



The Experiences of Adolescents in Building Self-Control in Huta III Nagori Manik Maraja, Sidamanik District, Simalungun Regency

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Abstract

Adolescence is a period filled with various challenges, during which individuals begin to build their identity and learn to regulate themselves. One of the crucial aspects that adolescents need to possess is the ability to exercise self-control, which includes regulating thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in accordance with the positive values surrounding them. This study aims to examine more deeply adolescents' experiences in identifying weaknesses in self-control, strategies for building self-control, as well as supporting and inhibiting factors in the development of self-control. This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design to obtain a holistic understanding of the participants' subjective experiences. The participants consisted of six female adolescents aged 15–17 years who were selected through purposive sampling based on the self-control problems they experienced, including verbal aggressiveness, gadget addiction, withdrawal behavior, susceptibility to peer influence, unstable emotions, and high emotional reactivity. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation. The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's thematic analysis technique. The findings revealed three themes. The study showed that the experience of building self-control is a long process influenced by internal factors such as self-awareness and motivation, as well as external factors such as family support and the social environment.

Keywords: Self-control, Adolescents, Experience

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is one of the most important and complex phases in the process of individual development. At this stage, individuals experience many significant changes, including physical, psychological, and social changes. Adolescence is an important stage in human development that begins around the age of 10 and continues until 18 years old. This phase functions as a bridge between childhood and adulthood, marked by major changes in various aspects such as physical condition, thinking abilities, emotions, and social relationships. During this stage, adolescents are often faced with various internal and external challenges that require high adaptive abilities. They are searching for their identity, trying to understand their role in society, and beginning to make decisions that will influence their future. However, the imbalance between desires and abilities in facing these challenges often triggers behavioral problems (Sinurat, N., 2025). In the process of growth, adolescents experience changes that may be reflected in inappropriate behaviors (Larasati, B. S., 2024). Adolescents have entered the formal operational stage in thinking abilities. They are able to evaluate various possibilities in solving problems from different perspectives and are ready to take responsibility (Halimah, S., 2022).

Self-control is an individual's capacity to regulate and control impulses, feelings, and actions in order to achieve long-term goals. In general, self-control can be interpreted as an effort to prevent or overcome unwanted thoughts or actions. It is the ability to modify inappropriate impulses and behaviors in order to provide responses that are aligned with goals, which is highly crucial during adolescence. Self-control is considered a psychological process involving efforts to restrain immediate impulses in order to achieve more significant long-term goals. In general, self-control can be concluded as an individual's skill in controlling and managing impulses, feelings, and actions, including regulating emotions and thoughts when facing temptations, with the aim of delaying gratification in favor of future benefits (Mayangsari, M. A., et al., 2024). Lazarus defines self-control as a process in which individuals make cognitive decisions to align their behavior with desired outcomes and goals (Duri, R., et al., 2024).

Calhoun and Acocella define self-control as the ability or skill to: (1) manipulate internal and external variables that influence behavior, (2) deliberately avoid actions that provide immediate satisfaction but are harmful in the long term, and (3) intentionally design and implement consequences for one's behavior. The behavioristic theory of Calhoun and Acocella explains that improving self-control can be carried out by applying three strategies: (1) manipulating antecedent stimuli, (2) manipulating responses (behavioral), and (3) manipulating consequences. These procedures are commonly abbreviated as ABC: Antecedent, Behavioral, and Consequence (Sudewi, K. A. A. G. I., et al., 2021).

One of the psychological abilities that is very important for adolescents in navigating this phase of life is self-control. Self-control is not merely the ability to avoid temporary temptations, but rather a complex self-management system involving the regulation of emotions, thoughts, and actions. This skill serves as an effective buffer against adolescents' natural impulsiveness, enabling them to think carefully before acting and choose constructive rather than harmful actions. Self-control can be interpreted as an individual's ability to voluntarily and consciously regulate focus, emotions, and impulses toward various temptations that conflict with life goals (Miskanik, 2022). Amid the rapid flow of globalization and societal development, people often face difficulties in clearly identifying themselves. Problems such as identity crises, lack of empathy, and insufficient self-control are increasingly becoming issues that require immediate

attention (Soesanto, E., & Eka, 2025).

