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Students' Experiences in Managing Emotions and Maintaining Peace of Mind at SMA Santo Arnoldus Janssen Kupang

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Abstract: *Adolescents in senior high school face academic demands, peer relationships, and family pressures that can disturb emotional stability and concentration. This study aimed to describe how tenth-grade students experience managing their emotions and maintaining peace of mind at a Catholic senior high school in Kupang, Indonesia. A qualitative phenomenological design was used. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with seven students of Class X E and one guidance and counseling (BK) teacher, and were analyzed thematically. Five themes emerged: (1) assignments and exhaustion as the main stressors; (2) pausing and self-calming as first responses; (3) personal calming strategies such as music, breathing, quiet places, and shared coffee breaks; (4) peers and teachers as a mostly supportive environment; and (5) prayer and recollection as spiritual resources. The teacher's account added academic anxiety, peer pressure, and family conflict, and described art therapy, mindfulness, and peer counseling. Students relied mainly on self-initiated, low-cost strategies supported by friends and faith practices. Schools can strengthen these resources by coordinating assignment loads, preserving calm spaces, and reaching students who rarely disclose stress.*

Keywords: *emotion management; peace of mind; adolescents; phenomenology; guidance and counseling*

Abstrak: *Siswa SMA menghadapi tuntutan akademik, hubungan pertemanan, dan tekanan keluarga yang dapat mengganggu stabilitas emosi dan konsentrasi belajar. Penelitian ini bertujuan menggambarkan pengalaman siswa kelas X dalam mengelola emosi dan menjaga ketenangan pikiran di sebuah SMA Katolik di Kupang, Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan desain kualitatif fenomenologi. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semiterstruktur dengan tujuh siswa kelas X E dan satu guru bimbingan dan konseling (BK), lalu dianalisis secara tematik. Terdapat lima tema: (1) tugas dan kelelahan sebagai sumber stres utama; (2) berhenti sejenak dan menenangkan diri sebagai respons awal; (3) cara menenangkan diri secara pribadi, seperti musik, pernapasan, tempat yang tenang, dan minum kopi bersama teman; (4) teman dan guru sebagai lingkungan yang sebagian besar mendukung; dan (5) doa dan rekoleksi sebagai sumber daya rohani. Keterangan guru BK menambahkan kecemasan akademik, tekanan teman sebaya, dan konflik keluarga, serta menjelaskan terapi seni, mindfulness, dan konseling teman sebaya. Siswa terutama mengandalkan cara yang dilakukan sendiri dan berbiaya rendah, yang didukung oleh teman dan kegiatan rohani. Sekolah dapat memperkuat sumber daya ini dengan mengatur beban tugas, menjaga ruang yang tenang, dan menjangkau siswa yang jarang mengungkapkan stres.*

Kata kunci: *pengelolaan emosi; ketenangan pikiran; remaja; fenomenologi; bimbingan dan konseling*

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Introduction

School is a place where adolescents learn, but it is also a place where they meet repeated pressure. Assignments, examinations, friendships, and problems brought from home all compete for a student's attention. When these demands are not managed well, they can disturb emotional stability and concentration in class. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) described stress as the result of how a person appraises demands in relation to the resources available to cope with them. Students therefore differ in how heavily the same school demands weigh on them, and in what they do about it.

Research on emotion regulation gives a useful vocabulary for these differences. Gross (1998) described regulation as a set of processes that influence which emotions people have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them. Strategies can act early, for example by choosing or changing a situation, or later, by changing the cognitive meaning of an event or by controlling its outward expression. A meta-analysis found that the strategies people use are linked differently to psychological well-being, so it matters which strategies students actually choose (Aldao et al., 2010). Mindfulness-based practices, including attention to the breath, are also widely used to lower stress and restore calm (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Most of this work describes strategies in general terms. Less attention has been given to how students themselves describe, in their own words, what they do when they feel pressured at school and what helps them recover calm. This question is especially relevant in a faith-based school, where prayer, recollection, and reflection are part of school life and may be a source of calm that a general model does not capture. Hearing the same issue from the guidance and counseling (BK) teacher also shows where the students' accounts and the teacher's view meet or differ.

This study therefore describes the experiences of tenth-grade students in managing emotions and maintaining peace of mind at SMA Santo Arnoldus Janssen Kupang. It is guided by three questions: (1) what school situations make students feel stressed, anxious, or tired; (2) how do students respond and restore calm; and (3) how do the school environment, spiritual activities, and BK services support them? The findings are intended to help counselors, teachers, and school leaders design support that fits what students actually experience.

