

Psychological Stress and Coping Strategies in Adolescent Athletes

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to explore the types of psychological stress faced by adolescent athletes, examine the coping strategies they implement to manage these stresses, and explain the contribution of social support in maintaining their mental well-being. This study uses a descriptive qualitative design using a single case study approach. The participant was a 16 year old teenager who was actively involved in badminton as a competitive athlete. The selection of participants was determined through purposive sampling based on criteria that were in line with the research objectives. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews and participatory observations. The collected data was analyzed using an interactive analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consisted of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing accompanied by verification. The findings showed that participants psychological stress was affected by demanding training routines combined with academic responsibilities, inadequate emotional support from parents due to their work commitments, and experiences of social isolation due to limited social interaction outside the context of sport. To cope with pressure, subjects applied emotion-focused coping by setting a study schedule and seeking help from friends when experiencing academic difficulties. Research findings show that social support from family, peers, school, and coaches plays an important role in helping adolescent athletes manage stress and maintain their psychological well being.

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a development phase that is vulnerable to psychological distress due to physical, emotional, social, and academic changes that occur simultaneously, especially in adolescent who also play the role of athletes because they are required to maintain sports and academic achievements. Various studies show that adolescent athletes are prone to experiencing stress, anxiety, and fatigue due to the high demands of activity and lack of emotional support. Family support is known to play an important role in helping teens manage stress and build adaptive coping skills. However, research on adolescent athletes subjective experience of psychological distress and coping strategies used is limited, especially in adolescent athletes with limited family emotional support. In this phase, adolescent are in the process of finding self-identity, social adjustment, and facing increasingly complex academic and environmental demands. Studies have shown that teens have a higher susceptibility to mental health problems than other age groups. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) reports that about 1 in 7 adolescents aged 10-19 years have a mental health disorder, with stress, anxiety, and depression being the most dominant problems. In addition, the result of the Indonesian National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS) show that around 34.9% of Indonesian adolescents have experienced mental health problems in the last 12 months, while 5.5% of them meet the criteria for mental disorders that require professional help (Center for Reproductive Health, Gadjah Mada University, 2022). TM, a 16-year-old badminton athlete, experiences various pressures arising from high training intensity, academic responsibilities, and limited interaction with parents who have full-time work commitments. These circumstances may

potentially influence their mental health and psychological well-being. Although several studies have examined stress, anxiety, and fatigue among adolescent athletes, most existing research continues to focus on measuring stress levels or analyzing relationships between variables using quantitative approaches. Meanwhile, studies that deeply explore the subjective experiences of adolescent athletes in dealing with psychological stress, particularly regarding limited family emotional support and the coping strategies applied in daily life, remain relatively scarce, especially within the context of adolescent athletes in Indonesia.

High psychological pressure on adolescents is increasingly seen in adolescent groups that have high achievement demands, one of which is adolescent athletes. Adolescent athletes face the double pressure of sports performance demands, victory targets, intensive training schedules, and the obligation to maintain academic achievement at the same time. Research by Rice et al. (2016) explains that young athletes have a high risk of experiencing psychological stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion due to competitive pressures and environmental expectations. Furthermore, research by Gerber et al. (2018) found that adolescent athletes who undergo high-intensity training are more prone to fatigue, sleep disturbances, and decreased psychological well-being. Similar findings are also described by Gustafsson et al. (2017) who state that fatigue in young athletes is characterized by emotional fatigue, decreased motivation to exercise, and the appearance of feelings of stress to excessive sports demands. This condition was also found in TM, a 16-year-old teenager who was active as a badminton athlete. TM undergoes intensive training every day accompanied by the obligation to take additional lessons to support his academic achievements. On the other hand, both of her parents work full-time so TM's interaction and emotional support are limited. As an only child who had no emotional closeness to his extended family, TM also experienced social loneliness and limited space to share stories about the pressures he faced. This situation shows the accumulation of psychological distress stemming from the demands of academics, sports, and lack of adequate social support. In this study, TM experienced stress due to academic and sports demands that occurred simultaneously, resulting in physical and emotional exhaustion. Recent research shows that social support and coping skills play an important role in maintaining the mental health of adolescent athletes. Research by Li et al. (2023) found that adolescent athletes who had good adaptive coping strategies and social support tended to have higher psychological resilience in the face of competitive pressure. However, most previous studies have focused more on athletes' stress levels and burnout in general, while studies that have examined in depth the subjective experiences of adolescent athletes' psychological distress in the context of family life and daily coping strategies are still relatively limited, especially in adolescent athletes in Indonesia. Therefore, this study has novelty in revealing in depth the dynamics of psychological pressure, limitations of social support, and coping strategies used by TM as adolescent athletes in facing academic and sports demands simultaneously.

