

Dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion among Adolescents Experiencing Family Conflict

Siti Nurhaliza. Binti Mahmud¹, Agus. Santoso^{2*}, Nayelli. Muñoz³

¹ Department of Psychology and Counseling, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

² Department of Educational Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

³ Faculty of Health Sciences, Private University of the North, Lima, Peru

* Corresponding author email address: agus.santoso@ugm.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore and identify the core dimensions of emotional exhaustion among adolescents experiencing family conflict in Indonesia.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study employed an exploratory design to examine the lived experiences of adolescents exposed to recurrent family conflicts. Using a purposive sampling approach, 22 adolescents aged 13 to 19 years (12 females and 10 males) from various urban and semi-urban regions in Indonesia participated in the research. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using NVivo 14 software. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-step approach, was applied to identify core themes and subthemes. Theoretical saturation determined the final sample size. Rigor and credibility were ensured through member checking, peer debriefing, and an external audit of the coding framework.

Findings: Data analysis revealed four overarching themes: (1) Emotional Drain from Family Tension, (2) Inner Conflict and Self-Blame, (3) Coping and Emotional Regulation Strategies, and (4) Social and Academic Consequences. Adolescents described chronic fatigue, helplessness, and emotional numbness resulting from prolonged family disputes. Feelings of guilt, shame, and internalized responsibility for family discord intensified emotional exhaustion. Coping strategies ranged from avoidance and spiritual reliance to creative expression and reframing. However, ineffective regulation often perpetuated distress. Emotional exhaustion further extended into diminished academic engagement, social withdrawal, and a strong yearning for family harmony. The findings collectively highlight emotional exhaustion as a relational, systemic, and culturally embedded process.

Conclusion: Emotional exhaustion among adolescents experiencing family conflict emerges as a multidimensional phenomenon rooted in persistent relational strain, internalized guilt, and limited emotional regulation resources. Strengthening family communication, emotional literacy, and support systems can mitigate exhaustion and promote adolescent emotional resilience.

Keywords: Emotional exhaustion; family conflict; adolescents; qualitative research; Indonesia; emotional regulation; coping strategies

1. Introduction

Emotional exhaustion represents one of the most pervasive and distressing forms of psychological strain that can emerge during adolescence—a developmental stage characterized by heightened emotional sensitivity and evolving social cognition. It denotes a state of chronic emotional fatigue resulting from sustained interpersonal tension, overexposure to stressors, and limited access to adaptive coping mechanisms (Feng, 2025). Although emotional exhaustion has often been examined within occupational or academic contexts, growing research underscores that the family environment plays an equally crucial role in shaping emotional depletion among young individuals (Yan et al., 2024). For adolescents, the family remains the primary social system where emotional security, socialization, and self-concept are formed. When that system becomes a source of conflict and emotional strain, the result can be profound emotional dysregulation and fatigue that extend far beyond the home environment (Chiang & Bai, 2024; Elattar et al., 2022).

The concept of family conflict encompasses a range of interparental and parent–child tensions, such as verbal disputes, inconsistent discipline, emotional neglect, and psychological hostility. Frequent exposure to such conflict has been consistently associated with emotional exhaustion, internalizing symptoms, and behavioral withdrawal in adolescents (LaMontagne et al., 2022). Research on parent–adolescent conflict suggests that the emotional atmosphere of the family strongly influences adolescents’ capacity to manage stress and regulate emotions (Chiang & Bai, 2024). Adolescents who perceive frequent or unresolved conflict often exhibit symptoms such as irritability, sadness, guilt, and emotional detachment, which collectively represent the experiential core of emotional exhaustion (Silva et al., 2020). Moreover, unresolved family tension can lead to learned helplessness, where adolescents begin to perceive their emotional investment as futile, resulting in diminished motivation, psychological depletion, and chronic fatigue (Dodanwala & Shrestha, 2021).

