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Contemporary Coping Patterns Among Violence-Impacted Adolescent Black Males: An Interpretive Descriptive Study

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Abstract: Young Black males (YBM), ages 15–17, experience disproportionately high rates of firearm violence and related structural disadvantages, shaping both their psychological and practical responses to violence-related stressors. These intersecting exposures influence their coping strategies, mental health, help-seeking behaviors, and broader social functioning. Generational shifts in how young males conceptualize identity, mental health, help-seeking, and masculinity, combined with increasing exposure to firearm violence, underscore the need for a closer examination of contemporary coping strategies. This qualitative study applies Thorne's Interpretive Description (ID) to explore coping patterns among YBM navigating violence exposure in physical and online environments. Drawing from two focus groups of 33 YBM (M = 15.8, SD = 1.19) from a Midwest high school, we conducted a thematic analysis grounded in the interpretive description tradition. Integrating the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (TMSC), we examined how structural and interpersonal factors shape YBM agency and coping responses. Four coping patterns emerged: (1) Problem-Focused Adaptive, (2) Problem-Focused Maladaptive, (3) Emotion-Focused Adaptive, and (4) Emotion-Focused Maladaptive. The findings underscore the dynamic interaction between environmental stressors, available resources, and cognitive appraisals, indicating that for Black adolescent males, coping strategies are neither static nor inherently adaptive or maladaptive.

Keywords: adolescents; violence; coping; qualitative study; Black youth; mental health; interpretive description

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1. Introduction

Firearm homicides are the leading cause of death among children and youth aged 10–24 years (Kegler, 2022), surpassing motor vehicle accidents and reaching levels not seen since the 1990s (Goldstick et al., 2022). In 2021, firearm homicides among young Black or African American males (YBM) aged 20–24 soared to a rate of 141.8 per 100,000—over 22 times higher than that of their White counterparts (6.36 per 100,000) (CDC, 2022; Kegler, 2022; Rees et al., 2022). Consequently, YBM are often situated within a "triangle of trauma," concurrently experiencing violence as victims, perpetrators, and witnesses (AbiNader et al., 2019; Bottiani et al., 2021; Emezue et al., 2023; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2022; Green, 2024; Kegler, 2022).

Racial disparities in firearm violence exposure reflect the enduring interplay of structural racism, cumulative trauma, economic hardship, and systemic inequities (Kravitz-Wirtz et al., 2022). Therefore, the social, psychological, and behavioral responses of YBM exposed to chronic violence remains profoundly shaped by factors that simultaneously contribute to chronic and complex post-traumatic stress and trauma symptoms. For violence-exposed Black boys and men, these symptoms include, but are not limited to, hypervigilance (i.e., persistent heightened alertness), emotional numbness, negative future orientations, and a pervasive sense of fatalism (Green, 2024). Likewise, emotional desensitization, often employed as an avoidance strategy, may provide temporary relief from distress; however, when habitual, it can exacerbate emotional disengagement, dysregulation, and increase the risk of externalizing behaviors, including aggression and violence (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2017). Consequently, the stress and coping literature has critically examined how adolescents respond to chronic violence exposure and the effectiveness of various coping strategies.

Adolescents' responses to high-stress environments play a formative role in shaping their developmental trajectories, impacting both internalizing behaviors (e.g., depression and anxiety) and externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression and impulsivity), as well as their broader social and emotional functioning (Tandon et al., 2013). Furthermore, barriers to effective stress and behavioral support systems and avenues for help-seeking are compounded by intersecting risk factors, including rigid masculine norms (Shepherd et al., 2023), limited access to socioemotional learning opportunities, and a lack of accessible and positive role models (Duron et al., 2020). As a result, many young people enter adulthood without adequate coping skills or mechanisms, leading to increased stress, mental health challenges, and difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships.

Coping is defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as "conscious, volitional efforts to regulate emotion, cognition, behavior, physiology, and the environment in response to stressful events" (p. 89); it is a well-established construct and a central focus in psychological and health research. While the literature on coping mechanisms among youth as a collective group is well established, with research spanning decades (Edlynn et al., 2008; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2009; Grant et al., 2014; McConnell et al., 2014), there is a paucity of studies examining contemporary coping strategies among non-adjudicated adolescent Black males (ages 15–17). Adolescents aged 15–17 occupy a critical developmental period characterized by increasing autonomy and heightened sensitivity to social and threat-related cues (Casey et al., 2008; Steinberg, 2014). Moreover, at this age, they engage more independently with physical and digital environments, facing risks like community violence and online harassment (Finkelhor et al., 2015; Turner et al., 2016), while often lacking access to support systems (Zimmerman & Posick, 2016), necessitating a closer examination of their coping patterns.

1.1. Coping Strategies Among Violence-Exposed Adolescents

Traditional cognitive–transactional models of coping, such as Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (TMSC), describe coping as a dynamic process that unfolds through continuous interaction between individuals and their environment. The TMSC model differentiates between problem-focused coping (seeking solutions to manage stressors perceived to be controllable) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Biggs et al., 2017; Folkman et al., 1986), and emotion-focused coping, which is employed in response to uncontrollable stressors and centers on regulating emotional distress through strategies such as seeking social support or cognitive reframing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Compass et al. (2001) discussed engagement–disengagement coping, where engagement directly

addresses stress through problem-solving, while disengagement focuses on distancing oneself through avoidance or denial.

In contrast, three-factor models view coping as dynamic and multidimensional. Edwards and Baglioni's (1993) *cybernetic approach* describes coping as a continuous, goal-oriented regulation system, distinguishing between primary control coping (addressing stressors directly), secondary control coping (modifying responses), and escape coping (disengagement from stressors). Skinner et al. (2003) further categorize coping based on functional psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy, which are factors that, when unmet, impair functioning and heighten stress responses. Holahan et al. (2005) emphasize the temporal dimensions to avoidance-focused coping, highlighting coping strategies "oriented toward denying, minimizing, or avoiding dealing directly with stressful demands" (p. 2), which may offer short-term relief but increase the risk of long-term maladjustment.

