

INMATES' COPING STRESS STRATEGIES AT CLASS IIA CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION OF KOTABUMI



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ABSTRACT

This study examines the issue of low self-efficacy and self-confidence among Children in Conflict with the Law during their rehabilitation at Pusat Pelayanan Sosial Griya Bina Karsa. The research aims to identify the role of self-efficacy in improving children's confidence and abilities throughout the rehabilitation process. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations involving child clients, community counselors, and social workers. The findings reveal that interventions such as skills training, non-formal education, and social support play a significant role in enhancing children's self-efficacy. These efforts help improve their confidence, adaptability, and readiness to reintegrate into society while reducing the risk of reoffending. The development of self-efficacy occurs gradually through strengthening motivational, cognitive, and emotional aspects. These findings highlight that self-efficacy is a crucial foundation for building positive behavior and supporting successful social reintegration among children undergoing rehabilitation.

Keywords: Coping Strategy; Stress; Prison; Emotion-Focused; Problem-Focused

INTRODUCTION

Correctional institutions play an essential role in the Indonesian criminal justice system, not merely as facilities for incarceration but more importantly as places for rehabilitation and reintegration. In accordance with Law Number 22 of 2022 concerning Corrections, correctional institutions are tasked with fostering inmates through educational, vocational, and moral development programs. The goal is to guide them toward becoming productive members of society after completing their sentence. However, the realization of these rehabilitative ideals is often hindered by systemic challenges, especially the mental and emotional strain experienced by inmates due to prolonged confinement, loss of autonomy, and restrictive social conditions. Stress becomes a common psychological issue that, if left unaddressed, could negatively impact inmates' behavior, inhibit rehabilitation efforts, and even lead to more severe mental health disorders (Taylor, 2009; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The experience of imprisonment itself is inherently stressful, particularly in overcrowded and under-resourced correctional environments. The case of Class IIA Correctional Institution of Kotabumi is illustrative of this phenomenon. With a designed capacity for only 300 inmates, the facility is currently inhabited by 771 prisoners representing an overcapacity rate of 271% (Wani et al., 2024). This condition has created a high-pressure environment that amplifies psychosocial stress among inmates. Overcrowding, limited personal space, insufficient access to health and psychological services, and lack of meaningful activity contribute significantly to psychological degradation. A notable incident was recorded in 2024 involving a male inmate diagnosed with a mental disorder following continuous psychological stress and isolation, highlighting the urgency for more robust coping mechanisms and mental health interventions within such institutions (Medical Record Report, 2024).

Research has demonstrated that inmates in correctional institutions employ various coping strategies to manage stress. Coping, as defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts made to manage the internal and external demands of situations appraised as stressful. Broadly, coping is classified into two categories: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping involves strategies that aim to reduce the emotional distress associated with the situation, such as prayer, acceptance, avoidance, or seeking emotional support. On the other hand, problem-focused coping involves actions directed at solving the problem causing the distress, such as participating in training programs, building social networks, or engaging in productive routines. Studies by Athallah and Santoso (2022) and Salsabella et al. (2022) found that these strategies are commonly used by inmates to mitigate stress and adapt to the prison environment.

Despite these contributions, previous studies often lack contextual specificity and fail to deeply explore the subjective experiences of inmates in individual prisons with unique institutional dynamics. Most existing research focuses on generalized prison populations or takes a quantitative approach that, while statistically informative, may overlook nuanced coping patterns formed by personal, social, and institutional factors. For instance, research conducted by Kurniawaty et al. (2021) in Kupang showed a statistically weak yet significant relationship between coping strategy use and inmate anxiety levels, but it did not capture inmates' lived experiences or explore how institutional factors shaped those strategies. Meanwhile, Pleško and Rihtarić (2024) in a study involving male inmates in Croatia highlighted that unhealthy coping mechanisms significantly increased anxiety and depression levels, but the cultural and systemic

context differs significantly from Indonesian settings, limiting the applicability of their findings in local policy design.

