



# Stressors and Coping Mechanism Strategies of Islamic Boarding School Students

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## Abstract

The study aimed to explore how students at an Islamic boarding school in Tangerang, Indonesia perceived various pressures and the strategies they employed to deal with them. It included the sample of 150 students from the first, second, and third grades enrolled in the school. The data were analyzed using Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory to identify recurring themes related to students' stress-coping strategies. The findings indicated that the majority of stressors stemmed from non-academic sources, encompassing issues such as interpersonal relationships, environmental factors, and health-related concerns. Interestingly, despite a substantial female representation in the sample, exceeding 60% of the total participants, a significant proportion of students employed problem-based coping strategies to address these stressors. The study suggests further exploration of coping strategies within the framework of human development theories and their potential contributions to future educational interventions, policies, and practices.

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## Introduction

In the human life span, adolescence serves as a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood. This period involves a range of biological, cognitive, and socioemotional changes. Dealing with biological change, puberty becomes the main difference among other periods which is characterized by a growth surge, hormonal changes, and sexual development. Meanwhile, there is an increase in abstract, idealistic, and logical thinking which are among the cognitive alterations. Then, the socioemotional changes that adolescents experience which include a search for independence, disagreement with parents, and a desire to spend more time with peers. (Santrock, 2016, p. 418).

Alongside the changes mentioned above, adolescence is also the transition from primary school to secondary school. Whyte et al., (2008) claimed that this transition is the most challenging period for students, especially for those who leave home to enter boarding school environments (p. 2). It must be admitted that students face several issues by having such a new life, particularly being far away from their family. They do not only have to adjust to the new level of academic performance but also need to adapt to a different environment. In fact, Leonard et al., (2015, p.1) states that adolescents often experience a variety of common, long-term stressors, such as academic and social obligations, which may impact their learning and well-being. Therefore, adolescent students who study at boarding schools mostly experience double stressors specifically with adjustment to unfamiliar cultural norms, disparities in educational systems, loneliness, homesickness, and the loss of existing support.

Many parents in Indonesia consider Islamic boarding schools as the best place for their children to learn especially in shaping their attitudes and strengthening their religious values. The report from the Directorate of Diniyah Education and Islamic Boarding Schools of the Ministry of Religion noted that there were 4.37 million students spread throughout Indonesia in the 2020/2021 academic year. The students are spread over 30,494 Islamic boarding schools. Specifically, with the amount of increasingly diverse problems that occur among adolescents, parents are more convinced to put their children in Islamic boarding schools. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) noted that during the 2016-2020 period, there were 655 children who had to face the law for being perpetrators of violence. In detail, 506 children committed physical violence and 149 children committed psychological violence (Pahlevi, 2022).

Given the facts above, plenty of approaches are needed to improve Islamic boarding school students' managing their stress. Coping strategies are instrumental in how adolescents contend with stress and navigate the challenges of this developmental period (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Although research on general adolescent populations has identified diverse coping strategies, such as problem-focused, and emotion-focused

approaches, and cognitive appraisal (Compas et al., 2001), further studies are needed to specifically examine the coping strategies employed by Islamic boarding school students in response to their distinct stressors.

## Literature Review

The period of adolescence is a crucial phase of development characterized by notable alterations in physiological, psychological, and social domains. The alterations frequently result in heightened levels of stress, which can have negative effects on an individual's mental health and overall state of being (Compas et al., 2001). The existing literature has primarily concentrated on stress among adolescents. However, there has been a relative lack of emphasis on the distinct stressors encountered by boarding school adolescents and their corresponding coping strategies, particularly within diverse cultural settings.

The significance of comprehending how adolescents manage stress and the function of coping in averting mental health issues is underscored in a thorough examination of coping techniques during childhood and adolescence (Compas et al., 2001). Grant et al. (2004) identified that various stressors, such as academic pressure, social stress, and family-related stress, are associated with the emergence of psychopathology in children and adolescents. This highlighted the importance of investigating the moderating and mediating influences of these stressors.

Suldo et al. (2014) conducted a study to investigate the correlation between perceived stress and mental health outcomes in adolescents. The results of the study indicated that elevated levels of stress were significantly linked to heightened internalizing symptoms, including anxiety and depression. This research offered valuable insight into the stressors encountered by adolescents in a general context. However, it highlighted the necessity for additional inquiry into the distinct stressors confronted by adolescents enrolled in boarding schools.