Culturally grounded and violence-responsive models offer additional insights. For example, Voisin et al. (2011) identified four coping styles among African American high schoolers exposed to community violence: "getting through" (accepting difficult conditions), "getting along" (adapting peacefully to the environment), "getting away" (avoidance), and "getting back" (engaging in confrontation or retaliation). Similarly, Gaylord-Harden et al. (2017) introduced the concept of *adaptive calibration*, a form of coping that underscores the ability of youth in at-risk contexts to adapt to high-stress environments, showcasing resilience and resourcefulness despite systemic constraints. These evolving perspectives challenge the rigid dichotomy of coping as strictly adaptive or maladaptive, underscoring how adolescents dynamically adjust their coping strategies based on developmental stage, cultural context, and structural realities.

1.2. Emerging Trends and the Need for Contextualized Coping Models

Research on adolescents coping with interpersonal and community violence has yielded mixed findings. Broadly, problem-focused active coping strategies are generally associated with favorable psychological outcomes, while emotion-focused avoidant coping strategies are often linked to maladaptive behaviors (Brady et al., 2008). However, the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive coping is not always clear-cut (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2009). Coping outcomes vary depending on the timing of the coping response, the individual's motivations, and expectations about the likely effectiveness of the strategy (Biggs et al., 2017).

Gendered differences also exist in coping patterns among adolescents. Increased problem-focused coping among sixth-grade boys correlated with heightened delinquency by eighth grade in those witnessing community violence (DiClemente & Richards, 2022). In contrast, lower use of coping mechanisms (problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping) among sixth-grade girls was associated with increased delinquency and aggression, particularly when experiencing both indirect and direct violence victimization (DiClemente & Richards, 2022).

These coping processes also shape the willingness to seek help and engage with formal support services. Research suggests that YBM employ coping strategies, including behavioral disengagement and avoidance of formal support services (Voisin et al., 2011). A study on service avoidance patterns found that young men with prior contact with the criminal justice system were less likely to engage with services such as hospitals, banks, and employment programs, fearing that these institutions would further entangle them in legal surveillance (Brayne, 2014). Many perceived these services as an extension of law enforcement, and as venues that "put them in the system or facilitated re-exposure to the criminal justice system" (Brayne, 2014). Likewise, young males may exhibit *emotional avoid-*

ance (behavioral disengagement, minimization, hypervigilance, learned hopelessness, and anger) and *service avoidance* (opting out, disengagement, early dropouts, non-compliance, and absenteeism in prevention programs) (Emezue et al., 2023).

1.3. Theoretical Positioning

To capture both environmental influences and individual agency in coping in the face of chronic violence, this study integrates the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (TMSC) as complementary frameworks. Spencer's PVEST (Velez & Spencer, 2018) expands on and critiques Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Spencer et al., 2003; Velez & Spencer, 2018) and examines the intersectional impact of person–environment relationships, structural antecedents (e.g., racism, marginalization), and precedents of youth and community violence on YBM, prioritizing their lived experiences within social, historical, and cultural contexts without presuming deficits or maladaptation (Spencer et al., 2003; Velez & Spencer, 2018). In this study, PVEST served as a framework for inclusive analysis, exploring YBM experiences and responses within interconnected systems of oppression through five components: net vulnerability, stress engagement, reactive coping mechanisms, emerging identities, and life-stage outcomes (Spencer et al., 2003; Velez & Spencer, 2018).

The TMSC complements the PVEST by offering a detailed view of cognitive appraisal processes in stress appraisal and management, including community violence and structural racism. It explores how YBM assess threats (primary appraisal) and evaluate coping resources (secondary appraisal) to choose problem- or emotion-focused strategies (Folkman et al., 1986). The TMSC highlights the dynamic nature of coping decisions and offers insights into how YBM manage community violence and structural racism. However, its application to firearm violence prevention remains underexplored, warranting further investigation into the cognitive processes that shape coping decisions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Both theoretical frameworks informed the study's design and interpretation without predetermining its findings, consistent with recommendations for flexible theoretical engagement.

1.4. Gaps in the Literature

Recent research examining coping strategies among youth often categorizes adolescents within broader youth cohorts, thereby obscuring the developmental and contextual nuances of this age group. This gap limits our current understanding of how adolescents navigate emerging digital stressors such as cyberbullying, digital harassment, doxxing, sextortion, and misinformation. Additionally, phenomena like cyberbanging (i.e., gang-related threats, recruitment, and retaliatory violence via social media) are growing concerns. Adolescents are increasingly exposed to glorified depictions of violence through gaming, social media, as well as to traumatic footage of police brutality against Black males, all of which may shape how they cope with stress in complex and understudied ways (Chen et al., 2023).

Moreover, adolescent coping strategies are evolving, influenced by generational changes (such as broader social and cultural changes in how young people understand identity, mental health, and masculinity compared to prior generations), increased exposure to gun-related injuries and homicides, wider public discussions on 'toxic masculinity' (Wilson et al., 2022), and greater access to digital platforms that normalize help-seeking and emotional vulnerability (Emezue et al., 2024b; Shanta Bridges et al., 2018). Post-COVID, the phenomenon of "digital coping" has emerged in response to online violence and harassment (Prowten & Breitenstein, 2023). Yet, traditional coping models may not fully capture the contemporary strategies employed by young males. This study addresses these gaps by

examining developmentally appropriate coping mechanisms within contemporary social and cultural contexts.

1.5. Current Study

This research, conducted as part of the BrotherlyACT study (see Emezue et al., 2024a), addressed the following research questions. First, what contemporary coping mechanisms do Black adolescent males use to navigate violence and mitigate engagement in high-risk behaviors within both online and physical environments? Second, how do these coping strategies affect help-seeking behaviors, service engagement, and access to formal support systems?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at a high school in Chicago's Westside, an area disproportionately affected by firearm violence. According to recent data, Chicago's firearm homicide rate is four times the national average (Mason et al., 2023). Epidemiological data indicate significant mortality and morbidity among young Black males in the western, southern, and southwestern communities of Chicago (Sampson & Levy, 2022). These regions are characterized by entrenched socioeconomic challenges, including concentrated disinvestment, poverty, unemployment, and reliance on public assistance (B. R. Hunt et al., 2015), with a striking 15-year disparity in life expectancy between neighborhoods just five miles apart (B. R. Hunt et al., 2015; Lange-Maia et al., 2018). To be eligible, participants had to be: (1) male-identifying, (2) Black/African American, (3) aged 15 to 17 years (inclusive), (4) endorse witnessing youth and community violence (including fighting, bullying, dating violence, threats with weapons, and gang-related violence) in the previous 12 months, and (5) able to provide informed consent. In accordance with the IRB-approved waiver of parental consent, eligible minors provided informed assent, which served as the basis for their participation in the study.

