



Coping Under Pressure: A Qualitative Analysis of Resilience Development among Chinese University Students in Family-School Contexts

Fu Chen

Shanghai Theatre Academy, Shanghai, China

E-mail: 676425988@QQ.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7800-4574>

Received 07/03/2025

Revised 04/04/2025

Accepted 13/05/2025

Abstract

Background and Aim: Resilience and coping strategies are essential for Chinese university students navigating academic pressures and personal challenges. This study aims to explore how family-school partnerships can foster resilience through problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective interventions to support student mental health.

Materials and Methods: This qualitative study employed in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to gather data from 30 Chinese university students across diverse regions. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of varying socioeconomic backgrounds and academic levels. The interviews focused on students' experiences with family-school interactions, coping mechanisms, and perceived barriers to mental health support.

Results: The findings revealed that cultural values such as filial piety and mental health stigma significantly influence students' coping behaviors. Regional disparities in resource availability further complicate access to mental health services. Problem-focused coping strategies were more prevalent among students with strong family-school support, while emotion-focused strategies were common in environments with higher stigma and fewer resources.

Conclusion: Enhancing family-school partnerships is vital for improving resilience and coping strategies among Chinese university students. Recommendations include increasing mental health literacy, reducing stigma, and addressing regional disparities in resource allocation. Future research should explore the long-term impact of these interventions on student well-being.

Keywords: Resilience Development; Coping Strategies; Family-school Partnerships; Chinese University Students; Mental Health; Higher Education

Introduction

College students represent a high-risk group for health and psychological problems globally. As they navigate the transition toward adulthood, they encounter multiple stressors including academic demands, career uncertainties, financial pressures, and relationship challenges (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Recent studies indicate that this vulnerability has intensified in the post-pandemic era, with Zhang et al. (2023) reporting significantly elevated levels of anxiety and depression among university students compared to pre-pandemic baselines.

In China specifically, the mental health landscape for university students presents particular concerns. The rapid socioeconomic transformation, combined with intensified academic competition, has created unprecedented psychological pressures. Liu et al. (2024) found that approximately 26.3% of Chinese university students reported moderate to severe depressive symptoms, while 31.7% experienced anxiety symptoms above clinical thresholds. These figures represent a marked increase from previous studies, highlighting the growing urgency of this issue (Huang & Chen, 2023).

The psychological challenges facing Chinese university students have highlighted the critical importance of resilience as a protective factor. Resilience, defined as the psychological adaptability of individuals in the face of adversity (Masten, 2001), has emerged as a key construct in understanding how students navigate stressors successfully. Contemporary research by Wang et al. (2024) demonstrates that resilient students not only experience fewer mental health problems but also perform better academically and report higher life satisfaction.

The development of resilience is increasingly understood as a dynamic, contextual process rather than an innate trait (Rutter, 1987). Recent theoretical frameworks emphasize that resilience develops through complex interactions between individual characteristics and environmental support systems (Xu & Zhang, 2023). This ecological perspective is particularly relevant in the Chinese context, where the





cultural emphasis on interpersonal harmony and collective support creates unique pathways for resilience development.

In Chinese society, family and educational institutions function as the primary support systems for students' psychological development, with distinctive cultural characteristics shaping these relationships. Contemporary research by Li and Yang (2023) highlights how the Confucian values of filial piety (xiao) and respect for education (zun shi zhong jiao) continue to influence family-school dynamics, creating both resources and challenges for student resilience. Families typically provide emotional security and identity affirmation, while educational institutions offer academic resources, structured guidance, and increasingly, formalized psychological support services (Chen et al., 2024).

However, the specific mechanisms through which family-school partnerships promote mental health and resilience among Chinese university students remain underexplored. As Yang et al. (2024) note, there is a pressing need to understand how these partnerships function in contemporary Chinese higher education, particularly as traditional support structures evolve in response to rapid social change and emerging mental health awareness. This knowledge gap is particularly significant given recent policy initiatives by China's Ministry of Education to strengthen psychological support services in universities nationwide (Ministry of Education, 2023).

A fundamental question in resilience research concerns how the coping strategies employed by individuals in response to stress influence their psychological adaptation. The theoretical distinction between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, first proposed by Folkman and Lazarus (1980), provides a valuable framework for understanding these processes. Recent meta-analyses by Wei et al. (2023) confirm that this dichotomy remains conceptually robust across cultural contexts, though the specific manifestations and effectiveness of these strategies may vary significantly.

Problem-focused strategies involve direct attempts to address or eliminate the source of stress through actions such as structured planning, information seeking, and resource mobilization. In contrast, emotion-focused strategies aim to regulate the emotional distress associated with stressors through approaches such as cognitive reframing, emotional expression, and social support seeking (Compas et al., 2001). Contemporary research by Zhang and Liu (2024) demonstrates that both strategy types can be adaptive depending on the nature of the stressor, the resources available, and the cultural context.

Although both strategy types have inherent strengths and limitations, their relative effectiveness and prevalence vary significantly across cultural and social environments. This variation is particularly evident in the Chinese context, where traditional cultural values interact with rapid social transformation to shape coping preferences and outcomes. Recent work by Huang et al. (2024) found that Chinese university students from collectivist family backgrounds demonstrate distinctive patterns of integrated coping, often blending problem-focused approaches with emotion-focused strategies that maintain family harmony.

In contemporary China, family and school support significantly influence students' selection and implementation of coping strategies. Traditional cultural emphasis on collectivism, harmony, and interdependence may predispose students toward emotion-focused strategies that preserve relationship quality and social standing (Wang et al., 2012). The concept of "face" (mianzi) continues to influence help-seeking behaviors, with recent research by Chen and Zhang (2023) documenting how concerns about social stigma often deter students from accessing formal mental health services.

Simultaneously, China's educational institutions have significantly expanded their mental health support infrastructure in recent years. The implementation of the "Comprehensive Plan for Student Mental Health Education" (Ministry of Education, 2023) has established new resources for problem-focused coping, including psychological counseling centers, peer support programs, and crisis intervention systems. However, Wu et al. (2024) found significant disparities in resource availability between urban and rural institutions, with implications for students' coping options.

Understanding how these familial and educational factors interact to shape Chinese university students' coping strategies represents a critical research priority. The present study aims to investigate the role of family-school partnerships in fostering resilience among Chinese university students, focusing





specifically on their coping strategies. To that end, it addresses the following questions:

- 1) How do family-school partnerships contribute to the development of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies?
- 2) What cultural and regional factors influence the effectiveness of these strategies?
- 3) What actionable insights can be drawn to improve mental health support in higher education?

Research significance

Studying the development of resilience and coping strategies among university students carries significant theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, this research advances our understanding of the complex interactions between individual psychological processes and social support systems, particularly within culturally specific contexts (Ungar, 2011). As Chen & Zhang (2023) argue, contemporary models of resilience must account for the cultural embeddedness of coping processes to achieve cross-cultural validity.

From an applied perspective, this research directly informs the development of evidence-based interventions to support student mental health in higher education settings. The prevalence of psychological distress among university students represents not only a significant public health concern but also has implications for academic achievement, retention rates, and career development. Wang and Li (2024) estimate that untreated mental health issues cost the Chinese higher education system approximately ¥27 billion annually through increased dropout rates, reduced academic performance, and subsequent career limitations.

In the Chinese context specifically, understanding the role of family and educational institutions in fostering resilience carries particular importance. These institutions represent the primary sources of psychological support for students, functioning within a cultural framework that traditionally emphasizes collective responsibility for wellbeing. Recent policy initiatives by the Chinese government have explicitly targeted the strengthening of these support systems, with the National Student Mental Health Action Plan (2023-2030) emphasizing the integration of family and university resources (State Council, 2023).

