

COPING AND RESILIENCE AMONG THE YOUTH DURING THE EXTENDED COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS: EXPLORING LESSONS LEARNT FROM COACHING-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Kanu Priya Mohan^{1*}, Narisara Peungposop¹, and Pranav Kalra²

¹ Behavioural Science Research Institute, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

² National University of Singapore, Singapore

ABSTRACT

***Corresponding author:**
Kanu Priya Mohan
kanum@g.swu.ac.th

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According to research across various countries, the mental health and psychosocial well-being of the youth have been deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, it is imperative to address the rising problems and develop resources for future preparedness. Applying insights from their previous mixed methods research, the authors integrate a coaching framework within a qualitative approach to design an intervention to support young participants. This research had three aims: firstly, to explore the experiences of the youth affected by the extended pandemic restrictions; secondly, to utilise coaching to help participants explore their coping strategies; and thirdly, to synthesise the lessons learnt for future applications. Purposive sampling was utilised to invite participants from the target group of 21–35 years. Participation was voluntary and the ethical practices of research followed. Sixteen participants joined the in-depth interviews and research sessions from May to June 2021. These participants included seven Indians and nine Thai young adults. Thematic analyses of data revealed that while the participants experienced both challenges and stresses, they also reported strategies of adjustment to the extended pandemic restrictions. The emerging themes were consolidated and discussed within the theoretical frameworks of coping and resilience. The participants' feedback on coaching confirmed its usefulness as an intervention in a challenging context. The implications of these findings are discussed to rethink the paradigms to support the psychosocial well-being of the youth dealing with challenges for future preparedness.

Keywords: Adaptive coping; coaching-based intervention; psychosocial well-being; resilience; youth

1. INTRODUCTION

Research studies across several countries have reported the long-lasting adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable groups, especially young adults. Although interventions to support were

provided in some contexts, there was a gap in showcasing the process of developing behavioural science interventions to support the psychosocial well-being of target populations.

Notably, there was emerging research evidence that highlighted the negative impact on mental health and psychosocial well-being of younger age groups (Chawla et al., 2021; Lundström, 2022; Mohan et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2021; Shigeto et al., 2021). In the context of Asia, a study by Wang et al. (2021) found that younger age groups experienced greater psychological impact in the six countries they surveyed for numerous reasons. These included: an increase in smartphone usage and an inactive lifestyle (Chawla et al., 2021); being single or staying away from family (Wang et al., 2021); fear of contracting COVID-19, and concerns about the impact on the economy, social aspects, daily life, and relationships (Onyeaka et al., 2021). These problems were exacerbated as the pandemic's impact varied in different parts of the world, and many countries experienced consecutive "waves". Moreover, researchers noted that the challenges faced by young adults affected several dimensions of their lives, such as physical, social, psychological, financial, as well as future uncertainty (Kauhanen et al., 2023; Lundström, 2022; Shukla et al., 2021). Cénat et al. (2022) confirmed the impact of the pandemic on mental health through their systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. However, they reported a lack of such studies from Asia.

In their seminal work on coping, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explained that coping involved both cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage demands appraised as being challenging or exceeding personal resources. When an individual copes effectively with these stressors, the process and outcome is resilience, which refers to the adjustment to challenges in life through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility, according to the American Psychological Association (n.d.). Foreseeing the long-lasting impact of the pandemic on young people, researchers such as Verdolini et al. (2021) recommended that efforts be taken to enhance the resilience and coping strategies of the young. Previous research studies on resilience have demonstrated the necessity and effectiveness of specific programmes or interventions to promote coping (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Macedo et al., 2014). Emerging research has shown the promise of developing interventions to support mental health and well-being during the pandemic (Keyan et al., 2022; Koydemir et al., 2021; Waters et al., 2021). Among the techniques applied to enhance the well-being of individuals, positive coaching was found to enhance the well-being of people in various domains during the pandemic (van Zyl et al., 2020); however, no such research exists on the application of coaching to the target group of youths during the pandemic. Furthermore, there was a paucity of research showing a systematic approach to developing interventions based on empirical findings in the context of the pandemic.

