

Coping Stress in Thyroid Cancer Patients

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Abstract: A diagnosis of thyroid cancer often triggers stress that affects the physical and psychological condition of patients. This study aims to explore the stress coping strategies used by thyroid cancer patients in facing health challenges. This qualitative study uses a case study approach with purposive sampling, involving subjects relevant to the research objectives. The results show that subjects apply problem-focused coping strategies, such as seeking medical information and planning treatment, as well as emotion-focused coping, such as utilizing social support and maintaining emotional stability. The implications of this study indicate that good stress coping is very important to reduce the negative psychological and physical effects caused by cancer. Conversely, poor coping can worsen the quality of life of patients and increase other risks. This study emphasizes the importance of insight in managing stress more effectively.

1 INTRODUCTION

Thyroid cancer is one type of cancer whose prevalence is increasing globally (Alomedika, 2023). In Indonesia, this cancer ranked fourth among the most common cancers in women between 2010 and 2013, with 13,114 new cases recorded in 2020, or 3.3% of all new cancer cases (Siswandi et al., 2020). Globally, there were 249,538 new cases of thyroid cancer in 2021, with 44,799 deaths (Zhou et al., 2024). In the United States, in 2024 there are an estimated 44,020 new cases and 2,170 deaths from thyroid cancer (American Cancer Society, 2024). The prevalence of thyroid cancer also continues to increase, with an estimated 1.2% of individuals in the US projected to receive a diagnosis of thyroid cancer (Boucai et al., 2024).

A cancer diagnosis often causes stress that affects physical and psychological well-being (Anisa

et al., 2022). Cancer patients often experience high levels of stress due to lengthy treatment and anxiety related to their illness (Ernawati et al., 2020). In China, the prevalence of stress in this group reaches 83.4% (Duan et al., 2021). Meanwhile, in Japan, 55.3% of adolescents with cancer experience psychological distress, especially those with low social support (Okamura et al., 2022). Research by Kartika et al. (2024) also shows that stress management improves with the duration of therapy in 80% of cancer patients experiencing moderate stress.

Stress management is important in dealing with a cancer diagnosis, which often triggers psychological pressure (Surjoseto & Sofyanty, 2024). One way to cope with this stress is through stress coping, which is an individual's adaptation effort to manage psychological or physical pressure (Folkman, 1982; Fa'izah & Cahyanti, 2021; Christiana et al.,

2024). Coping can take the form of problem-focused strategies, such as seeking medical information, or emotion-focused strategies, such as accepting the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Safrilsyah et al., 2022; Weber et al., 2024). Choosing the right strategy can help patients feel more in control. It can also reduce the negative impact of stress on patients' physical and mental conditions.

The positive impact of effective coping is also seen in students facing academic pressure. Students with high levels of religiosity have better ability to manage stress through direct approaches and emotional control (Sari & Haryati, 2023). Direct approaches such as problem-focused coping can help students find solutions to the challenges they face. This strategy has been proven to be more effective in increasing learning motivation than approaches that only focus on emotions (Syarifah, 2021). Its effectiveness is even more apparent when supported by healthy habits such as good sleep quality (Wang et al., 2020).

Healthy habits that support coping effectiveness are also important in the work environment, as professional pressures often affect performance. The combination of stress coping and self-efficacy has been shown to significantly improve employee performance (Pratama & Ansyah, 2024). Effective coping skills are closely related to personality and emotional responses that influence how individuals deal with stress (Gashi et al., 2023). When coping skills are low, the risk of other psychological disorders increases (Abdiani et al., 2023). Therefore, developing coping strategies is important to support mental well-being in various aspects of life.

The development of good coping strategies is key to improving individual well-being (Sumendap & Tumuju, 2023). Without effective coping skills, severe depression and a decline in quality of life can result. These effects can also worsen social interaction skills and disrupt physical functioning due to prolonged stress (Tuasikal & Retnowati, 2019). Poor coping increases the risk of despair and stress, which can ultimately trigger suicidal behavior (Lew et al., 2019). Thus, proper coping management is key to maintaining physical and mental well-being.