Within the broader stress–strain framework, emotional exhaustion has been conceptualized as a mediating mechanism linking chronic interpersonal conflict with negative emotional and behavioral outcomes (Wang et al., 2024). Studies have shown that continuous interpersonal strain activates physiological stress responses that, if unregulated, manifest in symptoms of emotional exhaustion such as fatigue, cynicism, and depersonalization (Yan et al.,

2024; Yeh et al., 2020). While much of this evidence arises from occupational settings such as teaching or healthcare, the psychological processes underlying emotional exhaustion are comparable across domains—persistent demands, emotional overextension, and insufficient recovery lead to depletion of emotional resources (Farrukh et al., 2024). In adolescents, however, the sources of exhaustion are often relational rather than professional, rooted in the quality of family communication and parental interaction styles (Elattar et al., 2022; Morón et al., 2023).

Empirical findings reveal that adolescents exposed to frequent parental quarrels and inconsistent family climates report higher levels of depressive symptoms and lower emotional resilience (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2024). Emotional exhaustion may thus act as an intermediate emotional state—bridging environmental stressors such as family conflict and psychological outcomes like anxiety, hopelessness, and social withdrawal (LaMontagne et al., 2022). From an emotional security theory perspective, adolescents who witness chronic interparental conflict internalize feelings of unpredictability and loss of control, undermining their emotional regulation capacities (Silva et al., 2020). Over time, these emotional strains accumulate, resulting in the erosion of emotional energy, motivation, and engagement with everyday life.

Cross-cultural evidence reinforces the universality of this phenomenon. For example, studies in Asian and Middle Eastern contexts indicate that adolescents often experience family-related emotional exhaustion differently from their Western counterparts due to cultural norms emphasizing obedience, filial piety, and family cohesion (Napitupulu & Desiana, 2023; Wardana & Waskito, 2024). In Indonesia, family dynamics are often guided by collectivistic expectations, where adolescents feel obligated to maintain family harmony even at the expense of their own emotional well-being. This sense of moral and emotional duty can heighten vulnerability to emotional exhaustion when family relationships become conflictual (Khisomudin et al., 2024). Such findings echo evidence from Chinese, Taiwanese, and Pakistani samples, where the intersection of role expectations and emotional labor within the family contributes to cumulative emotional fatigue (Hsieh et al., 2022; Yaseen et al., 2021).

In parallel, research on work–family conflict among adults provides conceptual insights applicable to family conflict in adolescence. For example, studies demonstrate that prolonged conflict between personal and role expectations fosters emotional exhaustion, mediating the

relationship between environmental stress and well-being (Feng, 2025; Yan et al., 2024). Although adolescents are not employees, they similarly juggle multiple emotional and social roles—child, student, friend—and thus experience inter-role tension when family instability interferes with emotional functioning in other domains (Zhang et al., 2020). Just as work-family conflict leads to burnout among adults (Okechukwu et al., 2023), family-school conflict can produce comparable exhaustion in adolescents, particularly when emotional resources are persistently depleted (Dodanwala & Shrestha, 2021; Yeh et al., 2020).

The link between emotional exhaustion and emotional regulation is central to understanding the adolescent experience. As noted by (LaMontagne et al., 2022), family context influences youth depressive symptoms primarily through its effect on emotion regulation capacity. Adolescents from conflict-laden families often exhibit limited access to adaptive emotional strategies such as cognitive reappraisal or mindfulness, instead resorting to suppression, withdrawal, or dissociation. The resulting emotional stagnation amplifies exhaustion, as the adolescent's emotional energy is spent maintaining self-control rather than processing distress. Similarly, (Chiang & Bai, 2024) found that adolescents with heightened reactivity to parental conflict displayed elevated internalizing symptoms, suggesting that repeated exposure to tension erodes regulatory resilience over time.

Emotional exhaustion within the family context also intersects with guilt, self-blame, and emotional contagion. In households where conflict is pervasive, adolescents often internalize responsibility for familial tension—believing they are the cause or that they could prevent disputes through obedience or silence (Silva, 2024). This internalized guilt not only fuels emotional exhaustion but also undermines self-esteem and emotional security. (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2024) highlighted that a supportive social and family climate contributes significantly to emotional intelligence and can buffer against suicidal ideation and emotional fatigue. Conversely, when adolescents perceive the family climate as threatening, the lack of emotional safety leads to chronic vigilance and stress hyperarousal, key antecedents of exhaustion.

