

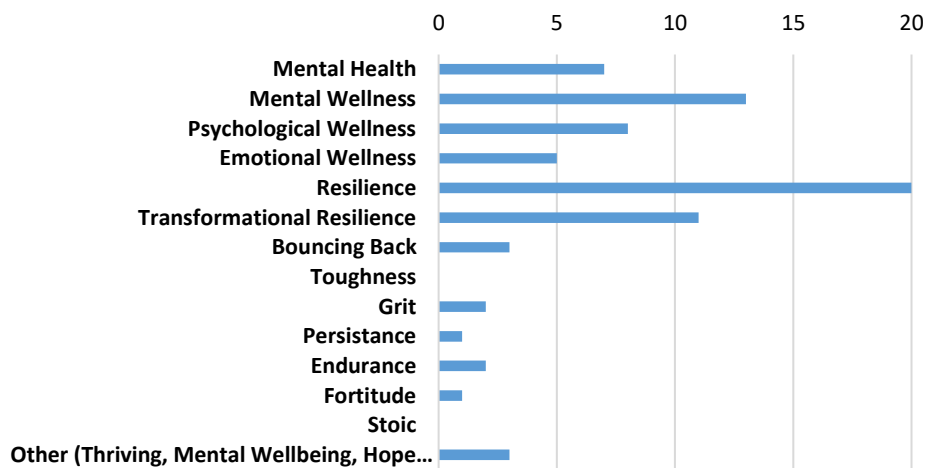
# Words Matter Survey Report

## Preliminary Findings of Terms Best Describing the ITRC’s Mission of Building Community-led Mental Wellness and Resilience for the Climate Crisis

The International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC) and Trauma Informed Oregon (TIO) conducted an online survey to better understand what phrases people feel most comfortable using when discussing community-based mental wellness and resilience activities. We received 27 responses from the survey. Most respondents were likely individuals already aware of ITRC’s mission including members of the steering committee or individuals involved in similar work. **The conclusions from this survey may not reflect the perspectives of individuals unaware of the ITRC’s work on mental wellness and resilience for the climate crisis or not reflect diverse cultural background.**

Because of these limitations, ITRC and TIO are continuing to gather feedback on what words best resonate with them when discussing community-based mental wellness and resilience. *If you would like to give feedback, you can fill out the survey [here](#). If you would like to send this survey to others, please contact Christy da Rosa at TIO ([cdarosa@pdx.edu](mailto:cdarosa@pdx.edu)) for a copy of the survey flier.*

### What words BEST relate to ITRC's goal?



*Resilience* received 20 votes for being best related to ITRC’s goal to help communities strengthen the capacity of their residents to respond to serious stresses, emergencies, and disasters without harming their mental health and instead use these adversities as catalysts to improve wellbeing. *Mental Wellness* (n=13) and *Transformational Resilience* (n=8) were the next top words that best related to ITRC’s goal. Other words and phrases respondents suggested included thriving, mental wellbeing, hope in action, community building, and long-term changes.

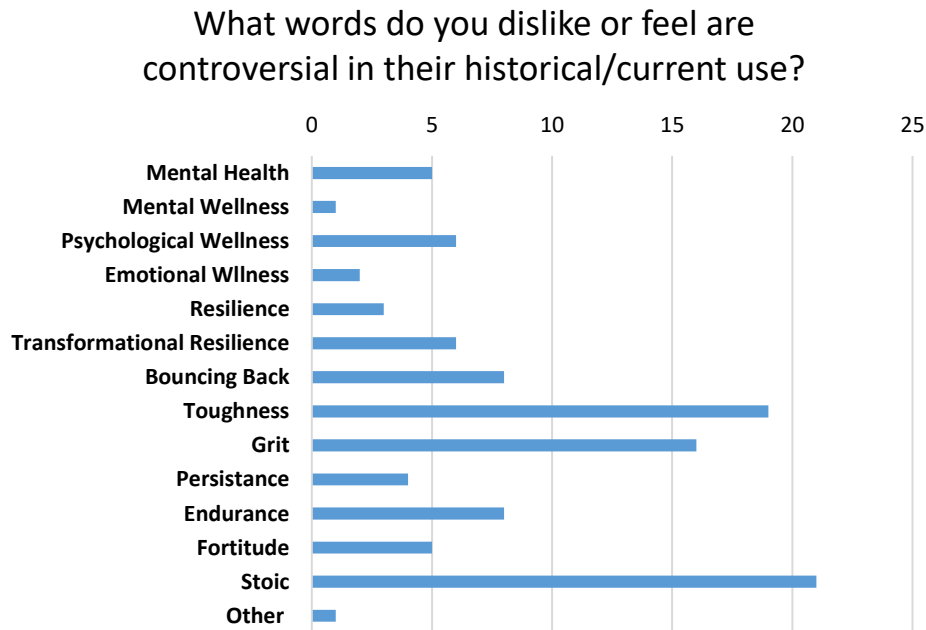
Respondents had multiple reasons why they selected the words they did. Some selected words that they felt everyone would recognize, were descriptive, and less likely to carry mental health stigma. Some encouraged the use of these words because they relate to being positively oriented, indicate collective action, and imply a holistic way to encompass how communities heal after trauma. Some respondents

