ISSN 2776-5229

Psychological Stress and Coping Strategies Among Individuals in Detention: A Qualitative Study at the Class IIB Banjarnegara State Detention Center, Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received September 28, 2026
Revised October 22, 2026
Accepted November 23, 2026

Keywords: Psychological stress; coping strategies; detention; religious coping; Islamic guidance and counseling.

ABSTRACT

This study explored psychological stress and coping strategies among individuals held at the Class IIB Banjarnegara State Detention Center, Indonesia, emphasizing the meanings attributed to religious practices. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed. The original study involved five purposively selected participants aged 22–35 years; detailed interview evidence was available from two participants, supplemented by observational summaries and institutional information. Data were examined using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that initial confinement, restricted autonomy, and family-related concerns shaped psychological distress, while recreational activities, interpersonal support, and religious engagement provided different perceived coping resources. A distinctive finding concerned the multiple functions of religious practices: Qur'anic reading was used to redirect distressing thoughts, whereas religious reflection supported perceived acceptance, self-examination, and meaning-making. Importantly, compulsory attendance at religious activities did not necessarily indicate personal engagement. One participant described developing intrinsic interest in religious instruction, while another reported motivation that varied according to the speaker and content. These findings suggest that coping emerges through interactions among individual appraisals, interpersonal relationships, institutional constraints, and spiritual resources. The study offers context-specific insights for educational psychology and Islamic guidance and counseling without establishing the psychological effectiveness of religious activities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Incarceration represents a significant disruption to individuals' psychological, social, and everyday experiences. Restricted autonomy, separation from family, unfamiliar institutional routines, and uncertainty about the future may generate considerable psychological distress. Beyond physical confinement, detained individuals must negotiate new social relationships, institutional expectations, and limitations on personal decision-making. Sykes (1958) conceptualized imprisonment through the deprivations associated with confinement, while Goffman (1961) emphasized how institutional arrangements reshape autonomy and everyday interactions. Recent qualitative research has also examined psychological pressures and coping experiences among incarcerated individuals (McLennan et al., 2025). In Indonesia, Kristianingsih et al. (2022) highlighted the relevance of social support to psychological stress in correctional settings. Together, these perspectives suggest that detention-related distress must be understood through both institutional conditions and individuals' interpretations of their circumstances. The transactional model of stress and coping provides a framework for examining these experiences. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) explained that psychological stress arises when individuals appraise environmental demands as challenging or exceeding their perceived coping resources. Lazarus (1999) further

emphasized the role of personal meaning in shaping emotional responses. Consequently, individuals experiencing similar institutional restrictions may respond differently depending on their expectations, relationships, perceived control, and available resources. Psychological adjustment to detention should therefore be examined as a subjective and context-dependent process rather than a uniform consequence of confinement. Coping involves cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage stressful demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These efforts may involve problem-focused strategies directed toward stressful circumstances or emotion-focused strategies aimed at managing emotional responses. In detention environments, limited autonomy may restrict opportunities to change institutional conditions, making emotional regulation, interpersonal interaction, and personal meaning-making particularly relevant. Santi et al. (2020) examined problem-focused coping among individuals serving life sentences, while Seno & Rahayu (2024) investigated emotional regulation in coping processes within an Indonesian detention center. Although these studies illuminate important coping dimensions, further qualitative attention is needed to understand how individuals interpret and combine coping practices in everyday institutional life.