Rueger et al. (2016) conducted a study to investigate the impact of social support on stress and mental health among adolescents. The study revealed that constructive associations with peers and adults, including teachers and parents, functioned as a safeguard against the adverse effects of stress. The proposition implied that the cultivation of amicable relationships within the boarding school milieu could potentially alleviate the stress encountered by the students.

Apart from the stressors previously cited, boarding school adolescents may encounter difficulties associated with homesickness and the lack of parental support (Thurber & Walton, 2012). The experience of homesickness among boarding school adolescents may result in negative emotional states such as loneliness, sadness, and anxiety, potentially intensifying the stress levels of these individuals. While certain adolescents may adapt to

their novel surroundings with relative ease, others may encounter difficulties coping with prolonged separation from their kin. This underscores the significance of devising tactics aimed at bolstering the emotional welfare of students in boarding school environments.

The correlation between stress experienced during adolescence and disruptions in sleep patterns has also been established in literature. Such disturbances in sleep have the potential to exacerbate the individual's overall state of wellness (Roberts, Roberts, & Duong, 2009). Students who attend boarding schools may encounter disturbances in their sleep patterns as a result of alterations in their living conditions, heightened academic obligations, or social stressors. Facilitating access to resources that foster healthy sleep habits could be a crucial component in bolstering the mental well-being and stress-coping abilities of boarding school students.

Various studies demonstrated the role of physical activity in alleviating stress among adolescents, as noted by Gerber et al. (2014). Consistent participation in physical activity has been shown to have a positive impact on an individual's stress levels, emotional state, and overall sense of health and happiness. Boarding schools could potentially derive advantages from the implementation of well-structured physical activity programs or by offering avenues for students to participate in sports or other forms of recreational activities, which could facilitate the reduction of stress. The potential impact of the digital age on adolescent stress warrants consideration. The study conducted by Woods and Scott (2016) suggested that the frequent exposure of young individuals to social media and the incessant influx of information may potentially lead to heightened levels of stress. Boarding school students may face the challenge of balancing their academic and social lives while also maintaining connections with friends and family members. Exploring the impact of digital technology on the management of stress among adolescents is a crucial area of inquiry for future research and the development of interventions.

Within the realm of coping strategies, scholars posited diverse theoretical frameworks to elucidate the mechanisms by which individuals navigate and mitigate stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed two prominent coping strategies, namely problem-focused and emotion-focused coping; furthermore, the authors proposed the cognitive appraisal theory as a theoretical construct to elucidate the cognitive processes involved in the perception and response to stressors by individuals. The coping strategy of problem-focused coping entails confronting the stressor head-on by actively seeking remedies or implementing measures to modify the circumstances (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This strategy is commonly utilized when individuals perceive that they possess agency over the stressor and can undertake measures to modify or eradicate it. Problem-focused coping strategies encompass problem-solving, time management, and seeking information or advice, among others. Research indicated that the utilization of problem-focused coping mechanisms could be efficacious in

the management of stress and is frequently linked with improved mental health outcomes (Penley, Tomaka, & Wiebe, 2002).

In contrast, emotion-focused coping pertains to the regulation of the emotional reaction to the stressor, as opposed to the stressor itself, as posited by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Individuals may resort to emotion-focused strategies in situations where they perceive the stressor to be outside their control or when they require emotional regulation to effectively cope with the stressor. Emotion-focused coping strategies encompass seeking emotional support, engaging in distraction activities, and utilizing relaxation techniques. According to Garnefski, Kraaij, and Spinhoven's (2001) findings, emotion-focused coping could be advantageous in certain circumstances, but an overreliance on this strategy may result in unfavourable mental health consequences.

According to the cognitive appraisal theory, the emotional and behavioural reactions of individuals towards stressors are influenced by their cognitive assessments or appraisals of the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The cognitive appraisal process comprises of two stages: primary appraisal, wherein individuals evaluate the stressor's significance and potential impact, and secondary appraisal, which involves assessing one's ability to cope with the stressor. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1985), the perception of a stressor as a threat, challenge, or harm/loss is determined by the interplay between primary and secondary appraisals, which subsequently affects the coping mechanisms employed.

Comprehending the distinctive stressors encountered by pupils in boarding schools and devising focused interventions to bolster their psychological welfare and overall wellness is of paramount importance. The existing body of literature indicated that various elements can be attributed to the stress experienced by adolescents. These factors include but are not limited to academic and social stressors, feelings of homesickness, disruptions in sleep patterns, and the influence of digital technology. Through identification and mitigation of these stress-inducing factors, educational institutions and scholars can collaborate to foster the fortitude and welfare of teenage students residing in boarding schools.

