



STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS, COPING STRATEGIES,
AND THE MEDIATING ROLE OF RESILIENCE
AMONG INCARCERATED FEMALE YOUTH IN
SELANGOR



NUR AIN SOFFI BINTI MOHD SURAT

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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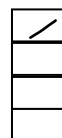
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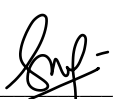
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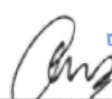
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ABSTRACT

Stressful life events are commonly experienced by incarcerated female youth and may influence their coping responses and psychological adjustment. This study examined the effect of stressful life events on coping strategies among incarcerated female youth and investigated the mediating role of resilience. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed, involving 101 incarcerated female youth recruited from rehabilitation institutions. Participants completed standardized measures assessing stressful life events, resilience, and coping strategies. Descriptive, correlation, and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to address the research objectives. The results indicated that stressful life events were not significantly associated with or predictive of coping strategies and were not significantly related to resilience. In contrast, resilience emerged as a significant positive predictor of engagement-oriented coping strategies, specifically emotion-focused engagement and problem-focused engagement. Mediation analyses conducted using the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach revealed that resilience did not mediate the relationship between stressful life events and coping strategies. These findings suggest that while resilience plays a protective role in promoting adaptive coping strategies among incarcerated female youth, it does not account for the relationship between stressful life events and coping strategies in this population. The study highlights the importance of resilience-focused interventions in supporting adaptive coping among incarcerated female youth.

Keywords: stressful life events, resilience, coping strategies, incarcerated female youth

**PERISTIWA KEHIDUPAN YANG MENYEBABKAN TEKANAN, STRATEGI
DAYA TINDAK DAN PERANAN PENGANTAR DAYA TAHAN DALAM
KALANGAN BELIA WANITA YANG DITAHAN DI SELANGOR**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti kesan peristiwa kehidupan yang menekan terhadap strategi daya tindak dalam kalangan belia perempuan yang dipenjarakan serta mengkaji peranan pengantaraan daya tahan. Kajian kuantitatif keratan rentas ini melibatkan 101 orang belia perempuan yang ditempatkan di institusi pemulihan. Data dikumpul menggunakan instrumen piawai bagi mengukur peristiwa kehidupan yang menekan, daya tahan, dan strategi daya tindak. Analisis deskriptif, korelasi, dan regresi hierarki telah dijalankan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa peristiwa kehidupan yang menekan tidak mempunyai hubungan atau kesan yang signifikan terhadap strategi daya tindak serta tidak berkait secara signifikan dengan daya tahan. Sebaliknya, daya tahan dikenal pasti sebagai peramal positif yang signifikan bagi strategi daya tindak berorientasikan penglibatan, khususnya penglibatan berfokuskan emosi dan penglibatan berfokuskan masalah. Analisis pengantaraan menggunakan pendekatan Baron dan Kenny (1986) mendapati bahawa daya tahan tidak bertindak sebagai pengantara dalam hubungan antara peristiwa kehidupan yang menekan dan strategi daya tindak. Secara keseluruhan, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa daya tahan memainkan peranan perlindungan dalam menggalakkan strategi daya tindak adaptif dalam kalangan belia perempuan yang dipenjarakan.

Kata kunci: peristiwa kehidupan yang menekan, daya tahan, strategi daya tindak, belia perempuan dipenjarakan

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Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ADHD	Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
BMD	Bipolar Mood Disorder
BPD	Borderline Personality Disorder
CD-RISC	Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale
CSI-SF	Coping Strategies Inventory – Short Form
EFE	Emotion-Focused Engagement Coping
EFD	Emotion-Focused Disengagement Coping
GAD	Generalized Anxiety Disorder
MDD	Major Depressive Disorder
PFE	Problem-Focused Engagement Coping
PFD	Problem-Focused Disengagement Coping
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SRRS	Social Readjustment Rating Scale
SUD	Substance Use Disorder



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the foundation of the research that had been carried out by the researcher. The discussion includes the background, problem statement, purposes, objectives, questions, hypothesis, limitation, conceptual framework and the significance of this research.