Despite the recognized importance of family-school partnerships in supporting student wellbeing, significant gaps remain in our understanding of how these partnerships function at the university level. While extensive research has examined family-school collaboration in primary and secondary education, Liu and Zhou (2024) note that these dynamics remain underexplored in higher education contexts, where students' increased autonomy and geographical distance from families create distinct challenges and opportunities.

This research addresses these gaps by providing a culturally grounded analysis of how family-school partnerships shape resilience and coping strategies among Chinese university students. By incorporating the perspectives of students, parents, and educators, it offers a multi-dimensional understanding of these dynamics. The findings contribute to theoretical frameworks such as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Folkman and Lazarus's coping model, while informing the development of contextually appropriate interventions to support student mental health in Chinese higher education.

Objectives

1. To investigate the specific mechanisms through which family-school partnerships influence the development of resilience among university students.
To analyze how families and schools provide emotional and academic support to foster resilience in university students.
To identify the roles and interactions of families and schools in helping students cope with academic and personal challenges.
2. To compare the roles of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies in the development of resilience.





To evaluate the effectiveness of problem-focused strategies (such as making plans and seeking resources) and emotion-focused strategies (such as emotional venting and seeking support) in coping with different types of stressors.

To explore the applicability and preferences of these strategies in different cultural and social contexts.

3. To identify cultural and regional factors influencing the choice of coping strategies among university students

To analyze how cultural values in China (such as filial piety and collectivism) affect students' choice of coping strategies.

To examine how regional disparities (such as differences in resource allocation between urban and rural areas) impact coping strategies and resilience development.

4. To propose recommendations for enhancing resilience development based on family-school partnerships

To provide specific strategies and suggestions to strengthen family-school partnerships and improve resilience among university students.

To explore how policies and practices can improve mental health support, reduce stigma around mental health, and promote overall student well-being.

5. To explore the long-term impact of family-school partnerships on resilience development.

To investigate the continuity and long-term effects of family-school partnerships during the university stage and their support for students' future career development and mental health.

To provide a multidisciplinary perspective, integrating theories from education, psychology, and sociology, to lay the groundwork for future research.

Literature Review

Resilience Theory and College Students' Psychological Development

Resilience research originated in the field of developmental psychology, with early studies focusing primarily on children's adaptation to adverse environments (Masten, 2001). Masten conceptualized resilience not as an exceptional quality possessed by few individuals, but as "ordinary magic" developed through protective factors present in everyday contexts. Contemporary resilience theory has expanded significantly, with recent meta-analyses by Wu and Chen (2023) identifying three core dimensions of resilience: emotional regulation capacity, problem-solving ability, and social adaptability.

In the past decade, resilience research has increasingly focused on university student populations, recognizing this developmental period as a critical transition characterized by multiple, simultaneous challenges. Huang et al. (2023) note that university students must navigate not only academic demands but also identity formation, financial independence, and changing relationship dynamics, all while separated from established support networks. This challenging transition is particularly pronounced in Chinese society, where university attendance often involves significant geographical relocation and adaptation to highly competitive academic environments (Li & Zhao, 2024).

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that resilience functions as a protective factor for university students' mental health and academic success. A longitudinal study by Yang et al. (2023) found that students with higher resilience scores demonstrated faster recovery from academic setbacks, greater willingness to seek appropriate support, and better overall psychological adjustment. Recent neurobiological research has further identified physiological markers of resilience, with Wang and Chen (2024) documenting differences in stress hormone regulation and neurological activation patterns between high-resilience and low-resilience students.

Within the Chinese context specifically, recent research has begun to explore the culturally distinctive aspects of resilience development. For example, comprehensive studies by Lin et al. (2023) found that perceived family support and social recognition function as particularly powerful protective factors within collectivist cultural frameworks, often outweighing individual psychological characteristics





in predicting resilience outcomes. However, these same cultural contexts can also generate unique stressors, with excessive academic expectations and family pressure potentially undermining the development of autonomous coping capacities (Zhou et al., 2024).

Recent theoretical advances have moved toward integrative models that recognize resilience as a dynamic, multidimensional construct shaped by complex interactions between individual, relational, and sociocultural factors. The socioecological model proposed by Liu and Wang (2023) conceptualizes resilience as emerging from reciprocal interactions between individual psychological resources, interpersonal support systems, institutional structures, and broader cultural contexts. This integrative framework is particularly valuable for understanding resilience development in Chinese university students, whose experiences are shaped by distinctive cultural values, educational systems, and family dynamics.

Coping mechanism: problem-focused and emotion-focused

The theoretical distinction between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, first proposed by Folkman and Lazarus (1980), provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals respond to stressors. Problem-focused strategies aim to directly address the source of stress through planning, information gathering, and active problem-solving, while emotion-focused strategies regulate the emotional impact of stressors through approaches such as emotional expression, cognitive reappraisal, and support seeking. Recent refinements to this model by Chen and Yang (2023) suggest that these categories represent not discrete types but complementary dimensions of coping that often operate simultaneously.

Problem-focused coping strategies are generally considered most effective for addressing controllable stressors where direct action can meaningfully impact outcomes. In academic contexts, recent research by Zhang et al. (2024) demonstrates that structured time management, goal setting, and resource mobilization significantly reduce academic stress and improve performance outcomes for university students. However, these strategies require specific skills and resources, including self-regulation abilities, executive functioning, and access to appropriate support systems (Li & Wu, 2023).

Emotion-focused strategies, by contrast, are typically more effective for managing uncontrollable stressors or the emotional components of challenging situations. These approaches include cognitive reframing, mindfulness practices, emotional expression, and seeking emotional support. While these strategies can effectively reduce immediate psychological distress, longitudinal research by Wang et al. (2023) indicates that excessive reliance on certain emotion-focused approaches, particularly avoidance or denial, may be associated with poorer long-term outcomes if used exclusively.

Cross-cultural research reveals significant variation in the prevalence and effectiveness of different coping strategies across cultural contexts. A comprehensive meta-analysis by Huang and Chen (2024) found that individuals from collectivist cultural backgrounds, including Chinese populations, demonstrate greater preference for and benefit from socially-oriented emotion-focused strategies such as seeking family support. By contrast, individuals from more individualistic cultural contexts typically demonstrate stronger orientation toward independent problem-solving approaches. These patterns reflect broader cultural differences in concepts of selfhood, interpersonal responsibilities, and help-seeking norms.

In the Chinese context specifically, family and educational institutions significantly influence students' coping strategy selection and implementation. Chen et al (2024) found that traditional parenting styles emphasizing interdependence may promote emotion-focused coping centered on relationship maintenance, while potentially discouraging independent problem-solving in certain contexts. Similarly, the hierarchical structure of Chinese educational institutions may influence students' help-seeking behaviors, with formal authority figures perceived as either valuable resources or potential sources of evaluation-related stress (Liu et al., 2024).

Recent research has increasingly emphasized the importance of coping flexibility—the ability to select and implement context-appropriate strategies from a diverse repertoire. A longitudinal study by Zhou and Wu (2023) found that Chinese university students with greater coping flexibility demonstrated





better psychological adaptation across diverse stressors compared to those with more rigid coping patterns. This flexibility appears particularly important during the university transition, when students encounter novel challenges requiring diverse coping approaches (Chen et al., 2024).

The concept and role of home-school partnership

Home-school partnership represents a critical mechanism supporting students' psychological development and academic achievement, with significant implications for resilience building (Epstein, 2001). Contemporary conceptualizations by Liu and Chen (2023) define effective partnerships as collaborative relationships characterized by shared responsibility, bidirectional communication, mutual respect, and common goals regarding student development. These partnerships operate through multiple channels, including formal organizational structures, informal communications, and technology-mediated interactions.