The scholarly discourse surrounding coping strategies emphasized the significance of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, in addition to cognitive appraisal, in comprehending how individuals cope with stress. Additional investigation is required to examine the utilization of these coping mechanisms by adolescents, specifically those who attend boarding schools, in order to effectively manage the distinctive stressors that they encounter. Moreover, previous studies on stress and coping among students primarily focused on Western populations, which limits the generalizability of the results to other cultural settings, such as Indonesia (Compas et al., 2001; Melnick & Meister, 2008). It is imperative to conduct further research to investigate the

relationships between cultural factors, stress, and coping mechanisms in diverse cultural environments, given the cultural heterogeneity of students in boarding schools.

The existing body of literature highlighted the importance of understanding stress and coping mechanisms among students, specifically those who are enrolled in boarding schools. The research gaps in this area of study concern the distinct stressors that are experienced by students in boarding schools, the coping mechanisms that they employ, and the potential impact of cultural factors on these dynamics. The identification and resolution of these gaps can provide significant contributions to the improvement of the welfare and achievement of boarding school students. This can be beneficial for educators, parents, and policymakers in developing interventions and support systems. (Redman-MacLaren, 2017).

Consequently, in order to optimize the welfare and achievement of adolescents in boarding schools, it is imperative to comprehend the distinct stressors they encounter and establish specialized interventions to bolster their psychological well-being. This calls for additional investigation into the efficacy of diverse coping mechanisms in addressing unique stressors and examining the influence of cultural elements on the encounter with stress and the adoption of coping mechanisms among boarding school adolescents across diverse cultural settings. The identification and exploration of these research voids can provide significant contributions to the knowledge base of educators, parents, and policymakers. This, in turn, can inform educational practices and policies aimed at fostering resilience and well-being among adolescents in boarding schools.

Therefore, this study aims to assess the perception of stress among Islamic boarding school students and their coping strategies by attempting to answer the following research questions:

1. What pressures do Islamic boarding school students face?
2. What are the strategies that the students use to cope with those pressures?

## **Method**

This study employed descriptive quantitative research. A descriptive quantitative design is one that collects quantitative data at one point in time (Roni et al, 2020). In more detail, the focus of this design was to explore the pressures faced by Islamic boarding school students which were divided into two categories: academic and non-academic stressors. After that, the researchers also examined the strategies that students used to cope with the pressures. The strategies were classified into the three theories of copying stress by Lazarus & Folkman (1984), namely, problem-focused, emotion-focused coping, and cognitive appraisal. This research approach provided an in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences and perspectives in their natural setting (Sandelowski, 2000).

### **Population and Sample**

In statistics and other areas of mathematics, a population is a complete collection of entities or items that have at least one characteristic in common (Rouse, 2015). For this study, a random sampling method was used, ensuring an unbiased representation of the target population (Levy & Lemeshow, 2013). There were 150 participants from one of the Islamic boarding schools in Tangerang who participated voluntarily. They were students from the first, second, and third graders of junior high level. The research participants included both males and females to ensure a diverse and rich data set. The final sample size was determined based on data saturation, where no new insights emerged from the data.

### **Research Instrument**

The primary instrument in this research was a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained two open-ended questions which investigated students' stress and their coping strategies. As a starting point, the researchers also put questions regarding students' personal information, such as gender, and grades in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed in the participants' preferred language i.e., Bahasa Indonesia.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection primarily involved online questionnaires through Google Forms. It consisted of open-ended questions and prompts related to the research questions, encouraging participants to share their experiences, feelings, and perspectives. To make sure that the questionnaires were easy to be understood by the students, the researchers did a pilot study on several Islamic boarding school students. As Hartono (2010) stated pilot tests are used to test the effectiveness of survey instruments (questionnaires) as a means of communication between researchers and respondents.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the open-ended questionnaire were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data, following the six-step process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method involves familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The iterative process allowed for the identification of patterns, themes, and categories related to the research questions. To ensure trustworthiness and rigor, various strategies, such as member checking and reflexivity, were implemented throughout the study.

The chosen methodological approach, coupled with a rigorous data collection and analysis process, aimed to provide valuable insights into the pressures experienced by boarding school students and the coping strategies they utilize. The findings from this study can contribute to a better understanding of the unique challenges faced as well as common coping strategies used by this population, and also inform future interventions, policies, and practices in the educational context.

## Results

The research findings are arranged based on the research questions which consist of general information about the students, and two subsections of open-ended questions. There are three tables depicted in the findings, the first describes students' characteristics, the second explains the pressures of boarding school students, and the last is about how the students cope with stressors.