Unfortunately, the reality in the field indicates that many adolescents still face challenges in building and maintaining adequate self-control. This deficiency is often reflected in various risky behaviors such as delinquency, inappropriate substance use, and the inability to resist peer and environmental influences, which ultimately hinder the development of their best potential. Aggressive behavior arises due to a lack of self-control among adolescents, which may cause various problems that can harm others, and this is certainly concerning. A high level of self-control can reduce and suppress aggressive behavior when there are stimuli that trigger aggressive actions. This is in line with the theory proposed by Baumeister and Boden regarding self-control, which states that low self-control allows aggressive behavior to emerge spontaneously, whether in the form of physical aggression, verbal aggression, or other forms of aggression (Madjid, A. N. F., et al., 2021).

Cases of phenomenological issues occurring among adolescents due to negative self-control have become problems in both social and personal environments, particularly in Sidamanik District. One example occurred in May 2025 and was reported by Mistar.id (Tuesday, May 6, 2025, 15:27), which stated that a 14-year-old adolescent in Sidamanik District, Simalungun Regency, was caught stealing a motorcycle on Friday (02/05/2025). To resolve the case, the police attempted diversion or settlement outside the judicial process. Such behavior is categorized as juvenile delinquency that may harm both the individual and the social environment. To address issues among adolescents who possess negative self-control, psychological approaches through group counseling have become one of the most appropriate and efficient solutions. Group counseling not only presents conventional values but is also influenced by modern developments, where adolescents in Huta III experience different dynamics compared to adolescents in urban areas. The environment of Huta III Nagori Manik Maraja serves as the primary context for examining how local factors influence the formation of adolescent character.

Previous research conducted by Tarmizi Thalib et al., entitled “Self-Control Among Former Drug Addicts: A Phenomenological Study,” employed a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The findings concluded that aspects of self-control, including behavioral control, cognitive control, and decision control, were interrelated in regulating the subjects’ behavior. These aspects of self-control were developed by the subjects in order to prevent themselves from using drugs again. In addition to self-regulation through aspects of self-control, the subjects also received external encouragement in the form of family support, particularly from parents and people around them. The findings indicate the importance of improving self-control in individuals to help them avoid negative behaviors that may harm themselves and those around them (Thalib, T., et al., 2024).

Research conducted by Ardianti Agustin et al., entitled “The Role of Mindfulness on Adolescents’ Self-Control Ability,” found a significant influence of mindfulness on adolescents’ self-control ability. Most adolescents’ mindfulness abilities were categorized as moderate, indicating that adolescents still require various aspects of self-development in order to strengthen mindfulness within themselves so they can exercise proper self-control (Agustin, A., et al., 2022). These findings demonstrate the importance of self-control abilities in improving various adolescent skills.

Another study conducted by Badriyah (2018) found that low aggressive behavior was

associated with high self-control. This means that when individuals are able to control themselves effectively, aggressive behavior decreases. Therefore, it is very important for individuals to train their self-control, particularly in aspects of behavioral control and decision-making before deciding on an action.

Based on the explanations above, the researchers aim to examine more deeply adolescents' experiences in identifying weaknesses in self-control, strategies for building self-control, as well as supporting and inhibiting factors in the development of self-control.

This research is considered highly important in bridging the gap between counseling theory and the realities faced by adolescents in Huta III Nagori Manik Maraja. By exploring their experiences and emotions in depth, counselors can design interventions that are more sensitive, appropriate, and positively impactful. This study is also necessary to provide space for adolescents, who are often overlooked in the design of youth development programs at the village level. Therefore, the researchers emphasize the importance of focusing on adolescents' experiences rather than merely statistical data, in order to contribute meaningfully to the development of more human-oriented and impactful counseling services in the future.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach. Qualitative research can be interpreted as research whose findings are obtained through understanding and interpreting the meanings derived from the studied data sources (Fiantika, 2022). The characteristics of qualitative research methods tend to be more descriptive, emphasizing process and meaning (Murdiyanto, 2020).