In the Chinese context, home-school partnerships demonstrate distinctive characteristics shaped by cultural traditions and contemporary educational structures. Recent research by Wang et al. (2024) documents how Confucian values continue to influence these relationships, with parents assuming primary responsibility for character development (de) while recognizing teachers' authority in academic domains. This traditional division has evolved in contemporary contexts, with Yang and Zhao (2023) noting increased parental involvement in academic matters and growing recognition of schools' role in supporting psychological wellbeing.

The rapid expansion of China's higher education system has introduced new dynamics in family-school partnerships at the university level. While parents have traditionally maintained significant involvement in their children's education, geographical distance and university autonomy create distinctive challenges for partnership maintenance. Recent research by Chen & Zhang (2023) documents the growing importance of technology-mediated communication, with digital platforms such as WeChat enabling more continuous family involvement despite physical separation.

Recent studies identify several mechanisms through which home-school partnerships contribute to resilience development in Chinese contexts. First, these partnerships provide comprehensive emotional support, with families offering psychological security and universities fostering institutional belonging (Wei et al., 2024). Second, they enable resource integration, combining family social capital with institutional academic and psychological resources to address diverse challenges (Li et al., 2023). Third, they help bridge educational disparities, with partnerships proving particularly beneficial for students from disadvantaged backgrounds where institutional resources can complement limited family support (Huang, 2024).

Despite their benefits, home-school partnerships in Chinese universities face several challenges. Research by Zhou and Chen (2023) identifies communication barriers arising from geographical distance, differing educational expectations, and insufficient institutional structures for family engagement. Additionally, Yang et al. (2024) document how changing family structures, including increased nuclear families and reduced sibling numbers, impact traditional support patterns, necessitating new partnership models adapted to contemporary social realities.

The effectiveness of home-school partnerships appears particularly significant for first-generation university students and those from rural backgrounds. Recent longitudinal research by Li and Wang (2023) found that structured family-university collaboration significantly improved retention rates, psychological adjustment, and academic performance for these vulnerable populations. These findings highlight the potential of strengthened partnerships to address educational disparities and promote more equitable outcomes in Chinese higher education.

Research on resilience in a cross-cultural context

Cross-cultural research consistently demonstrates that resilience development is significantly influenced by cultural values, social structures, and educational systems. Recent comparative studies by Zhang et al. (2023) highlight how Western cultural contexts typically emphasize individual autonomy, self-efficacy, and independent problem-solving—values strongly associated with problem-focused coping





strategies. By contrast, Eastern cultural traditions, including those in China, place greater emphasis on interpersonal harmony, collective support, and relational wellbeing, potentially facilitating different resilience pathways (Kim et al., 2008).

In contemporary China, ongoing social transformation and educational reform have significantly impacted resilience development processes. Recent research by Wang and Zhou (2024) documents how demographic policies, particularly the two-child policy shift and urbanization trends, have altered family support structures available to university students. Simultaneously, expanded higher education access has intensified competition for elite opportunities, creating distinctive stressors for the current generation of Chinese university students (Li et al., 2023).

Cultural factors significantly influence help-seeking behaviors central to effective coping. A comprehensive study by Chen et al. (2024) found that Chinese university students demonstrate distinctive patterns when facing academic challenges, typically seeking family support before professional assistance and emphasizing relationship-centered coping approaches. These patterns reflect broader cultural values regarding family obligations, interpersonal harmony, and the importance of education as a collective rather than individual achievement (Wang et al., 2012).

The collectivist orientation of Chinese society profoundly shapes students' coping behaviors and resilience development. Recent research by Liu and Yang (2023) demonstrates how filial piety (xiao) continues to function as a powerful motivator for academic perseverance while simultaneously creating distinctive psychological pressures. Students frequently reported striving for academic success primarily to honor family sacrifices rather than for personal fulfillment, creating complex motivational dynamics with both protective and risk elements.

Mental health stigma represents a significant barrier to resilience development in Chinese contexts. Recent surveys by Zhang et al. (2024) indicate that despite growing awareness, approximately 67% of Chinese university students express reluctance to seek professional psychological support due to concerns about social judgment. This stigma leads many students to rely exclusively on informal support networks, potentially limiting access to effective interventions for more severe psychological difficulties (Liang et al., 2021).

Regional disparities further complicate resilience development in China's geographically and economically diverse landscape. Contemporary research by Wu and Chen (2023) documents significant differences in mental health resource availability between urban and rural institutions, with top-tier urban universities offering comprehensive support services while rural institutions often lack basic psychological counseling capacity. These disparities reinforce broader socioeconomic inequalities, with students from disadvantaged backgrounds facing compounded challenges to resilience development (Zhou et al., 2020).

Literature review summary and research gaps

The existing literature provides valuable insights into resilience development and coping mechanisms among Chinese university students, while highlighting several important knowledge gaps that the present study addresses. First, while theoretical models suggest that home-school partnerships positively impact resilience development, empirical research examining the specific mechanisms of this influence remains limited, particularly in higher education contexts (Epstein, 2001). Recent reviews by Wang and Li (2023) note that most research has focused on primary and secondary education, with limited investigation of how these partnerships function during the critical university transition.

Second, significant questions remain regarding the cultural adaptability of traditional coping models in the Chinese context. While the problem-focused and emotion-focused distinction provides a useful conceptual framework, Zhang et al. (2024) argue that these categories may manifest differently in collectivist cultural environments where the boundaries between individual and collective coping are less distinct. The applicability and effectiveness of these strategies across different regional and socioeconomic contexts within China require further investigation.

Third, there is a notable lack of qualitative, in-depth research examining the lived experiences of students, families, and educators navigating these dynamics. Recent methodological critiques by Chen and





Yang (2023) highlight the limitations of purely quantitative approaches in capturing the complex, culturally embedded nature of resilience development. They advocate for mixed-methods and qualitative approaches that can illuminate the subjective meanings and processes underlying observable coping behaviors.

The present study addresses these gaps through a qualitative exploration of how home-school partnerships influence resilience development among Chinese university students. By focusing specifically on the interplay between family-school collaboration and coping strategy selection, it provides insights into the underlying mechanisms connecting these domains. The inclusion of participants from diverse regional and socioeconomic backgrounds enables examination of how these processes vary across different contexts within China, contributing to more nuanced theoretical models and contextually appropriate interventions.

Conceptual Framework

Based on our literature review, we have developed a conceptual framework that guides this research. This framework integrates ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the transactional model of stress and coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985), and culturally-specific elements of Chinese family and educational dynamics.

The framework positions family-school partnerships as a crucial mesosystem that influences resilience through several pathways. First, these partnerships provide complementary resources that expand students' coping options, with families offering emotional security and identity affirmation while educational institutions provide structured support and technical resources. Second, they shape coping strategy selection and implementation through modeling, guidance, and feedback processes. Third, they moderate the impact of contextual stressors, potentially buffering students from challenges arising from socioeconomic circumstances, academic pressures, or cultural transitions.

This conceptual model guides our research questions, methodological approach, and analytical strategy, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding the complex interrelationships between family-school partnerships, coping processes, and resilience outcomes in Chinese university students.

Methodology

This section outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical framework employed to investigate how family-school partnerships influence Chinese university students' resilience development and the roles of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. A qualitative research approach was chosen to capture the

nuanced experiences of students, educators, and parents within the sociocultural context of China.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory design, which is suitable for understanding complex phenomena within specific cultural and social settings (Creswell, 2013). A case study approach is utilized to provide in-depth insights into the interactions between family-school partnerships and coping strategies. The case study design allows for the detailed examination of individual experiences while situating them within broader patterns (Yin, 2018).

The study focuses on three key objectives:

1. To identify how family-school partnerships contribute to the resilience development of Chinese university students.
2. To compare the roles of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies in this process.
3. To explore the sociocultural factors shaping these mechanisms.

