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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON ADOLESCENTS' RESILIENCE IN FAMILY

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Abstract:

Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by profound physical, cognitive, emotional, and social transformations. Maintaining balanced mental health is especially important during this period, as it supports adolescents in navigating these challenges. This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore adolescents' lived experiences of resilience, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). A total of five adolescents, aged 16 to 17, participated in in-depth interviews. The thematic analysis revealed four key themes: (a) Family Dynamics and Conflict Response, (b) Adaptive Recovery from Family Conflicts, (c) Attribution in Family Conflicts, (d) Discipline and Moral Learning in Families, (e) Emotion-Focused Coping, and (f) Behavioural Coping in Family Stress. The findings highlight the central role of the family in shaping adolescents' resilience, both as a source of challenges and as a foundation for coping strategies.

Keywords:

Adolescent, Mental Health, Resilience, Family Conflict, Attribution Style, Internalize, Externalise

Introduction

Adolescent Mental Health

Adolescence is a developmental stage of significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and social transformations. During this time, adolescents develop and expand expectations, while facing challenging environments, including educational expectations, shifting family roles, and rapidly changing peer networks (Wray-Lake, Crouter, & McHale, 2010). Meanwhile, maintaining a good and balance mental health are significantly important among the adolescent. It is because mental health is an important and indispensable component of general well-being, which includes emotional, psychological, and social dimensions (Dandala & Hodambia, 2021). It influences how people think, feel, and behave, and it also has an impact on how they deal with stress, interact with others, and make decisions (Srivastava, 2011).

The prevalence of mental health disorders during this period is a growing concern, with conditions such as depression, anxiety, and behavioural disorders becoming increasingly common (Tahoun et al., 2023). Adolescents' psychological well-being is significantly shaped by a combination of individual experiences, societal impacts, and interpersonal connections, (Lin & Guo, 2024). These support systems are essential for fostering healthy development and overall well-being during the critical period of adolescence. Understanding the multifaceted nature of mental health during adolescence is crucial for developing effective interventions and support systems that promote resilience and well-being

In the Malaysian socio-cultural context, adolescents are likely to be attach in a collectivist culture, where individual identity is very closely associated with family and group expectation (Cong et al., 2020). Collectivism tends to emphasize harmony among groups, respect for elders, and common goals rather than personal desires. Even though such cultural orientation provides social harmonious, however it may lead to conflict especially when individual desires are different from family expectation (Wang et al., 2023). For instance, career choice is determined as much by following social expectation and family wish which potentially result in conflict or identity confusion (Ajmal et al., 2020). Peer conformity is also a key feature of adolescence within collectivist cultures, further increasing the pressure to maintain group values and behaviours (Apriyani, 2025). This can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and even depression, as adolescents navigate the delicate balance between personal autonomy and cultural expectations (Zaky, 2017).

In this study, the researcher is aim to explore the lived experiences of adolescents in how adolescents make sense of resilience in their daily lives. Secondly, to understand how adolescents attribute the causes and meanings of the challenges they encounter in their everyday experiences. Yet, to identify and describe the coping strategies adolescents employ when facing everyday challenges.

Family Interaction and Communication during Adolescence

Family interaction and communication are essential elements that significantly shape an adolescent's development and well-being. Open communication channels within the family enable adolescents to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns, thus fostering a sense of belonging and security. (Guo et al., 2021). When families cultivate a culture of respect, understanding, and empathy, teenagers are more likely to develop resilience and healthy coping mechanisms (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2022). Effective communication patterns, such as active

listening and constructive dialogue, facilitate conflict resolution and promote stronger family bonds (Adhariani, 2022). Conversely, dysfunctional communication patterns, such as criticism, hostility, or avoidance, can undermine an adolescent's self-esteem and contribute to mental health challenges (Q. Zhang et al., 2021). Such negative family dynamics are significantly linked to increased risk for various psychopathologies in adolescence, including depression and anxiety. Despite the increasing peer influence, the presence of parental support serves as a crucial protective factor against these risks, which buffers the impact of various stressors such as peer difficulties and romantic challenges (Pine et al., 2024). Conversely, a lack of familial support or poor family communication has been identified as a significant risk factor for mental health issues, potentially exacerbating the challenges adolescents face in managing everyday stressors and transitioning into adulthood. Therefore, encouraging healthy family interactions and communication styles is vital in fostering a supportive atmosphere that advances teenagers' healthy emotional and social development (Molina Moreno et al., 2024)