Thus, reviewing the gaps in research at that time, and to the best of our knowledge, this study aims to develop research-based intervention to support the adaptive coping among the youth in two Asian countries (India and Thailand) while they were living through extended restrictions during the ongoing waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. Three research objectives were identified for this research. The first was to qualitatively explore the experiences of youth during the extended pandemic restrictions. The second was to utilise a coaching approach to help participants explore their psychosocial coping strategies and identify the best practices of coping and resilience. The third was to synthesise the feedback on coaching-based interventions and develop best practices for offering such interventions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research showcases an applied behavioural science research perspective to develop interventions suitable for supporting adaptive coping in young adults during the pandemic to enhance their well-being. A behavioural science approach is meaningful since it integrates knowledge from an interdisciplinary perspective to develop research, as highlighted by Mohan (2015). Moreover, the subsequent evidence-based knowledge can be effectively applied in specific contexts to address and solve behavioural issues (Irwin & Suplee, 2012, as quoted by Mohan, 2015, p. 6). Thus, through a review of relevant literature, the authors integrated knowledge from positive mental health as well as psychological well-being and linked it to their emerging mixed methods research findings (Mohan et al., 2023) to develop the focus of this research. The following sections review the psychosocial impacts of the pandemic on the youth, followed by the theoretical background of coping and resilience. Finally, the researchers demonstrate how they integrated both theoretical and empirical findings into the coaching framework to develop interventions to enhance coping and resilience among the youth.

2.1. Psychosocial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the youth

Research studies have documented the negative psychosocial impact of the pandemic restrictions and lockdowns on young adults, such as depressive symptoms, anxiety, stress, and other disorders as reported in systematic reviews (Kauhanen et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2021) and meta-analysis (Deng et al.,

2021). Furthermore, in their systematic review, Chawla et al. (2021) found that the causes were related to a number of factors, such as the fear of the illness or social isolation, and exhibited in a variety of psychological and mental health symptoms. Other research corroborates these findings across various countries, such as the mental distress and sleep disorders revealed by Savarese et al. (2020) in Italian students or Creswell et al. (2021) in the context of the youth in the United Kingdom. Consequently, a need has emerged to address the risks and negative impacts among these vulnerable populations through psychosocial interventions aimed at enhancing their coping capacity and restoring well-being.

Thus, the current study aimed to contribute to the gap in research by creating empirical evidence of a systematic process to develop and apply research-based behavioural science interventions to understand and enhance coping. Furthermore, these interventions integrated coaching practices to support the coping practices among the youth during the pandemic.

2.2. Theoretical and empirical background of coping

The way people cope with stress during challenging situations continues to be of great interest to researchers and practitioners. Some of the most significant contributions to this topic have been made by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), who distinguished two basic coping categories: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Later researchers noted that this might be too simple and went on to develop various theories, such as the 14 ways of coping by Carver et al. (1989) or the three coping styles: task-oriented coping, emotion-oriented coping, and avoidance-oriented coping by Endler and Parker (1999).

The theoretical paradigm of this research is based on the transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which highlights the importance of understanding person-environment interaction. This research explored how the youth could reappraise a stressful situation based on their previous experiences and personal attributes like personality. Furthermore, the personal resources of individuals could result in adaptive coping, thus mitigating the negative effects of the situation. Within the conceptual framework of this theory, the researchers proposed that providing a coaching intervention could help empower young people to explore ways of using their experience from the previous waves of the pandemic to cope better with the subsequent waves.

Research conducted during the pandemic shows the diversity of coping techniques and their impacts on the youth. For instance, Mathias et al. (2020) reported in their research from India that young people used a variety of psychosocial practices to cope with the stress caused by the pandemic. In their research on coping involving 30 countries, Eisenbeck et al. (2022) found differences in the impact on well-being of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping among these countries. Moreover, this research is grounded in the mixed methods research of the authors (Mohan et al., 2023), who investigated the experience of people living under stress during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were found to use various coping strategies that could be differentiated into functional coping, problem-focused coping, and emotional coping.

Thus, the current research aimed to apply coaching-based interventions to explore the specific coping strategies utilised by the youth during the extended pandemic situation and help them to evaluate the ones most effective in enabling them to adapt and develop resilience to cope with future challenges.

2.3. The importance of resilience during stressful events

This research explores interventions as a pathway through which the youth could develop resilience in the face of challenges. Rice and Liu (2016) clarified the distinction between coping and resilience, stating that while the former could involve using positive, negative, or dysfunctional strategies without leading to enhanced functioning in the situation, the latter leads only to favourable adaptation.