recommended avoiding words that had negative implications or assumptions and recommended clear explanations for how the recommended words are used and to be mindful of how they might be translated in another language:

*I personally would steer away from words like "stoic" "grit" "toughness" when seeking to build community wide resilience and wellbeing. This is due to how the idea of resilience has often been weaponized against [BIPOC] and marginalized communities (E.g. LGBTQ2IA+) to "keep striving" or be "stoic" in the face of systemic violence via systems of capitalism, neoliberalism, ongoing colonial violence etc. Using words and language that uplift deeper systemic understanding is needed over more individualized terms.*

*I am familiar with Bob Doppelt's work and feel very comfortable with the way these terms are used in his explanations of mental health, resilience and transformational resilience. I have had some say, though, that being resilient has helped others take advantage of their ability to deal with lots of stress, even going to the point of expecting some to deal with far more than they should have to. I believe that all these suggested terms could be used depending on the audience to whom they are delivered. An audience's culture and educational level is important to assess when choosing language to address them.*

*I believe the three words above best capture what you want to work on. Resilience in Spanish isn't a widely used term. In fact, as a native Spanish speaker myself, I'd say many would not readily understand the concept.*



*Stoic* received 21 votes for being the most controversial or disliked word in their current or historical use in relation to mental health. *Toughness* (n=19) and *grit* (n=16) were the next top controversial or disliked words in relation to mental health use. Another respondent also added *trauma* under "Other" as a word that has been used negatively in their community.

Preliminary Findings for Words Matter. January 2024.

Respondents expressed concern that the words selected don't describe healing or growth from adversity, imply weakness/negativity toward mental health, risked pathologizing community responses, deviated from social justice, and reinforce stigma. Some respondents also expressed there are cultural implications to some of the words and can reinforce systematic oppression. Some respondents noted that the words selected emphasize individuals over community. One respondent expressed hesitancy around transformational resilience as it was unclear what it meant and felt there was "nothing wrong" with resilience on its own.

*I don't love the implications of words like "toughness" or "grit" because it implies that if you don't heal well or quickly from trauma you're weak. It also contributes to this image/idea of marginalized people being able to tolerate more than privileged groups, almost as if hardship doesn't affect them as deeply. "Stoic" to me also has cultural implications - for example, notions of emotional intelligence or calmness that are rooted in white supremacy.*

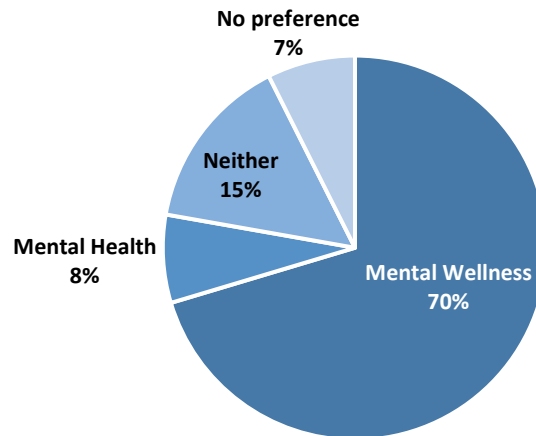
*I mainly dislike the term trauma when talking about a communit[y's] resilience because in my geographical areas this term is linked to very negative events and is associated with tragedy and hurt which is not always the best starting place for discussions around future development in communities.*