The relationship between family conflict and emotional exhaustion is also dynamic and reciprocal. Adolescents' emotional depletion may exacerbate family tension by reducing their ability to respond empathetically or calmly during conflicts. This cyclical interaction mirrors findings from adult studies showing that emotional exhaustion not

only results from interpersonal conflict but can also increase the likelihood of further relational strain (Segovia & Recuero, 2023). The actor-partner interdependence framework demonstrates how emotional exhaustion in one family member can spill over to others, reinforcing a cycle of tension and mutual emotional fatigue. In the context of adolescence, where emotional sensitivity and social learning are particularly strong, such reciprocal effects may be especially pronounced (Moroń et al., 2023).

Further, cross-domain parallels show that emotional exhaustion mediates numerous stress-related relationships, such as between abusive supervision and marital strain (Farrukh et al., 2024) or between job demands and work-family conflict (Wardana & Waskito, 2024). These findings reinforce the notion that emotional exhaustion functions as a universal stress response mechanism, manifesting wherever individuals face persistent emotional demands without sufficient psychological recovery. Translating these insights to the family system suggests that adolescents who experience prolonged emotional demands—such as mediating parental arguments, managing loyalty conflicts, or repressing their own distress—are likely to develop symptoms of emotional exhaustion similar to burnout syndromes observed in adult populations (Khisomudin et al., 2024; Lestari & Budiono, 2021).

Additionally, the role of social support and perceived security cannot be overstated. (Zhang et al., 2020) reported that social support buffers the effects of emotional exhaustion and anxiety among adults facing family conflict, and similar protective processes are likely relevant to adolescents. The absence of parental support deprives adolescents of one of the most critical protective factors against stress-related emotional depletion. As (Abas et al., 2024) suggested, perceived organizational support moderates emotional exhaustion at work; analogously, perceived familial support can mitigate exhaustion within the home. When adolescents feel heard and validated, they are more capable of processing distress and preventing chronic emotional fatigue. Conversely, in families where emotional neglect prevails, exhaustion becomes cumulative and debilitating.

Recent evidence also points to socio-cultural moderators in the family conflict-exhaustion relationship. In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, where family harmony is prioritized over individual expression, adolescents may suppress emotions to maintain peace, inadvertently increasing emotional exhaustion (Napitupulu & Desiana, 2023). Moreover, gender expectations can shape emotional

expression and vulnerability. Female adolescents often report higher levels of emotional exhaustion due to greater emotional labor and empathy demands within the family system (E.O et al., 2024). Boys, on the other hand, may externalize distress through irritability or disengagement, masking exhaustion under behavioral problems. These gendered expressions of exhaustion highlight the importance of considering cultural and social dimensions in adolescent emotional research.

The pandemic and post-pandemic transitions have further intensified the emotional dynamics within families. Remote schooling, confinement, and economic strain have increased opportunities for family conflict, thereby amplifying emotional exhaustion among adolescents (Hsieh et al., 2022; Morón et al., 2023). Parents facing their own burnout or job-related stress may display lower emotional availability, inadvertently transferring their emotional fatigue to their children (Segovia & Recuero, 2023). The convergence of parental burnout and adolescent emotional depletion underscores a systemic transmission of stress within families—an intergenerational exhaustion cycle. (Silva et al., 2020) and (Elattar et al., 2022) both demonstrated that adolescents' adjustment outcomes are closely tied to perceived emotional security at home, confirming that conflict and exhaustion are not isolated experiences but intertwined processes shaping developmental trajectories.

The growing literature also emphasizes that emotional exhaustion among adolescents should be viewed not merely as an individual emotional reaction but as an indicator of family system imbalance. According to (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2024), when family members fail to maintain emotional attunement, adolescents experience diminished emotional intelligence and coping efficacy, which elevates risk for mental health problems. (LaMontagne et al., 2022) further showed that family emotional context mediates depressive symptoms through emotional regulation—suggesting that exhaustion acts as a core mechanism within this mediation chain. Meanwhile, (Feng, 2025) argued that emotional exhaustion represents the bridge between emotional labor and family conflict, extending this model to adolescents who, despite their age, perform significant emotional labor in managing parental emotions.