Moreover, a majority of studies tend to focus exclusively on either emotional or problem-oriented coping, often neglecting how both interact or complement each other within a particular correctional setting. While some studies like those by Utari et al. (2020) explored emotional coping among juvenile inmates, they did not integrate an analysis of problem-focused strategies or how institutional programming and personal resilience interact. This results in a research gap particularly the need for a qualitative exploration of how inmates in a specific, overcrowded institution like Class IIA Correctional Institution of Kotabumi manage stress using both coping categories and how these strategies are shaped by factors such as personality, social support, and institutional opportunities.

Given the urgent mental health concerns in Indonesia's prison system and the gaps in current literature, this study aims to explore and analyze the stress coping strategies employed by inmates at Class IIA Correctional Institution of Kotabumi. This facility represents a high-pressure environment marked by overcapacity and limited psychological support, making it a critical site for investigating how stress is managed in extreme correctional contexts. By adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, the study seeks to uncover the subjective coping experiences of inmates, categorizing them into emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies while analyzing the contextual factors that influence their effectiveness. Data collection involves in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the coping processes at play.

This research holds significant implications both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it contributes to a more contextualized understanding of Lazarus and Folkman's coping theory in correctional settings marked by structural deficits. It also enriches the discourse on inmate mental health by integrating individual and institutional perspectives. Practically, the findings are expected to inform the development of mental health-supportive programs in prisons, enhance training for correctional staff, and encourage the implementation of policies that prioritize psychological rehabilitation alongside security. As Indonesia continues to grapple with overcrowded prisons and increasing rates of psychological disorders among inmates, understanding how prisoners cope with stress is essential for advancing humane and effective correctional practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Stress in Correctional Institutions

Stress is a psychological condition that arises when an individual perceives a discrepancy between environmental demands and personal resources, resulting in physiological and emotional strain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the context of correctional institutions, stress often stems from institutional factors such as isolation, loss of autonomy, monotonous routines, and especially overcrowding. Taylor (2009) describes stress as an unfavorable emotional experience accompanied by biochemical and behavioral changes aimed at adaptation. This perspective is particularly relevant in prison environments, where the structural and social conditions are often rigid and punitive rather than rehabilitative.

Inmates are often exposed to both predictable stressors (e.g., sentencing, confinement routines) and unpredictable stressors (e.g., violence, isolation, or sudden disciplinary sanctions) that challenge their psychological resilience (Hinkle, 1974; Baron

et al., 2001). These stressors can lead to symptoms such as depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, aggression, and even suicidal ideation, especially when no adequate coping mechanism is available (Islamia et al., 2019; WHO, 2022). The risk is even more critical in overcrowded prisons, as demonstrated by the conditions in Class IIA Correctional Institution of Kotabumi, which operates at more than 270% of its intended capacity (Wani et al., 2024).

Coping Stress Strategies

Coping refers to the set of cognitive and behavioral efforts used to manage stressful situations and emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies are commonly classified into emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping involves techniques aimed at reducing the emotional distress associated with a situation, such as denial, avoidance, or religious activities. This strategy does not directly change the stressor but can mitigate the psychological impact (Nevid et al., 2003).

Problem-focused coping, in contrast, is oriented toward solving or addressing the source of stress. In correctional settings, this may include participating in educational or vocational training, building supportive peer relationships, or engaging in self-improvement programs. Both strategies have their roles, but their effectiveness is often dependent on personality traits, the perceived controllability of the stressor, and environmental supports (Compas et al., 2014).

Empirical Studies on Stress and Coping Among Inmates

Several previous studies have examined the use of coping strategies among inmates. Athallah and Santoso (2022) identified religious practices, group interaction, and structured daily routines as key emotion-focused coping strategies that help inmates adapt to prison life. Salsabella et al. (2022) further categorized inmates' coping strategies based on the presence of emotional support systems, noting that spiritual and social activities were critical to maintaining psychological well-being in high-stress environments.

