

## Coping strategies and family support to the adjustment of adolescents who have parents working as migrant workers

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Adolescents often have difficulty adjusting to their surroundings. Coping and family support are also associated with this adjustment. However, the relationship between the aforementioned factors and adjustment among adolescents with parents who work as migrant workers remains unclear. This study aimed to analyze the relationship between coping and family support with the adjustment of adolescents who have parents who work as migrant workers.

**Methods:** This is a cross-sectional study. A total of 70 early adolescents with parents working as migrant workers were recruited from the total sample. In this study, coping strategies and family social support were assigned as independent variables, while the dependent variable was the adjustment of adolescents who had parents as migrant workers. The questionnaire was used to measure the outcome of interest and tested for validity and reliability. The data analysis in this study used Spearman Rho. Spearman's Rho correlation with alpha,  $\alpha$  set  $\leq 0.05$ , was used to analyze the data.

**Results:** The results indicate that Coping strategies ( $p = 0.018$ ;  $r = 0.283$ ) and family support ( $p = 0.001$ ;  $r = 0.380$ ) were associated with adolescent adjustment.

**Conclusions:** Both coping strategies and family support contribute to the adjustment of adolescents whose parents work as migrant workers. There is a need to increase the priority of psychosocial counseling for adolescents who have parents working as migrant workers and educate their families to increase attention and support appropriate adolescent development.

**Keywords:** coping strategies, family support, adolescent, migrant workers, mental health

### Introduction

Indonesia is one of several countries with a high population of migrant workers (Umami and Turnip, 2019). In 2017, the National Authority for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Overseas Workers (BPNP2TKI) reported that the population of migrant workers increased exponentially to 261, 820 in all sectors. Consequently, many people have to leave their

families and children in their hometowns and work as migrant workers (Lam and Yeoh, 2019a). These children are usually called "left-behind children" (Umami and Turnip, 2019), and, as they grow and reach adolescence, they are cared for by other parents, relatives, or caregivers.

The separation of parents and children for a long period of time (Hoang and Yeoh, 2012; Moyce and



Schenker, 2018) leaves a deep scar, especially to children, adjusting to enter their adolescence phase. A previous study on adolescents' adjustment factors reported that social-emotional problems are common among adolescent children (Hirvonen *et al.*, 2018). Adolescents who experience problems in emotional development are those who do not live with their parents working as migrant workers, which causes them to live separately from their parents for a long time (Garver, 2017). Adolescents are in a transition period from children to adults; they need a process of adjustment that is good for both the teenager and his family, such as dealing with stress, frustration, and conflict (Santrock, 2011).

In Indonesia, the phenomenon in one of the sub-districts where the research was conducted was that many middle-aged adolescents did not live with their parents because their parents had to work as Indonesian migrant workers. A previous study reported that adolescents whose parents work as migrant workers have a poorer quality of life than their children (Wong, Chang and He, 2009). Children perceive this phenomenon through the manifestation of psycho-emotional problems such as anger, anxiety, and poor performance at school (Garver, 2017). However, adolescents perceive and react differently to this phenomenon. According to the 2017 Kendal District Teaching and Learning Center (PKBM) survey, this district was second-ranked in Central Java, with a high dropout rate of 4,024 teenagers. Juvenile delinquency is one of the factors that cause school dropout. Juvenile delinquency occurs because of the failure of adolescents to adapt to their environment and daily relationships. Adolescent social-emotional adjustment is related to attention, parental support, and adolescent coping characteristics (Bullock *et al.*, 2018).

Working as a migrant worker demands high responsibility and sacrifices to live separately from their family for a long period of time (Hoang and Yeoh, 2012; Moyce and Schenker, 2018). Consequently, parents may face more complex problems (Hoang and Yeoh, 2012; Lam and Yeoh, 2019a), which is a transition period from child to adult. Therefore, more research is required. Inappropriate parent-child interactions will affect adolescent self-adjustment, which impacts emotional stability and the adolescent's adaptation process in preparing for adulthood (Martínez *et al.*, 2021). Early adolescents who experience failure in adjustment behave poorly in education, have an aggressive attitude, are very unconfident in themselves, feel insecure, and have feelings of giving up easily (Hurlock, 2006). Adjustment problems that occur in adolescents with

Table 1 Respondent characteristics (n=70)

Respondent characteristics	N	%
Sex		
Male	33	47.1
Female	37	52.9
Age		
13 years old	6	8.6
14 years old	34	48.6
15 years old	30	42.9
Parent education		
Primary school	21	30
Junior High	42	60
High school	7	10
Living with		
Aunt and uncle	15	21.4
Brother	11	15.7
Grandmother	44	62.9

parents who work as migrant workers are very urgent and important to be addressed and it is necessary to understand the relationship between family support and adolescent coping strategies with adolescent adjustment to parents as migrant workers, so that it can be used as a basis for developing relevant interventions to prevent negative impacts on adolescent development. The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationship between family support and adolescent coping strategies and adolescent adjustment to parents who work as migrant workers.