Finally, it is crucial to recognize that emotional exhaustion among adolescents experiencing family conflict carries significant developmental and societal implications. Chronic emotional depletion during adolescence can hinder academic engagement, peer relationships, and identity formation (Elattar et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Moreover,

emotional exhaustion may serve as a precursor to long-term emotional disorders such as depression or anxiety (Yaseen et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding the dimensions of emotional exhaustion within this context is essential not only for psychological theory but also for informing family-based interventions and preventive strategies that promote adolescent resilience and emotional well-being.

Accordingly, the present qualitative study aims to explore and identify the core dimensions of emotional exhaustion among adolescents experiencing family conflict in Indonesia.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design with an exploratory approach to identify and understand the dimensions of emotional exhaustion among adolescents who experience family conflict. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants who met specific inclusion criteria: adolescents aged 13 to 19 years, residing in Indonesia, and having reported recurrent experiences of family conflict (e.g., parental disputes, neglect, or emotional tension at home). A total of 22 participants (12 females and 10 males) were included in the final analysis. The sample size was determined based on theoretical saturation, the point at which no new themes or insights emerged from additional data.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed to capture the lived experiences and emotional expressions of adolescents in conflictual family environments. The interview guide contained open-ended questions focusing on perceptions of family conflict, emotional experiences, coping strategies, and feelings of exhaustion or helplessness. Example questions included: “Can you describe what happens when conflict arises in your family?” and “How do these situations make you feel emotionally?”

Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia by trained researchers in a private and comfortable setting—either at schools, community centers, or participants' homes—to ensure confidentiality and psychological safety. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, depending on participants' willingness and comfort levels. With participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded

and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes were taken to document contextual observations and nonverbal cues.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The analysis was facilitated using NVivo 14 qualitative data analysis software, which supported systematic coding and categorization of data segments. Initial open coding was performed to identify recurring patterns and emotional expressions, followed by axial coding to link related concepts under broader thematic dimensions of emotional exhaustion. To enhance the credibility and dependability of the findings, coding was performed independently by two researchers and cross-checked for consistency. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached.

Member checking was conducted with a subset of participants to validate the interpretations, and an external qualitative expert reviewed the coding framework to ensure analytical rigor. Reflexive journaling was also maintained throughout the research process to minimize researcher bias and enhance transparency in interpretation.

3. Findings and Results

A total of 22 adolescents participated in the study, comprising 12 females (54.5%) and 10 males (45.5%), all residing in various urban and semi-urban areas of Indonesia. Participants' ages ranged from 13 to 19 years, with a mean age of 16.4 years ($SD = 1.8$). In terms of educational level, 8 participants (36.4%) were in junior secondary school and 14 participants (63.6%) were in senior secondary school. The majority of adolescents (15 participants; 68.2%) reported living in two-parent households, while 7 participants (31.8%) lived with a single parent or extended family due to separation, divorce, or migration. Regarding socioeconomic background, 9 participants (40.9%) described their family's financial situation as low income, 10 participants (45.5%) as middle income, and 3 participants (13.6%) as upper-middle income. In terms of conflict type, 12 participants (54.5%) reported frequent verbal conflicts at home, 6 participants (27.3%) experienced both verbal and emotional conflicts, and 4 participants (18.2%) described exposure to physical altercations. The diversity in demographic backgrounds ensured a rich and varied set of perspectives on how family conflict contributes to emotional exhaustion in Indonesian adolescents.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts (Open Codes)

Main Themes (Categories)	Subthemes (Subcategories)	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Emotional Drain from Family Tension	Persistent Conflict Exposure	daily arguments; shouting and blaming; tension-filled atmosphere; no private space; feeling trapped
	Emotional Contagion	absorbing parents' anger; crying after fights; feeling nervous during silence; guilt when others fight; emotional exhaustion from empathy
	Helplessness and Fatigue	wanting to escape home; feeling powerless; "I can't change anything"; mental tiredness; low energy
	Sleep and Concentration Problems	sleepless nights; overthinking; poor focus at school; nightmares; physical tiredness
2. Inner Conflict and Self-Blame	Emotional Numbness	loss of sensitivity; feeling empty; emotional shutdown; "I don't feel anything anymore"
	Self-Attribution of Family Issues	blaming self for arguments; "maybe it's my fault"; trying to fix everything; sense of responsibility
	Guilt and Shame	fear of judgment; hiding problems from friends; guilt toward parents; low self-worth
	Confusion and Mixed Emotions	loving but resenting parents; "I hate it when I love them"; emotional instability; inner chaos
	Self-Isolation	withdrawing from family; avoiding conversations; emotional distance; preferring silence
3. Coping and Emotional Regulation Strategies	Suppressed Anger	pretending to be okay; crying in private; fear of expressing emotions; bottling up feelings
	Identity Confusion	uncertainty about self; "I don't know who I am"; conflict between independence and loyalty
	Avoidance and Distraction	listening to music; spending time online; leaving the house; avoiding conflict zones