Phenomenology places conscious human experience at the center of analysis by emphasizing reflective descriptions of experiences as they are lived, felt, and interpreted by individuals (Batsal, H., et al., 2025). Understanding phenomenological methodology is crucial for exploring experiences that are often overlooked or ignored in traditional research methods that are more objective in nature. Phenomenological methodology offers a different perspective in scientific research by focusing on the subjectivity of individual experiences. In phenomenological studies, researchers attempt to capture how individuals authentically experience phenomena and investigate the meanings associated with those experiences. One of the key elements of the phenomenological approach is the principle of phenomenological reduction, which is often associated with *epoché*. This stage involves suspending or setting aside assumptions from everyday life, including beliefs and perspectives that researchers may hold regarding the subject being studied. This allows researchers to approach experiences without being influenced by prior knowledge or existing theories and to observe experiences in a more direct and renewed manner (Handayani, B. A. B., 2024).

This study used a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological research design is a study based on experiences lived by specific subjects with the aim of interpreting those experiences and focusing on identifying, studying, and conveying a phenomenon (Rofiah, 2023). There are several main characteristics of phenomenological research conducted by phenomenological researchers, namely: (a) paying attention to existing reality, particularly awareness of certain conditions clearly; (b) understanding the meaning of events or incidents related to people in particular situations; and (c) beginning with silence followed by clear descriptions of directly experienced phenomena (Thalib, T., et al., 2024).

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that investigates human experiences. Phenomenology means a method of thinking to acquire new knowledge or develop existing

knowledge through logical, systematic, critical, non-aprioristic, and non-dogmatic steps. Phenomenology has four characteristics, namely: descriptive, reduction, essence, and intentionality (Hadi, A., et al., 2021). This approach enabled researchers to provide group counseling services and understand the complexity of adolescents' experiences in building self-control in Huta III Nagori Manik Maraja.

Participants

Participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling techniques. Several participant criteria had to be fulfilled, namely: (1) adolescents aged 12–18 years; (2) residing in Huta III Nagori Manik Maraja; (3) adolescents who had experienced situations or problems that challenged their self-control (such as family conflict, peer pressure, or difficulty managing emotions); (4) adolescents who were willing and able to share their experiences in depth regarding efforts to control themselves; and (5) adolescents who had the desire to develop their self-control (Hadi, A., et al., 2021). The participant recruitment process was conducted by distributing a Google Form link containing a qualitative questionnaire online through the WhatsApp group of adolescents from the local mosque community in Dusun 3 Manik Maraja. This questionnaire aimed to conduct initial screening of potential participants to ensure they met the established criteria. The number of participants in phenomenological studies is generally small (around 5–15 participants) because the focus is on the depth of data (Tarumingkeng, R. C., 2024).

Data Collection

The primary data collection process in phenomenological research is in-depth interviews. In addition, studies may use reflective notes, personal information, or supporting documents. Observation usually serves as a complementary rather than primary method. The data collected consisted of rich and in-depth experiential narratives. The data collection process often takes place iteratively (Aprilia, T. H., 2025).

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique in this study was conducted systematically and reflectively. Researchers repeatedly read the interview transcripts to understand the overall meaning. Then, significant statements were identified. These statements were subsequently grouped into thematic meanings. This process aimed to discover the essential structure of the experiences. One phenomenological analysis model used was Colaizzi's model. This model includes seven steps (Aprilia, T. H., 2025), namely: (1) reading all transcripts, (2) identifying significant statements, (3) formulating meanings, (4) grouping them into themes, (5) describing the results, (6) validating with participants, and (7) integrating them into the report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Participant Characteristics

This study involved adolescents residing in Dusun 3 Manik Maraja, Sidamanik District. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The participants consisted of six female adolescents aged 15–17 years who were selected based on predetermined inclusion criteria, namely adolescents who had experience in facing self-control challenges and were willing to share those experiences in depth. The following table presents the characteristics of the participants:

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Participants

No	Initial	Age	Gender	Initial Problems
1	AF	17	Female	Verbal aggressiveness & Difficulty managing anger
2	AA	17	Female	Gadget addiction & Neglect of academic tasks
3	AP	17	Female	Withdrawal behavior & Unstable emotions
4	SH	16	Female	Easily influenced by peers & Lack of assertiveness
5	AK	16	Female	Gadget addiction & Unstable emotions
6	CA	15	Female	High emotional reactivity & Low frustration tolerance

The six participants were female adolescents in the middle adolescence phase, a developmental period characterized by an increased need for autonomy, intensified peer interaction, and a stronger search for identity. All participants had different problem backgrounds, but generally shared difficulties in managing emotions and controlling impulsive behavior (Suryana, E., 2022).

