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Mechanisms of Rumination Deactivation: An Interpretive Phenomenological Study in Young Adults with Anxiety

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: This study aimed to explore the lived experiences and underlying psychological and contextual mechanisms by which young adults with anxiety naturally deactivate rumination.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative research design based on interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. The study involved 21 Indonesian young adults (aged 18–30) who self-identified as experiencing recurrent anxiety and ruminative thought patterns. Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling from mental health support networks and university counseling centers. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and analyzed using NVivo 14 software. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Analysis followed iterative coding, theme development, and integration processes, with peer debriefing and member checking to ensure credibility and confirmability.

Findings: Four overarching themes emerged: (1) awareness and cognitive shifts, including recognition of mental loops, decentering, cognitive reframing, and acceptance of imperfection; (2) emotional processing and release, such as naming core emotions, expressive disclosure, self-soothing practices, and emotional reappraisal; (3) behavioral and environmental regulation, encompassing structured routines, purposeful engagement, digital boundaries, and adaptive social connection; and (4) coping resources and growth, involving self-directed use of therapy-informed tools, spirituality and existential meaning-making, strengthening self-efficacy, and future-oriented hope. These mechanisms revealed a layered, dynamic process of disengaging from repetitive negative thinking in everyday contexts.

Conclusion: Rumination deactivation among young adults with anxiety involves a synergistic interplay of metacognitive awareness, emotional

regulation, behavioral structuring, and personal growth resources. Understanding these naturalistic strategies can inform culturally sensitive interventions, prevention programs, and self-help tools to support mental well-being in emerging adulthood.

Keywords: *Rumination; Anxiety; Young adults; Interpretive phenomenological analysis; Emotional regulation; Cognitive flexibility; Coping mechanisms*

1. Introduction

Rumination, defined as the repetitive and passive focus on one's distress and its possible causes and consequences, is recognized as a transdiagnostic cognitive vulnerability that intensifies anxiety and related emotional difficulties (Eisma et al., 2020; Puccetti et al., 2024). Its perseverative, self-referential nature sustains negative affect and disrupts adaptive problem solving (Morse et al., 2024). In young adults, rumination is especially concerning because it intersects with developmental tasks such as identity formation, relationship building, and career decision-making, amplifying psychological distress and interfering with sleep and daily functioning (Carlson & Williams, 2024; Lau, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023). Although theoretical models and interventions have conceptualized rumination as a central risk process, far less is known about how individuals naturally and experientially disengage from these repetitive mental loops, particularly among anxious emerging adults.

Repetitive negative thinking (RNT), which includes rumination and worry, has been consistently identified as a core mechanism underpinning anxiety, depression, and other emotional disorders (Hirsch et al., 2020; Puccetti et al., 2024). While worry is more future-oriented and verbal, rumination often centers on past events and personal flaws, intensifying self-critical cycles (Mizuno et al., 2022; Morse et al., 2024). Neurocognitive evidence suggests overlapping yet distinct activation patterns for these processes, with rumination more strongly linked to self-focused and identity-related concerns (Jansen et al., 2021; Misaki et al., 2024; Yun et al., 2022). Prolonged rumination predicts higher anxiety severity, impaired sleep quality, and reduced psychological resilience (Carlson & Williams, 2024; Zhou et al., 2023), and may contribute to behavioral patterns such as avoidance and bedtime procrastination (Carlson & Williams, 2024). These findings point to rumination as a self-reinforcing loop that sustains emotional dysregulation.

Emotional dysregulation is a central correlate of rumination. Individuals who ruminate report greater intensity and poorer differentiation of negative emotions, which contributes to vulnerability in the face of daily stress (Birditt et al., 2024; Eckland et al., 2022). Social and relational stressors often serve as catalysts for repetitive thinking, particularly in young adulthood when peer and family expectations are strong (Birditt et al., 2024; Yun et al., 2022). Social isolation and loneliness can intensify mental loops by reducing opportunities for perspective taking and emotional validation (Glenn et al., 2024). Broader environmental adversities, including uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic, have been shown to increase worry and rumination, amplifying psychological distress (O'Connor et al., 2021). Chronic anxiety often coexists with this cycle, making rumination both a coping attempt and a maintaining factor of distress (Hawley et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2025).