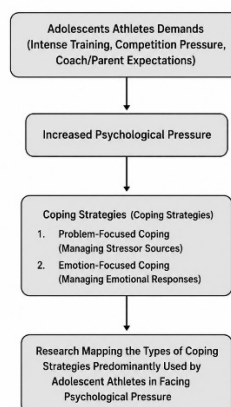


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a single case study design to understand in depth psychological stress and coping strategies in adolescent athletes. This approach was chosen because it is able to describe the subject's experience as a whole according to the real-life context. The study was conducted from March to April 2026 in the subjects' school, home, and training settings to get a comprehensive picture of their psychological state in various situations. The subject of the study was TM, a 16-year-old teenager who was active as a student-level badminton athlete. Subject selection was carried out by purposive sampling based on characteristics relevant to the focus of the research, namely adolescent athletes who experienced academic and sports demands at the same time. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and participatory observations to explore the experiences, psychological pressures, and coping strategies used by the subjects. Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive model which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions drawn. In the implementation of the research, the researcher also applies the principles of research ethics by maintaining the confidentiality of the subject's identity through the use of initials to protect the privacy of the participants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Based on the results of in-depth interviews and participatory observations, it was found that TM experienced psychological distress stemming from academic demands, strenuous sports activities, and limited emotional support from the family environment. The combination of an intensive badminton training regimen and mandatory extra classes often results in physical exhaustion and an emotional burden on TM. This situation affects TM's academic engagement, which is reflected in lower motivation to learn, decreased ability to maintain concentration, and increased psychological pressure in balancing academic and sports-related demands. In addition, limited interaction with parents who work full-time causes TM to feel emotionally less supported, resulting in feelings of social loneliness. The results of the study also showed that TM used several coping strategies to deal with the psychological distress he experienced. Strategies used include *emotion-focused coping* and *problem-focused coping*. A form of *emotion-focused coping* is listening to music and writing a personal journal to reduce stress and channel negative emotions. Meanwhile, *problem-focused coping* is carried out by developing a more structured study and practice schedule and asking for help from friends when experiencing academic difficulties. This strategy helps TM maintain emotional balance and continue to carry out daily activities. The implications of this study show that family, school, and coach support has an important role in maintaining the mental health of adolescent athletes. Theoretically, the results of this study reinforce the concept that adaptive coping strategies can help adolescents cope with psychological distress in a healthier way. Practically, this research can be the basis for the development of guidance and counseling services, psychological assistance, and mental support programs for adolescent athletes to be able to maintain a balance between academic, sports, and social life demands. TM was under psychological distress due to his busy training schedule and the academic demands that had to be lived at the same time. The activities that take place every day make participants feel physically and mentally tired. In addition to having to take part in intensive badminton training, participants are also required to maintain academic achievements at school. Participants described the condition as a tiring situation and difficult to balance. "I feel very tired because after training I still have to learn again. Also, if I have a lot of schoolwork, I can't focus on training" (TM) The coach also revealed that TM is an athlete who has a good training spirit, but is often seen experiencing fatigue due to academic and sports activities that go hand in hand. "TM is actually a child who is diligent in training and has a

good spirit, but sometimes looks tired and does not have the enthusiasm to practice. Sometimes TM is not in the mood during training, I have already said that TM can reduce his schedule first so that he can focus on one of the things he wants" (TM Coach). The teacher explained that TM was sometimes seen to lack focus when participating in class learning because of his tired physical and mental condition after practice. "TM is a disciplined student, it's never late to collect assignments unless there's an out-of-town match, TM is the type of student who focuses on studying but sometimes looks very tired when taking lessons in class." (TM Teacher) The teacher also added that TM has its own pressure to maintain academic achievement even though the training schedule is very busy. "He seems to have the burden of continuing to get good grades despite the very heavy training activities." (TM Teacher). Pressure not only arises from the busyness of activities, but also from the demand to always perform well in two fields at once, namely sports and academics.