2 METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore the stress coping experiences of a thyroid cancer patient. The research subject was a 20-year-old woman with the initials (A), who had been diagnosed with thyroid cancer more than a year ago. Data collection was conducted through a two-hour interview. The interview guide was semi-structured, covering questions about coping strategies, sources of support, and challenges faced. Data were analyzed using a thematic method, starting from interview transcripts, coding, to interpretation to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject's experiences.

3 RESULT

Problem-Focused Coping

In the problem-focused coping strategy, participants try to deal with their illness directly by seeking medical information, understanding treatment procedures, and developing a structured plan.

Participants follow their doctor's advice to undergo further treatment, seek information from patient communities, and read journals related to the prognosis of their illness. Initially, participants denied their thyroid cancer diagnosis, but later began to accept the medical procedures they underwent and tried to reject negative thoughts that could interfere with the recovery process. Participants also prepared for the worst-case scenario, including the risk of metastasis, as a form of anticipation so that they would be better prepared mentally and materially.

"At first, I was sad. I never thought I would get cancer, because in my mind, cancer was the final chapter... cancer? Surely not? Maybe it was a misdiagnosis [...] I had to come to terms with this disease so I could focus on healing [...] I'm afraid of metastasis or spread to other areas of the body, so I'm preparing financially and mentally."

Table 1: table of interview findings

Dimensions	Statements
Seeking Information Support	Following the doctor's advice.
	Seeking information about patients.
	Studying the disease.
Confronting the situation head-on	Denying the cancer diagnosis.
	Accepting medical procedures.
	Rejecting negative thoughts.
Planned problem solving	Making an action plan.
	Arrange treatment steps.
	Preparing for the worst-case scenario.
Seeking emotional and social support.	Obtaining family support.
	Seeking community support.
	Sharing selectively.
Maintaining distance.	Taking a mental break.
	Using personal space.
	Focusing on activities.
Escape Avoidance	Taking a temporary escape.
	Pursuing hobbies.
	Controlling anger.
Self-control	Managing emotional responses.
	Prioritizing emotional stability.
	Recognizing responsibility.
Accepting responsibility	Managing personal health.
	Staying informed.
	Choosing sources of support.

Positive reappraisal	Reflecting on spiritual meaning.
	Being grateful for family support.
	Cultivating a positive outlook.

Emotion-Focused Coping

In the emotion-focused coping strategy, participants utilize social support, maintain emotional stability, and divert their attention to positive activities. Family support, especially from mothers, provides encouragement and strength in facing the condition, while the community of sufferers becomes a place to share experiences and gain motivation. Participants also distance themselves by giving themselves space, taking a break from thinking about the disease, and channeling themselves into activities such as sports, cooking, or other hobbies. In addition, participants control their emotions by not venting their anger, choosing to remain calm, and focusing on things that can be controlled. Spirituality is an important aspect in this process, because through prayer and gratitude, participants feel more sincere and able to live life more relaxed.

"My family always said that I would definitely get through this [...] I only allowed a few of my friends to know that I was sick [...] I stopped thinking about my illness for 4-5 weeks. Whatever brings peace, I do it, like going to the gym or making juice [...] Praying, talking to God... afterward, I feel completely calm [...] I now follow a slow living philosophy, still doing my best but not pushing myself too hard."

4 DISCUSSION

Subjects coping with stress showed good results, supported by significant social support from their families and communities. This

support provided a sense of security, confidence, and emotional stability. This helped subjects deal with stress more effectively. The role of social support was evident in the subjects' ability to remain optimistic and committed to recovery. Research by Ata et al. (2023) states that social support, especially from family, can reduce stress levels by up to 11%, helping individuals manage pressure better.

Managing emotions positively is one of the keys to successfully coping with stress. Subjects are able to reflect on the spiritual meaning of their illness and focus on things that support recovery. This way of thinking not only reduces psychological pressure but also increases motivation to keep going. Ummah (2023) found that positive reappraisal significantly increases emotional resilience. This allows individuals to face difficult situations with greater optimism.

