

Adolescent Mental Health Strategies in the Post-Pandemic Era: Self-Healing and Coping Approaches

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on adolescent mental health, which continues into the post-pandemic era. This condition is characterized by increased symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression due to various stressors, including changes in learning systems, limited social interaction, and academic pressure. This study aims to examine self-healing and coping strategies as efforts to support adolescent mental health in the post-pandemic era. This study employed a qualitative approach using a conceptual review method. Data were obtained from relevant scientific articles, institutional reports, and academic books, and were analyzed using thematic analysis through literature selection, coding, and theme synthesis. The findings indicate that adolescent mental health is influenced by the interaction of risk factors such as academic stress, social media use, and social isolation, as well as protective factors such as family support and emotional regulation. Adolescents tend to use problem-focused and engaged coping strategies, which are associated with better psychological well-being. Self-healing functions as an internal process that strengthens coping effectiveness through improved self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience. In conclusion, the integration of self-healing and adaptive coping strategies forms an important mechanism in supporting the recovery of adolescent mental health in the post-pandemic era.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020, has not only impacted physical health but has also had a significant effect on the mental health of the public. Various changes during the pandemic, such as social restrictions, isolation, economic uncertainty, and exposure to inaccurate information, have triggered the emergence of various psychological disorders, including stress, anxiety, and excessive fear (Mubin et al., 2021). In addition, disruption to the education system, social interactions, and daily routines also worsen the psychological well-being of individuals.

Entering the post-pandemic era, mental health challenges do not necessarily end, but rather experience a shift from the crisis phase to the long-term adaptation and recovery phase. Lingering *psychological effects* are still felt, especially in individuals who experience prolonged stress during the pandemic. A number of findings suggest that symptoms such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, and emotional fatigue are still identified persistently (Min et al., 2021; Solomou et al., 2024) which indicates that the post-pandemic era demands not only the recovery process, but also the ability of individuals to adapt to the "new normal" marked by uncertainty. In particular, this impact is also seen in the adolescent and student population who are in the transition phase of development and education.

One of the groups most vulnerable to mental health issues is adolescents. Adolescents are a psychologically vulnerable group, and the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this situation. Various studies have shown a significant increase in symptoms of anxiety, depression, stress, and sleep disorders among adolescents during and after the pandemic, triggered by changes in the education system, limited social interaction, and academic pressure. A global meta-analysis reported that the risk of depression among adolescents more than doubled compared to pre-pandemic levels, while data from 204 countries showed a surge in the incidence of anxiety disorders and major depression during the 2020–2021 period. A study of 50,666 adolescents in China also found high prevalence rates of depression (46.8%), anxiety (31.5%), and sleep disorders (47.9%). Additionally, longitudinal research indicates that psychological symptoms may continue to rise in the post-pandemic phase as adolescents once again face the demands of social and academic adaptation (Kim et al., 2024; Larsen et al., 2023; X. J. Yang et al., 2025).

Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that about 10% to 20% of adolescents experience mental health disorders. Data UNICEF (2020) It shows that 27% of adolescents experience anxiety, 15% experience depression, 30% experience emotional instability, as well as decreased motivation in daily activities. In addition, other studies have shown an increase in symptoms of depression and anxiety in school-age children compared to before the pandemic, which is accompanied by attention deficits, social isolation, and maladaptive behaviors (Meade, 2020). These findings indicate that the pandemic has worsened mental health conditions that were previously a global issue in adolescents.

At the regional level, particularly in Southeast Asia, the prevalence of anxiety and depression was reported at 31% and 16% respectively in the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic (Pappa et al., 2022). In Indonesia, adolescent mental health conditions also show an alarming trend, with high rates of loneliness, anxiety, and the emergence of self-harm tendencies and suicidal ideation in the age group of 16-24 years. This condition is exacerbated by academic pressure, financial problems, body image, and the influence of social media that create a complex and layered psychological burden (Kaligis et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2022; Yani et al., 2025).

In the post-pandemic period, these impacts do not necessarily disappear. In fact, there is an increase in mental health service visits among adolescents aged 12–17 years, with a higher prevalence in women. Symptoms that appear include internalized symptoms such as anxiety and sadness, externalizing symptoms such as aggressive behavior, as well as somatic symptoms related to psychological distress (Sayed et al., 2024). This shows that there are differences in vulnerability based on gender and the need for intervention approaches that are more sensitive

to adolescents' psychosocial conditions (Kaya & McCabe, 2022). In dealing with these pressures, adolescents develop various *coping strategies*, namely cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage stress and environmental demands. This strategy includes *problem-focused coping* that is oriented towards solving problems, as well as *emotion-focused coping* that focuses on the regulation of emotions, both adaptive and maladaptive (Batte et al., 2024; Rizkiyani Istifada et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2021). The effectiveness of this coping strategy greatly determines the ability of adolescents to adapt to the post-pandemic era.