Internationally, Pleško and Rihtarić (2024) found that maladaptive coping strategies such as withdrawal and denial were positively correlated with higher levels of anxiety and depression among Croatian inmates. On the other hand, adaptive strategies particularly those that encourage self-control and engagement in constructive activities correlated with improved mental health outcomes. These studies, while valuable, mostly employed quantitative approaches and lacked deep insight into inmates' subjective experiences, particularly in Indonesia.

Kurniawaty et al. (2021) used a correlation design to explore the relationship between stress and coping strategies in Kupang's Class IIB detention center. They found a weak but significant negative correlation, indicating that better coping strategies were associated with lower anxiety levels. However, the use of survey instruments such as the Brief COPE Scale did not allow for in-depth exploration of inmate narratives or contextual factors affecting their stress response.

Previous Studies

The issue of psychological stress among inmates and the coping strategies they adopt has been a subject of increasing academic interest, especially in the context of overcrowded and under-resourced correctional institutions. Several previous studies have explored these dynamics through both qualitative and quantitative lenses, each contributing

valuable insights into how stress manifests and how it is managed within the correctional system.

One relevant study was conducted by Athallah and Santoso (2022), they explore the sources of stress faced by inmates, identifying factors such as legal problems, economic hardship, and limited social support. The study emphasized the significance of structured coping activities such as religious practices, recreational engagement, and interpersonal communication. Their findings indicated that emotional coping strategies helped inmates mentally adapt to the constraints of prison life. The study shares similarities with the current research, especially in terms of identifying overcrowding as a major contributing stressor. However, it focused more heavily on emotional coping, whereas the current study also integrates problem-focused coping into its analysis.

Another study by Salsabella et al., (2022), published in the *Jurnal Sudut Pandang*, analyzed stress coping strategies used by inmates in a Class I detention center. The study highlighted that inmates commonly use both emotional and problem-focused strategies to manage stress, with religious involvement and hobbies being prominent methods. Their research revealed that activities which promote a sense of purpose and community were especially effective in reducing psychological strain. The current study builds upon this by investigating how these strategies operate specifically within Class IIA Correctional Institution of Kotabumi a facility that suffers from extreme overcrowding and limited resources and how the interplay between institutional environment and personal traits shapes coping behavior.

Kurniawaty et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative study at Rumah Tahanan Negara Kelas IIB Kupang using the Brief COPE scale to assess the relationship between coping strategies and inmate anxiety levels. Their results showed a weak but statistically significant negative correlation, suggesting that more frequent use of coping strategies was associated with lower anxiety. However, due to its quantitative nature, the study lacked the depth needed to explore the lived experiences of inmates. In contrast, the current study uses a qualitative approach to provide a richer, more contextual understanding of coping mechanisms, which is especially important in institutions facing psychological crises related to overcrowding and isolation.

Internationally, Pleško and Rihtarić (2024) conducted a study on Croatian male inmates, applying the Multidimensional Coping Scale and DASS-21 to measure the impact of coping on mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and stress. The researchers found that maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance and denial, significantly increased emotional distress, while healthy coping behaviors mitigated such symptoms. This study supports the idea that the type of coping strategy used adaptive or maladaptive can have direct consequences on mental health. While the cultural and institutional context of the Croatian prison system differs from Indonesia's, the findings reinforce the necessity of promoting constructive coping mechanisms within correctional settings globally.

Utari et al. (2020) investigated the coping strategies used by juvenile inmates in a correctional institution in Kendari. Using a case study approach, they found that emotion-focused coping, particularly religious activities and support from peers, played a dominant role in stress management among adolescent inmates. This study is relevant to the current research in terms of its qualitative orientation and its focus on subjective experiences. However, the scope was limited to juveniles, whereas the present study targets adult male inmates, who may face different psychological challenges and employ more complex coping mechanisms due to maturity and length of sentence.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method with a focus on exploring and understanding the coping stress strategies used by inmates. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the psychological responses and lived experiences of inmates in dealing with stressful conditions within the prison environment. The study specifically focused on inmates at Class IIA Correctional Institution of Kotabumi, which is known for its severe overcrowding and limited mental health facilities. The scope of the study includes the forms of stress experienced, coping mechanisms applied, and the factors influencing the choice and effectiveness of these strategies.