Interpersonal relationships represent another important dimension of psychological adjustment. Family communication and peer relationships may provide emotional reassurance, companionship, and opportunities to express personal concerns. Febrianti & Masnina (2019) and Kristianingsih et al. (2022) examined relationships between social support and psychological stress in Indonesian correctional contexts, while Fakorede et al. (2023) considered family support in relation to prisoners' experiences and well-being. Nevertheless, family relationships may also intensify distress through separation, parental responsibilities, restricted communication, and uncertainty surrounding visits. Thus, social support should not be understood as uniformly protective; its psychological significance depends on the meanings individuals attribute to their relationships and circumstances. Religious beliefs and practices may provide additional resources for responding to adversity. Pargament (1997) conceptualized religious coping as the use of religious beliefs, practices, and meanings to manage stressful experiences, while Pargament (2007) emphasized the importance of personal spirituality in psychologically informed support. Indonesian studies have investigated religious coping (Muhammad et al., 2023), relationships between religiosity and stress (Zamarin & Wibowo, 2023), and religiosity and gratitude in relation to mental health (Aulia, 2023). Internationally, Woodbridge & Vanhouche (2025) examined Islamic practices as coping resources among Muslim men in a Belgian prison. Collectively, this literature demonstrates the relevance of religion to incarceration experiences while raising questions about the different psychological meanings attributed to religious engagement. This issue becomes particularly important when religious activities are incorporated into structured institutional programs. Qur'anic recitation, religious instruction, and collective worship may offer opportunities for learning, reflection, and spiritual engagement. Basuki et al. (2025) examined Islamic religious guidance and moral transformation in prison rehabilitation, while LaBarbera (2025) investigated well-being among participants in prison-based religious education. However, institutional attendance does not necessarily indicate personal motivation, meaningful engagement, or psychological improvement. Individuals may participate because attendance is required, because they value religious instruction, or because religious practices provide personally meaningful responses to adversity. Distinguishing compulsory participation from personally motivated engagement is therefore essential for understanding religious coping without assuming that institutional religious programs automatically produce therapeutic benefits. From an educational psychology perspective, institutional development activities involve interactions among motivation, emotional regulation, social relationships, and personal reflection. Religious education may create opportunities for learning and reconsidering personal experiences, but educational participation and psychological coping remain analytically distinct. Similarly, institutional religious instruction should not be equated with professional Islamic

guidance and counseling. Understanding participants' interpretations of religious activities can clarify their perceived significance while avoiding unsupported conclusions about educational or therapeutic effectiveness.

Despite existing research on psychological stress, social support, coping, and religiosity in correctional settings, the interaction among these dimensions requires further context-sensitive investigation. A particularly important issue is how individuals negotiate institutional restrictions while interpreting available recreational, interpersonal, and spiritual resources. The distinction between compulsory religious attendance and personally meaningful engagement also remains relevant to understanding the psychological significance of religious activities. The Class IIB Banjarnegara State Detention Center, Indonesia, provides a pertinent setting because its institutional routines include religious development, vocational activities, recreation, and family communication opportunities. Examining individual experiences within this environment may clarify how coping practices emerge through interactions between personal appraisals and institutional resources. Accordingly, this study aims to explore psychological stress and coping strategies among individuals held at the Class IIB Banjarnegara State Detention Center, focusing on adjustment difficulties, family-related concerns, interpersonal support, and the meanings attributed to recreational and religious activities. Its principal contribution is to develop a contextually grounded understanding of coping that recognizes the interaction between individual appraisals, institutional constraints, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual resources. Particular attention is given to religious practices as potential resources for attentional redirection, acceptance, personal reflection, and meaning-making, alongside differences between compulsory participation and personally motivated engagement. The study seeks to inform educational psychology and Islamic guidance and counseling without making causal claims regarding the psychological effectiveness of institutional programs.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore psychological stress and coping strategies at the Class IIB Banjarnegara State Detention Center, Central Java, Indonesia (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The facility accommodated 159 residents against a capacity of 71 and provided religious, vocational, recreational, and family communication activities. The original study reported five purposively selected participants aged 22–35 years, with access facilitated by detention authorities. Selection focused on experiences relevant to psychological adjustment and coping; however, formal inclusion and exclusion criteria were not documented. Detailed interview evidence was available for two participants aged 24 and 35 years with different legal circumstances. Institution-mediated recruitment posed potential selection and disclosure biases. Both interviewees were informed that answering questions was optional and verbally agreed to participate, although written consent and independent ethical approval could not be verified.

Table 1. Methodological Characteristics of the Study

Component	Description
Research design	Qualitative descriptive
Research setting	Class IIB Banjarnegara State Detention Center, Indonesia
Originally reported participants	Five individuals, aged 22–35 years
Detailed interview participants	Two individuals, aged 24 and 35 years
Sampling	Purposive, institution-facilitated
Documented interview date	January 26, 2026
Data sources	Two interview transcripts and institutional contextual information
Analytical approach	Six-phase thematic analysis
Participant identification	INT-01 and INT-02

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted on January 26, 2026, addressing emotional distress, family relationships, interpersonal support, recreational activities, and religious engagement. Indonesian-language question-and-answer transcripts were supplemented by

observational summaries and institutional information. Interview durations, audio-recording procedures, and verbatim transcription verification were not documented. Data were examined using Braun & Clarke (2006, 2022) six-phase thematic analysis: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, refinement, and reporting. Interpretation was informed by Lazarus & Folkman (1984) transactional coping framework and Pargament (1997) religious coping perspective, particularly differences between compulsory religious attendance and personally meaningful engagement. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymized identifiers and omission of identifying details. Limited interview evidence, incomplete procedural documentation, and institution-mediated recruitment constrained the transferability of findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Psychological Stress and Adjustment to Detention