Martin Seligman 3Ps Resilience Module

Positive mental health is a vital foundation for adolescents as they navigate the complex transition from childhood to adulthood (Llistosella et al., 2023). Building resilience becomes particularly crucial during this important stage because it gives adolescents the abilities they need to adjust, recover through, and flourish in the face of challenges and difficulties. Martin Seligman and his frameworks of positive psychology is based on the principles of the positive psychology movement (Fält-Weckman et al., 2024). Seligman (1990) proposed his idea of optimist and pessimist and it closely related with resilience. Seligman's Personalization Module, part of his broader theory of learned optimism and explanatory styles, focuses on how individuals explain the causes of events, especially negative ones. The three dimensions are: personalization, permanence, and pervasiveness. Personalization is one of the factors used to assess a person's explanatory style, including whether they attribute results to internal or external. Permanence is used to describe how long an event lasts, whether temporary or permanent in their life. Third, pervasiveness assesses how far an event has spread throughout an individual's life, whether specifically or worldwide.

Personalization, in this context, refers to the degree to which an individual attributes events, particularly adverse ones, to their own actions or characteristics (internal) versus external factors beyond their control (Townsend et al., 2021). This attributional style significantly influences an adolescent's self-esteem, emotional responses, and coping mechanisms, with a tendency towards internal, stable, and global attributions for negative events often correlating with increased vulnerability to depression (Yu et al., 2018). Conversely, an external, temporary, and specific attributional style fosters resilience, enabling adolescents to perceive setbacks as surmountable and less indicative of their inherent self-worth, thereby promoting a more adaptive response to adversity and fostering positive mental health outcomes. This framework highlights how perceptions of individual over challenging circumstances influence their psychological well-being and the capacity to adapt effectively. The emphasis on attributional retraining can empower adolescents to reframe their interpretations of challenging experiences, thereby enhancing their capacity to overcome obstacles and maintain positive psychological functioning (Phan et al., 2021)

The Attribution Theory of Motivation(Weiner, 1985) also assists in developing adolescents' thoughts and responses to these pressures. This theory predicts that individuals make attributions of life events along three dimensions: locus of causality (internal vs. external),

stability (stable vs. unstable), and controllability (controllable vs. uncontrollable). These attribution patterns influence emotional responses and behavioural choices. For example, an adolescent, who makes attributions to internal, stable causes of family conflict: "It's my fault they fight all the time," may experience guilt or low self-esteem. Conversely, attributing externally, "My parents are under a lot of stress with work these days," able to avoid unnecessary self-blame while keeping their psychological well-being. However, excessive externalization can also lead to avoidance and irresponsibility, though, preventing growth and resolution (Stavrou, 2022).

Problem Statement

Family Conflicts

Family conflicts and challenges are two distinct issues that can develop in most families. Family conflict refers to arguments or controversies among family members that involve interpersonal struggle, competing opinions, or emotional clashes (Kader & Roman, 2018). It is usually temporary or transitory, but it can become persistent if left unresolved. Most disagreements in household settings arise from specific behaviours such as unequal chores, decisions in money handling, or communication challenges such as unclear expectations or poor emotional tone (Fathia, 2023). If the conflicts mentioned above persist, they may have an influence on all family members and lead to stress, emotional strain, and communication failures. Adolescents often face a range of family conflicts and challenges as they navigate the transition from childhood to adulthood (Kader & Roman, 2018). During adolescence, as young people strive toward autonomy and identity formation, they often face tension with parental norms and expectations. One of the most common family conflicts during adolescence is related to autonomy—adolescents may seek more freedom in decision-making, social life, and lifestyle choices, while parents may struggle to adjust their roles or maintain control (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2023). This can lead to frequent disagreements over rules, curfews, academic performance, or household responsibilities. Furthermore, unresolved conflicts can escalate, fostering an environment of tension and misunderstanding within the household (Valizadeh et al., 2018).