Research Setting and Participants

1. Setting: The research was conducted in two universities located in different provinces in China: one in an economically developed region (Jiangsu University in Jiangsu Province) and one in a less-developed region (Northwest Normal University in Gansu Province). This





geographical diversity helps capture variations in family-school collaboration and resilience-building efforts. The research took place between September 2024 and January 2025, allowing for data collection across a full academic semester.

2. Participants: Participant selection employed a purposive sampling approach with maximum variation strategy to ensure diverse representation across key demographic variables. Initial recruitment occurred through university counseling centers, with subsequent snowball sampling to identify additional participants. Inclusion criteria required that student participants (1) were currently enrolled full-time, (2) had experienced and addressed at least one significant academic or personal challenge during their university career, and (3) had some form of family-school interaction related to this challenge. Parent participants were required to have a child currently enrolled at one of the participating universities and to have engaged with university personnel regarding their child's education or wellbeing. Educator participants needed at least two years of experience working with students and families in their current institution.

2.1 Participants included:

2.1.1 Students: 20 university students (10 from each institution) were selected based on their experiences of coping with academic or personal challenges. The student sample included representation across academic years (5 freshmen, 5 sophomores, 6 juniors, 4 seniors), academic disciplines (12 from STEM fields, 8 from humanities/social sciences), and family backgrounds (8 from rural areas, 12 from urban areas; 7 first-generation university students). The gender distribution was 11 female and 9 male students, with ages ranging from 18 to 24 years.

2.1.2 Parents: 10 parents actively involved in their children's academic and personal development were interviewed. The parent sample included 6 mothers and 4 fathers, with educational backgrounds ranging from middle school completion to graduate degrees. Six parents resided in the same city as their child's university, while four lived in different provinces, maintaining primarily remote communication with the institution.

2.1.3 Educators: 6 educators (3 from each institution) who facilitate family-school partnerships were included. The educator sample included 2 academic advisors, 2 psychological counselors, and 2 administrative staff members responsible for student affairs. Their professional experience ranged from 3 to 17 years working in higher education settings.

Data Collection Methods

1. Semi-Structured Interviews, Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, parents, and educators. The interviews were designed to explore: (1) Students' experiences of challenges and their coping strategies. (2) Parents' and educators' roles in supporting students' resilience. (3) Perspectives on the effectiveness of family-school partnerships.

Interview questions included: (1) "Can you describe a challenging situation you faced recently and how you dealt with it?" (2) "What kind of support did you receive from your family and university?" (3) "How do you perceive the collaboration between families and the university in helping students cope with stress?"

All interviews were conducted by the principal researcher and a trained research assistant in Mandarin Chinese, with subsequent translation into English by certified translators. Interviews took place in private offices at the respective universities or via secure video conferencing for participants unable to attend in person. Each interview was audio-recorded with written informed consent from participants.

Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent.

2. Focus Group Discussions, two focus group discussions were conducted, one with students and one with educators, to encourage interactive dialogue and generate insights into shared experiences. The student focus group was conducted on October 12, 2024, at Jiangsu University with 8 participating students, while the educator focus group occurred on November 5, 2024, at Northwest Normal University with all 6 educator participants. The focus groups explored themes such as the perceived importance of family-school collaboration and its impact on coping strategies.





3. Document Analysis, Relevant institutional policies and programs related to family-school partnerships (e.g., parent-student counseling initiatives, academic support policies) were analyzed to provide context for the findings. Documents examined included official university mental health policies, parent communication guidelines, orientation materials, and minutes from parent-educator meetings from both institutions.

Analytical Framework

Our analytical approach was guided by the conceptual framework presented earlier, integrating ecological systems theory, stress and coping models, and cultural perspectives. This framework informed our coding structure and interpretive process while remaining open to emergent themes not anticipated in existing theoretical models.

1. Thematic Analysis: A thematic analysis approach was employed to analyze qualitative data. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data. The process included: (1) Familiarizing with the data through repeated reading of transcripts. (2) Generating initial codes to identify key themes related to resilience, coping strategies, and family-school partnerships. (3) Reviewing and refining themes to ensure they capture meaningful patterns. (4) Defining themes, such as "emotional support through family-school communication" and "pragmatic problem-solving strategies."

The coding process employed both deductive and inductive approaches. Initial coding categories derived from the conceptual framework established a priori codes for anticipated themes such as "problem-focused coping," "emotion-focused coping," and "family-school communication barriers." These were supplemented with emergent codes identified through open coding of the data, allowing unanticipated themes to be incorporated into the analytical framework.

Coding reliability was established through independent parallel coding of a subset of transcripts by two researchers, with an initial inter-coder agreement of 84%. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached, and the refined coding scheme was applied to the remaining data.

2. Cross-Case Analysis: Cross-case analysis was used to compare findings across participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds and institutions. This approach highlights variations in experiences while identifying commonalities. Systematic matrices were developed to compare key themes across different participant groups, institutional contexts, and demographic categories, facilitating identification of patterns and exceptions.

3. Cultural Lens: The analysis was guided by a cultural lens, acknowledging the unique influences of Chinese values, such as collectivism and filial piety, on family-school dynamics and coping behaviors (Hofstede, 2001). This cultural perspective was strengthened through regular consultation with Chinese scholars in educational psychology who provided contextual insights during the analytical process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the respective universities' research ethics committees (Approval numbers: JSU-2024-0723 and NWNNU-2024-0815). All participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Data were securely stored, and participants were given the option to withdraw at any stage of the research. Particular attention was given to potential power dynamics in interviews with students, with clear protocols established to ensure participants understood that their responses would have no impact on academic evaluations or university standing.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria:

1. Credibility: Triangulation of data sources (students, parents, and educators) and methods (interviews, focus groups, and document analysis). Member checking was employed with a subset of participants (n=8) to verify the accuracy of transcripts and preliminary interpretations.

2. Transferability: Rich, detailed descriptions of participants' experiences allow for the application of findings to similar contexts. Comprehensive contextual information was documented to facilitate assessment of the findings' relevance to other settings.

3. Dependability: An audit trail of research decisions and coding processes was maintained.





Detailed methodological documentation included interview protocols, coding schemes, analytical decisions, and reflexive notes.

4. Confirmability: Peer debriefing sessions were conducted to minimize researcher bias. Two independent researchers not directly involved in data collection reviewed analytical processes and interpretations to challenge assumptions and identify potential biases.

Results

This section presents the findings from the study, organized into three major themes: the role of family-school partnerships in resilience development, the comparative effectiveness of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, and the sociocultural factors influencing these dynamics. Each theme is supported by qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, with specific attention to participant identifiers and contextual details.

Family-School Partnerships and Resilience Development

1. Emotional and Academic Support Family-school partnerships play a critical role in fostering resilience by providing both emotional and academic support. Students consistently reported that regular communication between their parents and educators helped them feel supported in managing academic stress. For example, a participant from a lower-income background shared:

"When I failed a major exam, my mother spoke with my tutor, and together they came up with a plan for me to improve. Knowing they both cared made me feel stronger." (Interview with Student A, 19-year-old female from rural Gansu, first-year engineering student, October 15, 2024)

This experience was echoed by other participants from diverse backgrounds. A student from an urban middle-class family described how coordinated support helped him overcome severe test anxiety:

"My performance anxiety was getting worse with each exam. After my parents talked with my academic advisor about it, they both helped me develop strategies—my parents practiced relaxation techniques with me at home, while my advisor arranged for extended test time. It was the combination that really made the difference." (Interview with Student B, 21-year-old male from Nanjing, third-year business student, November 3, 2024)

Educators confirmed the importance of this coordinated approach, noting that parental involvement often enhanced the effectiveness of institutional support mechanisms:

"When we can align our academic support with family emotional support, we see much better outcomes. Students who have both systems working together show remarkable resilience compared to those with fragmented support." (Interview with Educator C, academic advisor with 8 years of experience at Jiangsu University, October 28, 2024)

2. Joint Problem-Solving

Family-school collaboration often facilitated joint problem-solving strategies. Parents and educators worked together to address challenges such as time management, academic difficulties, and career planning.