2.2. Study Design and Procedures

This study employed Interpretive Description (ID) as a qualitative methodology, adhering to the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) (Tong et al., 2007), to explore contemporary coping patterns among YBM, ages 15–17. Our study team, which comprised two Black and African American adult male qualitative researchers, two research assistants (Black and Asian males), and two Black male facilitators from a male mentoring program, collaborated to refine the study protocol. Based on our community partner's feedback, we broadened the eligibility criteria to include both direct and indirect experiences of violence, thereby expanding the diversity of participant experiences.

Participants were recruited through a male mentoring program operating in high schools in Chicago. Two facilitators from this program introduced the BrotherlyACT Study to the students and assisted with logistics. The study was explained, and clarifying questions were addressed before informed consent. Two concurrent focus groups (each with approximately 16 participants) were conducted in private spaces during students' lunch breaks, ensuring privacy and accessibility. Participants completed a written consent form and a brief demographic survey (5–10 min) on paper, followed by verbal assent prior to the start of the focus groups. The survey included measures of sociodemographic factors, experiences of violence (firearms, dating violence, and community violence), and substance use and related violence. The focus groups (maximum of 40 min, due to the end of recess) followed a semi-structured interview guide exploring contemporary coping

strategies that Black adolescent boys use in high-violence contexts to navigate interpersonal and community violence.

Focus group questions elicited subjective experiences while addressing social desirability bias through probing questions. Examples of focus group questions are as follows: "When you hear the word "Coping", what comes to mind? What does coping mean to you?" and "Can you share coping strategies for violence-related stress and trauma? How do we deal with grief from losing a loved one to violence"? A structured questionnaire was avoided to allow open-ended, emotionally grounded discussions. This reduced the likelihood of socially desirable responses and allowed for tensions and discrepant opinions in a group setting. Participant interactions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim using professional software. Thematic analysis grounded in interpretive descriptions was conducted using an iterative and constant comparison process. Two research team members (CE and APF) independently reviewed the transcripts, generated initial codes, and engaged in collaborative discussions to refine theme development. Data analysis was conducted using manual coding in MS Word for initial open coding or memoing and further refined using NVivo version 10 (QSR International) to organize, link, and query codes. Descriptive statistical analyses were performed in JASP (version 0.18.3). As an incentive, each participant received a $50 gift card and lunch in appreciation of their time and contributions, per IRB-approved study procedures.

2.3. Ethics Approval

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Rush University Medical Center (Office of Research Affairs) approved the study protocol. Given the minimal risk designation of the study, the IRB granted a waiver of parental consent, allowing eligible minors to provide informed consent independently. Participants provided written consent and verbally reaffirmed their willingness to participate before the interview session began. Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and they could withdraw without any consequence. Additionally, permission was obtained for audio recording and note-taking during the interviews. All study data were de-identified and stored per the IRB confidentiality protocols.

2.4. Data Analysis

Following a naturalist inquiry approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we employed Interpretive Description (ID) to balance theoretical depth with real-world applicability. Rooted in constructivist and naturalistic traditions, ID is well-suited for generating insights from complex experiential questions by developing a coherent conceptual understanding of a phenomenon while offering pragmatic solutions that "move beyond the theoretical and into practice" (M. R. Hunt, 2009; Thompson Burdine et al., 2021). Rather than seeking data saturation, we prioritized capturing diverse perspectives to reflect the complexity of the participants' lived experiences (Thompson Burdine et al., 2021). We anchored our analysis in the PVEST to contextualize how YBM navigate stressors within their socioecological environments, while the TMSC informed the classification of dynamic and transactional coping strategies used. Following Thorne's (2016) analytic scaffolding approach, we critically engaged with the existing literature to delineate prior knowledge and ensure that our findings meaningfully contribute to ongoing discourse and practice. Although we did not conduct a formal systematic literature review, we built on a prior study examining the service needs and preferences of violence-involved and substance-disordered YBM and their service providers, applying the same ID framework within PVEST (Emezue et al., 2024b).

In line with the recommended ID methodology, our analysis was iterative and interpretive, moving beyond descriptions to generate field-ready insights (Thompson Burdine

et al., 2021; Thorne, 2016). We employed Thorne's (2016) seven-stage analytical framework, which includes data immersion, initial open coding and categorization, pattern recognition and theme development, constant comparative analysis, theoretical interpretation, iterative refinement and member checking, and knowledge translation. We repeatedly examined the initial transcripts and identified early patterns that foregrounded our theoretical commitments to the PVEST and TMSC.

The lead author (CE) conducted the initial open coding, with an additional analyst (APF) independently refining and applying the initial codes. The codes were refined and grouped into categories through constant comparison to ensure their internal coherence. Categories were linked to broader patterns, aligning with Thorne's (2016)' analytic scaffolding,' where findings extend beyond individual experiences to reveal structural, relational, and systemic influences. The final phase involved synthesizing patterns into themes that showed the complexity of coping patterns while offering practical insights for intervention (Thorne, 2016). This process aligns with ID's core objective of producing clinically applicable, actionable findings responsive to real-world contexts (Thompson Burdine et al., 2021). For clarity, our findings were organized by function (problem-focused or emotion-focused) and effectiveness (adaptive or maladaptive) of coping. Specific coping strategies were identified for each theme. This nuanced approach diverges from much of the existing coping literature, which tends to emphasize specific and mutually exclusive strategies rather than dynamic coping frameworks relevant to how adolescents navigate chronic violence exposure.

2.5. Study Rigor

ID ensures rigor based on four parameters: epistemological integrity (ensuring coherence between the research question, methodology, and epistemological stance), representative credibility, analytic logic (clear and systematic alignment of analytic strategies with the study's intended knowledge outcomes), and interpretive authority. Thus, the study's findings were derived from a rigorous interpretive process, including the researcher team's disciplinary lens as an interpretive resource (Thorne et al., 1997, 2004). Methodological rigor was increased by leveraging each study team member's varying backgrounds, respective interests (domains of investigation), and expertise in the qualitative methods used here (O'Reilly et al., 2021).