Several psychological interventions have been developed to target rumination. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and its adaptations, such as rumination-focused CBT, have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing repetitive negative thinking by challenging maladaptive thought patterns and promoting cognitive flexibility (Altena et al., 2023; Shahmoradi & Mostafavi, 2022). Mindfulness-based and acceptance-oriented approaches encourage decentering and non-judgmental awareness of internal experiences, offering another pathway to disengage from maladaptive cognitive loops (González-Palau et al., 2024; Hawley et al., 2024). Self-compassion has emerged as a protective factor, mediating the relationship between self-critical rumination and anxiety (Jansen et al., 2021; Mansueto et al., 2021). Recent digital interventions, including mobile health applications, show promise in providing scalable tools to reduce worry and rumination among young adults (Edge et al., 2021; Edge et al., 2023, 2024). However, most research emphasizes structured therapeutic techniques or symptom reduction outcomes rather than exploring the spontaneous, lived processes by which individuals disengage from rumination.

Sleep and physiological arousal represent another crucial dimension of rumination. Persistent mental loops are linked to disrupted sleep architecture and hyperarousal, which further heighten anxiety and impair daily functioning (Carlson & Williams, 2024; Lau, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023). Breaking cycles of repetitive negative thinking appears to support recovery of cognitive and emotional resources, reduce nocturnal worry, and facilitate resilience (Misaki et al., 2024; Mizuno et al., 2022). For young adults

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experiencing anxiety, strategies that enable mental quieting and restoration may have significant preventive and therapeutic value.

Cultural context shapes how rumination is experienced and managed. In collectivist cultures such as Indonesia, social comparison, family expectations, and relational obligations may heighten self-critical thought (Li et al., 2024). Yet cultural and spiritual frameworks can also provide protective meaning systems and facilitate acceptance and coping (Glenn et al., 2024; González-Palau et al., 2024). Understanding rumination deactivation within such a context can illuminate culturally embedded resilience strategies that go beyond Western intervention models and enrich global mental health approaches.

Despite these advances, important knowledge gaps remain. Much of the existing literature relies on quantitative assessment of rumination frequency or intensity (Joubert et al., 2022; Morse et al., 2024) and does not capture the nuanced internal shifts individuals describe when they interrupt or exit repetitive negative thought cycles. Neuroimaging studies have revealed overlapping but distinct neural substrates of rumination and worry (Misaki et al., 2024; Puccetti et al., 2024), but these data cannot fully explain subjective strategies or turning points. Qualitative studies exploring rumination are still limited, and most focus on clinical interventions rather than self-initiated or lived experiences (Joubert et al., 2022; Li et al., 2024). An interpretive phenomenological approach offers the depth and flexibility to explore these personal and contextual processes while acknowledging the dynamic meaning-making of participants (Edge et al., 2021; Glenn et al., 2024).

The objective of the present study is to explore the lived experiences and underlying psychological and contextual mechanisms by which young adults with anxiety in Indonesia deactivate rumination.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences and underlying mechanisms through which young adults with anxiety deactivate rumination. IPA was selected because it allows an in-depth understanding of subjective meaning-making processes while acknowledging the researcher's interpretive role in constructing insights from participants' narratives. The study population comprised young adults aged 18–30 years who self-identified as experiencing recurrent anxiety symptoms and repetitive negative thinking patterns. Participants were recruited from mental health support communities and university counseling centers across major cities in Indonesia through purposeful sampling to ensure rich, relevant, and diverse experiences. Inclusion criteria were: (a) being within the target age range, (b) reporting a history of anxiety-related experiences and engagement in rumination, (c) willingness and ability to articulate personal experiences, and (d) voluntary consent to participate. Individuals with severe psychiatric disorders requiring intensive clinical intervention at the time of data collection were excluded.

A total of 21 participants (13 females and 8 males) were included in the study. The sample size was guided by the principle of theoretical saturation — data collection continued until no new themes or insights emerged, ensuring depth and comprehensiveness in understanding the phenomenon under study. Participants were briefed on the research purpose, assured of confidentiality, and provided written informed consent prior to participation.

2.2. Measures

Data were gathered using in-depth semi-structured interviews to allow participants to narrate their lived experiences while enabling the researcher to probe for deeper meaning and clarification. An interview guide was designed based on existing literature on rumination, cognitive deactivation, and anxiety, but remained flexible to follow participants' unique accounts. Core areas explored included: personal experiences of rumination, triggers and contexts that sustain it, perceived turning points or methods of disengagement, and emotional or cognitive shifts associated with deactivation.