Several students mentioned that when their family and university worked as a team, they felt more confident in tackling challenges.

A particularly illustrative case involved a student struggling with major selection:

"I was torn between medicine and engineering, which caused me constant stress. My father and academic advisor set up a three-way video call where we discussed both my interests and my family's concerns. They helped me create a decision matrix that considered both practical factors and my personal passion. Having both perspectives helped me make a choice I feel confident about." (Interview with Student D, 20-year-old female from Lanzhou, second-year student, December 5, 2024)

Document analysis revealed that Jiangsu University had implemented a structured "Family-School Decision Partnership" program specifically designed to facilitate collaborative problem-solving around major academic decisions. Program materials emphasized the integration of family values and educational expertise:





The Family-School Decision Partnership aims to leverage the unique insights of both parents and educators in supporting students through critical academic and career decisions. By creating structured opportunities for three-way dialogue, we enable more comprehensive problem-solving than either party could provide alone." (Jiangsu University Student Affairs Office, Family Engagement Program Description, 2023)

This approach aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the importance of mesosystem interactions, such as family-school collaboration, in shaping individual development.

3. Communication Barriers

Despite its benefits, the effectiveness of family-school partnerships was sometimes hindered by communication barriers. For example, parents with limited educational backgrounds often struggled to engage meaningfully with educators, particularly in urban settings where academic expectations were higher.

A parent from rural Gansu described this challenge:

"When professors use all those technical terms, I feel lost. Sometimes I pretend to understand because I'm embarrassed to ask questions. How can I help my daughter if I don't even understand what her problems are?" (Interview with Parent E, 46-year-old father with middle school education, farmer from rural Gansu, November 18, 2024)

This communication gap was particularly pronounced at Jiangsu University, where sophisticated academic discourse created barriers for parents with limited formal education:

"We've noticed that parents from rural backgrounds or with less education often stop participating in communications after initial attempts. They feel intimidated by the academic environment and terminology. We're trying to address this through simplified communication protocols, but it remains a significant challenge." (Interview with Educator F, student affairs administrator at Jiangsu University, October 17, 2024)

Educators also noted difficulties in addressing parents' unrealistic academic expectations, which sometimes placed undue pressure on students.

One counselor described this challenge:

"Some parents, especially those who sacrificed greatly for their child's education, have expectations that simply aren't realistic. When we try to discuss a student's actual capabilities or interests, these parents can become defensive or dismissive. This creates tremendous pressure on students who feel caught between their parents' expectations and their own limitations." (Interview with Educator G, psychological counselor at Northwest Normal University, December 7, 2024)

The document analysis revealed minimal institutional policies addressing these communication barriers at Northwest Normal University, while Jiangsu University had recently implemented a "Parent Education Series" specifically designed to bridge communication gaps:

"The Parent Education Series aims to familiarize parents with university terminology, academic structures, and realistic expectations for student development. Through accessible language and practical examples, we hope to create more productive family-school partnerships across diverse educational backgrounds." (Jiangsu University Parent Outreach Program Document, 2024)

Problem-Focused vs. Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies

1. Effectiveness in Different Contexts

Problem-focused coping strategies, such as creating study schedules and seeking academic help, were perceived as more effective for long-term challenges, such as preparing for exams or improving grades. Regional differences emerged in how these strategies were implemented. At Jiangsu University (urban context), students typically described highly structured problem-focused approaches:

"When I was falling behind in calculus, I created a detailed study plan with daily practice problems. I scheduled regular meetings with my teaching assistant to review my progress, and I used the university's online diagnostic tests to identify specific areas of weakness. This systematic approach helped me improve





my grade from a C- to a B+ within one semester." (Interview with Student H, 19-year-old male from Shanghai, first-year computer science student at Jiangsu University, October 21, 2024)

In contrast, students at Northwest Normal University (less developed region) described more relational and resource-constrained problem-solving approaches:

"When I struggled with my research methods course, I couldn't access specialized tutoring like my cousins at bigger universities. Instead, I formed a study group with classmates facing similar problems. We pooled our resources, shared the few textbooks available, and taught each other. This collaborative approach worked for us despite limited institutional resources." (Interview with Student I, 22-year-old female from rural Gansu, third-year education major at Northwest Normal University, November 11, 2024)

Emotion-focused strategies, such as sharing frustrations with friends or practicing mindfulness, were more effective in managing short-term emotional distress. This supports findings by Folkman and Lazarus (1985), who argue that problem-focused coping is more beneficial for controllable stressors, whereas emotion-focused strategies are effective for managing uncontrollable stressors.

The effectiveness of emotion-focused strategies also showed contextual variation. A student from a traditional family background described:

"When I was overwhelmed by homesickness during my first semester, trying to 'solve' the problem didn't help—I couldn't change the fact that I was far from my family. What actually helped was joining a student group from my home province. We would cook traditional dishes together and share our experiences. Those emotional connections made my situation bearable even though they didn't change the underlying circumstances." (Interview with Student J, 18-year-old female from rural Jiangsu, first-year student living 500km from home, September 30, 2024)

2. Gender Differences

The data revealed notable gender differences in coping strategy preferences. Female students were more likely to use emotion-focused strategies, such as journaling or seeking social support, while male students favored problem-solving approaches.

A female student described her primary coping approach:

"When I'm stressed about exams or relationship problems, my first instinct is to call my roommate or my mother. Just talking through my feelings helps me gain perspective. I also keep a detailed journal where I process my emotions before trying to solve anything." (Interview with Student K, 20-year-old female from Nanjing, second-year psychology student, October 8, 2024)

In contrast, a male participant emphasized action-oriented coping:

"I don't see the point in just talking about problems without fixing them. When my scholarship was at risk due to low grades, I immediately made a recovery plan—extra study hours, meeting with professors, and dropping a non-essential activity. I didn't need to discuss my feelings about it; I needed to solve the actual problem." (Interview with Student L, 21-year-old male from Lanzhou, third-year engineering student, November 7, 2024)

The focus group with educators (November 5, 2024) revealed institutional awareness of these gender differences:

"We've observed that our male students often resist counseling services that seem focused on emotional expression rather than practical solutions. We've had more success engaging them through 'strategy sessions' that emphasize problem-solving while subtly incorporating emotional support." (Educator M, student affairs coordinator at Northwest Normal University)

This echoes prior research suggesting that gender socialization influences coping behaviors (Matud, 2004).

3. Cultural Influences on Strategy Selection

The collectivist nature of Chinese culture influenced the choice of coping strategies. Students often sought support from their families, emphasizing the importance of family obligations and interdependence.

For instance, one participant noted:





"My parents always remind me that our family is a team. When I face difficulties, they are there to help me figure out what to do." (Interview with Student N, 19-year-old male from a rural village near Lanzhou, first-generation university student, December 3, 2024)

The concept of family honor significantly influenced coping approaches, particularly among first-generation university students:

"When I consider dropping a difficult major, I think about how my entire extended family contributed to my education. My village held a celebration when I was admitted to university. How can I face them if I fail? This responsibility motivates me to persist through challenges rather than seeking an easier path." (Interview with Student O, 20-year-old female from rural Gansu, first-generation university student, November 15, 2024)

Parents confirmed the centrality of collective coping approaches in their support strategies:

"My son's education is not just his individual journey—it's our family's path to a better future. When he struggles, we mobilize all our resources to support him. His cousins who studied similar subjects provide tutoring, I adjust my work schedule to maintain daily video calls, and even his grandmother contributes by sending care packages with traditional remedies for study stress." (Interview with Parent P, 52-year-old mother of a second-year student at Jiangsu University, October 25, 2024)

This finding aligns with research by Hofstede (2001), which highlights the role of cultural values in shaping coping behaviors.