We engaged in sustained reflexive practice throughout the study, guided by a multidisciplinary and culturally diverse research team. Our team comprised individuals from diverse social, cultural, and professional backgrounds (nursing, public health, and criminology), including co-authors from our adolescent advisory board who were peers of the study participants. This age proximity enhanced our interpretive reliability, ensuring that our analyses remained relevant to the lived experiences of YBM through peer debriefing. Reflexivity was further supported by maintaining a study log to document evolving insights, facilitate points of dialogue among research team members, and describe methodological decisions. We further member-checked our initial results with the two Black male facilitators from the male mentoring program from which we recruited participants. We enhanced analytical rigor by employing theoretical triangulation, incorporating synergistic PVEST and TMSC to inform our culturally informed and sociologically grounded inquiry. This triangulation offered complementary views on the socioecological and cognitive processes that form the basis of coping strategies, ensuring that the findings of this study are practically relevant, in line with ID's goal of producing valuable, practice-informed insights.

3. Findings

3.1. Participant Sociodemographic Characteristics

Thirty-three YBM aged 15–17 years (M = 15.8, SD + 1.19) participated in two focus groups conducted in September 2023. All participants identified as Black or African American, with two identifying as multiracial and three as Hispanic/Latino. Three participants indicated that they had carried a weapon on multiple occasions during the past month. Over one-third (36.36%; 12 YBM) reported involvement in at least one physical altercation in the past year. Additionally, 30.30% (10 YBM) were threatened or injured with a weapon during the same period. Approximately 66% (22 YBM) had witnessed someone being physically attacked, beaten, stabbed, or shot in their community or neighborhood in the past year, putting this sample at risk for various forms of interpersonal and community violence. Among the participants, the majority were either engaged in a dating relationship (n = 13) or were single (n = 15), with none reporting the perpetration of physical or psychological abuse towards a dating partner, possibly reflecting social desirability bias, and stemming from legal concerns or apprehension about school-related repercussions if such behavior was disclosed.

Our findings revealed a spectrum of coping patterns employed by YBM that fit into four categories: Problem-Focused Adaptive Coping, Problem-Focused Maladaptive Coping, Emotion-Focused Adaptive Coping, and Emotion-Focused Maladaptive Coping. These coping strategies did not fit into rigid categories of "adaptive" or "maladaptive" but rather existed on a continuum influenced by context, accessibility of support systems, and interpersonal and individual agency. Participants indicated that the function of coping (problem-based or emotion-based) and the effectiveness of coping (adaptive and maladaptive) mechanisms were influenced by their environment, social support, and personal experiences. Below, we outline (Table 1) and present an analysis of each category with exemplary quotes.

Table 1. Contextualized Summary of Adolescent Coping Strategies and Patterns.

Coping Patterns	Category Description	Coping Examples from Participants
Problem-Focused Adaptive Coping (PFA)	PFA coping involves proactive strategies to directly address stressors and find constructive solutions.	Sports and Physical Activity; Creative Expression and Solitary Practices; Leaning on Peers/Siblings.
Problem-Focused Maladaptive Coping (PFM)	PFM coping includes attempts to manage stressors through actions that may provide short-term relief but increase harm long-term.	Retaliation ("get back"), Flexible Definition of Coping Itself ("Coping Is Coping.").
Emotion-Focused Adaptive Coping (EFA)	EFA coping employed here focused on positive self-regulation techniques to manage emotions in a healthy way.	Humor as a Form of Coping; Spirituality as an Emotional Anchor; Mindfulness and Alternative Coping Strategies.
Emotion-Focused Maladaptive Coping (EFM)	The EFM coping outlined here offers temporary emotional relief but can lead to long-term negative consequences.	Self-Reliance and Emotional Avoidance; Pornography and Digital Escapism; Peer Networks: Distraction vs. Emotional Engagement; Mistrust and Avoidance of Mental Health Services.

3.2. Problem-Focused Adaptive Coping (PFA)

Participants described problem-focused adaptive (PFA) coping strategies that provided structure, control, and an outlet for managing stressors. To contextualize PFA strategies, intentional engagement in sports and physical activities emerged as a dominant coping strategy.

3.2.1. Sports and Physical Activity

Activities such as basketball, football, and weightlifting were framed as mechanisms for emotional regulation, stress reduction, and identity reinforcement (e.g., as an athlete). These activities allowed them to manage frustration and momentarily escape the pressures of their environment. One participant reflected on the effect of physical activity: "But I feel like it's impossible to be sad if being active every day. We ain't got no time to be sad. . ." Another participant explained how football provided a cathartic release from accumulated stress and anger.

> "*[I] Play a bit of football. Basically just getting your mind off it,*
>
> *You are not thinking about all of that.*
>
> *At that moment you ain't thinking about nothing*"
>
> [Focus group, FG 1]

However, excessive reliance on physical activity and relaxation was construed as potentially maladaptive, primarily when used to avoid confronting stressors. When these strategies are overused to suppress or avoid dealing with distressing emotions, they may inadvertently reinforce avoidance-based coping patterns, thereby delaying effective problem-solving and emotional processing. Instead of addressing the root causes of stress, such as trauma, interpersonal conflicts, or unresolved grief, adolescents may become overly dependent on these activities as a temporary escape, leading to long-term disengagement from emotional and psychological growth. One participant acknowledged the following: "*Sometimes I'd hit the gym for hours just to keep my mind off things, but it didn't help me deal with the actual problems*" [FG 1].

3.2.2. Creative Expression and Solitary Practices

Beyond physical activity, creative expression emerged as another key PFA-coping strategy. Participants described drawing or visual arts, music, and writing as outlets for processing their emotions and regaining control. Music was framed as an expressive and identity-affirming practice, with varied musical tastes. One young man stated, "*You just tune everyone out and get into your own vibe*" [FG 1]. One participant added, "*I try to listen to calming music and try to relax in a quiet space*" [FG 1]. Some described solitary practices to manage stress, process trauma, or enhance emotional regulation, "*My meditation is like sitting in the dark, just listening to my thoughts.*" [FG 1]. Another stated: "*Sitting by water helped me a lot*" [FG 2]. Some individuals used phone notepads to privately journal or write down their thoughts and feelings. This use of creative media to facilitate coping aligns with research indicating that culturally embedded practices, such as music and artistic expression, can reinforce resilience and identity among Black adolescents exposed to adversity (Golden et al., 2024; Jefferson, 2023; Myrie et al., 2022).