One form of adaptive coping that is increasingly developing is self-healing, which is the process of independent psychological recovery through the management of positive emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Self-healing can include mindfulness, journaling, physical activity, strengthening self-meaning, and self-reflection, which contribute to increased *self-awareness*, emotion regulation, and resilience (Agustina et al., 2022). In this context, self-healing can be understood as part of an adaptive coping strategy that focuses not only on recovery, but also on strengthening the psychological capacity of the individual. Although various studies have addressed adolescent mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, studies that specifically integrate coping and self-healing strategies in post-pandemic contexts are still limited. In addition, there have not been many studies that classify self-healing as a conceptual framework in supporting adolescent mental health systematically. Therefore, this study aims to examine and synthesize self-healing strategies as part of coping strategies in supporting adolescent mental health in the post-pandemic era, so that it is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of more comprehensive mental health interventions.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the conceptual review method to examine and synthesize concepts of self-healing strategies for maintaining adolescent mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic period (2020–2026). The data used are secondary data obtained from national and international journal articles, official agency reports, and relevant scientific books via the PubMed and ScienceDirect databases using the keywords adolescent mental health, self-healing, coping strategies, and post-pandemic. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify, group, and synthesize the main themes, which were then used to develop a classification of self-healing strategies and a conceptual model.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Adolescent Mental Health Conditions Post-Pandemic

Basically, the mental health condition of adolescents in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era is still characterized by the emergence of psychological symptoms such as anxiety, tension, worry, stress, and depression. These findings indicate that the impact of the pandemic does not stop at the crisis phase, but continues in the recovery phase which is characterized by the emergence of *lingering psychological effects*. Thus, mental health problems in the post-pandemic era have shifted from acute conditions to long-term adaptation challenges.

A number of data shows that in the adolescent group, especially first-year students, more than half of the respondents experienced psychological distress (52.60%) (Subagyo et al., 2023). This condition indicates significant adaptation pressure in the educational transition process as well as adjustments to changes in the learning system and social environment post-pandemic. In addition, groups at higher risk of depression and anxiety include women, rural residents, and individuals with higher levels of education. The proportion of depression and anxiety among female students (45.5% and 36.3%) was higher than that of male students (41.7% and 36.2%) (Ninditya & Medise, 2022) which shows the existence of gender-based vulnerability and the influence of environmental factors on adolescent mental health conditions.

In addition, post-pandemic conditions also show that the process of recovering adolescent mental health does not take place in a linear manner, but is dynamic. Some adolescents experience a decrease in psychological symptoms over time, but others still show symptom persistence due to the accumulation of stressors during the pandemic. This indicates that

adolescents' psychological responses are greatly influenced by the individual's adaptive capacity and available environmental support, so an approach that is not only curative but also preventive and promotive in adolescent mental health is needed.

Factors Affecting Adolescent Mental Health

Factors that affect adolescent mental health include social media use, academic stress, communication in the family, and social isolation. The use of social media plays a role as a means of communication, especially when direct interaction is limited. However, excessive use, particularly exposure to negative news, misinformation, and content that triggers social comparisons, can increase anxiety and stress in adolescents. Conversely, open communication between parents and children has been shown to lower the risk of depression and anxiety. The role of the family as the main source of support has become increasingly important in the post-pandemic era, especially in providing emotional stability amid uncertainty (Fathurrahman, 2025).

Academic stress is one of the significant factors that also affect adolescent mental health, especially due to changes in the learning system that were carried out online, thereby increasing academic burden and the risk of psychological disorders (Subagyo et al., 2023). In addition, in the post-pandemic era, adolescents are faced with more complex adaptation demands, such as adjusting to new environments, expanding social relationships, increasing educational and career demands, and socio-cultural diversity, which can overall increase the risk of stress, anxiety, and depression.

In addition to academic and social factors, the family has an important role as a protective factor in maintaining adolescent mental health. Warm, open, and supportive family communication has been shown to be associated with a reduced risk of depression, anxiety, and risky behaviors in adolescents, through increased sense of security, self-esteem, and emotional regulation skills. Conversely, authoritarian, cold, or lack of openness can increase the risk of psychological problems. In the post-pandemic context, the quality of family communication is becoming increasingly important as a "psychological shield" that helps adolescents readapt to social and academic demands after long periods of restriction on interaction (Karimli et al., 2024; R. Yang & Zeng, 2023). On the other hand, social isolation also contributes significantly to the decline in adolescent mental health, which is characterized by anger, dependent behavior, sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, and the risk of self-harm behavior. (Putri Rahayu, 2021; Sugaya et al., 2020).