Family Challenges

Family challenges refer to recurring difficulties or tensions that impact the entire family system. It can be long-term or structural, and it may also involve external conditions. (Johari et al., 2021). For example, financial issues caused by unemployment, divorce, a family member's chronic illness, or a relocation. These challenges often involve adapting, adaptability, and endurance in various aspects of family life. However, it typically requires long-term problem solving, adaptation, or external support. These differences do not inherently lead to conflict; rather, the way families navigate and communicate about these distinctions can foster understanding and strengthen family bonds. These differences might cause misunderstandings, identity confusion, and isolation. Despite these challenges, many adolescents build resilience when their families offer open communication, emotional support, and opportunity for collaborative problem solving.

In conclusion, adolescence is a transformative period marked by significant academic and familial pressures. These challenges are further complicated by external stressors such as family instability, financial hardship, and cultural divides. However, adolescents' interpretations of these experiences—whether they attribute them to internal or external

causes—play a crucial role in shaping their emotional responses and coping mechanisms. By exploring how adolescents attribute their academic performance and family conflicts and challenges, this research aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which they construct meaning from their experiences.

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies is the efforts individuals employ to regulate their emotions and maintain psychological well-being when faced with stress or challenges (Moshfeghinia, 2025) These strategies can be broadly categorized into problem-focused coping, which involves directly addressing the source of stress, and emotion-focused coping, aimed at managing the emotional responses to stress (Parikh et al., 2019). Adolescents often utilize a blend of these strategies, adapting their approaches based on the perceived controllability of the stressor and their individual psychological resources (Hudson et al., 2015). The younger adolescents who often perceive less control and tend toward emotion-focused coping, whereas the older adolescents acquired with higher perceived control and they able to shift to problem-focused coping. This behaviour is mediated by metacognitive beliefs including the awareness and controllability expectation (Ge & Tolmie, 2025).However, the effectiveness of these coping mechanisms can vary significantly among individuals, influenced by factors such as age, prior experiences, and the specific domain of the stressor (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2024). A study on Chinese adolescents revealed that while they frequently employ emotion-focused coping strategies, there is a notable deficit in their use of problem-focused approaches, highlighting a need for interventions that bolster adaptive coping skills (Parikh et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2023).

Motion-focused strategies involve efforts to reduce the negative emotional impact of stressors when the source of stress cannot be directly altered (Achnak, 2021). These strategies include cognitive reappraisal, seeking emotional support, or engaging in distracting activities to manage distress (Garousi, 2022).This can encompass strategies like reframing negative thoughts, practicing mindfulness, or engaging in leisure activities to alleviate emotional tension. (Moore, 2011). Similarly, problem-focused strategies involve direct actions to address the source of stress, such as problem-solving or seeking instrumental support. Emotion-focused strategies involve efforts to reduce the negative emotional impact of stressors when the source of stress cannot be directly altered (Chen, 2023). Adolescents often employ a combination of both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping mechanisms, and the effectiveness of these strategies can be modulated by factors such as emotion regulation and mindfulness skills, which are crucial during this period of significant developmental change.