In their work, Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) noted that resilience is a “dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma”. According to the authors, this construct is two-dimensional and refers to both the “exposure to adversity” faced by an individual along with “the manifestation of positive adjustment outcomes” (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858). For the youth affected by the pandemic, it was important to find a way they could be supported and recover.

Polizzi et al. (2020) wrote that as a pathway to recovery from the pandemic, various coping strategies can be used to reduce stress and anxiety and build resilience to promote mental health recovery. At the international level, organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) emphasised the necessity for proper support and interventions for the youth to support their recovery from the psychological impact of the pandemic. Noting the high levels of stress and anxiety among the young in Thailand and six other Asian countries, Wang et al. (2021) recommended interventions for the vulnerable, including those younger than 30 years.

Thus, the current study focused on exploring ways to support psychosocial coping among the youth, with the intention that the intervention could impact their ability to bounce back and build resilience to deal with continued stress from the pandemic.

2.4. Developing interventions for enhancing psychosocial coping and resilience

Both theoretical and research-based evidence were used to develop interventions. The theoretical underpinnings for the development of resilience-enhancing interventions come from the integration of key concepts and theories from psychology, positive psychology, positive mental health, and well-being.

In her pioneering work on positive psychology, Fredrickson (2001) put forward the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. She highlighted the significant impact of positive emotions on developing psychological resilience among people since this emotional repertoire helps to cope with stress and supports a bounce back from the challenges faced. Furthermore, according to the broaden-and-build theory, psychological resilience is a lasting personal resource that enhances emotional well-being in the long term (Fredrickson, 2001).

In another significant work on positive psychology, Luthans et al. (2007) presented the concept of psychological capital (psycap), consisting of four psychological resources: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Youssef-Morgan and Luthans (2015) verified that psycap had a positive effect on well-being in different spheres of life, including work, since it was found to “trigger cognitive, affective, conative, and social mechanisms, leading to happiness and well-being” (Youssef & Luthans, 2013, as cited in Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015).

Evidence exists for developing interventions based on positive psychology approaches. Previous researchers, such as Luthar and Cicchetti (2000), have discussed the importance of building interventions and programmes to enhance resilience based on theory and linked to research. Later, in their systematic review of resilience research among adults, Macedo et al. (2014) noted that the interventions to enhance resilience showed effectiveness in terms of coping with general adversity. In their recent meta-analysis, Koydemir et al. (2021) reported the effectiveness of positive psychological interventions (PPI) on subjective and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the researchers recommended that positive psychology factors could either be integrated into new public interventions and/or incorporated into existing programmes and interventions such as self-administered computer training, mental health first aid, cognitive behavioural therapy groups, or mobile phone counselling administered during the pandemic (Koydemir et al., 2021).

Thus, it can be concluded that PPI could be useful during adverse times by amalgamating all the efforts previously aimed at enhancing well-being by “increasing positive emotions, positive cognitions, or positive behaviours” (Schueller et al., 2014). Furthermore, no research proposes coaching as an intervention in the context of a pandemic.

2.4.1. Coaching as an intervention

This research posits coaching as a framework for use in an intervention based on a positive psychology paradigm. According to a recent paper by Passmore and Evans-Krimme (2021), coaching is often regarded as an “applied aspect of positive psychology” aimed at optimising individual strengths for well-being. According to a review of the literature, coaching can be effective in enhancing resilience as noted by Lawton-Smith (2017). Biswas-Diener (2020) highlighted that coaching is a “natural fit” for the application of a positive psychology intervention.

Researchers have highlighted the positive impacts of an applied positive psychological approach that combines coaching with a strength-based focus from positive psychology on well-being (Madden et al., 2011). In their systematic review, previous researchers have discussed that although this combination, called “positive psychological coaching”, is being applied in practice, it still lacks a proper definition or process of implementation (van Zyl et al., 2020).

As the context of this research was the pandemic, and researchers such as Polizzi et al. (2020), had noted that though there was no “formula” to cope with the unprecedented global health adversity, it became imperative to understand the impact of coping strategies that could help in managing stress and enhancing resilience. Reviewing the salience of coaching for enhancing well-being, the current research assimilated coaching into the intervention of this qualitative study.