Table 1. Students' Characteristics

Characteristic	F	%
Gender		
Male	57	38
Female	98	62
Total	150	100
Grade		
1 <sup>st</sup>	85	56.7
2 <sup>nd</sup>	29	19.3
3 <sup>rd</sup>	36	24
Total	150	100

Table 1 illustrates the proportion of students' characteristics, including gender and grade that were involved in this study. We can see that more than half of the participants were female, exceeding 60 per cent of the total sample (98 students). While males reach almost 40 per cent of the sample students which is 57 students. In addition, the first-grade students dominated in volunteering for this research, they almost reach 60 per cent of the total sample.

Table 2. Pressure Frequency Distribution

Stressor	F	%
Academic	54	36
Non-academic	79	52.7
No pressures	17	11.3
Total	150	100



As it is presented in table II, most of the common stressors faced by the students were related to non-academic matters which placed just over half of the total response (52.7 %). There was nearly a third of the total response considered academic issues as their major stressor, 36 % accordingly.

Table 3. Coping Mechanism Frequency Distribution

<b>Coping Mechanism</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Problem Focused	90	60
Emotion Focused	39	26
Cognitive Appraisal	15	10
No Action	6	4
Total	150	100

According to Table III, over half of the students used the problem-focus approach as their coping strategy, reaching 60%. While students who used emotional-focus strategies touched roughly one-quarter of the total sample, which was 26%. The cognitive appraisal approach got a small portion of the total sample, 10%. The rest are tiny students who do not have any coping mechanism which was 4%.

## **Discussion**

The study sought to understand the stressors experienced by students in Islamic boarding schools and the coping mechanisms they use to handle stressors. As indicated by the research questions posed in this study, the study aimed to concentrate on the stressors confronting Islamic boarding school students and the coping strategies they employ to confront them.

### **Pressures Faced by Islamic Boarding School Students**

Table 2 demonstrated that most of the school students (52.7%) acknowledged dealing with non-academic stressors. The types of answers that showed non-academic categories varied starting from the relationship matters, the environment, and the health issues. While 36% noted that their main pressure came from their academic stressors. The problems were also ranging from the teaching materials, teachers' performance, and the abundant work that they have to finish. These results line up with the findings of Grant et al (2004), who found that various types of stresses, such as academic stressors, social pressure and familial-related stresses, are connected to the appearance of psychological issues in adolescents. Furthermore, the findings of this investigation match up with those of Thurber & Walton (2012). They pointed out the struggles resulting from homesickness and the lack of guidance from parents faced by students in boarding schools. Interestingly, the

findings also showed that there were small portions that believe they did not have any stressors living and learning in a boarding school, reaching just over 10 % of the total sample.

### **Coping Strategies Employed by Islamic Boarding School Students**

Table 3 outlined the coping mechanisms used by the students to deal with the pressures they faced. Around 60% of students said they used problem-focused strategies for dealing with pressures, while 26% chose emotion-focused coping strategies. 10% of the participants reported using cognitive appraisal as a coping strategy, and only 4% reported did not report any coping mechanisms to deal with the pressures. These results fit in line with the idea put forward by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) - that people use problem-focused and emotion-focused coping as primary coping strategies, along with cognitive appraisal as a critical component for dealing with different stressors.

Moreover, these findings are congruent with those of Penley, Tomaka, & Wiebe (2002), who determined that problem-focused coping can be useful for coping with stress and often results in improved mental well-being. In brief, this study reveals the special difficulties Islamic boarding school students encounter, as well as the tactics they use to address them. Notably, 26% of the students employed emotion-focused coping approaches. This suggests that some students may consider these pressures to be beyond their control---a conclusion affirmed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

The findings demonstrated the necessity of crafting specific interventions and aid systems to aid students in coping with their stress levels and improving their overall health. Future investigations could investigate how cultural backgrounds influence the mental pressures adolescents experience and the ways they manage them, as well as the consequences of digital technology on teenage stress management, as suggested by Woods and Scott (2016).

## **Implications**

### **Practical Implications**

This research has some legitimate uses that can be put into practice by teachers, parents, and government officials. Since a noticeable percentage of students deal with stressors like loneliness and social stress, it is vital to have coping strategies in place to assist these adolescents.

In order to create a supportive atmosphere for boarders, an intervention which could relieve homesickness and a sense of isolation would be to put in place mentorship programs (Thurber & Walton, 2012). This would involve those who are older - be it students or faculty members - offering guidance, support and friendship to

new entrants. In doing so, it would enable them to become more settled and acclimatize to the Islamic boarding school setting. Schools could also consider providing regular chances for students to communicate with their families, such as planned video calls or visits for families to attend, to keep and foster family connections (Rueger et al., 2016).