The population in this study consisted of all inmates serving sentences at Class IIA Correctional Institution of Kotabumi. This correctional institution has a capacity of 300 inmates but is currently housing more than 770 individuals, resulting in an occupancy rate exceeding 270% (Wani et al., 2024). Given the qualitative nature of the research, the study did not use a large-scale statistical sample but rather focused on selected participants who met specific criteria relevant to the research topic.

The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which is commonly employed in qualitative research to select information-rich cases that provide deep insights into the phenomenon under study. In this case, the selected inmates were those who had been incarcerated for a substantial period and were willing to share their personal coping experiences. These inmates had also been observed or recorded as experiencing symptoms of psychological stress, making them suitable subjects for the study. The total number of participants involved in the primary data collection was not quantitatively fixed, but instead based on the principle of data saturation, where interviews were conducted until no new significant information emerged.

Data were collected using three primary techniques :

1. In-depth interviews – to gather detailed narratives and perceptions from inmates about their stress experiences and coping strategies. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility to explore each participant's individual context.
2. Observation – non-participant observation was used to understand the daily routines, social interactions, and behavioral indicators of coping inside the prison environment.
3. Documentation study – researchers reviewed institutional records, medical notes, and rehabilitation program reports to triangulate data and strengthen the credibility of findings. For instance, medical records indicating symptoms of stress or mental disorders were analyzed to support the qualitative descriptions.

The interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Ethical clearance was maintained by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality throughout the process. The data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model which consists of:

1. Data reduction – summarizing and selecting relevant information from interview transcripts and observation notes.
2. Data display – organizing data into themes and categories related to coping stress strategies using matrices and visual maps. The software Nvivo 12 was utilized to assist in coding and thematic mapping.
3. Conclusion drawing and verification – interpreting the patterns and confirming findings through repeated data checks and triangulation.

Through this method, two major themes emerged: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping, along with various subthemes based on religious, social, and institutional dimensions. The analysis also considered contextual factors such as personal background, duration of imprisonment, and participation in rehabilitation program

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Analysis

This study analyzed the coping stress strategies adopted by inmates Class IIA Correctional Institution of Kotabumi using a descriptive qualitative approach. The findings were obtained through in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and document analysis, and were processed using Nvivo 12 to code and classify emerging themes. The analytical framework was based on the coping theory developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which categorizes coping into two main types: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping.

Kotabumi Correctional Institution, the site of this study, experiences severe overcrowding accommodating more than 770 inmates despite its original capacity of 300. Such overcapacity contributes to high psychosocial stress, limited access to mental health services, and restricted physical space, all of which increase the inmates' need for effective coping mechanisms.

Emotion-Focused Coping

Emotion-focused coping is a psychological strategy aimed at reducing the emotional distress associated with a stressful situation rather than directly solving the problem. In prison settings, this coping strategy is prevalent, especially because inmates have minimal control over their physical environment and institutional routines. Findings revealed that the most common emotion-focused coping mechanisms employed by inmates included prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, excessive sleep, self-isolation, and conflict avoidance. One inmate, NJS, explained:

"I usually pray, read the Qur'an, and join religious activities at the mosque. Sometimes, I just talk with my cellmates" (Interview with NJS, 2025).

This finding aligns with the study conducted by Athallah and Santoso (2022), which indicated that religious activities were the primary emotional coping strategies used by Indonesian inmates, particularly in overcrowded facilities.

Although this strategy provides temporary emotional relief, its long-term effectiveness remains questionable. Prolonged use of avoidance-based coping such as withdrawing socially or excessive sleeping may lead to increased risk of anxiety and depression. According to Pleško and Rihtarić (2024), inmates who relied heavily on avoidant coping strategies exhibited higher levels of emotional distress, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness.

Problem-Focused Coping

Problem-focused coping involves active efforts to address or change the source of stress. In correctional institutions, this typically includes participation in rehabilitation programs, vocational training, skills workshops, and social networking among inmates.