## Materials and Methods

The research design used in this study was cross-sectional. Adolescents who attend junior high schools and whose parents worked as migrant workers for at least three years at one of the junior high schools in Patebon District, Kendal Regency, Central Java, Indonesia, were included in this study. This research took place in an area where many adolescents were discovered abandoned by their parents who work as migrant workers abroad. Seventy samples were obtained using the total sampling technique.

The study examined two types of variables: independent variables, which included coping strategy and family social support, while the dependent variable was self-adjustment in adolescents who had parents as migrant workers.

## Instruments

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of a coping strategy questionnaire, a Family Support Questionnaire, and a Self-Adjustment Questionnaire. The coping strategy questionnaire was adapted from Lazarus' theory and developed by (Carver, C.S; Weintroub, J.,K; Sceiner. M., 1989). This questionnaire, which consisted of 15 questions, was modified by the researcher according to

the research objectives. The family support questionnaire was adapted based on the parameters of Langford et al. (1997) and Wittenberg-Lyles et al. (2014), consisting of 15 questions about emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal, and modified by the researcher. The researcher modified the self-adjustment questionnaire based on Schneider's (1964) parameters, which consisted of 20 questions.

All questionnaires were tested for validity and reliability and deemed valid and reliable. The results of the reliability test of Cronbach's alpha value on coping strategies were 0.761, and Cronbach's alpha value on parental family support was 0.754, Cronbach's alpha value on self-adjustment was 0.752.

### Procedure

Researchers obtained data from teachers on the respondents of adolescents who have parents who are migrant workers. Before the respondent took part in this study, the respondent's guardian signed a letter of consent after being explained the purpose of the study by the researcher. Then, when collecting data, the researcher, assisted by a counselling guidance teacher (BP), collected adolescents in second- and third-level classes to complete the questionnaire. The researcher explained the procedures for filling out the questionnaire in advance and asked if it was not clear. The time taken to complete the questionnaire was approximately 15-20 minutes.

### Data Analysis

The statistical test used in this study was the Spearman Rho correlation.

### Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing, Universitas Airlangga, with the code of ethics number 1531-KEPK.

### Results

The characteristics of the respondents in this study indicated that the male respondents were 33 (47.1%) and 37 (52.9%) were female. Almost half of the respondents were 14 years of age (48.6%). Most of the respondents' parents had completed junior high school education, with 42 students (60%). More than half of the total number of respondents lived with their grandmothers, with as many as 44 (62.9%) respondents ([Table 1](#)).

The results of this study indicate that the highest average adolescent coping strategy is one that focuses on emotions ( $1.87 \pm 0.63$ ), while the aspect with the highest average score on adolescent family support with parents who work as migrant workers is instrumental support ( $2.11 \pm 0.73$ ). This study shows that the highest self-adjustment of adolescents is the aspect of being able to be realistic and objective ( $2.03 \pm 0.74$ ). The results of the correlation test between coping strategies and self-adjustment showed that the significance value of the Spearman's rho correlation test was  $p = 0.018$  ( $p < 0.005$ ), indicating that there is a relationship between coping strategies and self-adjustment in adolescents whose parents work as migrant workers. The value of the correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is 0.283, which means that coping strategies and adolescent adjustment are related. A positive correlation coefficient indicates that

Table 2 The relationship between coping strategies and family support with adolescents' adjustment to their parents working as migrant workers ( $n=70$ )

Indicator	Mean	SD	p-value	r
<b>Coping Strategy</b>			0.018	0.283
Coping strategies focus on problems	1.79	0.65		
Coping strategies focus on emotions	1.87	0.63		
<b>Family support</b>			0.001	0.380
Informational support	1.94	0.75921		
Instrumental support	2.11	0.73313		
Appraisal or award support	1.90	0.72532		
Emotional support	1.96	0.87536		
<b>Adjustment</b>				
Able to control emotions and have patience	1.94	0.63442		
Have a good self-defense structure	1.73	0.50852		
Able to learn from experience	1.86	0.74767		
Able to be realistic and objective	2.03	0.74155		

the better the coping strategy, the better the adjustment. The relationship between family support and self-adjustment showed that the significance value on the Spearman's rho correlation test was  $p = 0.001$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). It can be concluded that there is a relationship between family support and self-adjustment among adolescents whose parents are migrant workers. The correlation coefficient value was 0.380, indicating that the relationship between family support and adjustment was sufficient. The correlation coefficient was positive, which means that increasing family support increases the level of adolescent adjustment (Table 2).

## Discussions

The coping strategies of adolescents who live separately from their parents because their parents have to work as migrant workers abroad affect their adjustment. In this study, there was a significant positive correlation between the coping strategies chosen by teenagers and their adolescent adjustment. Adolescent adjustment may increase if coping strategies increase. Similar to the results of previous research, adolescents with good coping strategies also have good emotional maturity (Lee et al., 2017). The conditions that occur in adolescents with parents who work as migrant workers abroad in this study, even though adolescents do not live at home with their parents, show they can still manage stress well so that they can adapt well to themselves and the surrounding environment.