B. Research Findings

Based on the analysis using Colaizzi's method, three major themes were identified that reflected adolescents' experiences in building self-control. The following is a summary of the themes found:

Table 2. Summary of Research Findings Themes

Theme	Theme Name	Subthemes/Descriptions
Theme 1	Adolescents' Experiences in Identifying Weaknesses in Self-Control	Self-awareness regarding impulsive behavior, unstable emotions, gadget addiction, verbal aggressiveness, and withdrawal behavior
Theme 2	Strategies for Building Self-Control	Emotion regulation techniques, time management, implementation of self-boundaries, engagement in positive activities, and seeking social support
Theme 3	Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Development of Self-Control	Supporting factors: family support, positive social environment, internal motivation; inhibiting factors: negative peer influence, excessive social media exposure, lack of guidance

Theme 1: Adolescents' Experiences in Identifying Weaknesses in Self-Control

a. Awareness of Aggressive Behavior and Anger

Participant AF (17 years old) revealed that she often experienced emotional outbursts in the form of anger that was difficult to control. She realized that her verbally aggressive behavior often emerged unintentionally, especially when facing situations that did not align with her expectations. AF stated:

“I often get angry at my parents, friends, even people I just met. I realize it’s not good, but it’s really hard to hold back once I’m triggered. After getting angry, I regret it, but it’s already happened.”

Self-awareness regarding aggressive behavior is a crucial initial step in the process of building self-control. This finding is in line with the view of Tangney et al. (2004), which states that individuals with low self-control tend to be emotionally reactive and have difficulty managing impulses. The ability to recognize and acknowledge one’s own weaknesses is a prerequisite for meaningful behavioral change (Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D., 2023).

b. Gadget Addiction and Its Impact on Daily Functioning

Two participants, AA (17 years old) and AK (16 years old), reported similar experiences related to gadget addiction. AA revealed that excessive gadget use led to neglect of academic tasks and declining academic performance. She realized that she was unable to limit the duration of social media use even though she repeatedly intended to reduce it.

“I can use my phone until dawn, then feel sleepy at school the next morning. My assignments are often unfinished. I know it’s wrong, but somehow I keep doing it.”

This phenomenon reflects a self-control deficit related to the inability to delay gratification for long-term interests. Smartphone addiction among adolescents strongly correlates with low self-control abilities and may disrupt cognitive and emotional development (Sharma, M. K., et al., 2022).

c. Withdrawal Behavior and Unstable Emotions

Participant AP (17 years old) reported a tendency to withdraw from social environments when facing emotional pressure. AP admitted that she preferred isolating herself in her room and refused to interact with family members or friends when feeling stressed.

“When I’m sad or angry, I prefer being alone. I close my bedroom door and don’t want to meet anyone. But afterward, I just feel even sadder and don’t know what to do.”

Withdrawal behavior as a response to emotional pressure can be understood as a maladaptive coping strategy that actually worsens emotional conditions in the long term. Adaptive emotion regulation requires the ability to identify, express, and manage emotions constructively rather than through avoidance (Aldao, A., et al., 2021).

d. Easily Influenced by Peers

Participant SH (16 years old) identified herself as highly vulnerable to peer influence. SH admitted that she often did things that conflicted with her personal values simply because of pressure or persuasion from her friends. She realized that her lack of assertiveness made it difficult for her to say “no.”

“I follow my friends even though deep down I don’t want to. I’m afraid of being called uncool or being excluded. In the end, I regret doing things I actually never wanted to do.”

This vulnerability to peer conformity is closely related to low self-efficacy and assertiveness. Adolescents with low self-control tend to be more susceptible to social pressure from peer groups, especially during the identity development phase (Morin, A. J. S., et al., 2022).

e. High Emotional Reactivity and Low Frustration Tolerance

Participant CA (15 years old) described her experience with high emotional reactivity and low frustration tolerance. CA admitted that she easily exploded in situations that did not meet her expectations, even over things considered trivial by others.