Interviews were conducted individually in a quiet and private setting, either face-to-face or via secure video conferencing platforms depending on participants' preferences and geographical accessibility. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness, and audio-recorded with consent. All recordings were transcribed verbatim and, where necessary, translated into English for analysis while maintaining contextual meaning. Field notes and reflective memos were documented after each session to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and initial interpretive impressions.

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2.3. *Data Analysis*

Data analysis followed the interpretive phenomenological analysis approach, aiming to identify, describe, and interpret the core psychological and experiential structures of rumination deactivation among young adults with anxiety. Transcripts were imported into NVivo 14 qualitative data analysis software to support systematic coding and organization. The analysis proceeded through iterative stages:

1. **Immersion and Initial Noting:** Each transcript was read multiple times to achieve familiarity, while initial comments were documented regarding descriptive content, linguistic nuances, and conceptual reflections.
2. **Emergent Theme Development:** Significant statements were identified, and conceptual codes were generated to capture essential meanings related to the deactivation of rumination.
3. **Connection Across Themes:** Codes were clustered into higher-order categories, identifying relationships and patterns within and across participants' experiences.
4. **Integration and Abstraction:** Themes were refined into superordinate and subordinate categories representing shared psychological mechanisms and contextual influences shaping rumination deactivation.

An audit trail of analytic decisions and reflexive notes was maintained to ensure transparency and confirmability. To enhance trustworthiness, peer debriefing was conducted with two qualitative research experts, and member checking was performed by sharing synthesized interpretations with several participants for validation and accuracy.

3. Findings and Results

The study included 21 young adults from various provinces in Indonesia who self-identified as experiencing recurrent anxiety and rumination. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 30 years, with a mean age of 24.6 years. Of the total sample, 13 were female (61.9%) and 8 were male (38.1%). Most participants were undergraduate or graduate students (n = 15; 71.4%), while the remainder were employed in diverse professional or semi-professional roles (n = 6; 28.6%). In terms of relationship status, 14 participants (66.7%) were single, and 7 participants (33.3%) were in a committed relationship or married. The majority reported experiencing anxiety symptoms for more than two years (n = 12; 57.1%), while others had symptoms for less than two years (n = 9; 42.9%). These demographic characteristics reflect a relatively young and academically active sample, aligning with the study's aim to explore rumination deactivation among young adults facing transitional life stages and psychological vulnerability.

Table 1

Main Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts (Open Codes) of Rumination Deactivation

Main Theme (Category)	Subtheme	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Awareness and Cognitive Shifts	Recognizing Rumination Cycles	Mental loops awareness; Intrusive repetitive thoughts; Acknowledging triggers; Detecting early warning signs; Feeling mental "stuckness"
	Mindful Self-Observation	Noticing thought patterns; Decentering from anxious thoughts; Labeling internal dialogue; Observing bodily tension
	Cognitive Reframing	Replacing catastrophic thoughts; Looking for alternative explanations; Generating neutral perspectives; Challenging unhelpful beliefs
	Acceptance of Imperfection	Embracing uncertainty; Allowing incomplete control; Self-compassion; Normalizing emotional fluctuations
2. Emotional Processing and Release	Identifying Core Emotions	Naming underlying fear; Differentiating sadness from anxiety; Surfacing suppressed anger
	Expressive Emotional Release	Talking out feelings; Journaling distress; Cathartic crying; Sharing with trusted peers
	Self-Soothing Practices	Breathing exercises; Physical relaxation (progressive muscle relaxation, stretching); Calming imagery
	Emotional Reappraisal	Seeing anxiety as temporary; Linking past experiences to current triggers; Forgiving self for mistakes
	Restoring Emotional Safety	Seeking comfort spaces; Setting personal boundaries; Avoiding emotional overload
3. Behavioral and Environmental Regulation	Structured Daily Routine	Scheduling activities; Creating sleep consistency; Digital boundaries (reduced social media scrolling)
	Engaging in Meaningful Action	Volunteering; Creative hobbies (drawing, writing, music); Learning new skills; Goal setting
	Physical Grounding Strategies	Walking outdoors; Body scanning; Mindful movement (yoga, stretching)