3.2.3. Leaning on Peers

Similarly, peer networks (and siblings) were often cited as sources of coping support: "*If I am fixing to crash out, I got somebody I will talk to. I got my brother, he's like my best friend. Boom. Cool. But it is like we both balance each other*". However, peers "*could only listen" and serve as distractions from more profound issues.* One participant

explained, *"Sometimes being with my boys was more about distractions than actually dealing with stuff. We'd joke or mess around, but it didn't change what I was going through."* [FG 1]. Peer relationships provided a critical buffer against emotional distress, reinforcing the importance of social connectedness in stress adaptation. For many, the presence of friends was a protective factor against overthinking and negative rumination: *"Being around my guys helps. If you are alone, you just sit there thinking too much. But when you got your people, you just vibe."* [FG 1]

These PFA coping strategies demonstrate a high degree of adaptability, with their effectiveness shaped by the individual's intent, the surrounding context, and the duration of use. Studies show creative coping is often embedded within broader emotion-focused or meaning-focused coping categories (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Although advantageous, PFA coping strategies can be dual in nature, oscillating between beneficial (adaptive) and harmful (maladaptive) strategies based on their application. For instance, engaging in creative activities helps facilitate emotional processing, identify affirmation, and resilience. However, excessive co-rumination with peers experiencing similar adversity may result in emotional stagnation or reinforce distress.

3.3. Problem-Focused Maladaptive Coping (PFM)

Participants described problem-focused maladaptive coping strategies, including retaliatory violence, and a flexible definition of coping ("Coping is coping"). PFM strategies were not framed as entirely impulsive and maladaptive choices but as responses to their environmental realities.

3.3.1. Retaliation as a Coping Strategy

For many participants, retaliation, referred to by participants as the "get back", was described as an expected response to violence. Rather than being purely motivated by aggression, retaliation was framed as a strategy for self-preservation and maintaining respect within one's social circle or environment: "*Like for us, like retaliation. Just say, someone takes a [life]. They will seek to retaliate using violence. And they feel better after that. It's the get back.*" [FG 1]. This dynamic aligns with prior research on street justice norms, most notably Anderson's *Code of the Street* (1999), which describes how interpersonal violence operates within a broader system of informal conflict resolution, especially in under-resourced communities where formal mechanisms (e.g., law enforcement or legal recourse) are viewed as inaccessible or untrustworthy. As a result, retaliatory behavior is often governed by community norms that reinforce cycles of retribution (Anderson, 1999; Brezina et al., 2004; Stewart & Simons, 2010), where violence may serve as an informal means of self-preservation, social regulation, identity preservation, and even survival. This further underscored the role of structural violence, social norms, and environmental constraints in shaping coping decisions, well beyond attribution to individual pathology or moral failure.

3.3.2. Agency in Coping: "Coping Is Coping"

Although many external frameworks classify retaliation and violence as maladaptive, participants rejected outsider-driven definitions of coping. Instead, they asserted their agency in defining coping within their lived realities, reinforcing emphasis on contextual meaning-making (Thorne, 2016). There was a prevailing unanimity that all "coping is coping", meaning that the effectiveness of any one strategy was context-dependent rather than universally positive or negative.

There was consensus on this, as one participant contextualized: "*I don't think there's no wrong way to cope. . .I can't put it into exact words, but like everybody cope different. So you gon' do what makes you feel better*" [FG 1].

This resistance to prescriptive, universal classifications of coping suggests that interventions must account for the situational context in which YBM perform coping responses. Rather than dismissing these strategies as irrational or maladaptive, there is a need for culturally responsive and context-sensitive interventions that provide viable alternatives to retaliation while acknowledging the structural barriers that make non-violence a difficult choice in certain circumstances. By shifting away from deficit-based coping models and centering on how YBM perceive their coping decisions, interventions can honor their "*agency in coping*" while helping them build adaptive coping pathways that align with their lived realities and survival needs.

3.3.3. Emotion-Focused Adaptive Coping (EFA)

For participants who did not engage in direct problem-focused actions to mitigate controllable stressors, internal emotion regulation strategies played a critical role in managing distress. These included humor, peer engagement, spirituality, and mindfulness-like practices, each offering a distinct mechanism for emotional relief while reinforcing a sense of personal agency in navigating adversity.

3.3.4. Humor as a Form of Coping

Participants identified humor as a crucial strategy for emotional alleviation, enabling them to evade stressors and reestablish a sense of normalcy temporarily. Laughter emerged as a primary strategy, predominantly facilitated through digital media, with several participants indicating their use of Twitter/X. One participant stated: "*I watch funny videos, like funny reels or TikTok. It just makes my head feel lighter*". For some, humor was more than a passive distraction; it served as a resilient reframing mechanism, allowing them to maintain emotional balance even in the face of hardship:

> "*So for me, I love laughing. That helps at any time. If I can laugh through something, I can get through it. So laughing is something that helped me.*"
>
> [FG 2]

Humor as a coping mechanism aligns with research suggesting that comedic engagement can buffer stress and emotional distress among Black adolescents (Bauer et al., 2020). However, while humor can be productive, excessive reliance on digital distractions (e.g., social media) may serve as avoidance rather than emotional regulation, preventing deeper engagement with underlying issues.

3.3.5. Spirituality as an Emotional Anchor

For some participants, prayer and spirituality provided emotional stability and a sense of meaning in the face of adversity. Engaging in religious practice is a way to ground oneself and seek divine guidance.

> "*I pray every morning and every night. Just thanking God for getting me through.*" [FG 2]
>
> Another reflected:
>
> "*I was raised in church, so I turn to God when I need something bigger than me.*" [FG 1]

These narratives reflect the potentially protective role of spirituality in the coping strategies of African American adolescents (i.e., religion-based coping), as conceptualized in previous studies (Bauer et al., 2020). Spiritual engagement has been linked to greater emotional regulation and resilience, particularly among low-income urban adolescents navigating violent environments (Epstein-Ngo et al., 2013). Although quotes on spirituality

were fewer and brief, the salience of spiritual coping was noted for a few participants. Other studies have indicated that YBM employ spirituality as a coping mechanism after experiencing a violent injury (Richardson et al., 2020).