The interaction between factors shows an interconnected relationship (interconnected risk factors), where uncontrolled social media use can exacerbate academic stress, while weak family support can increase the negative impact of social isolation. On the other hand, protective factors such as good family communication and social support play a protective role that can reduce the impact of these stressors on adolescent mental health. Thus, adolescent mental health in the post-pandemic era can be understood as the result of a complex interaction between risk factors and protective factors that work simultaneously and dynamically.

The Concept of Self-Healing and Coping Strategies in Adolescents

One of the solutions to overcome mental health in adolescents is *self-healing*. *Self healing* is a form of healing process without treatment to heal ourselves from inner wounds with the strength we have within ourselves. Healing this self to achieve happiness and peace in life (Rahmasari, 2021). In the post-pandemic context, this concept is closely related to the coping strategies used by adolescents in dealing with various psychosocial pressures.

Studies of adolescents in Banda Aceh show that the majority use *problem-focused coping*, such as planning activities, completing schoolwork, and maintaining communication with family, teachers, and friends, which is associated with lower levels of anxiety and relatively maintained *subjective well-being*. In general, adolescents also show adaptive coping through routine settings, compliance with health protocols, and efforts to maintain social and family relationships. However, there is still a need for reinforcement, especially in low physical activity

and inconsistent daily planning, so interventions to improve adaptive coping are still needed. At a broader level, the engaged coping profile (active coping, planning, acceptance, and positive reframing) was associated with higher psychological well-being, while *the avoidant* profile (substance use, self-blame, and defensive humor) was associated with increased stress and anxiety (Hidayati et al., 2024; Kavčič et al., 2022).

The relationship between self-healing, coping strategies, and mental health indicates that self-awareness and emotional regulation positively contribute to adolescents' psychological well-being. Mental health education interventions, including online health education, have been shown to reduce anxiety levels in adolescents. Furthermore, self-healing approaches such as mindfulness, self-awareness, and spiritual strengthening, along with the reinforcement of problem-focused and engaged coping strategies, have the potential to help adolescents adapt and recover psychologically in the post-pandemic era. Thus, the integration of structured self-healing and adaptive coping strategies serves as a crucial foundation for supporting the recovery and strengthening of adolescents' mental health following the pandemic (Hidayati et al., 2024; Mundakir et al., 2021; Mustika et al., 2024).

Classification of Self-Healing and Coping Strategies

The literature synthesis identifies four main categories of self-healing and coping strategies in adolescents, namely internal psychological resources, behavioral strategies, cognitive coping mechanisms, and external support. This classification shows that adolescent mental health is the result of a complex interaction between individual and environmental factors. The summary of findings is as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Classification of Self-Healing and Coping Strategies in Adolescents

Category	Strategy	Form	Function	Impact	Source
Internal Self-Healing	Mindfulness-based practices	Meditation, yoga, sophrology	Enhance emotional regulation and awareness	Reduce stress and improve well-being	(El Hajj et al., 2024)
Internal Self-Healing	Psychological capital	Self-efficacy, hope, resilience	Internal psychological resources for coping	Improve resilience and reduce anxiety	(Finch et al., 2025)
Behavioral Strategy	Physical activity	Exercise routines	Regulate stress and improve mood	Reduce psychological distress	(El Hajj et al., 2024)
Behavioral Strategy	Expressive arts	Art therapy, dance movement	Emotional expression and regulation	Reduce anxiety and improve self-regulation	(Grasser & Javanbakht, 2021)
Cognitive Coping	Adaptive coping	Positive reframing, problem-solving	Cognitive restructuring of stressors	Protect against depression	(Torinomi et al., 2022)
External Support	Social support	Emotional &	Interpersonal coping resources	Reduce depression risk	(Torinomi et al., 2022)

		instrumental support			
External Support	School-based intervention	Arts-literacy programs	Group reflection and expression	Reduce anxiety and depressive symptoms	(Osborn et al., 2023)

Table 1 shows that self-healing is a multidimensional construct that does not stand alone but is integrated with broader coping strategies. Interventions such as mindfulness, physical activity, emotional regulation, and social support have been shown to play a role in improving adolescents' psychological well-being. Based on a synthesis of research findings, a conceptual model was developed to explain the relationship between self-healing and coping strategies, psychological mechanisms, and their impact on adolescents' mental health. The integration of self-healing and coping strategies reveals a hierarchical relationship, in which coping strategies serve as mechanisms for responding to stress, while self-healing functions as an internal process that enhances the effectiveness of these coping strategies. Thus, the conceptual model developed not only explains linear relationships but also the multidimensional interactions between internal and external factors that influence adolescents' mental health, as presented in Figure 1.