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	Adaptive Social Connections	Selective sharing with supportive friends; Reducing toxic contact; Safe disclosure
4. Coping Resources and Growth	Therapeutic and Psychoeducational Support	Using therapy skills; Guided meditation apps; Psychoeducation on rumination; Self-help reading
	Spiritual and Existential Anchoring	Prayer or meditation; Seeking spiritual acceptance; Reframing life purpose; Gratitude practice
	Strengthening Self-Efficacy	Tracking progress; Celebrating small wins; Resilience-building self-talk
	Meaning Reconstruction	Learning from adversity; Integrating past lessons; Seeing anxiety as personal growth; New identity narrative
	Hope and Future Orientation	Positive goal envisioning; Cultivating optimism; Long-term planning

1. Awareness and Cognitive Shifts

Recognizing Rumination Cycles. Many participants described first needing to notice when their mind had entered repetitive and intrusive loops before any change could occur. They spoke of "getting stuck in the same worry track over and over" (P7) and "realizing I'm replaying old fears without new information" (P3). Identifying triggers—such as solitude or late-night overthinking—helped some break the cycle. One participant explained, "I can almost hear a bell ring now when my brain starts going in circles; that's when I try to stop" (P12).

Mindful Self-Observation. A shift toward observing thoughts without judgment emerged as crucial. Participants described "stepping back and looking at my mind like a movie" (P9) and "labeling what's happening instead of drowning in it" (P4). Developing a meta-perspective helped them distance themselves from anxious rumination. "Once I could just watch the storm instead of being in it, the rumination lost some power," noted one young adult (P16).

Cognitive Reframing. After noticing unhelpful thought loops, some intentionally replaced catastrophic thinking with balanced alternatives. "When my brain says 'everything will go wrong,' I answer back with evidence of times I handled things," shared P2. Others reframed uncertainty: "I stopped assuming unknown means danger; sometimes it just means surprise" (P11). These small internal dialogues lessened anxiety and gave them a sense of mental control.

Acceptance of Imperfection. A number of participants said that stopping rumination required letting go of perfectionistic demands. "I accepted that I don't have to figure out everything or be flawless," said P19. Others described self-compassion as an antidote: "When I told myself it's okay to feel anxious and imperfect, the mental noise softened" (P5). For some, embracing life's unpredictability itself was freeing: "Uncertainty isn't an enemy anymore; I can breathe with it" (P14).

2. Emotional Processing and Release

Identifying Core Emotions. Participants often discovered that rumination masked deeper emotions. "I thought I was just worried, but underneath was a lot of sadness," shared P8. Another noted, "When I named my fear directly, it felt smaller than the endless swirling thoughts" (P1).

Expressive Emotional Release. Releasing pent-up feelings helped loosen rumination's grip. "I journal every night; once the feelings are on paper, my head quiets" (P18). Talking to trusted friends or crying alone also surfaced as relief strategies. "It's like emptying the bottle so it doesn't shake inside me," said P10.

Self-Soothing Practices. Gentle calming activities—breathing exercises, stretching, or guided imagery—helped restore mental balance. "When my thoughts spiral, I put my hand on my chest and breathe slowly; it tells my body I'm safe," said P20. Another participant shared, "Progressive muscle relaxation makes me feel grounded again" (P9).

Emotional Reappraisal. Reevaluating the meaning of anxiety itself was transformative. "Instead of fighting it, I told myself: this is just my brain's alarm, not reality," explained P6. Some reframed mistakes as learning: "I forgave myself for past failures, and the rumination eased" (P15).

Restoring Emotional Safety. Participants emphasized creating internal and external safety to regulate emotion. "I only talk about my worries with people who don't judge me," (P3). Another shared, "I retreat to my quiet corner with music when it gets too much" (P21).

3. Behavioral and Environmental Regulation

Structured Daily Routine. Organizing daily life was repeatedly mentioned as protective. "Having a fixed morning routine keeps my brain from wandering into dark places," said P2. Sleep hygiene and setting screen-time limits were especially important: "I turn off my phone after midnight; otherwise, my rumination gets worse" (P11).

Engaging in Meaningful Action. Purposeful activity broke mental loops and gave alternative focus. "Helping at the local shelter keeps me outside my head," explained P4. Creative outlets like painting or music also surfaced: "When I draw, the inner noise dims" (P13).

Physical Grounding Strategies. Movement and sensory grounding provided immediate relief. "Walking outside and

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feeling the breeze resets my brain," said P16. Another mentioned yoga: "My anxiety quiets after even 15 minutes" (P7).