Coping strategy is a way to cope with and manage the stress that is being experienced (Stephenson and DeLongis, 2020); the coping strategies that adolescents of parents who work as migrant workers those that focus on problems and those that focus on emotions. This situation is in line with the results of previous research, which states that adolescent coping strategies to overcome their conflicts focus on overcoming problems and emotional control (Sang Ayu Ketut Tri Semaraputri, 2018). Both coping strategies are capable of dealing with stress experienced by adolescents. Problem-focused coping strategies mean that adolescents deal with stress by directly focusing on solving problems. In contrast, emotion-focused coping strategies mean that adolescents choose to control their emotions without forcing them to change their existing conditions (Fabick, 2011).

This study indicates that the majority of adolescents have coping strategies that focus on emotions rather than being problem-focused coping strategies. This is in line with previous research, which states that coping strategies for emotional control are related to self-

adjustment (Ghofiniyah and Setiowati, 2017). Adolescents who have to live separately from their parents because their parents work as migrant workers experience loneliness, longing for their parents, sadness, and feelings of being neglected (Hoang et al., 2014), they do not have the power to change the existing situation; they said that their parents worked abroad for their education and they would live with them in the future (Lam and Yeoh, 2019b), so that adolescents tend to control their emotions more than having to solve problems or change circumstances. Emotion-focused strategies are such as rejection, venting emotions, anger, confusion, apathy, or seeking social support if this condition is uncontrolled and receives inappropriate support it can lead to maladaptive responses (Baker and Berenbaum, 2007; Garver, 2017). Emotional-focused coping is usually more at risk for maladaptive outcomes (Schneider, King and Delfabbro, 2018). This maladaptive response leads to unsuccessful adjustments that can trigger juvenile delinquency or risky adolescent behaviour (Bullock et al., 2018; Schneider, King and Delfabbro, 2018). Not all adolescents in this study used emotion-focused coping strategies, it was also found adolescents with problem-focused coping strategies. When using problem-focused coping strategies, adolescents tended to express feelings directly about an event that caused stress, adolescents were realistic and objective and could adjust well. Previous research has shown that adolescents with problem-focused coping strategies are more adaptable than those with emotion-focused coping strategies (Lee et al., 2017). Problem-focused coping strategies result in good mental health (Mullis and Chapman, 2010).

This study also found that adolescents with parents who work as migrant workers will have good adjustment if they have good family support. The results of this study are in line with previous research that stated that proper family interaction and support affected emotional stability, which also had an impact on adolescent adjustment (Martínez et al., 2021), as well as the lack of support from the family, which has the potential to cause symptoms of depression in adolescents who also suffer from depression. This will affect the subsequent development of adolescents (Roche, Bingenheimer and Ghazarian, 2016). Adolescents who have to live separately from their parents need more attention from families who care at home; these teenagers lose attention and closeness to their parents; they need support in undergoing a difficult developmental and transitional period in adolescence (Krisnana et al., 2019). If they do not

receive appropriate support, they risk getting support from a negative social environment, which has the potential to lead to maladaptive behaviour (Baker and Berenbaum, 2007; Ani *et al.*, 2020).

Adolescents in this study received support from their families in the form of information, instrument, appraisal, and emotional support. The results of this study are in line with the research of Panewaty and Indrawati (2018), which states that adolescent self-adjustment family support includes emotional, information, instrumental, and appraisal support that affect adolescents' social adjustment (Panewaty and Indrawati, 2020). The higher the perceived social support, the higher the adolescents' social adjustment. Conversely, the more negative the parents' social support, the lower the adolescents' social adjustment. Social support from close family members influences adolescents' adaptation. Adolescents need parental social support, such as emotional support, information support, instrumental support, and appraisal support, to adapt to their environment (Marhamah and Hamzah, 2017). In this study, adolescents who did not live with their parents were more likely to receive instrumental support from their families than those who did not. Instrumental support is more evidently provided to children or adolescents to meet their daily needs compared to the need for appreciation or emotion; instrumental support tends to be more visible than other support, such as parents of an adolescent who work far away from abroad to improve the family economy (Lam and Yeoh, 2019b); parents provide money and the closest family tries to meet the physical or instrumental needs of adolescents, such as daily school needs, housing, clothing, health, and others (Moskal and Tyrrell, 2015; Fellmeth *et al.*, 2018). The limitation of this study is that it has not separated and analyzed further who the parents working as migrant workers are, whether father, mother, or both, thus requiring further research to identify it.

## Conclusions

Coping strategies and appropriate family support can affect adolescents' adjustment. It requires education-based intervention and special counselling for families and adolescents who have parents with migrant workers, so that they have good parenting styles according to the development of adolescents. In addition, the components related to adolescents who live separately from their parents who work abroad, such as teachers or the nearest health facility, must focus on paying attention to the mental health problems

of adolescents with this condition. It is also necessary to pay attention to the physical and mental health of their immediate family. Those caring for children whose parents have left and are working far abroad, are such as elderly grandmothers, grandfathers, or other families, so that it is hoped that they can optimize care and good quality of life for adolescents and the families who care for them.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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