1.2 Research Background

Incarceration refers to the act of keeping someone in a closed place and preventing them from leaving it (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025). This form of deprivation of liberty is usually a consequence of criminal behavior and is intended as a means of punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation or public safety. Incarceration limits a person's freedom of movement and access to the outside world where it is often accompanied by strict rules, surveillance and controlled daily routine. Beyond the physical restriction, incarceration may have a significant psychological, social and economic impacts on individuals, families and communities (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2025).

In Malaysia, correctional institutions for children and young people can be understood within the broader context of incarceration. These institutions are categorized into two types which are open institutions and closed institutions. Open institutions known as Approved Schools are managed by the Department of Social Welfare (*Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat*, JKM) and focus on rehabilitation in a less restrictive environment where some degree of freedom and community engagement are retains. In contrast, closed institutions such as Advanced Approved Schools or Henry Gurney Schools represent a more restrictive form of juvenile incarceration. These institutions are operated by the Malaysian Prisons Department (*Jabatan Penjara Malaysia*, JPM) and intended for youth involved in more serious offenses. In such settings, individuals experience a higher level of confinement and control where it is more align with the formal definition of incarceration that involves deprivation of liberty for the purposes of punishment, rehabilitation, or both. Thus, while both types

of institutions aim to rehabilitate, closed institutions reflect the more traditional form of juvenile incarceration within the criminal justice system (Teh, 2000).

Based on the study conducted, four correctional institutions under the e-Riqab program by *Majlis Agama Islam Selangor* (MAIS) and registered under Department of Social Welfare (JKM) in Selangor were selected to participate in this research. With vision and approach aligned with JKM, e-Riqab is an initiative introduced by MAIS to strengthen the Al-Riqab Rehabilitation Division in delivering structured and systematic distribution of assistance to *asnaf al-riqab*. This group refers to individuals who are involved in social problems and issues related to faith (*Majlis Agama Islam Selangor*, 2025).

The correctional institutions involved in this study were *Pusat Bimbingan Raudhatus Sakinah*, *Rumah Puteri Arafiah*, *Bayt Al-Rahmah* and *Baitul Islah*. These institutions function as protective and rehabilitative centres for female youth that offer shelter, counselling and support services grounded in Islamic values and principles. The institutions involved were chosen from Selangor based on the locations with the highest recorded rates of social misconduct in Malaysia (Majid, Rahman, Azizan, & Mohamad, 2025).

This study specifically highlighted female youth population with history of social problems because of the alarming rates of cases involving female youth engaged in social misconduct and offense in Malaysia (Dewan Negeri Selangor, 2015). This consideration was made in order to support and assist incarcerated female youth to become aware and prevent reoffending which in this context, assisting them by providing data and information that can help incarcerated female youth to build their

life back after impactful life events, promoting healthy mental and physical state and return to normal societal life (Narawati, et al., 2025).

Additionally, the emphasis on female youth population in this study were based on past research that indicate the female population is generally more at risk when involved with mental health. Female population's mental health has become a growing concern as research indicates that females are more likely than males to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety. Social disadvantages are often linked to poorer mental health outcomes among female population (Vy & Duy, 2025). Female population are more at risk of getting mental health issue especially among incarcerated female population as they face more challenging environment and social aspects in the correctional institutes (Pelton, 2011).

Coping strategies are believed to mediate the effects of negative emotions among incarcerated female youth and help them to manage the impact of negative life events that happen in their life including incarceration. Coping strategies are essential in shaping mental health outcomes. While effective coping mechanisms help alleviate negative emotion, maladaptive strategies can intensify stress and may even increase the risk of suicidal behaviour (Esinam, et al., 2025). Due to that, this study aims to identify the pattern of coping strategies adapted by incarcerated female youth population in order to promote their mental health by improving the system of rehabilitation and assisting them in building healthy coping strategies.

Resilience is also believed to serve as a crucial aspect to provide coping mechanism for managing challenges, fostering acceptance of irreversible circumstances, regulating emotions and supporting the development of healthy interpersonal relationship among incarcerated female youth. Resilience plays an

essential role in helping them adapt to difficult situation and is vital for ensuring the provision of quality care within correctional settings (Mwangi, et al., 2025). In response to gaps identified in previous research, the present study examined the effect of stressful life events on coping strategies and investigated the mediating role of resilience as a protective factor among incarcerated female youth in Selangor.