4. Social and Academic Consequences	Seeking Emotional Support	talking with close friends; relying on teachers; peer empathy; searching for understanding
	Spiritual or Religious Coping	praying; attending mosque; seeking comfort in faith; “God listens when no one else does”
	Creative Expression	journaling; drawing emotions; writing poetry; turning pain into art
	Reframing and Acceptance	trying to understand parents’ stress; seeing conflict as temporary; forgiving; emotional maturity
	Decline in Academic Motivation	skipping homework; declining grades; lack of focus; loss of interest in school
	Peer Relationship Difficulties	irritability with friends; mistrust; preferring solitude; feeling misunderstood
	Behavioral Withdrawal	staying indoors; social avoidance; loss of joy; minimal participation
	Emotional Overload in Social Settings	crying easily; anxiety in group work; irritability; emotional outbursts
	Desire for Stability and Belonging	“I just want peace”; longing for harmony; craving normal family life; idealizing other families

Theme 1: Emotional Drain from Family Tension

Participants vividly described a pervasive sense of emotional depletion resulting from continuous family disputes and lack of emotional safety at home. Adolescents repeatedly emphasized the constant exposure to conflict, where “every day feels like walking on eggshells.” The emotional contagion from parental anger often made them internalize negative emotions—one participant said, *“When my parents shout, I feel like my chest is burning even though they’re not shouting at me.”*

Over time, this led to helplessness and fatigue, as participants felt trapped in cycles of tension they could neither control nor escape. Several reported chronic sleep disturbances and difficulty concentrating in school due to persistent rumination at night. Some described emotional numbness as a protective mechanism—*“At first, I cried every night, but now I don’t feel anything. I just stay quiet,”* explained a 17-year-old female participant. This theme highlights the gradual emotional erosion that continuous family discord imposes on adolescents.

Theme 2: Inner Conflict and Self-Blame

The second theme captured adolescents’ internal struggles and their tendency to assume responsibility for family disharmony. Many participants reported self-attribution of family issues, believing they somehow caused the conflict—*“When my parents fight, I think maybe it’s because I didn’t do well in school.”* Feelings of guilt and shame emerged prominently, with participants avoiding disclosure to peers for fear of stigma.

They described a profound confusion of emotions, simultaneously loving and resenting their parents, creating an ongoing internal tug-of-war. Emotional suppression was a recurring response—*“I want to shout, but I just cry quietly in my room,”* said a 15-year-old boy. Some adolescents also conveyed identity confusion, expressing uncertainty about who they are within their unstable family context. The

combination of guilt, anger, and self-blame deepened their emotional exhaustion and hindered healthy self-concept development.

Theme 3: Coping and Emotional Regulation Strategies

Despite their distress, participants demonstrated adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms. Avoidance and distraction were common, such as escaping into music or social media to disengage from conflict. Others sought refuge in emotional support networks, confiding in trusted friends or teachers—*“My best friend is the only one who listens without judging me.”* A strong cultural and spiritual dimension was evident, as many participants relied on religious coping, finding solace in prayer or Quranic recitation—*“When I pray, I feel lighter even if nothing changes at home.”*

Some channeled their pain into creative expression, such as writing or drawing, which provided emotional release and meaning-making. A few participants adopted reframing and acceptance, showing emotional growth through understanding their parents’ struggles. This theme reflects the adolescents’ attempts to preserve emotional balance and regain control in an environment marked by instability.