Moreover, to tackle social tension, schools could bring in extracurricular activities that would foster social interaction and the building of friendships among students, for example, clubs, athletics teams, or groups of shared interests (Gerber et al., 2014). In addition, schools could organize workshops for students to handle disagreements and enhance communication, so they are better able to develop healthier relationships with their classmates.

Taking into account the effect of digital tools on student anxiety as outlined by Woods & Scott (2016), courses in digital education and responsible social media use could be incorporated into school curricula. This could aid students in striking an equilibrium between virtual communication and tangible personal connections, promoting a more positive relationship with digital technology.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research added to the current body of knowledge on stress and coping mechanisms among Islamic boarding school students. Through scrutinizing both academic and non-academic sources of stress and the strategies utilized by these learners, this work broadens on the ideas of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) providing a better comprehension of how Islamic boarding school students tackle the particular issues they confront.

The results of the study support the theoretical framework proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), primarily the predominance of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies among Islamic boarding school students. The high percentage of students employing problem-focused coping strategies aligns with the findings of Penley, Tomaka & Wiebe (2002), who associated problem-focused coping with improved mental health.

Moreover, this study emphasizes the need to take into account cultural factors when researching the stress and coping strategies of Islamic boarding school students. Compas et al. (2001) and Melnick & Meister (2008) largely focused on Western populations which limits the extent to which their findings can be applied across different cultures. By analyzing stress and coping mechanisms among students within the context of the Islamic boarding school in Tangerang, this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of Islamic boarding school students in diverse cultural environments, paving the way for further research in this area.

## Limitations

There are limitations and shortcomings in this research about coping with stress in the world of education. An important limitation is the chance of partiality in the sample, considering that the individuals were chosen from one specific Islamic boarding school in Tangerang, which probably may not be indicative of a larger population of students living in Islamic boarding schools (Bryman, 2016). This precise setting may impede the generalizability of the results to other Islamic boarding schools with varying cultures, religions, or regions.

Additionally, the use of self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias, such as social desirability bias or recall bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). There is also the possibility that students may give responses they think are most preferable instead of accurately portraying their real-life scenarios or they could have difficulty remembering past events or emotions. The possible repercussions of this could be an uncertain reliability of results and an impediment to the research's ability to make strong conclusions regarding the nature and types of pressures and strategies among students residing in an Islamic boarding school.

## Conclusion

The study was conducted on students at the Junior High School level at an Islamic boarding school in Tangerang consisting of male and female students. It revealed that the pressures and problems which are most often faced by students are the problems related to non-academic rather than problems in the academic field. This study used the theory of coping stress by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), namely problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and cognitive appraisal. Among the three coping strategies, the researchers found that problem-focused coping was the coping strategy which is mostly used by students as a form of solving problems and pressures by 60%. Furthermore, 26% used emotion-focused coping, and 10% used cognitive appraisal. Meanwhile, as many as 4% of the total said they did not have any pressure so there was no coping strategy. A quantitative descriptive research design was used for this study. The data were collected online via google form documents, consisting of a questionnaire and open-ended questions. It was found that even though a big portion of the participant was female exceeding 60% percent of the total sample, a large proportion used problem-based strategies to cope with the pressures.

## Recommendations

There are several suggestions for future research that can build upon the findings of this study. Firstly, longitudinal studies can be conducted to try and determine the causes of the observed patterns in stressors and coping mechanisms among Islamic boarding school students. This investigation could help pinpoint any risks

that bring about heightened stress levels and develop specific actions to address these stressors. Additionally, experiment designs could be conducted to see how well different coping strategies work for different sources of stress, with the aim of finding the most successful coping mechanisms for different situations. Secondly, further research could be conducted on the development of coping skills in adolescents, particularly those in Islamic boarding school systems. Such studies could explore the effectiveness of different approaches, such as mindfulness techniques or cognitive-behavioural therapy, to increase coping skills and reduce stress levels.

Additionally, further research could investigate the part of social support networks in the progress of coping mechanisms among Islamic boarding school students. Lastly, it is noteworthy that the amount of research on stress and coping mechanisms among Islamic boarding school students is confined, particularly in non-western societies. Consequently, additional research must be conducted in order to take into account the diversity of culture among Islamic boarding school students and assess how culture affects stress and coping mechanisms. Investigations of this kind could help create interventions and assistance that are sensitive to different cultures in order to raise the standards of living and academic performance of Islamic boarding school students around the world.

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