The analysis identified four interrelated themes: (1) initial adjustment and restricted autonomy; (2) family-related concerns and emotional vulnerability; (3) recreational and interpersonal coping; and (4) religious engagement, acceptance, and meaning-making. These themes were derived primarily from two interviews conducted on January 26, 2026. Previously reported observational summaries and institutional information provided contextual evidence. Together, the findings indicate that coping was shaped by individual appraisals, interpersonal relationships, institutional constraints, and accessible resources.

Table 2. Themes and Supporting Empirical Evidence

Theme	Empirical evidence	Data source
Initial adjustment and restricted autonomy	Difficulties adapting to unfamiliar people and routines; fear, boredom, restricted mobility, and gradual adjustment	INT-01 and INT-02, interviews, January 26, 2026
Family-related concerns and emotional vulnerability	Concerns about family, children, parental responsibilities, anticipated visits, and emotional distress	INT-01 and INT-02, interviews, January 26, 2026
Recreational and interpersonal coping	Playing chess, guitar, or cards; watching television; reading; conversations with peers; family communication	INT-01 and INT-02, interviews, January 26, 2026
Religious coping and meaning-making	Qur'anic reading, attentional redirection, acceptance, personal reflection, and differences in motivation for religious participation	Primarily INT-02, with contrasting experiences from INT-01
Supporting contextual evidence	Individual interests, institutional routines, religious instruction, vocational activities, and recreational facilities	Previously reported observational summaries and institutional information

Note. The first four rows represent the principal analytical themes. The final row identifies supporting contextual evidence rather than an additional independent theme.

3.2 Initial Adjustment, Uncertainty, and Loss of Autonomy

Initial detention was described as psychologically challenging because participants encountered unfamiliar people, institutional expectations, and restrictions on personal freedom. INT-01 explained: “It was difficult because everything was unfamiliar—the environment and the people. We had to learn how to behave and adjust to the rules here.” (INT-01, interview, January 26, 2026). This account illustrates how detention required adaptation to new social expectations as well as physical confinement. Restricted mobility also contributed to boredom: “I feel bored and want to see the outside world.” (INT-01, interview, January 26, 2026). INT-01 recalled greater fear during earlier confinement at a police facility but perceived the current setting as comparatively less restrictive because certain activities and family interactions were available. This comparison suggests that perceived autonomy varied across institutional environments. INT-02 similarly described confusion,

boredom, and emotional difficulties during the initial weeks: “It was during the first three weeks here. After those three weeks, I gradually began to adjust.” (INT-02, interview, January 26, 2026). The participant associated adjustment with increasing familiarity with daily routines and fellow detainees. These experiences correspond with Sykes (1958) account of imprisonment-related deprivation and Goffman (1961) analysis of institutional regulation. Through Lazarus & Folkman (1984) transactional framework, distress can also be understood in relation to participants' appraisals of unfamiliar demands and available coping resources. However, retrospective descriptions of adjustment do not establish longitudinal psychological improvement.

3.3 Family Separation and Emotional Vulnerability

Family concerns extended psychological distress beyond immediate institutional restrictions. INT-01 described worries about relatives and future circumstances, while INT-02 emphasized parental responsibilities and concerns about social stigma. INT-02 explained: “My children still do not know that I am here ... I tell them that I am working.” (INT-02, interview, January 26, 2026). Concealing detention was described as an attempt to protect the children, while also reflecting the emotional burden of maintaining family relationships under constrained circumstances. Family visits had contrasting meanings. INT-02 valued contact with relatives but reported persistent worry when anticipated visits did not occur. The participant also recalled crying and withdrawing during early detention. INT-01 similarly described fear and emotional overwhelm. Previously reported observational summaries noted family-related sadness (OBS-01), rumination and changes in gaze (OBS-02), and restlessness or irritability (OBS-05). OBS-03 and OBS-04 described comparatively relaxed interactions. These observations are descriptive rather than diagnostic, and their identifiers cannot be linked reliably to the interview participants. Research has emphasized the relevance of social support to stress in Indonesian correctional settings (Febrianti & Masnina, 2019; Kristianingsih et al., 2022). The present findings add that family relationships may simultaneously provide reassurance and intensify concerns about separation, responsibilities, and uncertain communication. Consistent with Lazarus & Folkman (1984), their psychological significance depends on individual appraisal rather than the mere presence of family support.