1.3 Problem Statement

There has been increasing global concern regarding youth mental health in recent years, as approximately 13% of individuals between the ages of 10 and 19 worldwide are affected by mental health disorders. It has been highlighted that youth mental health is highly complex and remains insufficiently researched and funded, resulting in many conditions being unrecognised and untreated (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). In the Malaysian context, female youth are widely acknowledged as a group particularly vulnerable to mental health difficulties, largely due to limited coping capacities and heightened exposure to psychosocial stressors. (Mohd Azrin, Ainul Mardhiyah, Farah Nadia, Nor A'tikah, & Suzila, 2024). Based on previous study, a considerable number of youth experienced symptoms of depression, stress, and anxiety, with higher prevalence observed among females. Factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, income, marital status, social interaction, and physical illness were found to significantly influence mental health outcomes (Shamzaeffa, Russayani, Siti Nurazira, & Shahanim, 2024).

Female youth also were expected to suffer greater impact of negative effects of imprisonment than male population. Research shows that the prevalence of psychiatric



disorder among incarcerated female individuals is disproportionately high. Studies indicate that incarcerated female individuals have elevated rates of trauma as report stated that 40% of incarcerated female individuals have been physically or sexually abused at some point in their lives (Pelton, 2011). Based on this information, female individual in incarcerated population were seen as more vulnerable than male individual as they were reported of being more exposed towards negative life events that might aggravate the negative impact of imprisonment. Hence, incarcerated female individual is particularly vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes due to heightened exposure to psychological distress due to various negative life events such as past trauma, abuse and imprisonment. These factors contribute to a greater risk of developing or exacerbating mental health disorders within this population (Kennedy, 2016).

Incarceration is a highly stressful and disruptive experience for female individual. Many incarcerated female individuals experience a wide range of mental health issues including depression and posttraumatic stress disorder which often stem from histories of violence and abuse (Augsburger, et al., 2022). Ongoing exposure to stress can result in lasting effects on both physical and mental health of an individual. Previous study indicated that incarcerated female individual experience multifaceted life events involving psychological distress, guilt, regret, anxiety and emotional toll of being separated from families during incarceration (Nkambule & Mbakaya, 2025). Structural changes in incarceration settings to address physical and mental issue could help improve the incarcerated population overall wellbeing. However, these are not sufficient as more effort need to be executed in order to enhance and preserve the overall health of incarcerated population (Augsburger, et al., 2022). Therefore, this study focused on addressing low health literacy especially mental health and empowered incarcerated women as it was essential in improving their health. Enhancing their ability





to understand basic health information equips them to make informed health decisions upon reentering the community.

Beyond the experience of incarceration itself, youth encounter a range of positive and negative life events during their developmental years. Exposure to adverse life events in adolescence has been shown to undermine psychological well-being during this critical period and may have lasting effects that extend into adulthood (Chandler & Mello, 2021). Past research indicates that adverse life experiences during adolescence are associated with a range of developmental and psychological difficulties, including internalizing and externalizing behaviours, self-harm, depression, and anxiety (Siti Nor, Yui, Muslihah, Zarinah, & Rumaya, 2019).

Coping mechanisms are dynamic processes that develop and change with age and experience, thereby influencing individuals' developmental trajectories. During developmental stages, exposure to negative life events may contribute to the formation of maladaptive coping strategies, which can persist over time and adversely affect psychological well-being. Consequently, the development of adaptive coping mechanisms at an early age is essential, as these strategies can promote long-term resilience and healthier responses to stress, particularly among youth who have experienced significant adversity (Navya & Bismirly, 2025).

Hence, the use of effective coping strategies is particularly critical during incarceration where individuals often experience heightened psychological distress and greater risk of mental health symptoms. Lack utilization of adaptive coping strategies especially among individuals with pre-existing history of mental illness or early exposure towards negative life events increased likelihood of worsening psychological distress (Cho, Hagen, & Goldmann, 2023). Therefore, identifying and understanding





the coping strategies adopted by incarcerated female youth is essential in revealing patterns of how they manage stress and adversity. This also helps in determining the most effective strategies that can enhance their overall well-being during incarceration (Polatci, Antalyali, Alparslan, & Yastioglu, 2023).