“If something goes wrong even a little, I immediately get emotional. My friends say I’m overreacting, but I really can’t stay patient. I cry easily and get angry easily too.”

High emotional reactivity is a characteristic of poor emotional regulation ability. Effective emotional regulation includes the capacity to modulate the intensity of emotional responses according to situational demands. CA’s low frustration tolerance indicates the need for interventions focused on developing distress tolerance (Gross, J. J., 2022).

Theme 2: Strategies for Building Self-Control

a. Emotion Regulation Techniques

All participants independently or with guidance developed various techniques to manage their emotions. AF explained that she began learning deep breathing techniques and tried counting to ten before responding to situations that triggered her anger.

“Now when I want to get angry, I try to take a deep breath first. Or I go somewhere quiet for a while, then come back when I’ve calmed down a bit. It helps, even though it doesn’t always work.”

Breathing-based emotion regulation techniques are among the strategies proven effective in modulating emotional responses. This strategy is categorized as response modulation, which operates at the final stage of the emotion regulation process (Gross, J. J., 2022). Consistent mindful breathing exercises have also been shown to reduce emotional reactivity in adolescents (Iani, L., et al., 2021).

b. Time Management and Limiting Gadget Use

Participants AA and AK actively attempted to build discipline in gadget use through scheduling and screen-time limitations. AA explained that she started using the screen time feature on her phone to limit social media use.

“I set a timer on my phone. If I’ve used social media for one hour, I have to stop. At first it was hard, and I often broke my own rules. But over time I got used to it, and my school assignments became easier to complete.”

These efforts to establish personal boundaries reflect the principle of self-regulation through goal-setting and behavioral monitoring. Self-regulation skills develop through the processes of setting goals, monitoring progress, and consistently evaluating oneself. The use of technology to support limitations on technology itself is becoming increasingly relevant in the digital era (Zimmerman, B. J., & Schunk, D. H., 2023).

c. Seeking Social Support and Self-Disclosure

Several participants identified that seeking support from trusted people around them was an important strategy in building self-control. AP began opening up to her mother after realizing that withdrawing herself did not solve her problems.

“I used to never tell anyone anything. Now, when I don’t feel okay, I try talking to my mom. It feels so relieving when someone listens. My feelings become lighter.”

Self-disclosure and seeking social support are adaptive coping strategies proven effective in developing self-regulation. Involvement in supportive interpersonal relationships contributes positively to the development of emotional regulation capacities in adolescents (Werner, K., & Gross, J. J., 2023).

d. Engagement in Positive Activities

Several participants developed strategies by channeling their energy into productive and

meaningful activities. CA revealed that reading books, drawing, and participating in religious activities in her neighborhood helped reduce her emotional reactivity.

“When I feel upset, I try drawing or reading books. Or I go to religious gatherings at the mosque. After that, my mind feels clearer and I’m not as emotional anymore.”

Positive behavioral activation as an emotion regulation strategy is related to the concept of behavioral activation commonly recognized in cognitive behavioral interventions. Participation in religious activities also reflects the role of spirituality as a psychological resource that supports self-control. Adolescent involvement in religious activities positively correlates with self-control abilities and mental health (Ibrahim, F., et al., 2024).

e. Assertiveness and Setting Personal Boundaries

Participant SH actively learned to develop assertiveness in order to resist negative peer influence. She described the process of learning to say “no” firmly without hurting her friends’ feelings.

“I started learning to say no when I really didn’t want to do something. At first it was hard, and I was afraid people would think I was arrogant. But good friends still respected me. Those who didn’t probably weren’t good friends anyway.”

The development of assertiveness is an important component in building self-control related to interpersonal behavioral dimensions. Assertiveness training significantly improves self-efficacy and adolescents’ ability to resist peer pressure (Park, S., & Kim, J., 2023).

Theme 3: Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Development of Self-Control

a. Internal Supporting Factors: Self-Awareness and Motivation

All participants mentioned that self-awareness was the main foundation in the process of building self-control. Awareness that their behavior had negative impacts on themselves and others became an intrinsic motivation for change.

