletion and how to train it. By exposing ourselves to experiences that make us practise patience, practising patience will progressively become something we are used to, and we will become better at it. Establishing habits in our life, setting objectives, being true to ourselves, staying present and cultivating intrinsic motivation are just some of the practices believed to be helpful for developing inner strength, patience and self-control. The more we get accustomed to enhancing these qualities, the better we will become at them.

Different points of view on patience

Touching upon the previous idea where patience and perseverance need to be aligned with other good virtues to achieve positive effects, it is important to also understand other points of view. Is patience generally associated with positive traits? How can impatience be good in our lives? This section considers other authors’ perspectives on patience and impatience.

Is patience alone enough to achieve the good things in life? Is it guaranteed that we can accomplish everything we want in life by exercising will-power, patience and self-control? To better understand these virtues, character traits or skills, it is important to look at both sides of the coin. In the

previous sections, we have analysed the literature on the positive aspects of developing these skills; however, as was briefly mentioned in the fourth section of this paper, these skills alone are not enough if we want to accomplish what we consider morally right decisions for the individual and for the people around us. When thinking of the positive outcomes of our behaviours, we need to think about how those behaviours affect others positively, instead of only thinking about getting what we want. For example, sometimes by succumbing to our desires, we can get what we want in the moment, but by doing so, we might be hurting someone else. As Szutta (2020) stated, the virtues of will-power, self-control, perseverance and patience – when combined with the virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, generosity, honesty and justice – contribute to doing good in the world. If combined with jealousy, extreme competition, greed, vanity and selfishness, they can achieve evil things for the community.

In a TED Talk, Coine (2015) explained how impatience is what we need in life to accomplish our goals: “Impatience is a wonderful, wonderful force for good in the world” (minute 01:31–01:35), and “Nothing in this world has ever been accomplished by those who wait; people who wait don’t start a business, don’t get fed up and they don’t start social movements, people who wait don’t bother to run for public office” (minute 07:47–08:02). He discussed how, as has been argued for patience, impatience cannot work alone. If impatience is combined with relentlessness and a noble cause it can be a formula for achieving positive change and impact at the individual and societal level.

In a different TED Talk, Zimbardo (2009) stated, “Life is temptation, it’s all about yielding, resisting, yes, no, now, later, impulsive, reflective, present focus and future focus” (Minute 01:04–01:11). He explained the concept of how our own time perspective influences the decisions we make without even being aware of it. There are people who are more focused on past experiences and this determines the decisions they make in the present. There are others who are more focused on the present moment without thinking so much of the past and the future; and there are still others who instead of focusing on what they can get today, anticipate potential consequences and are thus more future-focused. How does this relate to patience? How long should we wait for things to happen? Should we give up what we can get, certainly, in the present moment, for a hypothetical reward in the future? According to Zimbardo (2009), it is important to find a balance between the three time profiles: past, present and future. The optimal balance would combine, moderately, the positive sides of the three profiles, if going to the extremes of one or the other would have negative effects. Finding the balance between being able to learn from the past, living in the present and considering the future when making decisions has been shown to have positive effects on education, career and health (Zimbardo, 2009). How can one find that middle ground when exercising patience, self-control and

willpower? What is enough, too little or too much? These questions remain unanswered because their answers are believed to depend on the individual and the circumstances of each situation.

Conclusion

Sometimes, if we do not wait long enough, we miss the chance to gain something extraordinary. At other times, if we wait too long, we miss the boat. How do we find the most accurate measure between these two possibilities? As this definition academic article has shown, patience, willpower, and self-control – when combined with substantial virtues such as compassion, generosity, honesty, and fairness – have been proven to be positively associated with successful life outcomes for careers, relationships, and health. Exercising patience and understanding that good things in life take time and require investment and practice form a challenging but worthwhile process passed from one generation to another, which varies greatly by generation and from culture to culture.

“Patience is personal. Patience is a great teacher. Patience is a great achievement. Patience is great power (Ashton, 1973). Time is one of the most, if not the most, valuable limited resources we have, and determining how to invest our time wisely is a topic of arduous study. Are we willing to give up the certainty of the present for a hopeful but uncertain future? As has been shown, patience and perseverance are two of the most important ingredients for a successful future in various aspects of life, and these qualities, like time, are not unlimited, but require constant support and training. It is through such training, through mindfulness practices, intrinsic motivation, developing habits, or via setting goals and achieving milestones that one can find the balance between learning from the past, not missing out on the present, and being able to ‘forecast’ the future. Patience is, most certainly, very present in the formula for achieving that balance, by paying attention to those details that happened, what is happening and what will happen.

Suggestions: Applications, recommendations, and limitations of research on patience

By understanding patience, a tiny piece of the big puzzle of human behaviour, it is possible to dig deeper into the consequences that our actions have on others. What patience is, what might help develop it, and the consequences of adopting a patient attitude can have an effect beyond the personal and affect society and humanity as a whole. Ferecatu and Öncüler (2016) have emphasized the importance of understanding time preferences and risk aversion attitudes in people when making decisions while developing public

and environmental policies to create an environment that enhances patience, self-control and will-power, which will then help individuals make better health and career choices. Heponiemi et al. (2018) have also suggested that trainings on patience, cross-cultural understanding and language skills can be beneficial for teamwork and team productivity, especially when the team members come from diverse backgrounds and are accustomed to different societal and work expectations.

One of the keys of the application of research on patience is determining how to find the balance between patience and the other substantial virtues mentioned above, as well as how to cultivate and develop those skills to achieve what we want in life. How can understanding patience and putting it to beneficial use achieve positive social impacts? How can patience help us become better people and contribute positively to our physical and mental health? These are some of the questions that could be explored in future research studies. The author of the present paper has started to design other research studies as a continuation of this one focused on the collection of primary data to find more roots and effects of willpower, self-control, and patience. This study is a definition academic article focused on secondary data and analyzing and comparing studies either focused on or related to the concept of patience over the past few decades. One of the limitations of this study is the access to more research papers and more literature; based on time constraints, language barriers, and publication requirements, the length of the paper does not allow for more detail here, but further details will be investigated in subsequent studies by the author.

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