Literature Review

Phenomenon of Resilience

Resilience, at its core, describes the dynamic process by which individuals adjust positively in the face of adversity. This concept holds particular importance for adolescents, a demographic undergoing significant biological, psychological, and social transitions that heighten their susceptibility to stressors. It is often measured behaviourally, based on one's ability to demonstrate competence and meet societal expectations despite considerable obstacles (Srivastava, 2011). Research further indicates that resilience is not a fixed trait but an evolving phenomenon shaped by both internal strengths and external supports. For example, Zhang et al. (2023) showed how parents of adolescents with depression progressed through phases of decompensation, recovery, and eventual normality, illustrating resilience as a cyclical and

adaptive family process rather than a linear outcome. Likewise, phenomenological studies on adolescents from divorced or disharmonious families reveal that resilience does not equate to the absence of distress, but rather the capacity to sustain hope, renegotiate roles, and reconstruct meaning in the face of disruption. Luthar et al. (2000) conceptualize resilience as a multidimensional and sometimes unstable phenomenon, whereby competence in one domain may coexist with vulnerabilities in others—a reality highly relevant for adolescents balancing multiple developmental demands. Zolkoski & Bullock (2012) further situate resilience at the intersection of risk and protective factors, underscoring the importance of social competence, autonomy, and sense of purpose as buffers against adversity. Extending this view cross-culturally, Abiola & Udofoia (2011) validated resilience in Nigerian youth as encompassing perseverance, self-reliance, and optimism, confirming its role in protecting against depression and anxiety during stressful life events. More recently, Park et al. (2024) documented how South Korean university students cultivated resilience amid the COVID-19 pandemic through innovation, self-reflection, and transcendence, framing resilience as both a personal strength and a socially embedded response. Collectively, these perspectives suggest that resilience in adolescents is not merely about enduring hardship but about actively constructing meaning, maintaining relationships, and negotiating identity in the face of adversity. Nonetheless, this process is continually tested, as adolescents must confront the persistent challenges of academic uncertainty, family instability, and emotional distress that strain the boundaries of their resilience.

Challenges Faced by Adolescents and Perceptions of Resilience

Adolescents often confront a wide range of stressors that test their emotional and psychological resilience. These include family-related challenges such as conflict, parental separation, economic hardship, and parental mental health struggles (O. Digon, 2023). Beyond the family domain, academic pressures, peer relationships, and identity formation also emerge as significant sources of stress (Zhou et al., 2023). All stressors can lead to unhealthy mental health such as anxiety and loneliness if an individual tends to internalize all the problems. Opposingly, when individuals externalize all the challenges they face may lead to aggression and withdrawal behaviours. Importantly, the cultural context shapes how these challenges are experienced in collectivist societies, adolescents may suppress their emotions to maintain family harmony, whereas in Western contexts they may assert greater independence by voicing concerns. Adolescents' perceptions of resilience are largely shaped by how they interpret the causes and controllability of family challenges. O. Digon (2023) reveal that many adolescents view resilience as the ability to endure and make sense of family instability while maintaining hope for the future. This suggests that adolescents perceive resilience as a mix of acceptance, adaptation, and continuity of life, rather than the eradication of adversity.

Coping Strategies Among Adolescents

Coping strategies represent the behavioural and cognitive mechanisms through which adolescents enact resilience. Studies consistently distinguish between adaptive coping—such as reflection, self-reflection, seeking social support, and reframing—and maladaptive coping, including avoidance, withdrawal, and self-blame (Kurniawaty et al., n.d.; Zhou et al., 2023) emphasized that adolescents often prefer coping through activities and friendships, suggesting that resilience is expressed collectively rather than individually in many cultural contexts. In high-risk scenarios, coping has been shown to act as a mediator between family functioning and mental health outcomes. For example, Cong et al. (2020) reported that problem-focused coping reduced suicidal ideation in adolescents by buffering the impact of low family

flexibility. These findings underscore that coping strategies are not static but evolve over time, reflecting adolescents' developmental growth, resources, and contexts.

Overall, the literature underscores resilience as a multifaceted, culturally shaped phenomenon that unfolds through adolescents' attributions and coping responses to adversity. The 3Ps framework provides a useful lens to understand these processes, while phenomenological studies highlight the importance of capturing adolescents' voices in describing their perceptions of resilience. Despite progress, gaps remain in integrating attribution and coping, exploring Southeast Asian contexts, and mapping protective factors that mediate resilience pathways. Addressing these gaps is vital to develop culturally sensitive, developmentally appropriate interventions that empower adolescents to thrive amid family and social challenges.