3.4 Coping Strategies and Available Institutional Resources

3.4.1 Recreational Activities and Interpersonal Support

Participants described recreational activities and social interaction as ways of managing boredom and redirecting attention. INT-01 stated: “Usually, I play the guitar, chess, or cards. I also talk with others and watch television.” (INT-01, interview, January 26, 2026). INT-02 similarly reported reading, playing chess, and conversing with fellow detainees, including discussions about future plans. These practices can be interpreted as predominantly emotion-focused coping because they addressed emotional responses to circumstances participants could not readily change (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Nevertheless, their functions differed: recreation occupied attention, whereas conversation offered companionship and opportunities for expression. Family communication provided another interpersonal resource. INT-02 described the spouse's support: “Thankfully, my wife is the one who always supports me. She continues to support me and comes to visit.” (INT-02, interview, January 26, 2026). Telephone contact and visits helped maintain valued relationships. However, disappointment when visits did not occur demonstrates that supportive relationships could also generate emotional vulnerability. These accounts establish perceived coping functions, not measurable reductions in psychological stress.

3.4.2 Religious Coping, Acceptance, and Meaning-Making

Religious engagement emerged as a distinctive coping resource, particularly for INT-02. The participant described Qur'anic reading as a response to distressing thoughts: “When I start thinking about my problems and my family, I take a book and read the Qur'an to redirect my thoughts.” (INT-02, interview, January 26, 2026). Here, religious practice functioned as attentional redirection. The same participant also interpreted detention through religious reflection: “I began to think that perhaps this was a reminder ... I started learning to accept it sincerely.” (INT-02, interview, January 26, 2026). This account illustrates *ikhlas* (sincere acceptance), self-examination, and spiritual meaning-making. Attentional redirection and acceptance were therefore interconnected functions within one participant's experience, rather than independent findings attributed to multiple interviewees. These interpretations align with Pargament (1997) understanding of religious coping as involving practices and meanings used to respond to adversity. A particularly important finding concerned the distinction between compulsory religious attendance and personal motivation. INT-02 explained: “Initially, it was compulsory ... but later I wanted to listen to the religious talks and learn what further advice they might offer.” (INT-02, interview, January 26, 2026). Although attendance initially reflected institutional requirements, the participant subsequently described developing personal interest in religious instruction. INT-01, however, expressed conditional interest: “It depends on who delivers the session ... and also on the material.” (INT-01, interview, January 26, 2026). These contrasting accounts demonstrate that compulsory participation did not necessarily produce equivalent personal engagement. One participant associated religious instruction with growing interest and reflection, whereas the other's motivation depended on the speaker and content. This distinction constitutes the study's principal contribution to understanding religious coping in institutional settings. Religious attendance alone cannot establish that participants experienced spiritual meaning-making or psychological benefits. Rather, religious practices acquired significance through individual motivation and interpretation. The findings are consistent with research examining Islamic practices as coping resources in prison (Woodbridge & Vanhouche, 2025) and Indonesian studies of religious coping and religiosity (Muhammad et al., 2023). Their specific contribution lies in illustrating how institutional obligation and personal engagement may diverge. For Islamic education and guidance and counseling, these accounts suggest that meaningful engagement requires attention to participants' motivations and spiritual interpretations. However, the study did not measure changes in psychological functioning or evaluate religious instruction as a therapeutic intervention.

3.4.3 Personal Interests, Skills, and Institutional Opportunities

Previously reported observational summaries documented varied interests and practical skills, providing context for potential engagement opportunities.

Table 3. Participants' Interests, Skills, and Suggested Activities

Observation code	Interests and hobbies	Reported skills	Suggested activities
OBS-01	Traveling; volleyball	Practical fieldwork	Additional sports activities
OBS-02	Futsal	Motorcycle maintenance, computers, livestock, cultivation, haircutting	None recorded
OBS-03	Music; basketball	Not recorded	None recorded
OBS-04	Billiards	Automotive and computer-related knowledge	None recorded
OBS-05	Films and anime; touring; automotive interests; traveling; gaming	Not recorded	Sports activities and updated library books

Note. These entries reproduce previously reported observational summaries. Underlying individual observation records were unavailable for verification; OBS identifiers must not be assumed to correspond to INT-01 or INT-02.