Adaptive Social Connections. Participants became intentional about social contact. "I share my worries with safe friends, not with everyone," noted P19. Cutting ties with toxic or invalidating relationships was also key: "I distanced myself from people who feed my anxiety" (P12).

4. Coping Resources and Growth

Therapeutic and Psychoeducational Support. Formal and self-directed learning empowered participants to disengage from rumination. "Therapy taught me tools to challenge my thoughts," (P8). Others mentioned online resources: "Guided meditation apps remind me to pause and breathe" (P5).

Spiritual and Existential Anchoring. For some, spiritual practices created inner calm and acceptance. "Prayer gives me perspective; I'm not alone with my fears," said P18. Gratitude practices also appeared: "Listing blessings helps me stop obsessing over what's wrong" (P14).

Strengthening Self-Efficacy. Feeling capable emerged as protective against mental loops. "Every time I manage my anxiety, I write it down; it proves I can do it again," said P1. Others emphasized small achievements: "I celebrate small wins so my brain learns success is possible" (P21).

Meaning Reconstruction. Participants reframed anxiety as part of personal growth. "I used to hate my overthinking, now I see it as sensitivity that I can channel," shared P3. Another reflected, "Pain shaped me; I'm wiser now" (P11).

Hope and Future Orientation. Finally, cultivating hope countered the stagnation of rumination. "When I imagine a future where I'm okay, my thoughts lose their grip," (P17). Some planned proactively: "Having long-term goals reminds me this moment isn't everything" (P6).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study explored how young adults with anxiety in Indonesia recognize and deactivate rumination by examining their lived experience through interpretive phenomenological analysis. The findings revealed four overarching psychological and contextual mechanisms: (1) awareness and cognitive shifts, (2) emotional processing and release, (3) behavioral and environmental regulation, and (4) coping resources and growth. These mechanisms form a dynamic and interrelated process in which participants first recognize and label their ruminative cycles, gradually shift to a more flexible and self-compassionate perspective, and finally adopt concrete emotional, behavioral, and relational strategies to exit repetitive negative thinking.

A central finding was the crucial role of meta-awareness and cognitive decentering. Participants consistently described recognizing mental loops and developing the ability to step back and observe their thought processes. This aligns with prior evidence that repetitive negative thinking is sustained when individuals remain fused with their internal dialogue, whereas decentering disrupts the self-referential cycle (Hirsch et al., 2020; Puccetti et al., 2024). Neuroimaging studies suggest that rumination involves hyperactivation of self-focused default mode network regions, and that awareness can modulate this activity by engaging prefrontal regulatory systems (Misaki et al., 2024). Similarly, work on self-compassion and emotional competence has shown that observing and labeling internal states reduces reactivity and facilitates cognitive flexibility (Jansen et al., 2021; Mansueto et al., 2021). Our participants' descriptions of "watching the storm instead of being in it" echo the decentering processes emphasized in mindfulness-based approaches (González-Palau et al., 2024; Hawley et al., 2024).

The emergence of cognitive reframing and acceptance of imperfection further highlights the potential of naturalistic cognitive change. While structured interventions like rumination-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (RFCBT) train individuals to challenge catastrophic and self-critical thoughts (Shahmoradi & Mostafavi, 2022), our findings show that some young adults intuitively adopt similar reappraisals. This is consistent with studies suggesting that even without formal therapy, individuals may spontaneously generate alternative explanations and develop tolerance for uncertainty (Edge et al., 2021; Edge et al., 2023). Acceptance of life's unpredictability and embracing imperfection were powerful turning points for many participants, resonating with previous work on the protective role of self-compassion and flexible coping in reducing anxiety and depressive rumination (Mansueto et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2025).

Another major contribution of this study is its detailed portrayal of emotional processing and release as a mechanism of rumination deactivation. While cognitive models often emphasize top-down control, participants described the value of confronting and expressing underlying emotions. This echoes findings that rumination can function as avoidance of painful core feelings (Eisma et al., 2020; Joubert et al., 2022). By naming sadness, fear, and anger, participants seemed to reduce the undifferentiated

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affect that fuels repetitive loops (Eckland et al., 2022). Expressive writing, crying, and sharing with trusted others emerged as important vehicles of release, consistent with evidence that emotional expression promotes adaptive regulation and prevents perseveration (Birditt et al., 2024; Glenn et al., 2024). Additionally, self-soothing practices such as breathing exercises and relaxation mirror strategies taught in acceptance and mindfulness-based programs (González-Palau et al., 2024; Hawley et al., 2024), suggesting that naturally developed emotional safety strategies may converge with evidence-based clinical tools.