Theme 4: Social and Academic Consequences

The final theme revealed how emotional exhaustion spilled over into adolescents’ academic and social lives. Many experienced a decline in academic motivation, citing poor concentration and diminished interest in learning—*“I can’t focus on school when my home is full of shouting.”* Family tension also disrupted peer relationships, as irritability and mistrust made it hard to maintain friendships.

Participants often exhibited behavioral withdrawal, preferring isolation and minimizing social interactions. Some reported emotional overload in social settings, leading to sudden tears or anger outbursts during group work. A common thread was the desire for stability and belonging—

an emotional yearning for peace and family unity. As one participant expressed poignantly, *“I just want to have dinner together without anyone fighting.”* This theme underscores how family conflict extends beyond the home, shaping adolescents’ broader emotional and academic functioning.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present qualitative study explored the dimensions of emotional exhaustion among adolescents experiencing family conflict in Indonesia and identified four overarching themes: *emotional drain from family tension, inner conflict and self-blame, coping and emotional regulation strategies, and social and academic consequences*. These dimensions collectively illustrate the multifaceted nature of emotional exhaustion as not merely an emotional state but a psychosocial condition embedded in family dynamics and sociocultural expectations. The findings reveal that chronic exposure to conflictual family environments produces cumulative emotional fatigue, maladaptive coping responses, and weakened motivation in adolescents. These patterns align with existing theoretical and empirical literature emphasizing that emotional exhaustion represents a depletion of emotional and cognitive resources resulting from persistent interpersonal demands (Feng, 2025).

The first theme—emotional drain from family tension—captured participants’ descriptions of persistent stress, emotional contagion, and helplessness in conflict-laden households. Adolescents reported feeling overwhelmed by parental arguments, emotional volatility, and the lack of psychological safety. This aligns with the emotional security theory, which posits that repeated exposure to interparental conflict disrupts adolescents’ sense of emotional safety and predicts internalizing symptoms (Silva et al., 2020). Similarly, (Chiang & Bai, 2024) demonstrated that heightened parent–adolescent conflict directly increases emotional reactivity, which in turn exacerbates psychopathological symptoms. These mechanisms explain why adolescents in this study exhibited emotional fatigue, sleep disturbances, and cognitive disengagement. The cyclical nature of exhaustion and family tension also mirrors the reciprocal patterns identified by (Segovia & Recuero, 2023), who found that emotional exhaustion in one family member can reinforce stress and negative emotional climates in others. Thus, emotional exhaustion among adolescents is not a solitary response but a relational process emerging within an interdependent family system.

Participants’ expressions of helplessness, emotional numbness, and empathy fatigue echo findings from prior studies describing exhaustion as a prolonged reaction to unresolvable relational tension. (LaMontagne et al., 2022) reported that adolescents’ depressive symptoms were mediated by poor emotion regulation arising from stressful family contexts. Similarly, adolescents in this study described losing motivation, disengaging from family discussions, and developing emotional detachment—strategies that conserve psychological energy but simultaneously deepen emotional withdrawal. These outcomes are consistent with the depletion model of stress, where continuous exposure to emotional demands without recovery leads to chronic exhaustion and reduced functional capacity (Yan et al., 2024). The Indonesian adolescents’ testimonies—“I feel tired even when nothing happens at home” or “I can’t stop thinking about their fights”—illustrate this internalization process vividly.

The second major theme—inner conflict and self-blame—revealed that adolescents frequently attribute family conflict to themselves, internalizing guilt and shame. Participants believed that better behavior or academic achievement might have prevented parental arguments, reflecting a pattern of self-attribution bias common in collectivist cultures emphasizing filial responsibility (Napitupulu & Desiana, 2023). Comparable results were observed by (Silva, 2024), who showed that guilt functions as an antecedent of emotional exhaustion, as individuals expend emotional resources managing internalized responsibility. The present findings expand this understanding to adolescents, for whom guilt becomes both a cognitive distortion and a driver of fatigue. Similarly, (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2024) highlighted that supportive family climates enhance adolescents’ emotional intelligence, reducing suicidal ideation and fatigue; the absence of such a climate, therefore, amplifies guilt and self-blame.