Previous study findings demonstrated a significant negative correlation between resilience and social isolation where individuals with higher levels of resilience tend to experience lower level of social isolation. This is consistent with several studies which suggest that resilience individuals are more likely to possess adaptive coping mechanisms, stronger emotional regulation skills and greater capacity to maintain meaningful interpersonal relationship even when facing adverse circumstance (Lotfalizadeh, Sabzi, Farokhzadian, & Tabebordbar, 2025). While incarceration of a population is a physical and institutional condition, social isolation is more emotional and psychological. These two concepts are interdependent and often overlap where each concept contribute to and exacerbating the effects on an individual's psychological well-being (Pageau, Seaward, Habermeyer, Elger, & Wangmo, 2022). Due to that, this study intended to explore more on the role of resilience and it impact on the wellbeing of incarcerated female youth.

1.4 Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore how life events influence the coping strategies adopted by incarcerated female youth in Selangor. Specifically, this study aims to examine the types and impacts of significant life events the population have experiences and how these events shape their emotional and behavioral responses while in



incarceration. Additionally, the research seeks to assess the role of resilience as a protective factor that may help manage stress more effectively, adapting to circumstances and maintain psychological well-being. By understanding the relationship between life events, coping mechanisms and resilience, this study aspires to contribute valuable insights for developing targeted rehabilitation programs and mental health interventions within incarcerated female youth population.

1.5 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effect of life events on coping strategies among incarcerated female youth in Selangor and to explore the mediating role of resilience in this relationship. More specific objectives are as below:

1.5.1 To examine the relationships between stressful life events and coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

- a) To examine the relationship between stressful life events and problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- b) To examine the relationship between stressful life events and problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- c) To examine the relationship between stressful life events and emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- d) To examine the relationship between stressful life events and emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.

1.5.2 To examine the relationship between stressful life events and resilience among incarcerated female youth.



1.5.3 To examine the relationships between resilience and coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

- a) To examine the relationships between resilience and emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- b) To examine the relationships between resilience and emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- c) To examine the relationships between resilience and problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- d) To examine the relationships between resilience and problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.

1.5.4 To determine whether stressful life events significantly predict coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

- a) To determine whether stressful life events significantly predict emotion-focused engagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.
- b) To determine whether stressful life events significantly predict emotion-focused disengagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.
- c) To determine whether stressful life events significantly predict problem-focused engagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.
- d) To determine whether stressful life events significantly predict problem-focused disengagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

1.5.5 To determine whether resilience significantly predicts coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.



- a) To determine whether resilience significantly predicts emotion-focused engagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.
- b) To determine whether resilience significantly predicts emotion-focused disengagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.
- c) To determine whether resilience significantly predicts problem-focused engagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.
- d) To determine whether resilience significantly predicts problem-focused disengagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

1.5.6 To examine the mediating role of resilience between stressful life events and coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

- a) To examine the mediating role of resilience between stressful life events and emotion-focused engagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

- b) To examine the mediating role of resilience between stressful life events and emotion-focused disengagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

- c) To examine the mediating role of resilience between stressful life events and problem-focused engagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

- d) To examine the mediating role of resilience between stressful life events and problem-focused disengagement coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

1.5.7 To examine differences in the coping strategies based on demographic profiles among incarcerated female youth.

1.6 Research Questions

Based on the objectives stated, the purpose of this study is to response towards the questions as below:

1.6.1 Is there a significant relationship between stressful life events and coping strategies among incarcerated female youth?

- a) Is there a significant relationship between stressful life events and emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- b) Is there a significant relationship between stressful life events and emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- c) Is there a significant relationship between stressful life events and problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- d) Is there a significant relationship between stressful life events and problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.

1.6.2 Is there a significant relationship between stressful life events and resilience among incarcerated female youth?

1.6.3 Is there a significant relationship between resilience and coping strategies among incarcerated female youth?

- a) Is there a significant relationship between resilience and emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- b) Is there a significant relationship between resilience and emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth?



- c) Is there a significant relationship between resilience and problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- d) Is there a significant relationship between resilience and problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth?

1.6.4 Do stressful life events significantly predict coping strategies among incarcerated female youth?

- a) Do stressful life events significantly predict emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- b) Do stressful life events significantly predict emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- c) Do stressful life events significantly predict problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- d) Do stressful life events significantly predict problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth?