Limited Emotional Support and Social Loneliness

The busyness of the two parents led to interactions that occurred only at night so that the participants felt less of a place to share stories and feelings. TM revealed that he often feels alone when facing pressure or certain problems. "I rarely tell my parents because they always come home at night and by then I have a break, sometimes when I'm sad I keep it to myself because I don't know who to talk to, after all I'm an only child, even if I tell stories with friends, it feels uncomfortable because I never express my feelings to anyone" (TM). As an only child who was not very close to the extended family, participants also felt social loneliness in daily life. Despite having friends in the training environment, participants felt that not everything could be told to them. "I have a lot of friends but sometimes I still feel lonely" (TM). This feeling of loneliness arises due to a lack of consistent emotional support from the immediate environment. Research shows that TM uses coping strategies such as listening to music, writing a personal journal, and seeking peer support to reduce the emotional distress they experience.

Coping Strategy Through Music, Journals and Scheduling

The third theme describes the various coping strategies used by participants to deal with psychological distress, including emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping is reflected in activities such as listening to music and writing a personal journal, which helps participants regulate emotions and reduce stress. As TM explains, "*When I'm feeling stressed, I usually listen to music to help myself calm down. I also enjoy writing in journals because I find it difficult to share my feelings with others, and writing makes me feel relieved*" (TM). This approach reflects an emotion-focused coping strategy that supports TM in managing emotional distress and reducing psychological distress. In addition to regulating emotions, TM also demonstrates the use of problem-focused coping strategies. This is evident through efforts to manage daily activities more effectively, minimize excessive academic load, and seek support from peers when facing learning difficulties, especially after skipping class due to sports commitments. TM explained, "*Now I'm trying to manage my schedule so that it doesn't get too stressful... I started to be more open to the people around me and share my thoughts or ask for help*" (TM). These changes are further supported by external observations. Teachers report that TM becomes more proactive in handling academic responsibilities and is more willing to ask questions when faced with challenges. Similarly, the trainer observed an improvement in TM emotion control and noted a calmer attitude during the training session. Overall, these findings suggest that TM develops a stronger capacity to balance academic obligations, athletic demands, and emotional management through the application of more adaptive coping strategies.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study support the coping theory proposed by Lazarus and Folkman, which suggests that individuals use emotion-oriented and problem-oriented coping mechanisms to manage psychological stress. These findings are also consistent with research conducted by Rice et al. (2016), which showed that the psychological stress experienced by athletes can contribute to concentration difficulties, decreased motivation, and negative mental health consequences. In addition, these findings are in line with Chu et al. (2010), who emphasized that family support plays an important role in promoting psychological adjustment and facilitating a more adaptive coping process among adolescents. Nevertheless, current research offers a different perspective than previous research by emphasizing the personal and subjective experiences of adolescent athletes, especially in situations characterized by limited emotional support from family members. Further findings suggest that support from family, educational environment, and coaches contributes substantially to maintaining the mental well-being of adolescent athletes. From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the understanding that adaptive coping mechanisms allow adolescents to respond to psychological challenges in a healthier and more constructive way. In practical terms, these findings could provide the basis for developing guidance and counseling interventions, psychological support services, and mental health programs aimed at helping adolescent athletes maintain a balance across academic responsibilities, athletic commitments, and the demands of social life. Based on the findings of research on the psychological pressure experienced by TM as a teenage badminton player, adolescent athletes are faced with emotional, social, and academic pressures simultaneously, in addition to physical demands. These results are in line with previous research showing that high achievement demands and imbalances between sports, education, and home life make adolescent athletes a vulnerable group to psychological distress. The academic pressure, sports demands, and limited emotional support experienced by TM show how stress in adolescence can affect a person's emotional regulation, concentration, and psychological well-being. Moksnes, Moljord, Espnes, and Byrne (2010) show that high levels of stress in adolescents are associated with the emergence of negative emotional conditions such as anxiety, emotional distress, and psychological fatigue. In the study, it was explained that adolescents who face prolonged stress tend to experience decreased emotional well-being, especially when they do not have adequate psychological support. This situation is reflected in TM's experience managing academic responsibilities and athletic commitments simultaneously, which affects his concentration, motivation, and emotional regulation.