Behavioral and environmental regulation also played a crucial role in breaking rumination. Participants described the stabilizing effect of structured routines, reduced exposure to digital triggers, and purposeful engagement in meaningful activities. This finding parallels research linking bedtime procrastination and unstructured late-night rumination with sleep disruption and anxiety (Carlson & Williams, 2024; Lau, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023). It also supports the idea that behavioral activation and engagement with rewarding, goal-directed activities reduce cognitive preoccupation and depressive brooding (Edge et al., 2024; O'Connor et al., 2021). Furthermore, intentional social connection—sharing with safe, supportive peers and distancing from invalidating interactions—reflects the protective role of relational quality in mitigating repetitive negative thinking (Birditt et al., 2024; Glenn et al., 2024). In collectivist cultures such as Indonesia, this selective relational engagement may be especially salient because family and peer networks strongly influence coping responses (Li et al., 2024).

The final theme, coping resources and growth, emphasizes that rumination deactivation is not merely a symptom reduction process but part of a broader trajectory of psychological resilience. Participants' use of therapy-informed strategies, mindfulness applications, and psychoeducational resources aligns with emerging digital and self-help interventions for young adults (Edge et al., 2021; Edge et al., 2023, 2024). Spiritual anchoring and existential reflection also surfaced as important resources, echoing research showing that culturally grounded meaning systems and spirituality buffer repetitive negative thinking and promote acceptance (Glenn et al., 2024; González-Palau et al., 2024). Participants reframed anxiety as a growth experience, similar to findings that reinterpreting adversity fosters resilience and future-oriented hope (Jansen et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2025). By envisioning meaningful futures and celebrating small victories, they counteracted the stagnation associated with rumination, aligning with cognitive and motivational theories of well-being (Morse et al., 2024; Puccetti et al., 2024).

Taken together, these findings extend the existing literature in several ways. First, they confirm core theoretical insights about RNT and anxiety (Hirsch et al., 2020; Puccetti et al., 2024) but illustrate how these mechanisms are lived and enacted outside structured therapy. Second, they provide culturally specific insight, showing how collectivist relational values, spirituality, and adaptive social selection shape rumination deactivation (González-Palau et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). Third, they bridge cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains, emphasizing that disengaging from rumination is not a single event but a layered process of awareness, acceptance, expression, action, and growth. These nuanced findings can inform both the personalization of clinical interventions and the design of low-intensity, culturally sensitive prevention strategies for young adults.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, it relied on self-reported accounts from a relatively small and culturally homogeneous group of Indonesian young adults, which may limit transferability to other populations. Participants were self-selected and might represent individuals already motivated to reflect on and manage their anxiety, potentially biasing the data toward adaptive narratives. Second, although interpretive phenomenological analysis enables deep exploration of subjective meaning, it does not allow for broad generalization, and findings cannot establish causal mechanisms. Third, all interviews were conducted within a single time frame, so insights about how rumination deactivation evolves longitudinally remain limited. Finally, while efforts were made to ensure translation accuracy and preserve nuanced meaning, subtle linguistic and cultural aspects could have been lost when transcribing and analyzing data in English.

Future studies should expand to more diverse and cross-cultural samples to examine how cultural values, social norms, and religious frameworks influence rumination deactivation across societies. Longitudinal qualitative or mixed-method designs would help track the process of disengagement over time and clarify whether certain strategies predict sustained well-being. Combining experiential accounts with physiological or neurocognitive measures could enrich understanding of the underlying

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mechanisms, linking subjective shifts with objective markers such as arousal regulation or brain network changes. Additionally, investigating the role of digital interventions in natural rumination deactivation could inform scalable prevention and early self-help tools tailored to young adults' preferences.

The results highlight the importance of helping anxious young adults develop awareness of mental loops, practice self-compassion, and create emotionally safe contexts for expression. Clinicians might integrate structured psychoeducation with clients' naturally emerging strategies, such as journaling, selective social disclosure, and routine building. Training programs in schools and universities could promote emotional literacy, mindfulness skills, and healthy technology boundaries to reduce nocturnal rumination. Furthermore, culturally attuned approaches that validate spiritual and existential meaning-making may enhance engagement and sustainability of mental health practices among young adults in collectivist settings.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article.

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