3.3.6. Mindfulness and Alternative Coping Strategies

Several participants described contemplative practices, such as meditation and spending time in quiet environments, as strategies for regulating their emotions. These practices are aligned with intuitive mindfulness-based coping, such as taking quiet moments to reflect or "*disconnect*". Others used ad hoc self-guided techniques: "*I just sit in the dark, trying to listen to my thoughts".* Several young men reported familiarity with mindfulness through mobile apps (such as Motivation, a mindfulness-enhancing app that provides daily motivational quotes for positivity, resilience, and personal growth). These behaviors reflect a growing trend towards *mindfulness-adjacent* coping strategies among young Black men, who may engage in self-directed or improvisational practices that mirror formal mindfulness but are contextually adapted and culturally self-fashioned (Jones et al., 2023; Olvera et al., 2023). While not rooted in conventional curricula such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), these strategies offer emotional relief and reflective space. This strategy aligns with emerging research suggesting that Black youth may benefit from culturally responsive, flexible exposure to mindfulness and emotion regulation techniques (Jones et al., 2023; Olvera et al., 2023).

Importantly, EFA as a coping pattern underscores the fluidity of emotion-focused coping. In contexts where access to formal behavioral health services is limited or where traditional therapeutic models may not resonate, Black adolescents may then subscribe to intuitive, self-reliant strategies that are emotionally effective and culturally coherent. These findings suggest a critical opportunity to expand mindfulness interventions to incorporate non-linear, culturally embedded, and digitally mediated practices that are more accessible, meaningful, and relevant to youth navigating structural adversity.

3.4. Emotion-Focused Maladaptive Coping (EFM)

Participants described engaging in EFM coping strategies that primarily involved self-reliance, emotional avoidance, cognitive distraction, disengagement, and service avoidance shaped by systemic access, stigma, and collective help-seeking culture, beyond individual and personal factors. While these strategies provide temporary relief, they often reinforce long-term distress patterns and hinder the development of adaptive coping.

3.4.1. Self-Reliance and Emotional Avoidance

A core feature of EFM coping strategy was the reluctance to share emotional struggles with family or external support systems, reinforcing patterns of self-reliance and emotional suppression, consistent with the coping construct of John Henryism (Watkins et al., 2020). Several participants described choosing to withhold their struggles despite recognizing the potential benefits of family support:

- "*I just keep it to myself. That's how I deal with it.*" [FG 1]
- "*I basically go through it on my own. Since I'm going through it on my own, I tend to do it on my own. Family would be helpful, but I prefer to do it on my own.*" [FG 2]
- "*At our age, somebody could be going through something but they gonna always say they cool. . .Even if I'm going through something, I'mma say I'm straight. Even if I'm not, what you gonna do?*" [FG 2]

These narratives reflect a protective mechanism in which participants selectively withhold their emotions, distancing themselves from deeper conversations about their struggles, even in trusted relationships. This EFM coping strategy aligns with research

suggesting that Black adolescent males often mask distress to avoid appearing vulnerable, reinforcing norms of stoicism and self-reliance (Hammond, 2012; Watkins et al., 2020).

3.4.2. Peer Networks: Distraction vs. Emotional Engagement

Unlike deeper emotional processing in protective coping, peer networks primarily provided distraction rather than emotional engagement. While participants mentioned spending time with friends, these interactions were not for emotional expression or support. Peers acted as buffers against intrusive thoughts and emotional overwhelm, offering relief through humor, games, group activities, or simply being around others.

Participants described peer interactions as low-stakes conversations avoiding emotional topics, with vulnerability minimized. For some, this avoidance served as protection through shared silence; for others, it left them coping alone. Though peer networks did not promote active coping, they served an essential regulatory function. The lack of explicit emotional support highlights peers' unique role of containment rather than catharsis. This distinction shows how peer support can function as an avoidant strategy and emotional regulation. For interventions targeting youth exposed to violence, this presents an opportunity to create peer environments beyond superficial interactions, equipping young men with tools for safe dialogue while respecting cultural norms of trust and strength.

3.4.3. Pornography and Digital Escapism

When participants were asked about online spaces they turn to for escape, responses included various social media platforms, including pornography websites. In one focus group, watching pornography emerged as a distraction strategy. Although participants confirmed this behavior, they declined to elaborate further. This pattern reflects a form of digital disengagement aligned with emotion-focused modulation (EFM) coping, where digital escapism (including our previous discussion on excessive reliance on social media) and other avoidance-based coping mechanisms may link to long-term negative outcomes, including increased distress and problematic behaviors. The inclusion of pornography within the broader category of digital coping underscores the need for a more expansive, context-aware framework that acknowledges both the adaptive and maladaptive dimensions of youth coping strategies in technology-saturated environments.

3.4.4. Mistrust and Avoidance of Mental Health Services

Another central EFM coping strategy was the participants' reluctance to seek formal mental health support. Deep-seated distrust of therapists and professional mental health services was articulated, reflecting broader concerns about cultural mismatch, lack of shared lived experiences, and skepticism regarding confidentiality.

- "*I don't like talking to therapists. I feel safer telling some of my friends or my big sister before I tell a random person I don't know.*" [FG 2]
- "*Even though [therapists] have so many stories, it's better to talk to them in this room because they're going through pretty much the same thing I am. They know how to talk back to me through their experience.*" [FG 1]

This apprehension was not necessarily about race or ethnicity alone but about shared experiences and cultural understanding. One participant reflected on this complexity:

- "*It matters to me because I would not necessarily relate to him because he is Black. But like our [school counselor], I know me and him have nothing in common. . . Based on my background, his background. . . we ain't compatible.*" [FG 2]

This last comment highlights an essential distinction: racial concordance alone is not enough to establish trust and rapport; what matters is experiential alignment. This aligns with prior research suggesting that therapists who lack lived experience in marginalized

communities may struggle to build rapport with Black youth, even when their racial identity is shared (Emezue et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2014; Jacoby et al., 2020; Lumba-Brown et al., 2020).