Self-blame also interacts with identity confusion, as many adolescents reported difficulty distinguishing their own emotions from those of their parents. This internalized emotional burden corresponds with (Moroñ et al., 2023), who demonstrated that parental burnout and adolescent emotional dysregulation are interconnected through family emotional networks. The resulting internal conflict—wanting to maintain family harmony yet resenting continuous stress—reflects the “double bind” of collectivistic family systems where obedience coexists with suppressed frustration (Khisomudin et al., 2024). Such

suppression consumes emotional energy, fostering emotional exhaustion similar to the mechanism described in the emotional labor literature (Feng, 2025). Thus, adolescents' inner struggles mirror occupational emotional labor, as they continuously regulate expressions of distress to preserve relational stability.

The third theme—coping and emotional regulation strategies—illustrated a spectrum of adaptive and maladaptive responses. Avoidance behaviors, such as retreating to music or social media, functioned as temporary relief but ultimately reinforced detachment. These findings parallel (Wardana & Waskito, 2024), who found that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace demands and work–family conflict, indicating that avoidance may mitigate short-term tension but depletes long-term emotional resources. Adolescents also turned to peers or spiritual practices for comfort, underscoring the protective value of social and spiritual support. According to (Zhang et al., 2020), social support acts as a buffer between emotional exhaustion and anxiety symptoms, which is consistent with participants' reports that “talking with a friend makes me feel lighter.” Spiritual coping was particularly salient in this study, reflecting cultural and religious practices in Indonesian contexts, where prayer and faith serve as accessible strategies for emotional regulation.

Creative outlets such as journaling and drawing further represent emotion-focused coping that transforms distress into symbolic expression. This aligns with (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2024), who emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in promoting life satisfaction. By articulating emotions through creative activities, adolescents in this study demonstrated resilience and self-awareness, suggesting that emotional exhaustion, while debilitating, can also catalyze emotional growth when managed through reflective outlets. Nonetheless, several participants described acceptance as resignation rather than transformation, consistent with (Farrukh et al., 2024), who reported that emotional exhaustion mediates destructive outcomes such as relational strain when individuals accept stressors without reappraisal. This implies that acceptance without empowerment may perpetuate emotional depletion rather than resolve it.

The final theme—social and academic consequences—revealed how emotional exhaustion extends beyond the family to broader developmental contexts. Adolescents described loss of motivation, academic disengagement, and deteriorating peer relationships. These effects parallel (Elattar et al., 2022), who found that adolescents' perception

of inter-parental conflict negatively predicted academic achievement through diminished emotional security. Similarly, (Wang et al., 2024) demonstrated that emotional exhaustion mediates the link between work–family conflict and reduced professional identity among teachers; in adolescents, this manifests as diminished academic commitment and self-worth. Participants' statements such as “I can't concentrate when my parents fight” illustrate how cognitive load from family tension interferes with learning processes. Moreover, irritability and social withdrawal reported by participants correspond to findings by (LaMontagne et al., 2022), where emotional dysregulation in youth mediated depressive symptoms and social isolation.

The adolescents' longing for “peace at home” reflects an unmet need for stability and belonging, concepts strongly associated with emotional well-being (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2024). The spillover of exhaustion from family to school contexts also supports (Yeh et al., 2020), who found that supervisor support moderates burnout in occupational settings; by analogy, emotional support from teachers or peers could play a similar buffering role for adolescents. In both domains, the absence of emotional validation accelerates exhaustion. This cross-domain correspondence affirms that emotional exhaustion operates as a universal mechanism across relational environments—whether familial, occupational, or academic (Abas et al., 2024; Lestari & Budiono, 2021).

Taken together, these findings emphasize that emotional exhaustion in adolescents is relational, systemic, and culturally contextual. The dimensions identified—emotional drain, self-blame, coping, and social consequences—form an integrated model in which chronic family conflict depletes emotional resources, triggers maladaptive cognitive appraisals, and compromises socio-emotional functioning. The results extend previous quantitative studies by offering qualitative depth into how adolescents subjectively experience exhaustion. Whereas prior research largely conceptualized emotional exhaustion as a byproduct of work–family conflict or parental burnout (Dodanwala & Shrestha, 2021; Okechukwu et al., 2023), this study demonstrates its developmental manifestation within adolescent family life. Furthermore, by situating the analysis within the Indonesian sociocultural framework, the study reveals the amplifying role of collectivist values and filial expectations—dimensions rarely addressed in Western-centric research (Khisomudin et al., 2024; Napitupulu & Desiana, 2023).