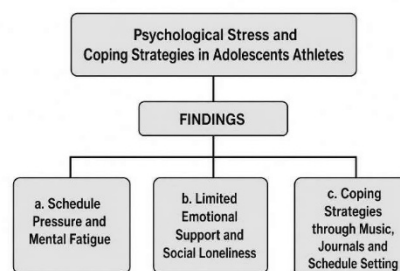


Figure 2. Research Findings and Discussions

The first theme, which focused on scheduling demands and psychological fatigue, revealed that participants' stress stemmed largely from the high intensity of balancing school obligations with routine training activities. TM is required to maintain academic performance while consistently attending daily badminton training sessions. As a result, he reported experiencing monotony in his daily routine, along with physical fatigue, mental fatigue, and challenges in maintaining focus. These findings are in line with research conducted by Pascoe et al. (2020), which showed that continuous exposure to academic-related stress can lead to psychological fatigue, reduced concentration, and

lower levels of mental well-being among adolescent and student populations. These findings are consistent with Stambulova et al. (2015), who reported that adolescent athletes often experience stress when trying to balance academic responsibilities with the demands of training and competition. The schedule pressures experienced by participants were also consistent with the findings of Sorkkila et al. (2017), who found that a combination of academic and sports-related demands may contribute to increased stress and fatigue among adolescent student-athletes. These findings are further supported by Smith's (1986) cognitive-affective model of athletic fatigue, which explains that fatigue develops when athletes experience prolonged stress and feel that the demands placed on them exceed the available coping resources. Teenage athletes who experience burnout often show emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation to train, lose motivation to achieve success, and are bored with the sports activities they usually enjoy. This condition can also be understood through the Theory of Self-Determination put forward by Ryan and Deci (2000), which shows that psychological well-being and intrinsic motivation are influenced by the fulfillment of basic psychological needs, including autonomy, competence, and connectedness. When these needs are not adequately met, motivation and well-being can decrease. The participants' situations also show the contradiction between their roles as athletes and students. TM is expected to excel in both academics and sports at the same time. This is in line with research findings, which show that adolescent athletes are often faced with conflicts between the demands of sports achievement and education. Psychological tension tends to increase when individuals have difficulty managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously. The second theme, which explores social isolation and limited emotional support, suggests that social environments and family dynamics play an important role in shaping the mental well-being of adolescent athletes. TMs report having limited opportunities to express personal concerns or receive emotional reassurance during stressful periods, due to demanding schedules reducing the frequency and quality of communication with family members. These findings are consistent with Bowlby's attachment theory, which emphasizes that adolescent psychological development is closely related to emotional connectedness and secure relationships with parents. When emotional needs are not adequately met, teens may have greater difficulty regulating emotions and may become more susceptible to feelings of loneliness and insecurity. In this context, family support serves as an important protective factor that helps adolescents manage psychological challenges. Emotional support through parental involvement, meaningful communication, and consistent attention can contribute to greater security and encourage the development of more adaptive coping strategies. Supporting this perspective, Rueger et al. (2016) report that adolescents who feel stronger family support generally show higher levels of psychological well-being and lower emotional distress. TM's experience of social isolation seems to be more influenced by his family situation as an only child and the absence of close relationships with extended family members. Although he interacts with colleagues in his training environment, he feels that certain personal difficulties cannot be shared openly with them. These findings suggest that peer relationships can provide support, but they do not always completely replace the emotional support obtained from family.