1.6.5 Does resilience significantly predict coping strategies among incarcerated female youth?

- a) Does resilience significantly predict emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- b) Does resilience significantly predict emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- c) Does resilience significantly predict problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- d) Does resilience significantly predict problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth?





1.6.6 Does resilience mediate the relationship between stressful life events and coping strategies among incarcerated female youth?

- a) Does resilience mediate the relationship between stressful life events and emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- b) Does resilience mediate the relationship between stressful life events and emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- c) Does resilience mediate the relationship between stressful life events and problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth?
- d) Does resilience mediate the relationship between stressful life events and problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth?



1.6.7 Are there significant differences in coping strategies based on demographic profiles among incarcerated female youth?

1.7 Research Hypothesis

The hypotheses that had been formed are as below:

1.7.1 H_0 - There is a significant relationship between stressful life events and coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

- a) H_0 - There is a significant relationship between stressful life events and emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.





- b) H_0 - There is a significant relationship between stressful life events and emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- c) H_0 - There is a significant relationship between stressful life events and problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- d) H_0 - There is a significant relationship between stressful life events and problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.

1.7.2 H_0 – There is a significant relationship between stressful life events and resilience among incarcerated female youth.

1.7.3 H_0 - There is a significant relationship between resilience and coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.



- a) H_0 - There is a significant relationship between resilience and emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- b) H_0 - There is a significant relationship between resilience and emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- c) H_0 - There is a significant relationship between resilience and problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- d) H_0 - There is a significant relationship between resilience and problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.

1.7.4 H_0 – Stressful life events significantly predict coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

- a) H_0 - Stressful life events significantly predict emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.





- b) H_0 - Stressful life events significantly predict emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- c) H_0 - Stressful life events significantly predict problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- d) H_0 - Stressful life events significantly predict problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.

1.7.5 H_0 – Resilience significantly predicts coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

- a) H_0 - Resilience significantly predicts emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- b) H_0 - Resilience significantly predicts emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- c) H_0 - Resilience significantly predicts problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- d) H_0 - Resilience significantly predicts problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.

1.7.6 H_0 – Resilience mediates the relationship between stressful life events and coping strategies among incarcerated female youth.

- a) H_0 - Resilience mediates the relationship between stressful life events and emotion-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- b) H_0 - Resilience mediates the relationship between stressful life events and emotion-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.



- c) H_0 - Resilience mediates the relationship between stressful life events and problem-focused engagement coping among incarcerated female youth.
- d) H_0 - Resilience mediates the relationship between stressful life events and problem-focused disengagement coping among incarcerated female youth.

1.7.7 H_0 - There are significant differences in coping strategies among incarcerated female youth based on their demographic profiles.