2.4.2. Application of research-based evidence

Research-based evidence to develop interventions was grounded in the mixed methods research conducted by the authors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Significant results from the authors’ previous research (Mohan et al., 2023) were utilised to develop and offer interventions to the participants living under extended COVID-19 restrictions. Firstly, the previous findings showed that the younger age group (21–30 years old) was more negatively impacted by the pandemic in comparison to other age groups. Thus, the target sample for this research was identified as those aged 21–30 years old and later extended to 35 years due to participation being based on the snowballing technique. Secondly, the findings indicated that the personal resource of psycap had a significant positive impact on well-being and coping. Thus, the selected intervention focuses on enhancing the four dimensions of psycap, identified as hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism

(Luthans et al., 2007; Rabenu & Yaniv, 2017). According to longitudinal research, these psychological resources efficiently protect well-being since they have the ability to buffer the negative effects of the pandemic (Pellerin & Raufaste, 2020). Thirdly, the context of the current research was based on previous research involving participants from two countries in Asia, namely India and Thailand. It can be meaningful to develop interventions addressing the needs of vulnerable populations (Villani et al., 2023). Fourthly, a qualitative approach was chosen as the method for applying interventions. In the second phase of mixed methods research, the qualitative method was utilised, with the participants reporting that they felt it gave them an opportunity to share and reflect on their own coping strategies. Furthermore, Mathias et al. (2020), through their research from India, highlighted that a qualitative enquiry into the circumstances of the participants could be more appropriate in developing interventions to help them cope and adapt effectively. Thus, an intervention approach that utilises coaching integrated with the qualitative exploration into the experiences of the participants living under extended COVID-19 restrictions was developed in this present study.

3. METHOD

The main purposes of this applied behavioural science research were developed from the results of the earlier research, as explained in the previous sections. A qualitative approach integrating a coaching framework was utilised to connect with the target participants living under the extended COVID-19 restrictions. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. The data were explored to answer the three research objectives.

3.1. The procedure

The participants in this research were chosen based on criteria that matched the objectives. Specifically, the youth in India and Thailand were approached through snowballing techniques since these target groups had been part of the previous phases of a larger research project (Mohan et al., 2023). Contacts in India and Thailand were sent messages using email and the social media applications WhatsApp and Line. The participants were subject to the following inclusion criteria: a) in the age group of 21–35 years; b) living within the extended COVID-19 restrictions in the two countries of India and Thailand from May to June 2021; c) participating voluntarily; d) able to communicate in English; and e) possessing the necessary resources and technical ability to access the online platforms. The research team also obtained ethical clearance from the institutional ethics board for this research project. Participation was voluntary, and all ethical practices were followed during the research, including informing the participants about the research objectives and procedures, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring confidentiality.

3.2. The research participants

Sixteen participants joined the research and were interviewed using the online platform Google Meet. There were seven males and nine females. In terms of nationality, seven were Indians, and nine were Thai. Four participants belonged to the 21–30 age group, nine to the 26–30 age group, and three to the 31–35 age group. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants in this research.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the study participants ($n = 16$)

Characteristics	Sub-category	Indian	Thai	Total	%
Gender	Female	4	5	9	56.25
	Male	3	4	7	43.75
Marital status	Married	1	2	3	18.75
	Single	6	7	13	81.25
Age	21–25 years	3	1	4	25.00
	26–30 years	4	5	9	56.25
	31–35 years	0	3	3	18.75

3.3. The intervention sessions with a coaching framework

The research team designed the applied phase of this research to offer open-ended interview sessions based on a coaching framework. For each session with the participants, the researchers integrated the coaching principles and questions that were developed from the positive psychology perspective of a strengths-based approach. The intervention design in this research was grounded in the three-point criteria for implementing PPI originally presented by Parks and Biswas-Diener (2013) and later supported by Trom and Burke (2022).

Under the criteria, a PPI needs to (1) focus on positive themes, (2) result in a positive outcome, and (3) aim to improve wellness (instead of treating illness).