The third topic, which discussed coping mechanisms including writing, music, and time management, showed that participants attempted to find ways to reduce the psychological stress they were experiencing. The participants applied coping techniques that focused on emotions and that focused on problems at the same time. To relieve stress and express emotions that are difficult to express directly, the participants chose to write in a personal notebook and listen to music. This strategy is in line with the ideas of Lazarus and Folkman, who state that people use emotion-focused coping mechanisms to reduce the emotional stress caused by uncontrollable circumstances. Compas et al. (2017), who highlight that adaptive coping strategies and emotion regulation help adolescents manage stress more effectively and reduce the risk of psychological difficulties. In addition,

participants implemented problem-focused coping strategies by setting their schedules and seeking help from peers when facing academic challenges, demonstrating an active effort to address the source of stress head-on while reducing the negative emotions associated with these difficulties. Jones and Lavalley (2009), who found that participation in sport can facilitate the development of important life skills, such as time management, self-regulation, and problem-solving, which help adolescents cope with challenges in various aspects of life. These findings are consistent with Tamminen and Holt (2012), who suggest that adolescent athletes develop coping skills through social experiences and interactions, with support from significant others who help them manage stress and adapt to challenging situations. Emotional changes and the process of self-adjustment, show that a person's emotional state and social behavior are also affected by the stress he or she is experiencing. TM becomes more fatigued and sensitive, and sometimes chooses to withdraw when under heavy stress. This suggests that adolescents' ability to maintain emotional stability can be affected by prolonged psychological distress. These findings are consistent with Gustafsson et al. (2017), who explain that adolescent athletes may experience emotional exhaustion, decreased motivation, and psychological distress as a result of prolonged performance demands and training pressure. Teens are more prone to emotional disturbances such as anger, anxiety, withdrawal from social environments, and lack of motivation if these pressures continue without adequate support. The *coping* strategy used by TM shows an effort to reduce stress in a healthy way and maintain psychological balance in the midst of high academic and sports demands. Participants in this study must have a good coping mechanism in order to overcome the pressures faced as athletes and students.

However, the findings indicate that participants continuously attempted to adjust to their new circumstances. TM began to recognize the importance of emotional control, time management, and seeking activities that could help reduce psychological stress. The participants' resilience was reflected in their ability to endure challenges and adapt to changing situations. Li et al. (2023) reported that adaptive coping strategies are positively associated with greater resilience and better mental health outcomes among adolescent athletes. Athletes who demonstrate effective emotional regulation and actively take steps to address sources of stress generally show greater adaptability when managing academic responsibilities and athletic commitments. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that psychological stress among adolescent athletes is influenced by several interconnected factors, including training intensity, educational demands, limited social support, and individual emotional conditions. Athletes who possess good emotional regulation abilities are able to manage pre-competition anxiety, maintain focus, and develop greater self-confidence (Andana, B. I. B., Nafala, M., & Faqihudin, A. (2025). When stress is not managed appropriately, it may negatively affect various aspects of adolescents' lives, including mental health, athletic performance, social functioning, and overall psychological well-being. Therefore, support from family members, schools, coaches, and the broader social environment plays an important role in helping young athletes cope with the pressures they encounter. A supportive environment can provide adolescents with a stronger sense of security and acceptance while creating opportunities to express emotions and discuss personal challenges more openly. Beyond external support, the development of adaptive coping strategies is also an essential component in promoting healthy stress management among adolescent athletes. Effective coping mechanisms can reduce perceived stress, enhance emotional regulation, and strengthen individuals' ability to adapt to various demands encountered in daily life.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of interviews and in-depth observations, it was found that TM as a teenage badminton athlete experienced psychological distress stemming from academic demands, a tight

training schedule, and limited emotional support from his family. Intensive daily exercise activities accompanied by the obligation to take additional lessons cause TM to experience physical and emotional exhaustion. This condition affects their study concentration, motivation, and emotional stability in carrying out daily activities. The limited time to interact with parents who work full-time makes TM feel less emotionally supported. As an only child who has no closeness to a large family, TM also experiences social loneliness and tends to keep his own problems. The stress experienced causes feelings of anxiety, stress, fatigue, and worry about the demands of academic and athletic achievement. In the face of this pressure, TM uses several coping strategies. *Emotion-focused coping* strategies are done by listening to music and writing a personal journal to calm and reduce emotional stress. Meanwhile, *problem-focused coping strategies* are carried out by setting a study schedule, dividing practice time and academic time, and asking friends for help when experiencing difficulties in lessons. The results of the study showed that the coping strategy used by TM helped reduce the psychological stress he experienced. However, social support from family, school, and coaches remains an important factor in maintaining the psychological well-being of adolescent athletes so that they are able to face academic and sports demands in a more adaptive way.

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