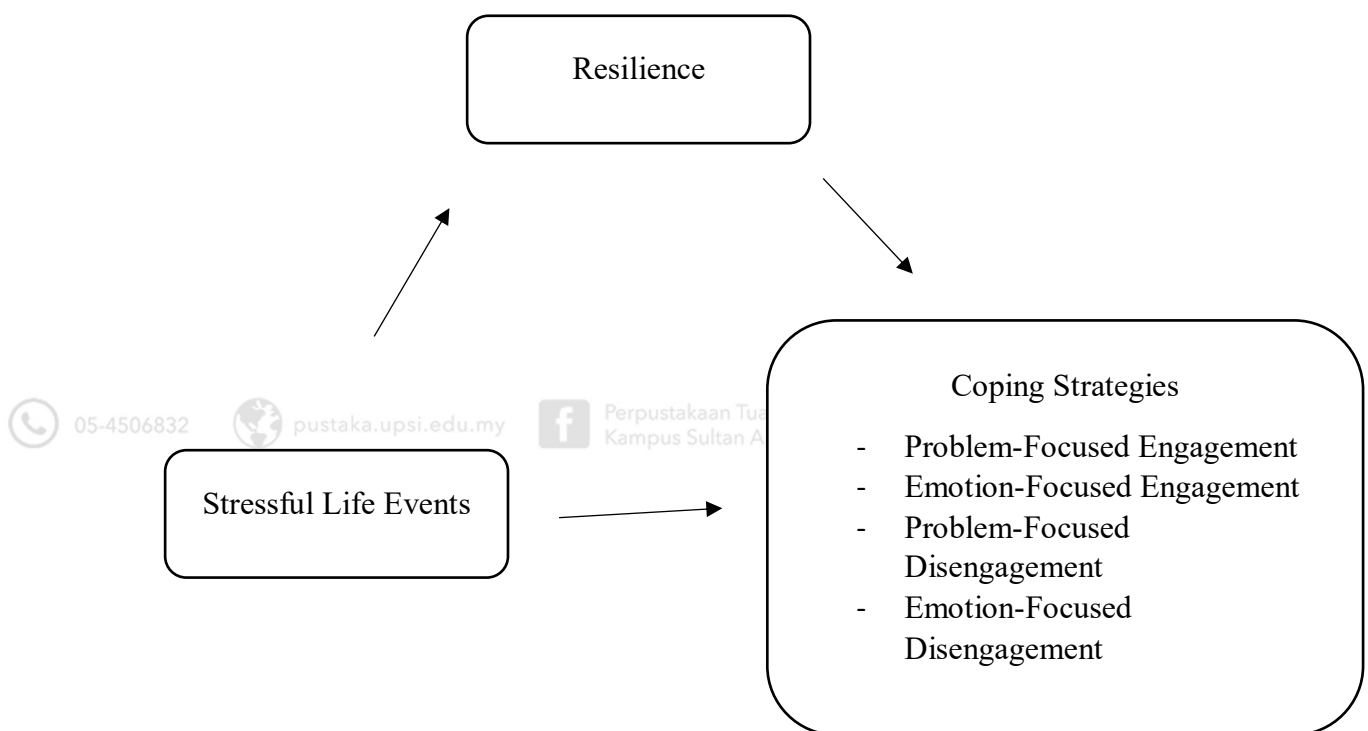
1.8 Conceptual Framework

Based on Figure 1, the conceptual framework of this study proposes that resilience functions as a mediating variable in the relationship between life events and coping strategies among incarcerated female youth. Exposure to significant life events, particularly adverse or stressful experiences, may influence an individual's psychological resources and adaptive capacities. One important psychological resource is resilience, which reflects the ability to adapt, recover, and maintain psychological functioning in the face of adversity. In this study, stressful life events are expected to influence the level of resilience among incarcerated female youth. In turn, resilience is anticipated to shape how individuals respond to stressful situations by influencing the type of coping strategies they adopt. Individuals with higher levels of resilience are more likely to employ adaptive coping strategies, whereas lower levels of resilience may be associated with maladaptive coping responses. Therefore, resilience is

conceptualized as an intervening mechanism that explains how exposure to stressful life events affects coping strategies.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



1.9 Significance of Research

This research holds substantial significance both theoretically and practically, particularly within the fields of psychology, social and public health. Incarcerated female individuals especially female youth represent a highly vulnerable population as they often bear histories of varied life events that might be perceived as disruptive or



pleasant. During incarceration, the environment of the correctional institutes may have limited access to emotional support system and inadequate to support mental and physical well-being of the incarcerated female youth. Understanding how life events influence coping strategies is critical to address the mental and physical health needs of the incarcerated female youth which at the same time supporting their rehabilitation.

Other than that, this study also contributes to the growth of literature on coping and resilience by focusing on a population that has been marginalized for a long time in psychological research. By examining the role of resilience as a protective factor, the research adds valuable insights on how internal psychological factors can mitigate the negative effects of past life events. Following this study, potential for incarcerated female individuals especially female youth to developed more adaptive coping strategies increased as the result of this study can provide the knowledge to create a targeted interventions focusing on fostering resilience, promoting psychological well-being and reducing recidivism among incarcerated female youth.

The findings of this study also can be used by professionals in mental health field and correctional institutions to develop programs that suitable and potentially promotes coping strategies and resilience among incarcerated female youth. Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to more humane and effective approaches on rehabilitation and reintegration program for incarcerated female youth in order for both individuals and society benefits.