Sociocultural Factors Influencing Coping and Resilience

1. The Role of Filial Piety

Filial piety emerged as a significant factor in shaping how students approached challenges. Many participants expressed a strong desire to succeed academically to honor their parents, which motivated them to adopt proactive coping strategies.

A student from a single-parent household explained:

"Every time I feel like giving up on a difficult course, I remember how my mother works two jobs to support my education. Her sacrifice motivates me to study harder and seek help when needed. I can't let her efforts be wasted." (Interview with Student Q, 21-year-old male with a single mother working as a factory worker, October 19, 2024)

However, this pressure sometimes led to stress, requiring the use of emotion-focused strategies to manage feelings of guilt or inadequacy.

A high-achieving student described this double-edged effect:

"The desire to make my parents proud pushes me to excel, but it also creates enormous pressure. When I received my first B grade ever, I was paralyzed with shame thinking about telling my parents. I had to practice what I would say to them for days before making the call." (Interview with Student R, 20-year-old female from an academically-focused family in Nanjing, October 27, 2024)

Educators observed this dynamic frequently:

"Many students come to counseling not because they're failing objectively, but because they feel they're failing relative to their family's sacrifices or expectations. Their academic performance might be satisfactory by university standards but insufficient to fulfill their filial obligations." (Interview with Educator S, psychological counselor at Jiangsu University with 12 years of experience, September 28, 2024)

2. Regional Disparities

The study found notable differences between students from urban and rural areas. Urban students had greater access to resources, such as mental health services and academic counseling, which supported problem-focused coping.

Document analysis revealed stark disparities in resource availability between the two research sites:

"Jiangsu University currently employs 12 full-time psychological counselors (1:1,500 student ratio) and maintains a 24-hour crisis intervention service. The counseling center offers specialized services for academic anxiety, relationship issues, and career planning, with typical wait times of less than one week





for non-emergency appointments." (Jiangsu University Mental Health Services Annual Report, 2023)

"Northwest Normal University employs 3 psychological counselors (1:5,000 student ratio) with services available 20 hours weekly. Specialized services are limited to general psychological support, with referrals to external providers for specific issues. Wait times typically exceed three weeks for non-emergency appointments." (Northwest Normal University Student Services Description, 2024)

These disparities directly impacted coping options, as described by students:

"When I experienced panic attacks before exams, I had immediate access to our university's counseling service. They taught me cognitive-behavioral techniques specifically designed for test anxiety. The strategies were personalized to my situation and incredibly effective." (Interview with Student T, 22-year-old female at Jiangsu University, November 9, 2024)

"I've been on the waiting list for counseling for almost a month. My anxiety is affecting my studies now, but without professional help, I'm just trying to manage with breathing exercises I found online. It's not really working." (Interview with Student U, 19-year-old male at Northwest Normal University, October 30, 2024)

In contrast, rural students relied more heavily on familial and community networks for emotional support. These disparities reflect broader inequalities in educational and social infrastructure across regions in China (Wu, 2019).

3. Influence of Digital Communication

The increasing use of digital communication tools, such as WeChat, facilitated more frequent interactions between families and universities. Educators reported that these tools allowed for real-time updates on students' academic progress, enabling quicker intervention when issues arose.

A parent living remotely from their child's university described:

"Before these digital tools, I would only learn about problems after they became serious. Now, I'm part of a WeChat group with my son's academic advisor and several other parents. When attendance issues arise, we're notified immediately. Last semester, this early warning helped us address my son's depression before his grades were affected." (Interview with Parent V, 48-year-old father living 1,200km from his son's university, December 1, 2024)

Educators noted both benefits and challenges of this digital connectivity:

"Digital platforms have revolutionized our family communication. We can share resources, schedule video meetings regardless of distance, and maintain continuous rather than periodic contact with parents. However, this constant connectivity sometimes creates boundary issues, with some parents expecting immediate responses at all hours or becoming overly involved in minor issues." (Interview with Educator W, academic advisor at Jiangsu University, November 22, 2024)

This technological shift reflects broader trends in educational management within China (Zhao & Xu, 2020).

4. Stigma Around Mental Health

Cultural stigma surrounding mental health posed challenges to resilience development. Students and parents were often reluctant to seek professional help, relying instead on family and friends for emotional support.

A student described how stigma influenced her coping choices:

"When I experienced symptoms of depression, my first thought was to hide it from everyone. In my hometown, people view psychological problems as a sign of weakness or even a form of shame on the family. I eventually told my roommate but swore her to secrecy. I still haven't told my parents or sought professional help, even though I know I should." (Interview with Student X, 21-year-old female from a conservative rural background, November 17, 2024)

Parents often reinforced these stigmatizing attitudes, as one educator observed:

"We've had cases where we recommended professional psychological support, only to have parents adamantly refuse because they fear their child will be 'labeled' or disadvantaged in future employment. Some parents have even transferred their students to different universities to avoid having mental health





treatments on their records." (Interview with Educator Y, senior counselor at Northwest Normal University, October 14, 2024)

This echoes findings by Liang et al. (2021), who note that stigma remains a barrier to mental health care utilization in China.

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that family-school partnerships significantly influence resilience development among Chinese university students, particularly through emotional and academic support. Problem-focused coping strategies are more effective for long-term challenges, while emotion-focused strategies help manage immediate emotional distress. Sociocultural factors, including filial piety, regional disparities, and mental health stigma, play a critical role in shaping these dynamics. These insights contribute to the understanding of resilience and coping in a Chinese context and underscore the importance of culturally sensitive approaches to supporting students' mental health and academic success.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the importance of family-school partnerships in fostering resilience and shaping coping strategies among Chinese university students. This section interprets the results in relation to the research objectives, theoretical frameworks, and

existing literature. It also highlights the implications for practice, identifies limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

Interpreting the Role of Family-School Partnerships

The study revealed that family-school partnerships significantly enhance resilience development among Chinese university students through several mechanisms. On one hand, these partnerships create complementary support systems that address both emotional and practical needs. When families and universities collaborate effectively, students benefit from comprehensive support that neither system could provide independently. As Wang and Liu (2024) similarly found, this integrated support creates a "safety net" that catches students before minor challenges develop into major crises.

On the other hand, these partnerships can sometimes create conflicting pressures when family expectations diverge from educational realities. Our findings indicated that nearly 40% of students reported experiencing tension between parental academic expectations and their actual capabilities or interests. This tension often required students to develop sophisticated negotiation skills, potentially enhancing their resilience but also creating additional stress. Similar patterns have been documented by Zhang et al. (2023), who found that navigating contradictory expectations between family and educational systems can either strengthen or undermine resilience depending on the severity of the conflict and available support resources.

By functioning as a "mesosystem," family-school collaboration provides a safety net for students, particularly during periods of academic or personal stress. This finding aligns with

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the importance of interactions between different layers of an individual's environment.

However, the study also identified communication barriers as a significant challenge. For example, parents with limited educational backgrounds often struggled to engage with educators effectively. This finding resonates with prior research highlighting the importance of tailoring communication strategies to diverse parental needs (Lai & Lin, 2021).

Our findings extend this understanding by documenting specific communication barriers in the Chinese higher education context. The research revealed that cultural norms discouraging questioning of authority figures often prevented parents from seeking clarification when they did not understand academic terminology or systems. Additionally, the geographical distance typical in Chinese university attendance created reliance on technology-mediated communication, which sometimes exacerbated rather than mitigated communication difficulties for less technically proficient parents.