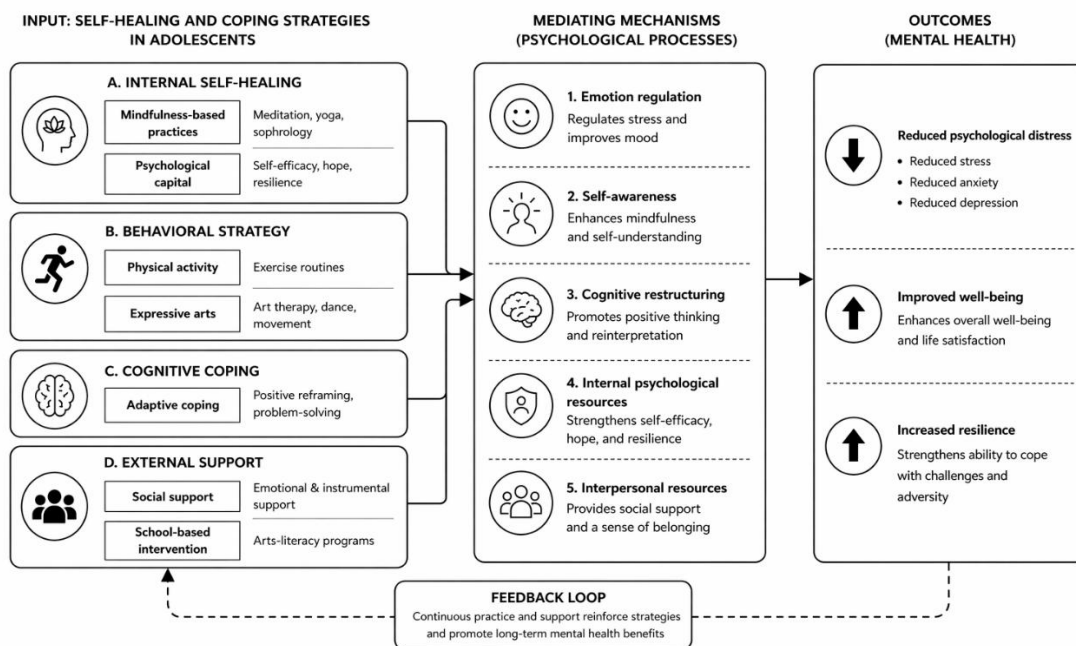


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Self-Healing and Coping Strategies in Adolescents

The conceptual model in Figure 1 shows that self-healing and coping strategies in adolescents consist of four main components: internal self-healing, behavioral strategies, cognitive coping, and external support. These four components encompass various forms of intervention, such as mindfulness, psychological capital, physical activity, expressive arts, adaptive coping, as well as social support and school-based interventions. These components do not directly impact mental health but rather operate through psychological mechanisms such as emotional regulation, self-awareness, cognitive restructuring, and the strengthening of psychological resources. These mechanisms play a role in helping adolescents manage stress more adaptively. The ultimate outcome is a reduction in psychological distress (stress, anxiety, and depression) as well as an increase in well-being and resilience. Additionally, there is

positive feedback indicating that sustained self-healing and coping practices can strengthen adolescents' adaptive capacities in the long term.

4. CONCLUSION

The study findings indicate that adolescents' mental health in the post-pandemic era remains characterized by high levels of persistent psychological symptoms such as anxiety, stress, and depression due to lingering psychological effects. This condition is influenced by the interaction of various risk factors such as academic stress, uncontrolled social media use, social isolation, and weak family support which reinforce one another. Conversely, protective factors such as warm family communication, social support, and emotional regulation play a role in minimizing these psychological impacts.

Additionally, adolescents employ various coping strategies to address post-pandemic pressures, with a dominant tendency toward problem-focused coping and engaged coping, which are associated with better psychological well-being. In this context, self-healing functions as an internal process that enhances coping effectiveness through increased self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience. The integration of self-healing and coping strategies forms a multidimensional adaptive mechanism that contributes to the recovery and improvement of adolescents' mental health in the post-pandemic era.

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