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative research approach was applied in this study to explore adolescents lived experiences in resilience. Rather than focusing on quantitative data, researchers aim to examine the participants' real-lived experiences. By focusing on participants' subjective perspectives, qualitative research emphasizes how individuals express themselves. This is particularly crucial in research involving vulnerable groups, such as adolescents, as it provides an opportunity for participants to share their experience in their own words, thus adding credibility and trust to their narratives. In this study, the phenomenological approach will help uncover the subjective, lived experiences of adolescents as they navigate stress and resilience during challenging times, more specifically Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) was employed in this study. According to Smith (1996), IPA is a qualitative research approach concerned with exploring in detail how individuals make sense of their personal and lived experiences. All data were collected through in-depth interviews with adolescents who have experienced the phenomenon.

Participant Recruitment

In this research, researchers chose purposive sampling to align with the study that aims to explore meaning-making and lived experiences in selected participants who have experienced the phenomenon being studied. However, not all adolescents will be able to offer meaningful insight into the resilience experiences and their coping strategies. Hence, purposive sampling can help to exclude unsuitable participants. However, unlike quantitative studies need a huge participant, IPA studies usually are conducted on small sample size (Smith, 2016). In this research, there will be recruiting between 4 to 6 individuals in the sample to represent a range of backgrounds. Smaller sample sizes are common in qualitative studies because the emphasis is on quality and depth of findings over quantity and generalizability (Creswell, 2023). This approach aims to capture diversity in socioeconomic status, gender, and family dynamic, factors that reveal challenges in school and home setting. Participants included in the sample also must meet specific requirements. First, they must fulfil the World Health Organization (WHO) definition of an adolescent as someone who is between the ages of 10 and 19. Second, they should currently be attending secondary school in the Kota Kinabalu area, setting the age range for inclusion between 13 and 18. Thirdly, they must not be deaf or silent so that the researcher may perform a seamless in-depth interview. One of key requirement is their willingness to participate fully in one-on-one interviews, providing detailed insights into their

lived experiences in the way to attribute internally or externally in both school and home setting. Additionally, as all the participants are underage, parental consent and participant consent were required, adhering to ethical guidelines for adolescent research. However, the socioeconomic status of the sampled individuals is not constrained, nevertheless, to allow for comparisons between respondents from various socioeconomic backgrounds. To explore adolescents lived experiences in attributing academic successes, failures, family conflicts, and challenges to internal or external factors—and how these attributions shape their coping strategies—semi-structured interviews will be conducted. This method is optimal for capturing the depth and complexity of adolescents' perspectives, allowing them to narrate their experiences freely in an open, conversational setting rather than adhering to rigid questioning. As noted by Smith (2015) that sequence of interview questions matters less than fostering an environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their stories.

Data Collection

Research procedure begins with obtaining ethical and administrative approvals, starting with an application to the Ministry of Education (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia), followed by a parallel submission to the Sabah State Education Department (Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Sabah). Once institutional approvals are secured, permission is sought from selected schools to access participants. The researcher then coordinates with the school's counselling department (Unit Bimbingan dan Kaunseling) to identify a list of students who faced disciplinary actions (e.g., suspensions) or challenges linked to family issues, academic struggles, or behavioral problems. After compiling this purposive sample, the researcher initiates participant recruitment by contacting eligible students and their parents. To ensure ethical compliance, parental consent forms (for minors) and participant consent form are distributed, clarifying the voluntary nature of the study and willingness to engage in semi-structured interviews. This structured yet flexible approach aligns with phenomenology's focus on deeply exploring lived experiences while adhering to institutional protocols and guaranteeing participants' autonomy.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Population