Method

Research Design and Setting

This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, which aims to describe the meaning of an experience as the people who lived it understand it (Creswell, 2016 ; Moustakas, 1994). The setting was SMA Santo Arnoldus Janssen Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Data were collected in September-October 2026.

Participants, Sample, or Data Sources

The main data source was seven students of Class X E. They are identified as S1 to S7 in this article to protect their identity. A second source was one BK teacher (T), who was interviewed to describe the emotional and mental health concerns she sees in students and the support the school provides. Using two kinds of informants allowed the students' accounts to be compared with the counselor's professional view. The seven students were selected through purposive sampling, based on the researcher's observation that they showed emotion management drawn from their own personal experience.

Instruments and Measures

Data were collected with two semi-structured interview guides. The student guide had five questions on (1) school situations that cause stress, anxiety, or tiredness; (2) first reactions when feeling pressured in class; (3) ways of calming the mind and places that feel calm; (4) whether the school environment feels safe for managing emotions; and (5) the role of spiritual activities such as communal prayer and recollection. The BK teacher guide had four questions on (1) the emotional problems students most often report; (2) signs of emotional instability or severe stress at school; (3) the techniques used to help students regain calm; and (4) preventive programs run by the BK room.

Procedure and Research Ethics

Each participant was interviewed individually using the guide above, and the answers were recorded in writing. Participation was voluntary, and names of students are replaced by codes.

Data Analysis

The answers were analyzed thematically following the steps of Braun & Clarke (2006) reading all transcripts repeatedly, coding meaningful statements, grouping codes into candidate themes, reviewing the themes against the data, and naming them. Student data were coded first, and the BK teacher's data were then used to compare and extend the themes. Credibility was supported by comparing the two sources of informants and by keeping close to participants' own wording, in line with the trustworthiness criteria of Lincoln & Guba (1985) Cases that did not fit a theme were kept and reported rather than removed.

Results and Discussion

Results

The analysis produced five themes, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes and supporting evidence

No.	Theme	Evidence
1	Assignments and exhaustion as main stressors	Assignments: S1, S2, S4, S5, S6; tiredness from lack of rest: S3; no stress reported: S7
2	Pausing and self-calming as first response	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5; S6 and S7 report rarely feeling pressure in class
3	Personal strategies for peace of mind	Music (S2, S7); breathing (S3); prayer and fresh air (S1); quiet places (S1, S2, S3, S5); coffee break (S5, S6)
4	Friends and teachers as support	Supportive: S1, S2, S3, S4, S7; partly: S5; not very: S6
5	Spiritual activities as a source of calm	Prayer: S2, S4, S5, S6; reflection and recollection: S1, S2; spiritual songs and reflections: S3; reading and life insight: S7

Note. S = student; codes replace real names.

Theme 1: Assignments and exhaustion as main stressors. Five of the seven students named assignments as the main cause of stress. S4 described getting three or four assignments in one day and being unsure which to start with, and S2 said that as assignments pile up she becomes anxious that she cannot finish them. S5 added that the piling up came partly from her own habit of delaying, so she placed part of the cause in herself. S3 named a different source: tiredness from lack of rest and from forcing the brain to focus. S7 said he rarely felt stress. The BK teacher confirmed this picture and added more: academic anxiety, fear of failing exams, pressure from friends, and family conflict (including broken homes) that is carried into school and disturbs concentration. Family problems did not appear in the students' own answers.

Theme 2: Pausing and self-calming as first response. When pressured, most students first tried to stop and calm down before reacting. S1 wanted to vent but first looked for a place in the school to calm down. S2 calmed herself first and reprimanded others only if the situation had become excessive. S4 tried to control her emotion so she would not be carried away by it, and S5 stayed silent to avoid venting. S6 and S7 said they hardly felt pressure in class, S7 attributing this to high self-confidence. The teacher described the signs she sees in students who are not coping: some withdraw (quiet, daydreaming, absent), while others become easily offended and quarrel.

Theme 3: Personal strategies for peace of mind. Students used simple, low-cost strategies. S2 and S7 listened to music, S3 took long, slow breaths, and S1 prayed or took in fresh air. S5 looked at the scenery outside the classroom and walked around the school grounds, and S5 and S6 described a coffee break, S6 with biscuits and friends, before returning to study. Several named places in the school that help: the garden with a pond, where S2 liked the sound of water, and the garden beside the statue of Saint Arnoldus Janssen, named by S3. S5 said she preferred going to the sea. The teacher's own techniques were art therapy through writing or drawing, then individual counseling with mindfulness or breathing exercises and joint problem solving.