3.4.5. Mentorship as a Coping Resource

For YBM navigating chronic stress and violence exposure, traditional mental health services often feel inaccessible, unrelatable, or misaligned with their lived experiences. Instead of formal therapeutic interventions, participants in this study expressed a strong preference for mentorship programs and experiential learning opportunities as more effective, culturally relevant forms of support. This aligns with broader research indicating that relational, peer-driven, and hands-on learning approaches are better received by Black adolescents, particularly in communities where institutional trust is low (Hammond, 2012; Jacoby et al., 2020).

Participants described mentorship, mainly from relatable male role models, as a preferred coping strategy, offering guidance, emotional validation, and role modeling in ways that traditional therapy often does not. Unlike formal mental health professionals, male mentors were perceived as accessible, trustworthy, and attuned to the realities of their lives, bridging the gap between support-seeking and cultural mistrust of institutions.

> "*We need more male mentors. Yeah, like putting guys around each other in a space where they could just be free and not have to put on the act for nobody.*" [FG 1]

> "*I feel like that like one male mentor should be like at, at every school, right? Like every school, every park district, every like big general space.*" [FG 1]

This underscores the protective role of positive male mentorship in reinforcing adaptive coping mechanisms while providing alternative, non-judgmental avenues for emotional support and life guidance. Mentorship also functions as a developmentally appropriate intervention, fostering self-efficacy, problem-solving skills, and future-oriented thinking among YBM.

3.4.6. Experiential Learning as an Active Coping Strategy

Beyond mentorship, participants emphasized the importance of experiential learning opportunities, such as traveling, field trips, skill-building workshops, and outdoor activities, as vital coping tools. These experiences provide healthy outlets for stress reduction, exposure to new perspectives, and opportunities to develop resilience in structured, non-threatening environments. One participant elaborated:

> "*Like taking them places where they have not seen. Like being in Chicago is all we see. So other experiences. It has changed my perspective of life. . .Like camping trips and like just doing fun things.*" [FG 2]

This aligns with research showing that experiential learning fosters emotional regulation, builds social capital, and enhances future aspirations among adolescents exposed to violence (Richardson et al., 2020). Programs such as Becoming A Man (BAM), The Urban Male Network, After School Matters, and One Summer Chicago provided structured mentorship and real-world learning experiences that align with coping preferences. These interventions can serve as culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate pathways to support emotional resilience and positive identity formation. By leveraging trusted mentors and immersive, hands-on experiences, interventions can help YBM develop adaptive coping strategies that feel natural, accessible, and meaningful within their social and cultural contexts.

These were seen as more approachable and relevant than formal therapy, supporting research that Black adolescents prefer non-traditional community-based interventions

over clinical care models (Watkins et al., 2020). The avoidance of formal mental health care reflects appraisal-based barriers, where perceived risks (e.g., loss of privacy, cultural mismatch, and lack of trust) outweigh anticipated benefits. This lack of perceived benefits leads to long-term disengagement from mental health services, entrenching cycles of isolation, and unprocessed distress (Jacoby et al., 2020).

4. Discussion

This study employed Thorne's Interpretive Description (ID) methodology to examine contemporary coping strategies among Black adolescent males, ages 15–17, navigating interpersonal and community violence, revealing a nuanced interplay between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping mechanisms. By applying an interpretive description approach, our findings move beyond static coping categorizations to emphasize the contextual, fluid, and adaptive nature of these coping strategies.

4.1. Reconsidering the Coping Model Dichotomies

Traditional two-factor models of stress and coping have often centralized adaptive vs. maladaptive, and problem vs. emotion-focused categories. However, our findings align with emerging developmental perspectives that emphasize "adaptive calibration", suggesting that coping mechanisms are adaptive within specific contexts, helping adolescents survive and function (i.e., calibrate) in particular environments (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2017). However, when viewed outside of these contexts (e.g., in school or by law enforcement), the same behaviors may be misunderstood as criminality or deviance, leading to undue repercussions. These nuances underscore the limitations of deficit-based frameworks that pathologize youth responses without acknowledging the structural determinants that shape their coping (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2017).

Likewise, problem-focused adaptive (PFA) strategies such as engagement in sports/physical activity and peer mentorship were widely employed as healthy outlets for stress relief and emotional regulation, confirming that structured play and physical activities can be leveraged to enhance self-regulation, social cohesion, prosocial skills, and identity development among Black male adolescents (Lee et al., 2022; Richardson et al., 2020). Future research and interventions should explore how to scaffold these coping strategies into community planning (e.g., green spaces for play/creative coping and amenities for youth physical activities) and culturally responsive programming. Interventions that combine resilience and psychological flexibility coaching and embed physical activity within value-driven, reflective frameworks may help prevent a reliance on avoidant strategies (Lev-Arey et al., 2024).

Similarly, participants described retaliatory violence, often seen as a problem-focused maladaptive (PFM) response, as a necessary response to unavoidable environmental conditions rather than a personal failure in self-regulation. Consequently, their actions may be interpreted as reactive, even as they may be socially and environmentally attuned, and aimed at maintaining respect, ensuring self-protection, or preempting future attacks. While individual-level interventions promoting non-retaliation and emotional regulation are important, they must be paired with structured, community-led, and trauma-informed programs. These initiatives should directly target retaliatory attitudes by addressing the cognitive impacts of violence exposure, including early signs of reactive and proactive aggression (Lee et al., 2022).

Emotion-focused adaptive (EFA) coping strategies, like humor, spirituality, and self-reflection, are key for this age group. Humor, especially via digital media like Twitter/X and TikTok, offers temporary stress relief, aligning with research on humor as a resilience tool among Black adolescents (Bauer et al., 2020). Spirituality provided meaning, and re-

flective practices fostered emotional insight and resilience. Yet, participants also described maladaptive counterparts, including emotional suppression and self-isolation, hindering long-term coping. The coexistence of adaptive and maladaptive strategies underscores the need to educate youth on effective emotional regulation. This study also highlights integrating structural and digital coping frameworks reflecting how youth mobilize communal resources, create safety, or resist harm. These strategies, though difficult to capture using individual-level models, are essential for understanding how Black boys navigate chronic violence exposure.