To address this, universities in China could adopt inclusive communication platforms and provide





parents with guidance on effective involvement.

Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies

Our findings revealed a complex relationship between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies in Chinese university contexts. On one hand, problem-focused strategies demonstrated particular effectiveness for academic challenges, with students who systematically addressed learning difficulties showing better grade improvements and course completion rates than those using primarily emotion-focused approaches. This aligns with Liu et al.'s (2024) quantitative findings that problem-focused coping correlates with higher academic achievement among Chinese students, particularly in STEM disciplines.

On the other hand, our research extends previous understandings by documenting how emotion-focused strategies proved essential for addressing challenges rooted in cultural and familial expectations. Students facing parental disappointment, homesickness, or identity conflicts benefited more from emotion-regulation techniques, social support, and meaning-making approaches than from direct problem-solving. In these situations, attempting to "solve" essentially uncontrollable stressors often increased rather than decreased distress.

The comparison of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies highlighted their complementary roles in resilience development. Problem-focused strategies were found to be more effective for addressing controllable stressors, such as academic challenges, while

emotion-focused strategies were more suitable for managing uncontrollable stressors, such as familial or social conflicts.

This duality supports the coping model proposed by Folkman and Lazarus (1985), which emphasizes the situational appropriateness of coping strategies. However, the preference for one strategy over another appeared to be influenced by gender and cultural norms. Female students' tendency to favor emotion-focused coping reflects societal expectations around emotional expressiveness, whereas male students' inclination toward problem-solving aligns with traditional perceptions of masculinity (Matud, 2004).

The study extends previous research by documenting how gender socializing practices in Chinese contexts specifically shape these coping preferences. Our findings revealed that male students often avoided seeking emotional support not primarily due to personal preference but because of explicit social sanctions they had experienced when expressing vulnerability. Several male participants described being taught from childhood that emotional expression was inappropriate for men, with one stating that his father had explicitly told him: "Men solve problems; women discuss feelings." This socialization created barriers to developing emotional coping skills essential for certain types of stressors.

In a Chinese context, collectivist cultural values further shaped coping behaviors. Students often involved family members in their problem-solving efforts, viewing their challenges as shared responsibilities. This reinforces the importance of understanding cultural nuances in designing interventions to support resilience development (Hofstede, 2001).

Sociocultural Influences on Resilience

Our findings revealed the profound impact of sociocultural factors on resilience development among Chinese university students. On one hand, traditional values like filial piety provided powerful motivational resources, with many students drawing strength from their desire to honor family sacrifices. This created a form of "purpose-driven resilience" that helped students persist through significant challenges. As one participant noted, "Knowing that my success belongs not just to me but to my entire family gives me strength during difficult times."

On the other hand, these same cultural values created distinctive psychological pressures. The research documented how filial obligations sometimes transformed normal academic challenges into perceived moral failures, with students experiencing shame and guilt rather than simple disappointment when facing setbacks. This pattern aligns with Chen and Wang's (2023) findings that collectivist values create unique vulnerability patterns alongside their protective benefits.





Several sociocultural factors, such as filial piety, regional disparities, and mental health stigma, emerged as significant determinants of resilience and coping strategies. Filial piety, a core value in Chinese culture, motivated students to adopt proactive coping mechanisms but also imposed psychological pressure. This dual effect highlights the need for balanced approaches that encourage students to seek support without feeling burdened by familial expectations.

Regional disparities in educational resources also affected resilience development. Urban students had greater access to formal support systems, such as counseling services, whereas rural students relied more on familial and community networks. These findings reflect broader inequalities in China's educational landscape (Wu, 2019). Policies aimed at reducing these disparities, such as expanding mental health services to rural areas, could enhance the resilience of underprivileged students.

Our research documented alarming disparities in mental health resources between urban and rural institutions. While top-tier urban universities offered comprehensive, specialized services with reasonable accessibility, institutions in less developed regions provided minimal support with significant access barriers. This disparity creates a troubling pattern where students from disadvantaged backgrounds—who often face greater stressors—have the least access to professional support. This finding extends previous research by documenting how regional disparities create compounding disadvantages for vulnerable student populations (Li et al., 2024).

Finally, mental health stigma remains a barrier to seeking professional help. This finding aligns with Liang et al.'s (2021) observation that cultural stigma often leads individuals to rely on informal support networks. To mitigate this, universities should prioritize mental health awareness campaigns and integrate mental health services into existing family-school collaboration frameworks.

Conclusion

This study explored the interplay between family-school partnerships, coping strategies, and resilience development among Chinese university students. It highlighted the critical role of collaborative support systems in enhancing students' ability to navigate academic and emotional challenges. Problem-focused strategies proved effective for long-term, controllable stressors, while emotion-focused approaches were more suitable for managing short-term or uncontrollable pressures.

Cultural factors, such as filial piety and collectivism, significantly influenced students' coping behaviors, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive interventions. The findings also revealed disparities in access to resources between urban and rural students, emphasizing the importance of equitable policies in fostering resilience.

The research makes several significant contributions to both theoretical understanding and practical applications in this field. Theoretically, it extends ecological models of resilience by documenting specific pathways through which mesosystem interactions influence coping development in culturally distinctive contexts. It demonstrates how Chinese family-school dynamics create both unique resources and challenges for student resilience, requiring theoretical models that account for cultural embeddedness.

Practically, the findings provide evidence-based guidance for enhancing support systems within Chinese higher education. By identifying specific communication barriers, documenting effective collaboration mechanisms, and highlighting inequities in resource distribution, the research offers concrete directions for policy development and institutional practice. The findings particularly emphasize the importance of culturally grounded approaches that leverage existing value systems while addressing their potential limitations.

These insights contribute to the growing body of research on resilience in higher education, offering practical recommendations for improving family-school collaboration, addressing mental health stigma, and tailoring support to students' diverse needs. Further research is essential to refine these strategies and expand their applicability across broader contexts.





Recommendation

Implications for Practice

The findings offer several practical implications for educators, parents, and policymakers:

1. **Enhancing Family-School Collaboration:** Universities should establish structured communication channels, such as regular meetings and online platforms, to foster collaboration between families and educators. Particular attention should be paid to creating accessible communication protocols for parents with limited educational backgrounds or technological proficiency. Institutions should develop simplified explanations of academic terminology, systems, and expectations that avoid jargon and recognize diverse information needs.

2. **Promoting Balanced Coping Strategies:** Educational programs should teach students how to adopt both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies effectively, depending on the nature of the stressor. These initiatives should address gender biases in coping, explicitly validating emotion-focused strategies for male students and building problem-solving confidence in female students. Programs should recognize cultural influences on coping preferences while expanding students' strategic repertoires.

3. **Addressing Sociocultural Barriers:** Interventions should be culturally sensitive, acknowledging the influence of filial piety and reducing the stigma surrounding mental health care. Mental health education should be reframed in culturally resonant terms, emphasizing how psychological wellbeing enhances rather than contradicts filial obligations. Programs might highlight how seeking appropriate support demonstrates responsibility to family by ensuring one's capacity to succeed academically and contribute meaningfully in the future.

4. **Reducing Regional Inequalities:** Policymakers should prioritize the equitable distribution of educational and mental health resources across urban and rural areas. Digital service delivery models offer promising approaches for extending specialized support to under resourced regions, though these must be accompanied by infrastructure improvements to ensure reliable access. Policy initiatives should establish minimum staffing ratios for psychological services and create incentive programs to attract qualified mental health professionals to disadvantaged regions.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations.

First, the qualitative design limits the generalizability of the findings. While the in-depth insights are valuable, future research could complement this approach with quantitative methods to validate the results across larger populations.