The optimism formed from positive reappraisal is also closely related to self-efficacy. Subjects showed confidence in planning strategic steps, such as preparing for various possible scenarios. This confidence created a greater sense of control over the situation at hand. Rachmawati et al. (2021) emphasized that self-efficacy plays an important role in helping individuals cope better with stress. With strong confidence, individuals are

better able to focus on solutions rather than dwelling on problems.

The focus and effectiveness supported by self-efficacy are also reflected in the application of problem-focused coping strategies. Subjects actively seek medical information, develop treatment plans, and take concrete steps to manage uncertainty. This helps create a sense of security while reducing psychological pressure. Caroll's (2020) research shows that problem-focused coping strategies are significantly effective in minimizing negative impacts. One such impact is psychological stress on individuals with chronic conditions.

Werdani's (2020) research shows that stress levels have a significant influence on the coping mechanisms of cancer patients, especially in the context of undergoing therapy management. Kartika et al. (2023) also confirm that patients undergoing chemotherapy tend to experience moderate stress, but with a longer duration, they are better able to manage the stress they face. These results reinforce that the selection of problem-focused coping strategies is crucial for patients to gradually adapt to their treatment conditions. Rahayu and Mubin (2023) even demonstrated that Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) therapy can significantly reduce patients' stress levels. Thus, the effectiveness of coping is not only influenced by medical factors but also by relevant psychological and spiritual interventions.

Relevant psychological and spiritual interventions are increasingly important in light of data from Santosa et al. (2023), who found that most breast cancer patients undergo chemotherapy while experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression. Swastika and Sinaga (2023) added that in the new normal era, most breast cancer patients are in the normal stress category, although there are still those who experience moderate to severe stress. Muadi et al. (2025) found that low self-efficacy is often associated with moderate to high stress levels, so self-confidence has been shown to be a protective factor in the coping process. Hasan et al. (2025) reinforce these findings by showing that family, especially children, are the main source of strength and motivation in dealing with cancer. In other words, social support and personal self-efficacy play a vital role in helping patients develop more effective problem-focused coping strategies.

More effective problem-focused coping strategies are also reflected in the research by Ernawati et al. (2020), where Al-Qur'an reading therapy and aromatherapy were able to significantly reduce stress levels in cancer patients. Niedzwiedz et al. (2019) reported that depression and anxiety in cancer patients are higher than in the general population, making the selection of adaptive coping strategies crucial in preventing further psychological problems. Research by El Haidari et al. (2020) shows that spirituality and quality of life are closely related,

especially in advanced cancer patients undergoing palliative care. These results are in line with international studies emphasizing that emotional well-being can be improved through a combination of problem-focused coping and spiritual aspects. Therefore, coping strategies that integrate medical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions will be more optimal in reducing the negative impact of stress on cancer patients.

The reduced negative impact through problem-focused coping strategies is inseparable from self-control abilities. Subjects successfully maintained emotional stability by regulating their responses to pressure and accepting their responsibilities. This ability supports more rational decision-making during the healing process. Gashi et al. (2023) confirmed that self-control plays a key role in mitigating the negative impact of stress on mental and physical health. In this study, the subjects' ability to maintain emotional stability proved to be a major factor in successful stress management.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the stress coping strategies applied by the subject, a thyroid cancer patient, reflect effective and structured stress management. These strategies consist of two main approaches, namely problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping can be seen in the subject's efforts to seek medical information, develop a treatment plan, and face

challenges head-on. On the other hand, emotion-focused coping includes managing emotions through social support, maintaining emotional distance, and engaging in activities that provide temporary escape. This approach is reinforced by the subject's ability to control emotions and accept responsibility, which allows them to face difficult situations with optimism and confidence. Further research could involve more participants, use longitudinal methods, and consider sociocultural factors to provide a more comprehensive picture of stress coping among cancer patients.

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