The intervention development in this research was guided by the intervention mapping (IM) approach, which serves as a protocol for developing theory-based and evidence-based health promotion programmes (Bartholomew et al., 1998, as cited in Kok et al., 2016). The IM includes six-steps process that have been researched and implemented widely (Kok et al., 2016; van Agteren et al., 2021). These guidelines were adapted to the current research and are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Steps of the intervention development

Step	Area of Focus	Details
1	Needs assessment of the problem	Evidence based assessment of the problem based on authors' previous research and literature review
2	Identifying objectives of the intervention (session)	1) To explore the perceived stresses and challenges during the extended pandemic restrictions. 2) To understand the coping strategies used by the participants and identify the practices of adaptive coping.
3	Selecting theory-based intervention methods and practical applications	- Review of intervention methods - Focus on <i>positive psychology interventions</i> (PPI) - Choice of <i>coaching framework</i> guided by research evidence and qualifications of the project head as a certified coach
4	Designing the components of the intervention and preparation	- Qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with a single participant - Select the GROW model of coaching - Design session overview/time, questions based on GROW model, and information sheet for participants that included research overview and session objectives - Contact participants and take informed consent
5	Implementation	- Online/ digital intervention - Intervention sessions lasting from 30 to 45 minutes - Use the GROW model of coaching to ask questions
6	Evaluation	Take qualitative feedback from the participants at the end of the session

A coaching framework based on the GROW model was found to be most suitable for probing the experiences of coping, resilience, and best practices among the participants. The "GROW" framework developed by Sir John Whitmore (1937–2017, as noted by Wilson, 2020) has been widely used in coaching. Although many models of coaching are used in practice, this research focused on the application of the GROW model since it provides a clear and simple structure that enables the coachee to visualise new possibilities (Leach, 2020) and build protective resources and resilience to demands. In this model, *G* stands for exploring goals, *R* for reality check, *O* for exploring options, and *W* for deciding on a way forward. Questions based on the GROW model of coaching were posed during the intervention session. A brief representation is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: GROW model of coaching applied in the intervention sessions

Aspect	Aim	Sample Questions
G: goal	To explore the experience of stress and its impact during the pandemic	- What have been the main challenges/stresses for you? - What was the impact you felt?
R: reality check	To explore what participants did to cope with the stress	- What strategies did you use to cope with the stress?
O: options	To explore the effectiveness of the coping strategies used	- What coping strategies have been helpful?
W: way forward	To help identify the participant's best practices of coping that could lead towards resilience if faced by another stressful situation in life	- What are some of the best practices of coping that you identified? - If faced with difficulty in another situation, what would you want to do?

3.4. Data collection

Coaching-based interventions were offered to the participants through qualitative sessions conducted online from 4 May 2021 to 8 June 2021. These sessions included coaching frameworks for interviews, lasting between 30–40 minutes, with data collected until the information was saturated. The number of participants interviewed was based on the data saturation guidelines explained by Charmaz (2006). Later researchers such as Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2018) further explained that two types of data saturation can be observed in the

emerging codes and meanings. Thus, the researchers attempted to look for saturation in the emerging codes and meanings while conducting interviews, and stopped when no new ones emerged.

3.5. Data analysis

Thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2012), who enumerated seven steps in this process: transcription, reading and familiarisation, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finalising the analysis. Thus, the data collected from interviews with the 16 participants were coded and categorised into themes to answer the research objectives. As mentioned by Saunders et al. (2018), there are various focal points for looking at data saturation, one of which is when “saturation appears confined to the level of analysis”. This practice was followed in the current research during the interviews.

4. RESULTS

The information gathered from the 16 participants during the coaching-based sessions was analysed and categorised into three main parts to answer each of the research objectives. First, the perceived stresses and challenges during the extended pandemic restrictions were analysed. Next, the coping strategies used by the participants and practices of adaptive coping were explored. Finally, the emerging feedback on the interventions is presented and discussed for future implications. The participant names are kept confidential and coded as P1, P2, and so on.

4.1 Category 1: Perceived stresses and challenges during the extended pandemic restrictions

Overall, the participants reported various dimensions of experiences and impact levels. Most reported perceived differences between the first wave of the pandemic in 2020 and during May 2021. There were differences between participants from the two countries only regarding the management of the situation.

The perceived stresses and challenges among the participants during the extended pandemic restrictions can be summarised into seven themes, with the number of participants reporting these shown in parentheses. It is important to highlight that not all impacts were perceived as negative; there were positive impacts, too, such as the opportunity to stay with family or pursue a hobby.

1) Overall perceived impact of the COVID-19 situation (n = 12). All participants noted the impact of the pandemic, as can be seen from the following statement by one participant: “COVID-19 has changed our lives in many ways.” [P1]

The participants also experienced changes in their perception of the pandemic over time. As shared by another participant, “The first wave and second wave were quite different... now we are more afraid of COVID.” [P13]

However, there was a positive outlook too, such as that shared by one participant [P8], “Last year was a new experience for us. We must learn to survive ... so now it is ok”. Another participant [P16] also had a similar experience, where the process of adaptation helped to improve their outlook over time.