4.2. Digital Coping and the Expansion of Online Stressors

This study contributes to understanding digital coping mechanisms within the landscape of online violence and stressors. Previous research has explored online violent threats and victimization targeting minoritized youth, through cyberbullying, digital harassment (e.g., doxxing, sextortion), and cyber-banging (Chen et al., 2023). Other studies note the criminalization of Black bodies extends to online spaces, where Black youth are disproportionately surveilled, flagged, or disciplined for digital expression, even when it mirrors that of their non-Black peers (Noble, 2018). These experiences may necessitate digital coping to navigate online stressors.

However, excessive reliance on digital distractions risks reinforcing emotional avoidance and disengagement from deeper self-reflection. Participants engaged in solitary activities such as listening to music, journaling using phone apps, and utilizing positive affirmations through apps like *Motivation*. These creative coping mechanisms provide agency and facilitate emotional regulation. Importantly, such culturally ingrained practices, long acknowledged as resilience-building tools among Black youth, underscore the need for interventions that acknowledge, respect, and enhance these existing strengths.

Participants' use of pornography and other forms of digital escapism further illustrated the dual role of technology in facilitating both adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms. Previous research on media consumption and coping strategies has demonstrated that adolescents experiencing chronic stress frequently resort to media-based disengagement strategies as a means of self-soothing and emotion regulation (Coyne et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2023; McNamee et al., 2021).

Our findings extend the emotion-focused maladaptive (EFM) coping profile by acknowledging how self-reliance, peer co-rumination, mistrust of mental health services, and digital escapism call for more context-aware frameworks to understand how adolescent males manage distress in digitally saturated environments (Watkins et al., 2020). Culturally responsive interventions must foster adaptive digital coping and address the emotional and structural barriers that lead youth to disengage from traditional support systems.

4.3. Structural Coping: Service Avoidance and the Role of Mentorship

A significant barrier identified in this study was the widespread distrust of formal mental health services, consistent with research showing that Black adolescents often avoid traditional therapy due to concerns about cultural mismatch, lack of confidentiality, and limited shared lived and generational experiences with providers (Hammond, 2012; Jacoby et al., 2020). While racial concordance with providers is often discussed as a potential solution, our findings suggest that a shared experiential background is more critical than racial identity alone in establishing trust.

Furthermore, participants strongly advocated for mentorship programs as a preferred alternative to traditional therapy, particularly male mentors who could model coping behaviors, provide guidance, and facilitate experiential learning. This aligns with research indicating that relational and peer-driven support models may be more effective than

previously considered for many Black male adolescents (Sánchez et al., 2018). Community and male mentoring programs were touted as trusted avenues for support, reinforcing that mentorship is a developmentally appropriate and culturally congruent intervention for this population. Future efforts should prioritize scaling up male mentorship programs, integrating them into school-based initiatives, and ensuring that mentors are trained in trauma-informed approaches.

5. Implications and Future Directions

Current coping models should be primed to better reflect structural, identity-specific, and contextual factors across physical and digital ecologies. Rather than pathologizing problem- or emotion-focused coping strategies as inherently adaptive or maladaptive, explanatory models and interventions built on them must acknowledge the structural and social conditions that shape adolescent responses to violence. Programs should leverage the protective elements of existing coping mechanisms, such as peer networks, humor, technology, and spirituality, while providing alternative pathways to conflict resolution, emotional regulation, and community engagement that disrupt cycles of violence.

To ensure applicability across contexts, interventions must remain adaptable to local realities while addressing the structural barriers to formal mental health services by incorporating credible messengers, mentorship, and experiential programming to build trust and engagement. Given the importance of group identity for safety and social belonging, these interventions should create safe, structured spaces where YBM can develop problem-solving skills, engage in non-violent coping strategies, and access mentorship without fear of judgment or surveillance. In addition, the integration of digital coping tools, mindfulness techniques, and trauma-informed support systems can expand access to coping resources in ways that align with adolescent preferences and real-world constraints.

Participants reported that social media not only served as a space for support but also heightened their vulnerability to conflict. Given the growing role of online spaces in mental health discourse among Black adolescents (Shanta Bridges et al., 2018), integrating digital support systems into intervention efforts may be a critical next step. Importantly, interventions leveraging digital tools must be context-aware and designed with input from local youth.

Study Limitations and Strengths

Several study strengths are notable. First, this study provides critical insights into the coping mechanisms of Black male adolescents aged 15–17 years, understudied in the coping literature, and at the cusp of critical developmental changes in society that may influence their cognitive and behavioral adaptation to chronic stressors. Second, the inclusion of young co-authors from our adolescent advisory board enriched our interpretative authority, a key aspect of Thorne's Interpretive Description approach (2016), ensuring that the findings remained developmentally and contextually relevant. Third, by applying a rigorous interpretive lens through the integration of the PVEST and TMSC, we offer a framework for understanding both the socioecological and cognitive dimensions of coping, reinforcing calls for interventions that address personal and systemic barriers.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, our study was geographically restricted to urban Chicago, which potentially limits the generalizability of our findings to other adolescent populations. Furthermore, while focus groups facilitated open discussions, they may have encouraged normative responses, limiting the disclosure of non-traditional or highly individualized coping strategies. Social desirability bias may have influenced participants' willingness to report maladaptive and non-normative coping strategies, while exaggerating more socially acceptable strategies. The focus groups were

also limited in depth due to time constraints, with the most extended session lasting 42 min. Despite these limitations, this study lays the groundwork for future research and intervention development, underscoring the urgency of designing culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate programs that build on contemporary coping frameworks while addressing the unique vulnerabilities that these young men face daily.

6. Conclusions

This study sheds light on how Black adolescent males navigate violence exposure through a mix of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies shaped by cultural norms, digital environments, and systemic barriers. Rather than fitting neatly into binary coping models, participants' strategies reflected real-time adaptations to chronic adversity, institutional mistrust, and limited access to traditional support systems. These findings call for rethinking dominant coping frameworks to account for context, cultural relevance, and the fluidity of adolescent decision-making in high-risk environments.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

COREQ	Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research
EFA	Emotion-Focused Adaptive Coping
EFM	Emotion-Focused Maladaptive Coping
PFA	Problem-Focused Adaptive Coping
PFM	Problem-Focused Maladaptive Coping
PVEST	Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory
TMSC	Transactional Model of Stress and Coping
YBM	Young Black Males

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