An example comes from the same inmate, NJS, who stated:

"I joined the sewing workshop because I thought it was useful. Instead of sitting idly in the cell, I decided to learn something new" (Interview with NJS, 2025).

This response reflects a conscious effort to regain a sense of agency and construct a meaningful routine within the prison. The finding reinforces Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) assertion that problem-focused coping is typically adopted when individuals believe they have some control over the situation and can take practical action.

Additionally, Lotar and Pleško (2024) found that participation in vocational and educational activities significantly reduced psychological distress among Croatian inmates and improved their post-release adaptation. Similarly, Salsabella et al. (2022) emphasized that constructive activities such as work programs and creative skills training provided a sense of hope and improved self-esteem in Indonesian correctional settings.

Factors Influencing Coping Strategies

The selection of coping strategies was found to be influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include personality traits, mental resilience, life experiences, and individual religious orientation. Inmates with more introverted or withdrawn personalities were more likely to adopt emotion-focused coping, such as self-isolation or passive acceptance. One inmate, TWS, stated:

"I don't have close friends here. It's hard for me to trust people, especially strangers"
(Interview with TWS, 2025).

External factors involve the institutional environment, availability of programs, the level of overcrowding, social dynamics between inmates, and support from correctional officers. Inmates with access to religious programs, skills training, and peer support groups tended to engage more with problem-focused coping mechanisms. These findings confirm earlier research by Kurniawaty et al. (2021), which suggested that inmates with supportive environments were more likely to adopt adaptive coping behaviors and demonstrated lower levels of psychological distress.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm the theoretical proposition by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) that coping is a dynamic process shaped by how individuals appraise the stressor and assess their ability to respond to it. In the high-pressure environment of Class IIA Correctional Institution of Kotabumi, inmates were found to engage in a combination of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies, depending on the severity of stress, personal resilience, and institutional support.

While emotion-focused coping offers immediate psychological relief, it may not be sufficient for long-term adaptation. On the other hand, problem-focused coping contributes to psychological growth, a sense of purpose, and better readiness for reintegration into society. This aligns with Salsabella et al. (2022), who argued that a blended approach using both emotional and practical coping strategies was the most effective for inmate resilience and mental health stability.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concludes that inmates at Class IIA Correctional Institution of Kotabumi adopt a variety of coping strategies to manage psychological stress arising from their incarceration, particularly in the context of extreme overcrowding and limited institutional resources. The findings reveal that both emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping are employed simultaneously, although the predominance of one over the other depends on the inmate's personal background, psychological

resilience, and the institutional environment. Emotion-focused coping, such as prayer, religious engagement, avoidance, and emotional withdrawal, was more frequently utilized, especially in the early stages of imprisonment or among inmates with limited access to rehabilitation programs. However, this strategy often served as a temporary relief rather than a long-term solution to psychological distress.

In contrast, inmates who participated in productive activities such as vocational training, skills workshops, and rehabilitation programs demonstrated the use of problem-focused coping. These strategies were shown to be more constructive, as they enabled inmates to redirect their focus toward future goals, self-improvement, and a sense of meaning despite the constraints of prison life. The effectiveness of coping strategies was closely linked to the quality of institutional support, the presence of peer networks, and individual agency. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of coping within high-stress correctional settings and provides empirical evidence supporting the integration of structured mental health interventions and adaptive programming within Indonesian prisons.

Based on the findings, it is suggested that future research explores the dynamic evolution of coping strategies over different phases of incarceration to understand how inmates shift from emotion-focused to problem-focused coping over time. It is also important to examine the role of correctional officers and institutional policies in either facilitating or hindering the development of adaptive coping behaviors. Further qualitative studies could expand this topic by including diverse inmate groups such as female prisoners, juvenile inmates, or those with mental health diagnoses to provide a more holistic view of psychological adaptation within correctional institutions. Such efforts would not only enrich the academic literature on prison psychology but also inform the development of more humane and effective correctional management practices.

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