2) Psychosocial impact on relationships (n = 11). The participants noted the effect of the pandemic on their relationships with others and how they felt about it. This included the physical distancing rules that meant they could not meet their family/friends/coworkers: “I prefer to meet others in person—it made me feel lonely.” [P1]

Some of them had relationship problems, too, due to the pandemic restrictions, including the breakup of relationships: “It hurt a lot...my girlfriend broke up.” [P2]

Some reported that they felt stressed for family members who were not with them: “The main thing stressing me is that my parents and grandparents are in India, and the situation there is very stressful.” [P9]

3) Impact on mental health (n = 7). The participants reported many negative impacts of the pandemic restrictions, such as loneliness, sad feelings, more stress and anxiety than in 2020, as well as mental exhaustion from the situation, as can be seen from the following examples:

“I have these feelings of loneliness, sadness, distress.” [P1]

“I feel blue emotion because I have to sit here all day... like living in a small box all the time.” [P13]

4) Work related impacts and adjustment (n = 5). Of the 16 participants, five were working and reported both positive and negative issues regarding the pandemic restrictions, such as the use of online platforms:

“The problem is hard to work out on my own 100% as I cannot consult the team. We can have online meetings, but these are less engaging and less productive.” [P7]

Another reported challenges of living with a family but also mentioned getting support:

“Living with my family—my parents don’t understand my WFH situation, but my sister helps me.” [P8]

5) Technological issues related to online work/study (n = 5). With technology at the forefront of how they managed to continue working/studying, the participants shared some of their concerns:

“The first time, it was very scary to leave the university and go back home. This time it was not too different, but doing all by internet is not possible.” [P3]

6) Anger about the mismanagement of the COVID-19 situation (among Thai participants only, n = 5). Differences between participants emerged under this theme, shared by five of the nine Thai participants interviewed, as follows:

“I might say I am not so stressed, but I am angry about the management.” [P8]

7) Sadness and concern for others (n = 4). Some of the participants did report a concern for other people rather than themselves.

“I don’t like this picture of seeing so many homeless people.” [P6]

Interestingly, apart from the identification of stressors, one participant from India, who was working at a hospital, mentioned that people should not just focus on their stress but appreciate the work of others, such as healthcare workers:

“I went to the COVID ward wearing PPE, and after 15 minutes, I felt suffocated. I feel it is easy to blame the doctors and nurses... from that moment, I genuinely salute them! If I was in their position, I feel I could not do the job they are doing.” [P10]

4.2. Category 2: Coping strategies and the best practices of adaptive coping and resilience

Various coping strategies were used by the participants during the extended restrictions. The emerging themes among coping practices shared by participants aligned with the three coping factors emerging in the previous mixed methods phases of the research. The participants were asked to identify their personal “best practices” which helped them to adapt and promote their resilience. These emerging best practices of adaptive coping were examined using the framework of the three coping factors arising from the authors’ previous research on the COVID-19 impact (Mohan et al., 2023), namely *functional coping*, *problem-focused coping*, and *emotional and avoidance coping*. The information from the research is synthesised and shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Emerging themes of coping and the best practices of adaptive coping and resilience

Coping Strategies	Best Practices of Adaptive Coping and Resilience
Functional Coping	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-distraction: “I try something new like cooking- to keep my mind away from stress” [P7] Focus on new hobbies: “I tried cooking and making new dishes to pass time.” [P11] Actively search for coping strategies: “I thought about worst case scenario and prepared myself as I live alone” [P1] Social/ emotional support: “I stay in contact with my family...we need someone to talk to ... to listen and share.” [P3] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find engaging activities/ new hobbies Connect with social support that you trust, sharing emotions with trusted ones Search for different perspectives about the situation Find the next step/action to do.
Problem-focused Coping	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accept the situation: “Let things flow- life is like a river.” [P2] Learn to live with the lockdown: “Yesterday is past. Only moment we can live is in the present.” [P1] Find ways to help with the COVID situation: “This is the time to do something for the society” [P3] Reframe the situation positively: “I always try to focus on the positive in each situation.” [P11] Focus on goals: Plan “something to look forward to. Little things can be meaningful.” [P16] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accept the situation Learn from past challenges Set daily routine activities Look for the positive aspects of this situation Focus on creating meaningful plans and goals Find ways to help others, and build communities
Emotional and Avoidance Coping	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of negative emotions: “I cope by myself... I focus on my negative emotions.” [P6] Release/vent emotions: “I don’t keep my emotions to myself- I release my anger- I talk frankly.” [P8] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop awareness of emotions Build positivity into life routines Develop gratitude and spiritual practices that help Seek external interventions to help with the situation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spiritual practices: “The basic thing I do is meditation- that helps” I pray a lot these days.” [P9] Gratitude for positive things: “I try to remember how I should be grateful for everything I have” [P4] 	