“I realize that if I keep living like this, my life won’t improve. I want to become better, not for other people, but for myself.” (AF)

Intrinsic motivation is the strongest predictor of successful long-term self-control development. Self-Determination Theory states that individuals motivated by needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness tend to demonstrate more effective and sustainable self-regulation (Vansteenkiste, M., & Ryan, R. M., 2023).

b. External Supporting Factors: Family and Social Environment

Family support, especially from parents, was mentioned by most participants as a highly influential external factor. Participants who felt emotional support and guidance from their parents showed faster development of self-control compared to those who did not receive such support.

“My mom is always there when I want to talk. She doesn’t immediately get angry or judge me. That’s what makes me want to open up and change.” (AP)

Parental support in the form of emotional involvement and warm monitoring is a protective factor proven to contribute to the development of adolescent self-control. The quality of parent-child relationships is a significant predictor of self-regulation abilities during adolescence (Atherton, O. E., et al., 2022).

c. Inhibiting Factors: Negative Peer Influence and Social Media

On the other hand, all participants identified negative peer influence and excessive social media exposure as the main obstacles in developing self-control. Pressure to conform within peer groups and social media content that stimulates impulsive behavior were identified as the greatest challenges they faced.

“It’s really hard to control yourself when friends keep inviting you to do weird things. And on TikTok and Instagram there’s so much content that makes me unproductive and addicted.” (AA)

Negative peer influence and social media exposure are significant risk factors in the development of adolescent self-control. Intensive social media exposure correlates with increased impulsivity and decreased self-regulation abilities, especially among adolescents undergoing identity development (Valkenburg, P. M., et al., 2022).

d. Inhibiting Factors: Lack of Knowledge and Guidance

Several participants expressed that their lack of knowledge regarding emotional management strategies and limited guidance from professionals became additional obstacles. They stated that their surroundings provided inadequate education about the importance of self-control.

“No one ever taught me how to manage emotions properly. We never learned it at school, and it wasn’t taught at home either. I searched on the internet by myself, but I didn’t know which information was actually correct.” (CA)

These findings indicate an urgent need for structured intervention programs at the community level that can provide adolescents with education and self-management skills. School- and community-based programs focusing on self-control development have been proven effective in preventing various behavioral problems among adolescents (Piquero, A. R., 2021).

C. Discussion

Based on the thematic analysis using Colaizzi’s method, this study successfully revealed three major themes representing adolescents’ comprehensive experiences in building self-control in Huta III Nagori Manik Maraja, Sidamanik District, Simalungun Regency. The following discussion integrates the research findings with relevant theories and empirical evidence.

1. The Experience of Identifying Weaknesses in Self-Control as the Starting Point for Change

The findings in the first theme indicate that identifying weaknesses in self-control is a complex and multidimensional experience for adolescents. The six participants demonstrated different patterns of self-control weaknesses, reflecting the heterogeneity of subjective experiences in line with the phenomenological approach.

Theoretically, these findings can be understood within the framework of self-control theory as the ability to regulate thoughts, emotions, impulses, and behaviors to remain consistent with one’s standards and values. Weaknesses in one of these dimensions, as experienced by the six participants, may potentially disrupt overall psychosocial functioning. It is noteworthy that all participants demonstrated an adequate degree of self-awareness regarding their weaknesses despite experiencing difficulties in controlling them. This phenomenon is related to the gap between knowledge about appropriate behavior (declarative knowledge) and the ability to implement it in real situations (procedural knowledge). This discrepancy between intention and actual behavior is at the core of self-control problems experienced by many individuals

(Hofmann, W., et al., 2022).

2. Strategies for Building Self-Control: A Continuous Learning Process

The second theme revealed that adolescents' efforts to build self-control constitute a long, dynamic learning process filled with both successes and failures. Participants developed various strategies independently and collaboratively, which can be categorized into antecedent-focused strategies (before emotions arise) and response-focused strategies (after emotions arise), in accordance with the process model of emotion regulation (Gross, J. J., 2022).