Recruitment and interviews occurred concurrently from May to August of 2025. A total of 4 individuals expressed interest in the study participation. All the respondents self-identified as Sabahan participants completed demographic questionnaire and semi-structure interviews to describe their lived experienced in family conflicts and challenges, yet their coping strategies. Three participants were recruited through purposive sampling, while one participant was recruited thru snowball sampling. The study sample consisted two females and two males. All of them are secondary school students in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Two of the participants self-identifies as Buddhist while another two are Muslim. Overall, all the participants living between two to six household family members. The table below shown the demographic data of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic

Participant	Gender	Age	Religion	Ethnic	Child Ranking
R1	Male	16	Buddha	Chinese	Middle
R2	Male	16	Buddha	Chinese	Youngest
R3	Female	15	Islam	Bisaya	Middle
R4	Female	16	Christian	Chinese	Eldest

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the four adolescent participants involved in the study. The participants ranged in age from 15 to 16 years old, with two males (R1, R2) and two females (R3, R4). In terms of religious, the sample reflected diversity, including Buddhism (R1, R2), Islam (R3), and Christianity (R4). In ethnicity, three participants identified as Chinese, while one identified as Bisaya. Child ranking within the family varied across participants, with one eldest child, one youngest child, and two middle children. This demographic diversity provided a varied lens through which the adolescents lived experiences in attribution and coping strategies were explored.

Theme 1: Family Dynamics and Conflict Response

This first theme reveals the most fundamental topic which is the family dynamic and conflicts respond. Participants frequently highlighted on family conflicts as defining challenge and difficulties they faced. It captures how adolescents navigate their interpersonal tensions and parental expectations within the family dynamic. Participants unrevealed a variety of family interactions, ranging from sibling argument to parental discipline and perceptions of unfair treatment from parents. R1 is a middle child, and he always fight with his brother back to the time when they were primary. As he explained: "*I argue with younger when we are still in primary school time.*" While R2, a youngest child with an elder sister, he describes his argument with sister: "*I argue with sister back then but my parents always say that was my fault, it is unfair.*" While R3, a middle child with all girl siblings does not respond on how she feels when argue or conflicts happened. Strategies for managing disagreements were often pragmatic, but in this study all the participants remain quiet most of the time like R1 and R3 said: "*I just keep quiet.*" However, there are slightly different in R2, he does conditional engagement and take this opportunity to sound out that issue. He said: "*I will speak out if the argument happened not related to parents.*" He will not interrupt it if the issues happened just between his parents. Moreover, the second subtheme were revealed it is related to parental discipline. Participants also reflected on the disciplinary method used by their parent. As R1 shred, "*Mom will punish both of me and my brother without know the truth, because we make the mess.*" On another hand, R2 experienced totally differently where the parents will say that you not supposed to fight with sister. From here he emphasis that he perceives unfair treatment from parents, as captured in the statement, "*Maybe they will say my sister is right, but I am the one who wrong. But I think that I am the right one, I felt like unfair... and nothing.*" while the other respondents did not mention about unfair treatment from parents.

Theme 2: Adaptive Recovery from Family Conflicts

This theme reveals that how adolescents recover and move forward after experiencing family conflicts, their strategies to cope and some said that focus less on confrontation and more on maintaining peace and stability. Participants described adopting avoidance behaviours such as remaining silent, withdrawing from tense situations, or allowing arguments to naturally fade

away. These strategies suggest a pragmatic approach where adolescents prioritize family harmony over immediate resolution. For example, R1 explained, “*When bring up the problems, I think it will trigger something, then make them argue again.*” He illustrates the perception that discussing issues might reignite conflict, leading him to prefer silence as a protective response. Interestingly, participants also framed conflict as temporary and short-lived, indicating an understanding that disputes would eventually subside on their own. R1 further emphasized, “*No, is okay only, I am tired in arguing,*” reflecting a sense of exhaustion toward prolonged conflict but also normalization of it as a recurring part of family life. This approach to recovery demonstrates resilience not through confrontation but through acceptance and endurance. The normalization of conflict as “*just part of family life*” illustrates how adolescents attempt to preserve relationships by minimizing escalation. Such patterns indicate that while adolescents recognize conflict as inevitable, their strategies emphasize moving past disagreements rather than seeking resolution or accountability.