*Bouncing back centers on an event from which one returns... and implies that you return to where you were (which isn't possible - only transformation is possible). Toughness, grit, endurance, and stoic all play to a cultural narrative where you knuckle through tough things while perhaps not feeling them or allowing them to touch you deeply - when that is actually the fuel for the transformation that has to occur.*

*The register for Transformational resilience is too high. Toughness and grit are best left to describe a Western film! Stoicism equals martyrdom...no, thanks.*

*These words are making assumptions that individuals are responsible or have the capacity when in reality that may not be true and many issues are system issues that diminish the ability to do these descriptives.*

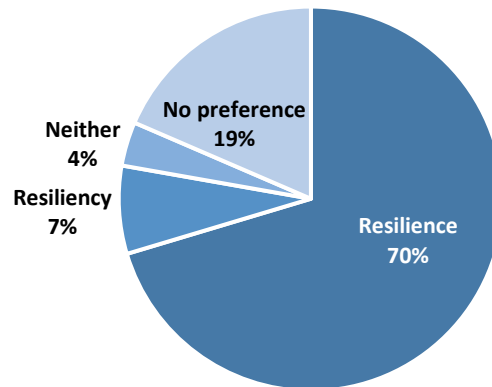
## Mental Health or Mental Wellbeing



The majority of respondents preferred “Mental Wellness” (n=19) over “Mental Health” (n=2). Some respondents noted that mental wellness is proactive, preventative, and “conjures the concept of being well.” Another respondent felt that wellness can be limited and that mental health may be less stigmatized. A few preferred *wellbeing* over *wellness*. For alternative phrases, respondents suggested:

- Whole Wellbeing: *“The idea of whole wellbeing also connects to many Indigenous understanding of wellbeing as deeply interconnected and multifaceted. Working to uplift these critical Indigenous Knowledges, wisdoms and teachings is an important part of decolonizing climate work.” “Overall wellbeing, taking care of yourself, holistic care, person-centered care.”*
- Health and wellness: *“We need to drop physical, mental, etc and start talking about ourselves as the whole beings we are. If one is sick, the rest is too.”*
- Psychological and emotional well-being: *“No negative connotation, no baggage, just clear phrasing.”*
- Emotional health/Emotional wellness
- Human Flourishing
- Adaptability
- Social intelligence

## Resilience or Resiliency



The majority of respondents preferred “Resilience” (n=19) over “Resiliency” (n=2). One respondent noted that it was less about the word and more about the definition stating, *“I don't mind the word resilience but I do think we need to emphasize a better definition that includes the crucial importance of relationships/communities and the responsibility of larger systems - can't just be put on the person alone. I also think that when we focus just on the resilience pieces, we tend to leave out the understanding of the science of stress and trauma and the impacts on us overall. I think we can do harm if we leave out the normalization of understanding how these things impact us and focus only on resilience.”* Other alternative words respondents suggested included:

- Thriving
- Whole-beingness,
- Transformative energy
- Regenerative ability
- Strength of being
- Tenacity or tenacious x2
- Healing x2
- Catalyze
- Regaining strength
- Recovering from adversities
- Fortitude or Mental Fortitude
- Adaptive fitness
- Ability to bounce back
- Emotional toughness
- Thrive
- Flourish
- Prosper
- Develop
- Progress

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- Gedeihen (German)
- Grounding
- Inner Preparedness
- Creating Internal Security
- Strengthening Internal Systems
- Robustness

For additional considerations around the terms discussed in the survey, respondents suggested considering the word's ease of translation, being specific about the word's meaning, leaning into process or systems-oriented language, and understanding toxic stress.

*I think toxic stress is key - helping people to understand their own brain, nervous system, body etc and normalizing these things to reduce shame and this can help individuals have a greater understanding of the potential to heal these wounds and move into greater resilience. I also think we need to focus on words that support better systemic responsibility. Not sure what that looks like though.*