4.3. Category 3: Feedback on the coaching-based interventions

Feedback was obtained from all participants at the end of the sessions on how they felt about sharing their experiences using this approach. Some salient feedback is summarised into three themes along with quotes from the participants.

1) The interview technique elicited sharing. The participants acknowledged that they felt the clear guidelines shared by the researchers and the interview approach was more suitable for them than another intervention.

“You gave me interview guidelines—it helped me to think.” [P1]

2) Interest in the application of a coaching framework. The application of a coaching framework during the interviews was interesting and useful for the participants. As shared by some of them:

“I would like to know more about coaching”. [P1]

“I would love to know about coaching—I am a professional overthinker”. [P4]

3) Positive feelings after the process. Overall, the participants felt they had been helped in various ways by participating in the research as well as through sharing their experiences. Some of them stated:

“What you are doing through this research, we can learn from as this situation is new for us” [P9]

“A natural way to share—pour out our feelings... is good for us. This video call lets us have eye-to-eye contact”. [P2]

“Listening is a part of moving forward.” [P6]

“I like this interview; we are eager to share like this.” [P10]

4) Other Feedback. Some of the participants shared other ways of helping the youth deal with the pandemic situation, such as inviting an expert or creating online forums to share their experiences.

“Get an expert to talk to young people if you want to change something”. [P3]

“Things that would truly help others such as set online meetings among communities to share our feelings.” [P1]

5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Discussion of the main findings

This research studied the experiences of the youth living through the extended pandemic restrictions through a qualitative lens and offered them research-based behavioural science interventions using a coaching framework to enhance their coping capability. The thematic findings on coping and the emerging best practices can be categorised into three themes: functional coping, problem-focused coping, and emotional and avoidance coping, as shown in Table 2. Furthermore, the participants shared positive feedback on applying the coaching framework during the intervention.

The emerging best practices of coping and resilience can be differentiated into cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions, all of which help to deal with the stress of ongoing waves of the pandemic, leading to well-being. The findings of this research corroborate those of previous works, such as the classic study by Endler and Parker (1999) or the more recent one by Stanisławski (2019). Functional coping themes show active coping and ties in well with best practices. Problem-focused coping focuses on dealing with the situation at hand, linking with the emerging best practices to demonstrate acceptance and routine setting during the restrictions. Interestingly, the emotional and avoidance coping practices include both maladaptive and well-adaptive strategies. This difference can be seen in the use of spirituality as a coping practice. While the findings from our previous research indicated that spiritual practices could be used as an avoidance coping strategy (Mohan et al., 2023), multiple participants in the current research (participants P8, P9, P13) linked their use of meditation to radical acceptance of their situation. This indicates how a single coping strategy can be applied differently according to the cultural context and that meditation could be recommended as a best practice for a target group. Such a coping strategy could help in reappraising the situation (Stanisławski, 2019) and encourage positive reinterpretation, leading to positive emotional coping (Carver et al., 1989). Overall, it can be summarised that the shared “best practices” of coping indicate that adaptive coping could be helpful in recovering from the stresses of the pandemic, as also noted by Polizzi et al. (2020).

Using a qualitative approach in this research helped the researchers to gain valuable insights into the experiences of the youth such as their anger towards the mismanagement of the situation. Researchers from India also reiterate the value of using a qualitative approach to give voice to the participants (Ivbijaro et al., 2020; Mathias et al., 2020).