Institutional information documented religious instruction, daily assemblies, Saturday exercise, selected vocational activities, and shared recreational and communication facilities.

Table 4. Institutional Activities and Their Potential Relevance to Coping

Institutional resource	Documented availability	Potential psychosocial function
Religious instruction and Qur'anic activities	Regular institutional activities	Religious reflection, meaning-making, and spiritual engagement
Chess, guitar, and shared television	Shared recreational facilities	Distraction, social interaction, and management of boredom
Sports and exercise	Scheduled Saturday exercise	Physical activity and opportunities for social engagement
Vocational activities	Livestock care, cultivation, handicrafts, haircutting, and cooking	Skill development and structured daily activity
Family visits and telephone services	Institutionally provided communication facilities	Maintenance of family relationships and access to social support
Reading materials	Reading reported by INT-02 as a coping practice	Individual recreation and attentional redirection

Note. Potential psychosocial functions indicate plausible uses of institutional resources rather than measured psychological outcomes.

Available resources offered different possibilities according to individual interests and access. However, institutional availability does not demonstrate participation, and personal interest does not establish coping behavior. Accordingly, coping functions were attributed only where supported by interview accounts. The facility accommodated 159 residents against a capacity of 71. Although this population pressure characterized the setting, the interviews did not establish its direct psychological effects. Institutional conditions are therefore treated as contextual influences rather than causal explanations. From a transactional perspective, available resources may shape coping possibilities, but their significance remains dependent on individual appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

3.5 Implications for Educational Psychology and Islamic Guidance and Counseling

The findings suggest that detention-related coping emerges through interactions among personal appraisals, interpersonal relationships, institutional constraints, and recreational and spiritual resources. Participants experienced similar restrictions but interpreted and managed them differently. For educational psychology, the distinction between compulsory attendance and personally meaningful engagement highlights the importance of motivation and individual differences when interpreting institutional development activities. Participation alone cannot establish meaningful learning or psychological change. For Islamic guidance and counseling, the accounts emphasize the relevance of recognizing personal spiritual meanings alongside adjustment difficulties and family-related concerns. Qur'anic reading, acceptance, and reflection served different perceived functions, indicating that religious engagement should not be treated as a uniform coping mechanism. These implications do not constitute evidence of intervention effectiveness. No structured counseling intervention was evaluated, and psychological outcomes were not measured. Interpretation is further limited by two detailed interview accounts, institution-mediated recruitment, incomplete procedural documentation, and observational summaries that could not be independently verified or matched to interviewees. Despite these constraints, the study offers a contextually grounded contribution: coping reflects the interaction between individual interpretation and accessible resources, while compulsory religious participation must be distinguished from personally

meaningful spiritual engagement. This distinction provides a basis for further qualitative investigation and for considering psychologically responsive, spiritually sensitive institutional support.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that coping with detention-related psychological stress is shaped by the interaction of individual appraisals, interpersonal support, institutional constraints, and spiritual resources. Rather than operating as independent strategies, recreational activities, family relationships, peer interactions, and religious practices acquired different meanings according to participants' circumstances and perceived needs. This finding highlights the importance of understanding psychological adjustment as a context-dependent process within the restricted environment of detention. The study's distinctive contribution concerns the relationship between compulsory religious participation and personally meaningful engagement. Although religious activities formed part of institutional routines, the interview accounts revealed differences in participants' motivations and interpretations. In particular, one participant described religious practices as resources for redirecting distressing thoughts, developing acceptance, reflecting on personal circumstances, and constructing spiritual meaning. These experiences suggest that the psychological significance of religious engagement cannot be inferred from attendance alone. However, they do not establish that religious instruction directly reduces psychological stress. For educational psychology and Islamic guidance and counseling, these findings underscore the importance of attending to individual motivation, emotional needs, and personal spiritual interpretations when considering institutional development activities. Given the limited number of detailed interview accounts and the constraints of institution-mediated recruitment, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific rather than broadly generalizable. Future research should compare coping experiences across detention facilities, employ longitudinal designs to examine changes in psychological adjustment, and investigate more closely how spiritual meaning-making relates to adaptation under conditions of restricted autonomy.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors express their appreciation to the administration and staff of the Class IIB Banjarnegara State Detention Center for facilitating access to the research setting. Sincere gratitude is also extended to the participants who shared their experiences and perspectives. Their contributions were essential to understanding psychological stress and coping within the detention environment.

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