Theme 3: Attribution in Family Conflicts

The third theme explores how adolescents interpret and attribute the causes of conflicts within their families. These attributions revealed a spectrum of meaning-making, ranging from self-blame to perceptions of unfair treatment and externalization toward siblings’ behaviours. For instance, R1 recalled conflicts with both brother and sister, admitting, “*I argued with my sister too... rather than argue I would like to said she scolded me, because I did something that make, she scolds me, and it is my fault.*” This admission demonstrates how some adolescents internalize responsibility, attributing blame to themselves rather than others. In contrast, others perceived unfair parental judgment as central to family disputes. R2 expressed frustration, saying, “*Maybe they will say my sister is right, but I am the one who wrong. But I think that I am the right one, I felt like unfair... and nothing.*” His situation highlights how parental responses are sometimes interpreted as biased, shaping his view of family conflict as unjust. Externalization also emerged as a distinct attributional pattern. R4 openly expressed annoyance at his sibling’s lack of responsibility, noting, “*Yes, I get very annoyed when he did not do his chores so I have to do it.*” Similarly, R2 mentioned using family discussions as opportunities to voice his perspective: “*I will also sound out my opinion whenever they are discussing some certain topics but if the issue of topic is among my parents’ personal issue, I will not comment on it.*” These reflections reveal how adolescents shift between different attributional lenses, sometimes taking personal responsibility while at other times placing blame on siblings or parents. Together, these show how meaning-making in family conflicts is not fixed but negotiated, influenced by the relational context, and perceived fairness within the family unit.

Theme 4: Discipline and Moral Learning in Families

This theme shows how parental discipline is perceived by adolescents and how it shapes their understanding of morality, fairness, and responsibility. Participants reflected on disciplinary practices that ranged from physical punishment to mediation and corrective guidance. For example, R4 recalled a childhood experience where punishment was meted out through physical means, “*My dad will beat me with a belt when I misbehave back then.*” Similarly, R1 shared, “*Yes, they do rotan us,*” framing such punishment as a typical aspect of growing up. While harsh, these measures were not always described with resentment but often rationalized as lessons for correcting behaviour. Discipline was also closely tied to perceptions of fairness. R1 explained, “*My mother will stop us and punish both of us,*” demonstrating a form of parental intervention aimed at neutrality. However, not all participants viewed discipline as equitable. R2 emphasized feeling that parents sided with siblings, sharing, “*My parents will say that you*

not supposed to fight with sister... maybe they will say my sister is right, but I am the one who wrong." Such experiences illustrate the dual role of discipline as both corrective and potentially a source of perceived injustice. These reflections highlight the moral learning that occurs through disciplinary encounters. While some participants interpreted punishment as a necessary correction, others viewed it as evidence of bias, shaping their long-term perception of fairness in the family. The contrast between these accounts suggests that parental discipline is not merely about rule enforcement but also a key site where adolescents negotiate meaning about justice, responsibility, and their place within the family dynamic.

Theme 5: Emotion-Focused Coping

This theme captures the ways adolescents manage family-related stress by turning inward or seeking emotional outlets. Many participants described strategies that involved reflecting on their experiences, confiding in peers, or deliberately avoiding confrontation. These methods reveal a preference for emotional regulation over direct conflict resolution, particularly when adolescents felt disempowered within family hierarchies. Self-reflection emerged as a common coping approach. For example, R2 explained, "*I will reflect on it, then I will avoid doing on it next time,*" suggesting that personal mistakes or misjudgements were internalized as learning opportunities. This introspective response illustrates how adolescents sought to transform stressful experiences into lessons for self-improvement rather than outward blame. When family members were not viewed as safe or approachable for emotional disclosure, adolescents often relied on friends as confidants. R2 emphasized this reliance, saying, "*I will share what problems that I face with other peoples.*" Such accounts reveal the importance of peers as alternative emotional support systems, especially when familial communication was limited by generational gaps or perceived parental unfairness. Avoidance also appeared as a significant coping pattern. Participants like R3 preferred to disengage from conflict rather than address it directly, explaining, "*Not feeling stress, because it is passed.*" This perspective underscores how some adolescents resolved tension by letting issues fade naturally, an act of emotional self-preservation. Collectively, these accounts highlight how adolescents draw on emotion-focused strategies to cope with family-related stress, balancing between introspection, external peer support, and avoidance as ways to manage challenges.