Theme 4: Friends and teachers as support. Most students felt that their environment helped them manage emotions. S2 said that meeting friends feels like returning home, where she can talk and laugh and feel that she is still cared for. S3 felt that friends care, and S4 felt comfortable when friends helped her control her emotions. S1 pointed to the unique ways teachers and friends educate. The picture was not uniform: S5 answered "more or less," and S6 said school did not make her feel especially safe and comfortable. The BK room adds a weekly classical guidance program on stress management, emotion regulation, and cyberbullying prevention, and a peer counseling program that trains student representatives to listen to classmates.

Theme 5: Spiritual activities as a source of calm. Six of the seven students mentioned prayer, recollection, reflection, or spiritual songs. S2 said prayer calms her and recollection helps her understand and change her point of view. S1 described reflection and deepening of faith guided by the homeroom teacher, a priest, and other teachers. S3 became calmer through listening to meditations and spiritual songs. S4 prayed that God would open a way so a problem would not become a burden, and S6 told her complaints to God and asked for grace to be calmer. S5 said prayer lets her open up to God. S7 answered that reading and life insight help him, which is less explicitly religious.

Discussion

The findings show that students manage school pressure mostly through what they do themselves, in small and practical ways. Seen through the process model of Gross (1998), several of these actions are early regulation: S1 chose a quiet place, and S5 and S6 stepped away from the class setting. Some students modulated their response, for example S4 controlling her emotion and S5 staying

silent. Only a few described changing the meaning of a problem, as S2 did when she said recollection changes her point of view. Silence and holding in feelings are not always helpful (Aldao et al., 2010), so it is worth noting that students who rely on them do not yet describe a clear way to release the feeling afterwards.

The breathing exercise described by S3 matches what the BK teacher teaches and what mindfulness approaches describe as a way to lower stress by attending to the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). This agreement suggests that the school's counseling input and the students' habits point in the same direction, although the data cannot show whether students learned the technique in the BK room.

The repeated mention of prayer, recollection, and spiritual songs suggests that for these students, faith practices work as a coping resource. This fits Lazarus & Folkman (1984) view that coping depends on the resources a person can call on, and it is a feature of a Catholic school that general models do not describe. At the same time, the data do not show whether prayer alone is sufficient when problems are heavy, and the BK teacher's description of withdrawal and conflict shows that some students need more than self-help.

Two gaps deserve attention. First, the teacher reported family conflict as a frequent source of distress, but none of the seven students mentioned it. This may reflect the interview questions, which asked about stress at school, or students' reluctance to speak about home. Second, S6 and S7 reported little pressure. This may reflect real well-being, but it may also mean some students do not disclose stress, so the findings should not be read as showing that these students need no support.

The findings have practical implications. Teachers could coordinate assignment deadlines across subjects, since students linked stress to several assignments in one day. The school can protect the calm spaces students already use, such as the garden and pond. Counselors can build on breathing, music, and prayer as familiar strategies, and add ways to release feelings safely for students who tend to stay silent. Peer counseling can help reach students who rarely speak.

This study has limits. It involved seven students from one class in one school, so the results describe their experience and are not meant to be generalized. The answers were short, which limits depth, and the BK teacher was a single informant. Future studies could include more classes and schools, use longer interviews or observation, and ask directly about experiences at home.

Conclusion

Tenth-grade students in this study managed emotions and kept peace of mind mainly through their own simple strategies: pausing, finding a quiet place, listening to music, breathing, sharing a coffee break with friends, and praying. Assignments and tiredness were the main sources of pressure, and friends, teachers, and spiritual activities were the main support. The BK teacher's account added academic anxiety, peer pressure, and family conflict, and showed that school counseling uses art therapy, mindfulness, problem solving, classical guidance, and peer counseling.

The main contribution of this study is to show how students themselves describe these experiences in a faith-based school, where prayer and recollection sit beside everyday strategies. Schools can respond by coordinating assignment loads, protecting calm spaces, building on strategies students already use, and reaching students who rarely say that they are under pressure. Studies with more classes and schools are needed to test whether these patterns hold more widely.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions (Optional)

Reinardus Reinardi Diun contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and writing the original draft. Rosa Mustika Bulor contributed to supervision, validation, and reviewing and editing the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Generative AI Disclosure

The authors used generative AI-assisted tools to support language refinement and manuscript preparation. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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