1.10 Conceptual and Operational Definition

Conceptual definitions refer to definitions that are grounded in theory and describe a concept by explaining its underlying meaning using clear language, ideas or constructs. The purpose of this definition is to provide a precise and comprehensive understanding of the term within a specific academic or theoretical context (Sequeira, 2014). While operational definitions represent the transformation of abstract or conceptual ideas into specific, measurable elements. This allows the process to translate theoretical constructs into practical terms that can be tested, measured and analyzed empirically (Lammers & Badia, 2013).

1.10.1 Stressful Life Events

Conceptually, major life events are broadly understood as significant changes or disruptions in an individual's environment. These events typically carry a certain level of emotional or psychological impact which often poses as a challenge, stress or demands that require individuals to adapt. Other than that, life events may evoke feelings of threat, discomfort or instability. This occurrence is often linked to shifts in behavior or mental well-being (Monroe & Slavich, 2019).

According to Lunskey et al. (2014), life events are typically characterized as brief and impactful experiences that can significantly influence an individual's psychological state. These events often carry substantial emotional weight and possibly disrupt a person's sense of stability or well-being. Stressful life events are closely linked to the



onset or worsening of mental health issues including anxiety, depression and other psychological disorders. Furthermore, stressful life events also have been associated with behavioral problems and in more severe cases, may contribute to the need for psychiatric intervention or hospitalization (Hastings, Hatto, Taylor & Maddison, 2004; Owen et al., 2004).

The concept of life events also referred to as the experiences that arise as a natural part of human development and the unfolding of everyday life. The events that happen can range in intensity and impact. As well as from routine or expected changes to sudden and disruptive occurrences. Stressful life events are not limited to events such as marriage, job loss or death as they may include everyday hassles like interpersonal conflicts or extreme and traumatic incidents that disturb an individual's environment. Regardless of the nature of the events, it can significantly affect an individual's psychological, emotional and behavioral functioning (Daruna, 2012).

According to Romas and Sharma (2017), a stressful life event is typically defined as a distinct and identifiable occurrence that can be clearly observed and objectively reported. These events are considered measurable because they usually have a specific onset and can be recognized by different people or in different situations. Usually, these events required some degree of psychological and social adjustment. This adjustment might involve adapting emotionally, altering behaviors or shifting roles and routines in response to the changes. Whether the event is perceived as positive or negative, it creates a level of stress that challenges the individual's capacity to cope and maintain psychological equilibrium.

Based on this research, stressful life events variable was measured using Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS). The scale was developed by Holmes and Rahe





(1967) with a list of 43 life events of varying severity. The SRRS is a self-report tool that assigns specific scores to different life events. The score obtained by the individual reflects how much adjustment a person might need to make after experiencing each event, whether the event is positive or negative.

1.10.2 Coping Strategies

The concept of coping refers to thoughts and behavior mobilized to deal with internal or external stressful situations (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Different from defense mechanisms which are automatic and unconscious, coping involves conscious and deliberate efforts to reduce or manage stress (Algorani & Gupta, 2023). Individuals that face stressful situation has different ways to respond to the situation known as coping styles. Coping styles are relatively stable personality traits that influence how a person typically thinks, feels and behaves when dealing with stress (Boer & Buwalda, 2017).

Coping refers to the thoughts and actions people use to handle the demands of stressful situations whether those demands are internal or external. Earlier theories viewed coping in a more structured way where it was strictly defined as positive or adaptive response and contrasting it with negative or maladaptive reactions (Han, 1969; Menninger, 1963). The understanding of coping broadened as it includes a wider range of both mental and behavioral responses to stress. A stressful situation depends on how the individual evaluates or interprets it and the responses are not automatically labeled as adaptive or maladaptive. Instead, the effectiveness of coping strategy depends on the individual and the situation (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005; Stephenson & DeLongis, 2020).





Conceptually, coping involves taking action to resolve or reduce the impact of a difficult or challenging situation. There are various classifications of coping strategies (Ray, Lindop, & Gibson, 1982). Coping strategies may be intentional and planned where an individual consciously chooses how to respond. It also may occur unconsciously without the individual being fully aware of their behavior. Most of the times, the feelings, needs or goals driving a coping response are not entirely conscious and causes the individual to not fully recognize or be able to explain why they are reacting a certain way.