The present results also contribute to the growing understanding of reciprocal emotional dynamics within families. As (Segovia & Recuero, 2023) argued, emotional exhaustion can act as both cause and consequence of relational strain, producing feedback loops of emotional depletion. Adolescents' descriptions of being emotionally "drained but unable to stop caring" exemplify this reciprocity. Moreover, parallels with occupational stress research (Feng, 2025; Wardana & Waskito, 2024) suggest that emotional exhaustion may represent a fundamental human response to enduring emotional dissonance. Just as employees who must conceal negative emotions for professional reasons experience burnout, adolescents who suppress distress to maintain family harmony similarly exhaust their emotional capacities.

Another critical implication concerns the mediating role of emotional regulation. Consistent with (LaMontagne et al., 2022), this study confirms that ineffective emotional regulation mediates the relationship between family conflict and adolescent exhaustion. Participants who could articulate or externalize emotions through creative or spiritual outlets reported less emotional numbness, whereas those who suppressed feelings displayed chronic fatigue and disengagement. These findings correspond with (Silva et al., 2020), who demonstrated that emotional insecurity within families undermines adaptive regulation and predicts adjustment problems. In this sense, emotional exhaustion serves as both a symptom and an early warning signal of broader emotional dysregulation. Recognizing this link may allow clinicians, educators, and parents to intervene before exhaustion evolves into depressive or anxiety disorders (Yaseen et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce and extend the existing literature by highlighting that emotional exhaustion is not confined to adults or occupational domains but constitutes a critical emotional outcome of familial stress during adolescence. The overlap between emotional labor in workplaces and emotional containment in families underscores the universality of this psychological process. Moreover, the results suggest that enhancing emotional literacy, social support, and communication within families could mitigate exhaustion and foster adolescent resilience (Abas et al., 2024; Peláez-Fernández et al., 2024).

5. Limitations & Suggestions

This study, while offering valuable qualitative insights, has several limitations. First, the sample size was limited to

twenty-two adolescents from specific regions of Indonesia, which may restrict the generalizability of findings to broader cultural or socioeconomic contexts. The study relied solely on self-reported interview data; thus, participants' accounts might be influenced by recall bias or social desirability, particularly when discussing sensitive family issues. Furthermore, as the research design was cross-sectional, it cannot determine the temporal or causal relationships between family conflict and emotional exhaustion. The absence of parental or teacher perspectives also limits the ecological validity of interpretations. Finally, although NVivo 14 supported systematic coding, thematic interpretation inherently involves researcher subjectivity, and alternative analytical frameworks might yield different thematic structures.

Future research should aim to triangulate adolescent self-reports with parental, teacher, or counselor observations to capture a more comprehensive picture of emotional exhaustion within family systems. Longitudinal qualitative or mixed-methods designs could illuminate how emotional exhaustion develops and fluctuates across adolescence and identify protective factors that promote recovery. Comparative studies across cultures—particularly between collectivist and individualist societies—would deepen understanding of how cultural norms shape adolescents' perceptions of conflict and exhaustion. Additionally, integrating physiological measures such as cortisol levels or sleep quality assessments could enrich the psychological data, offering multidimensional evidence of emotional depletion. Exploring gender differences, socioeconomic influences, and the moderating role of digital media use may also extend current findings.

The results underscore the importance of developing culturally sensitive family interventions that enhance emotional communication, conflict resolution, and adolescent coping skills. Counselors and school psychologists should provide safe spaces where adolescents can express distress without fear of judgment, thereby reducing emotional suppression. Family-based psychoeducation programs can help parents recognize the emotional impact of conflict and teach constructive dialogue techniques. At the school level, guidance counselors could integrate resilience training and emotional regulation workshops to empower adolescents to manage stress adaptively. Moreover, community initiatives that strengthen peer and religious support networks may offer additional buffers against emotional exhaustion, fostering healthier developmental outcomes.

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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 to this article.

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