As reported in this research, coaching, as a framework for applying research-based interventions, could be useful. A coaching intervention could be valuable for augmenting personal agency since it works through a goal-focused process, as also noted by Grant and Atad (2021). The coaching process helps trigger positive emotions since the participants are empowered to recall how they cope to reduce stress and identify

their best practices. An individual's awareness of their own resources in this study is based on the work of psycap by Youssef-Morgan and Luthans (2015). In addition, as noted by Fredrickson (2001) in the broaden-and-build theory, these positive emotions can be helpful in regaining well-being. The effectiveness of delivering positive psychology interventions for a target audience has been noted by Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) and reiterated in recent research as being able to positively impact well-being during the pandemic (Keyan et al., 2022; Koydemir et al., 2021; Polizzi et al., 2020; Waters et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the findings from this research are discussed within the theoretical framework of the transactional model of stress by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The first wave of restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the *primary appraisal* of stress for the youth in this research. The negative impact on the youth has been reported by other studies in India (Keyan et al., 2022) and Thailand (Charatcharoenwitthaya & Niltwat, 2022). Furthermore, the results of this research indicated that multiple pandemic waves and lockdowns served as opportunities for *secondary appraisal* or the *reappraisal* of how to cope better. From this research, the behavioural science interventions could help the youth review their past experiences and become aware of their psychosocial resources for adaptive coping. Hence, to bolster resilience or the "bouncebackability" from ongoing stress, researchers and practitioners need to develop context-based interventions for enhancing adaptive coping among the youth affected by the extended COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The researchers endeavour to summarise the findings from this research in the context of the transactional model of stress, as depicted in Figure 1.

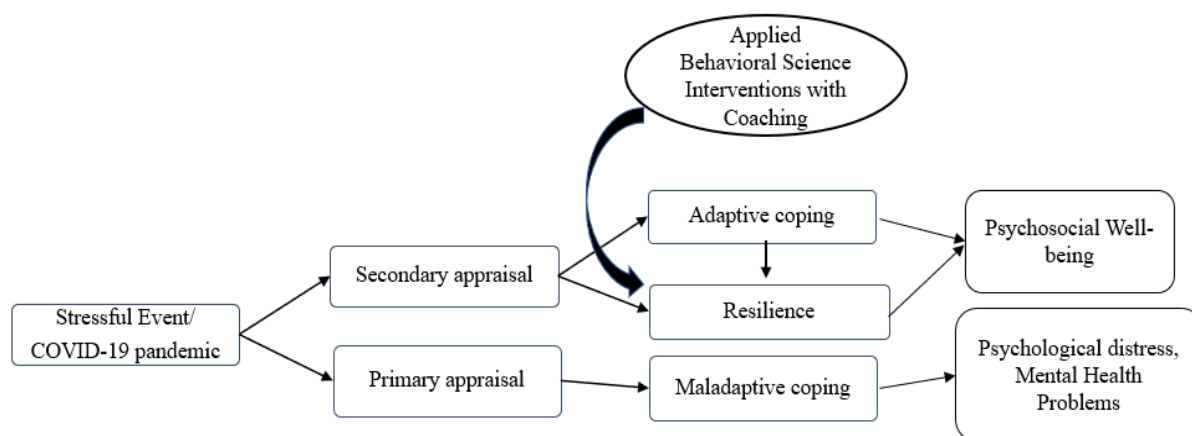


Figure 1: Coaching-based interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic within the framework of the transactional model of stress and coping

5.2. Implications

The implications of this research could be valuable for young individuals, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. Although this research is subject to limitations such as a small sample, the emerging best practices could be shared with the youth in similar contexts to Thailand and India. The qualitative approach integrating the coaching framework in this study emphasises its applied contribution to the field of coping and resilience. The framework of the transactional model of stress could be meaningful for research-based practitioners in developing target-focused interventions to support the youth, especially those in vulnerable situations. Policymakers and other stakeholders are recommended to support the development of participative research-based interventions to help the younger age groups deal with the challenges triggered by the pandemic.

5.3. Conclusion

As this research was conducted to provide interventions to support the participants during the pandemic, the scope of the study meant that no follow-up was conducted after the intervention. Future researchers and practitioners could integrate quantitative surveys and conduct follow-up studies to evaluate the post-intervention impact.

This research showcases the process of developing positive psychological interventions based on a coaching framework to enhance coping and well-being among the youth during the pandemic. These findings highlight the importance of developing research-based interventions to enhance coping and well-being for specific target audiences. Furthermore, such interventions could play a significant role in helping the vulnerable to deal effectively with a crisis while promoting resilience and well-being in times of uncertainty.

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