Other than that, coping strategies also refer to the helpful or harmful thoughts, behaviour and action an individual uses to handle stress. Each decision made in response to stress carries potential advantages and drawbacks which can impact mental well-being (Baqtayan & Mai, 2012; Scribner, Sasso & Puchner, 2020). Coping is the ongoing process of adjusting one's thought and behaviour to manage both internal and external challenges that arise during stressful experience. The coping strategies used by the individual depend on the intensity of the situation and personal attitude towards addressing the situation. Coping strategies aim to either alter the situation that induced stress or to regulate individual response toward stresses.

The coping strategies variable in this research was measured using the Coping Strategies Inventory Short Form (CSI-SF) developed and modified by Addison et al. in 2007. The CSI-SF consists of 16 items scale adapted from the original 78-item Coping Strategies Inventories (CSI). The CSI-SF measures the coping strategies among incarcerated women by incorporating four subscales from the original scale which include problem-focused engagement, problem-focused disengagement, emotion-focused engagement and emotion-focused disengagement. The score obtained by





participants showed the coping strategies adopted by them when facing stressful situation.

1.10.3 Resilience

Conceptually, resilience refers to the process in which individuals recover from adversity and continue with their lives. It is a dynamic and ongoing process that is strongly shaped by the presence of protective factors which is a specific skills or strengths that support positive adaptation during difficult times (Dyer & McGuinness, 1996). The concept of resilience leads towards the understanding on how an individual might respond with symptoms to a minor event even though another individual might not experience distress even when facing major disrupting event. Resilience carries the hopeful notion that positive outcomes can emerge from hardship or adversity.

Fundamentally, resilience refers to ability to positively adapt and maintain (or restore) mental well-being despite experiencing adversity. Resilience is an interactive process that reflects an individual's capacity to resist the negative effects of challenging environments or to successfully cope with and recover from stress and hardship (Herrman, et al., 2011). The concept of resilience does not imply the lack of distress or suffering, instead, it reflects a capacity to manage, endure and grow through difficulty. Often, this quality results in personal development and renewed sense of purpose.

Resilience is also often described as the ability to “bounce back” from adversity. However, this concept involves much more than simply coping well with challenges (Yang, 2012). Resilience goes beyond ordinary recovery where it represents a transformative process in which individuals not only return to their previous state but



often grow stronger or reach a higher level of functioning than before the hardship (Mancini & Bonanno, 2006).

Other than that, resilience is also often define as flexible and adaptive process where individuals recover their previous level of psychosocial functioning after experiencing a period of dysfunction caused by psychological trauma or stress (Grygorenko & Naydonova, 2023). While there is ongoing debate about whether resilience should be viewed as a trait or a process, there is general agreement that the concept of resilience refers to the capacity of individuals, families and communities to cope with, adapt to and function effectively despite facing psychological, social, cultural or physical challenges.

Based on this research, the resilience variable was measured using Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) that was developed by Kathryn M. Connor and Jonathan R. T. Davidson in 2003. The resiliency of research population was measured based on five key constructs where the first construct reflects personal competence, high standards and tenacity. The second construct assesses trust in one's instincts, tolerance of negative emotions and the ability to grow stronger through stress. Third construct involves positive acceptance of change and the presence of secure relationship. The fourth construct addresses a sense of control while the fifth captures spirituality as a source of strength and resilience. Higher total score obtained from the scale indicates higher resilience among incarcerated women.



1.11 Limitations

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations must be acknowledged from this study. Firstly, the data were collected through self-administered questionnaire, which may be exposed to bias or inaccurate recall particularly when reporting sensitive life events or involving emotional responses. Participants may have underreported or overreported their experience to align with perceived expectation.

Furthermore, this study was conducted within specific correctional institutes population within Selangor, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other incarcerated population from different states, groups or correctional systems. Based on this study, some cultural or contextual differences in coping behaviour or resilience interpretation may not be fully captured by the standardized scale although efforts were made to adapt the instruments for use in the study context.

Lastly, some participants may have faced challenges during the administration of the instruments as they might encounter difficulty to understand the items in the instrument due to limited literacy levels. Although efforts were made to adjust the instruments according to the level of literacy of the population, this situation still could affect the reliability of the responses collected.





1.12 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter elaborated on the research background about the life events, coping strategies and resilience of the incarcerated female youth. Other than that, the problem statement, conceptual and operational definition for the variables of this research were also discussed. Researcher also stated the purpose and limitation of this research.