Theme 6: Behavioural Coping in Family Stress

While emotion-focused coping centered on internal or relational strategies, behavioural coping highlighted how adolescents actively engaged in activities that diverted attention from stress or provided physical release. These strategies illustrate the embodied nature of coping, where the body becomes a tool for managing emotional distress. Several participants described sleep as an immediate escape mechanism, a way to temporarily withdraw from family tension. R3 simply stated, "*I will sleep,*" showing how rest functioned as a form of avoidance as well as a relief from stress. Other participants spoke about visible physical responses to stress, such as sweating or nervous habits, as R2 noted: "*I will rub my hands, because I want to remove the sweat.*" These bodily manifestations demonstrate how stress is experienced somatically as well as emotionally. Engaging in hobbies emerged as a constructive behavioural strategy. R3 shared how collecting keychains brought joy and distraction: "*I just like to collect the weird keychain, I feel happy looking at them and I will hang it at my bag.*" This illustrates how small, personally meaningful activities provided a sense of control and positive emotion during family stress. Physical activities such as sports and exercise were also described as effective coping outlets. R1 reflected, "*I like to play badminton,*" while R2 described engaging in outdoor exercises: "*Push up, monkey bar in the park while listening to the music.*" These accounts highlight how

physical activity served not only as a diversion but also as a direct release of built-up emotional tension. Adolescents' behavioural coping demonstrates a multifaceted approach—ranging from rest and escape to constructive hobbies and vigorous physical activities. These strategies underline how adolescents transform stress into opportunities for self-regulation and personal comfort through embodied practices.

Discussion

This study revealed that adolescents interpret and cope with family challenges through complex attribution processes and diverse coping strategies. Consistent with attribution theory (Weiner, 1985), adolescents' perceptions of responsibility and fairness shaped their emotional and behavioural responses. The findings echo (Zhang et al., 2019), who noted the interplay between academic pressure and family stress, and extend this by highlighting fairness as a central attribution. Importantly, adolescents demonstrated resilience by reconstructing meaning, reflecting Seligman's 3Ps model of resilience - Personalization, Pervasiveness, and Permanence.

The family emerges as both a primary site of conflict and a foundation of resilience in adolescents' lived experiences. The interplay of sibling dynamics, parental expectations, and perceived fairness shapes how adolescents interpret challenges and mobilize coping strategies. Consistent with Weiner's Attribution Theory (1985), participants often located causes of conflict either in themselves or in perceived biases of parents.

This study also underscores the importance of relational resilience where resilience is not a fixed trait but emerges through negotiation within family systems. Adolescents did not describe resilience as independence from family, but rather as a process of navigating support and conflict simultaneously. Reflexively, the authors acknowledge that the initial inclination was to separate "supportive" from "conflictual" family interactions, but participants' voices showed that the two often coexisted—parents and siblings could be both stressors and sources of strength in the same context. Implications for practice include fostering open communication in families, enhancing parental awareness of adolescents' need for recognition, and incorporating family-based interventions in counselling.

Conclusion

The findings highlight the central role of the family in shaping adolescents' resilience, both as a source of challenges and as a foundation for coping strategies. Family dynamics, parental involvement, and perceptions of fairness significantly influence how adolescents attribute meaning to their experiences and develop resilience in the face of difficulties. These insights underscore the need for families, educators, and mental health practitioners to foster supportive environments that enhance adolescents' coping skills, promote positive mental health, and encourage adaptive responses to challenges. Future research with larger and more diverse samples is recommended to deepen the understanding of adolescents' resilience within varying cultural and social contexts.

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