The strategies developed by participants, such as deep breathing, time management, seeking social support, and engaging in positive activities, reflect the use of emotion regulation techniques that have been empirically proven effective. However, what is particularly interesting is that most of these strategies were developed independently through trial and error rather than through structured professional guidance. These findings have important implications for intervention practices. On one hand, adolescents' ability to independently develop adaptive strategies reflects psychological resilience that deserves appreciation. On the other hand, without proper guidance, independently developed strategies may become suboptimal or even maladaptive in the long term (Compas, B. E., et al., 2021).

From the perspective of social cognitive theory, the development of sustainable self-control requires three main components: self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction. The six participants demonstrated the presence of these three components in their efforts to build self-control, although with varying levels of consistency (Zimmerman, B. J., & Schunk, D. H., 2023). The combination of cognitive and behavioral techniques produces more effective results compared to using a single strategy. This is consistent with the pattern found in this study, where participants who demonstrated more rapid self-control development were those who flexibly combined multiple strategies (Malik, F., & Balda, S., 2021).

3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors: The Ecology of Self-Control Development

The third theme revealed that the development of adolescent self-control cannot be understood in isolation, but rather within a complex ecological context. This ecological perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding individual development within interacting systems (Paquette, D., & Ryan, J., 2023).

At the microsystem level, parental and family support proved to be the primary protective factor. Participants who maintained open communication with their parents demonstrated better abilities in identifying and managing emotions. These findings are consistent with the concept of authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and consistency, which significantly contributes to the development of adolescent self-control.

At the mesosystem level, interactions between family environments and peer groups created complex dynamics. Conformity pressure from peers, particularly related to gadget use and risky behaviors, was consistently identified as the greatest inhibiting factor. Intensive social media exposure among adolescents negatively correlates with self-control abilities, mainly due to mechanisms of social comparison and impulsive urges generated by digital platform algorithms.

At the macrosystem level, the lack of self-control educational programs within schools and communities reflects a policy gap that requires serious attention. Community-based programs focusing on adolescent self-control development significantly reduce the risk of antisocial behavior and improve psychological well-being (Piquero, A. R., et al., 2021).

The findings regarding the role of spirituality and religious activities as supporting factors

in self-control development represent a distinctive and contextual aspect of this study. Within the social context of Huta III Nagori Manik Maraja, which remains strongly influenced by religious values, participation in religious activities functions not only as a coping mechanism but also as a source of values and behavioral guidance that help adolescents establish personal standards. Religiosity positively correlates with self-control among Indonesian Muslim adolescents, particularly through the internalization of religious values that encourage self-restraint.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully revealed the in-depth experiences of female adolescents aged 15–17 years in building self-control in Huta III Nagori Manik Maraja, Sidamanik District, Simalungun Regency. Through a phenomenological approach with Colaizzi's thematic analysis, three major themes reflecting the complexity of this process were identified.

The first theme showed that identifying weaknesses in self-control, including verbal aggressiveness, gadget addiction, withdrawal behavior, peer conformity, and high emotional reactivity, constitutes a crucial starting point in the process of change. The second theme revealed that adolescents developed various adaptive strategies, including emotion regulation techniques, time management, seeking social support, and assertiveness development, although most of these efforts were carried out independently without structured guidance. The third theme highlighted the important role of ecological factors, in which family support and intrinsic motivation became the main supporting factors, while negative peer influence, social media exposure, and the lack of educational programs became significant obstacles.

These findings emphasize that the development of self-control among adolescents is a dynamic process that requires a holistic approach involving both internal individual factors and external environmental factors. The practical implications of this study include the need for comprehensive community-based intervention programs, strengthening the role of families, and integrating digital literacy in efforts to support the sustainable development of adolescent self-control.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, all participants were female adolescents, therefore the findings cannot be directly generalized to male adolescents who may have different experiences in building self-control. Second, the study was conducted within a specific geographical context, namely Huta III Nagori Manik Maraja, thus unique sociocultural factors may influence the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Third, although participatory observation was conducted as data triangulation, this study primarily relied on participants' self-reports, which may contain social desirability bias. Fourth, the limited research duration did not allow observation of participants' self-control changes over the long term. Future longitudinal studies are needed to more comprehensively understand the developmental trajectory of adolescent self-control.

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