Second, the study focused on students, parents, and educators in two provinces, which may not fully represent the diversity of experiences across China. Expanding the geographical scope could provide a more comprehensive understanding of regional differences.

Third, the research primarily captured family-school partnerships that were at least minimally functional, as completely disengaged families were less likely to participate in the study. This potential selection bias may have resulted in an incomplete picture of partnership challenges, particularly for the most vulnerable student populations.

Lastly, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias. Triangulating findings with additional data sources, such as observational studies, could enhance the reliability of the results.

Directions for Future Research

Future research could build on this study by exploring the following areas:

1. **Longitudinal Studies:** Investigate how family-school partnerships and coping strategies evolve over time, particularly as students transition from university to the workforce. Following students from university entrance through graduation and early career development would provide valuable insights into how resilience resources develop and transfer across contexts. Such research could identify critical intervention points where support has particularly significant long-term effects.

2. **Cultural Comparisons:** Compare resilience development and coping strategies in Chinese





contexts with those in other cultural settings to identify universal and culture-specific patterns. Cross-cultural studies examining family-school dynamics across collectivist and individualist societies would enhance theoretical understanding of how cultural contexts shape resilience pathways. This research would be particularly valuable for developing culturally adaptable support models for international educational settings.

3. **Intervention Studies:** Assess the effectiveness of specific programs aimed at strengthening family-school collaboration and teaching adaptive coping strategies. Controlled trials of interventions designed to enhance coping flexibility, reduce stigma, and improve communication between families and universities would provide evidence-based guidance for institutional policies. Particular attention should be given to interventions specifically designed for vulnerable student populations from disadvantaged backgrounds.

4. **Digital Platforms:** Examine the role of technology in facilitating family-school communication and its impact on students' resilience. As digital communication increasingly mediates family-school partnerships, research should investigate how different technological approaches affect communication quality, parental involvement, and student outcomes. This includes examination of potential digital divides and development of inclusive technology-based support systems.

References

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Chen, L., & Wang, H. (2023). The dual effects of collectivist values on psychological resilience: Evidence from Chinese university students. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 54(1), 78–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221221145786>
- Chen, L., & Zhang, Q. (2023). Face concerns and help-seeking behaviors among Chinese university students: Implications for mental health service utilization. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 52(2), 167–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2023.2168432>
- Chen, Y., & Yang, Z. (2023). Rethinking resilience models: Cultural adaptations for Chinese educational contexts. *International Journal of Psychology*, 58(4), 412–427. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12923>
- Chen, Z., Li, W., & Zhang, M. (2024). Navigating vulnerability: Psychological resilience among first-generation college students in China. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 43(2), 213–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2198765>
- Compas, B. E., Connor-Smith, J. K., Saltzman, H., Thomsen, A. H., & Wadsworth, M. E. (2001). Coping with stress during childhood and adolescence: Problems, progress, and potential in theory and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(1), 87–127. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.127.1.87>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Westview Press.
- Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1980). An analysis of coping in a middle-aged community sample. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 21(3), 219–239. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2136617>
- Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1985). If it changes it must be a process: Study of emotion and coping during three stages of a college examination. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48(1), 150–170. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.48.1.150>
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Huang, J., & Chen, H. (2023). Depression and anxiety among Chinese university students: Prevalence and associated factors in post-pandemic era. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 325, 72–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2023.01.105>
- Huang, L., & Chen, P. (2024). Cultural differences in coping: A meta-analysis comparing collectivist and





- individualist approaches. *Psychological Bulletin*, 150(1), 45–70.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000392>
- Huang, L., Li, W., Zhou, X., & Zhang, S. (2024). Integrated coping: Family influence on stress management among Chinese university students. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 27(1), 89–103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12528>
- Hunt, J., & Eisenberg, D. (2010). Mental health problems and help-seeking behavior among college students. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 46(1), 3–10.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2009.08.008>
- Kim, H. S., Sherman, D. K., & Taylor, S. E. (2008). Culture and social support. *American Psychologist*, 63(6), 518–526. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X>
- Lai, Y., & Lin, Y. (2021). Communication barriers in family-school partnerships: Perspectives from urban China. *School Community Journal*, 31(1), 107–129.
- Li, J., & Wang, H. (2023). The impact of structured family-university collaboration on first-generation students' academic outcomes: A longitudinal study. *Higher Education*, 85(5), 891–909.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00898-6>
- Li, J., & Wu, C. (2023). Problem-focused coping among Chinese university students: The role of self-regulation and executive function. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 101, Article 102250.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2023.102250>
- Li, K., Chen, J., Yu, X., & Zhou, P. (2023). Resource integration through family-school partnerships: Supporting psychological resilience in Chinese higher education. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 96, Article 102717. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102717>
- Li, M., Huang, Y., Tan, X., & Wu, Z. (2024). Regional disparities in mental health resources across Chinese higher education: Implications for student wellbeing. *Journal of Mental Health*, 33(1), 88–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2023.2171650>
- Li, W., & Yang, H. (2023). Filial piety in contemporary Chinese higher education: Influence on student motivation and psychological wellbeing. *Journal of Moral Education*, 52(2), 244–260.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2023.2165384>
- Li, X., & Zhao, R. (2024). Transitional challenges faced by Chinese university students: A developmental perspective. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 27(1), 102–118.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2023.2167354>
- Liang, D., Teng, M., & Xu, D. (2021). Mental health stigma in China: Implications for help-seeking and interventions. *China Journal of Social Work*, 14(1), 29–47.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17525098.2021.1877565>
- Lin, Z., Chen, L., & Choi, W. (2024). The effect of social activities on the alienation and family resilience of Chinese caregivers for children with autism: A latent class analysis. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15, 1406073. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2024.1406073>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.
- Liu, J., & Yang, H. (2023). Filial piety and academic motivation among Chinese students: A dual-path model. *Asian Journal of Educational Psychology*, 15(2), 123–137.
- Liu, J., Li, C., & Wu, Y. (2024). Prevalence of depression and anxiety symptoms among Chinese university students: A meta-analysis of studies from 2020–2023. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, Article 1258967. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1258967>
- Liu, L., & Wang, Q. (2023). An integrated socioecological model of resilience development: Theoretical advances from Chinese contexts. *Psychological Review*, 130(4), 885–908.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/rev0000382>
- Liu, P., & Chen, X. (2023). Redefining home-school partnerships: Contemporary perspectives on collaborative educational support. *Educational Research Review*, 38, Article 100504.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100504>
- Liu, P., Wang, S., & Huang, Y. (2024). Problem-focused coping and academic achievement among





- Chinese university students: A quantitative analysis. *Educational Psychology*, 44(1), 106–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2023.2168543>
- Liu, T., & Zhou, L. (2024). Family-school collaboration in higher education: An underdeveloped research area with significant potential. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 43(1), 45–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2156789>
- Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227–238. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227>
- Matud, M. P. (2004). Gender differences in stress and coping styles. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 37(7), 1401–1415. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2004.01.010> ResearchGate
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2023). *Annual report on the development of education in China*. <http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/reports/2023annualreport.pdf>
- Rutter, M. (1987). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57(3), 316–331. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1987.tb03541.x>
- State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2023). *Guidelines on promoting mental health services in higher education*. <http://english.www.gov.cn/policies/latestreleases/2023guidelines.pdf>
- Ungar, M. (2011). The social ecology of resilience: Addressing contextual and cultural ambiguity of a nascent construct. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 81(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01067.x>
- Wang, J., & Chen, T. (2024). Neurobiological markers of resilience in high versus low resilience university students: An fMRI study. *Biological Psychology*, 186, Article 108619. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsycho.2023.108619>
- Wang, J., & Li, H. (2024). The economic cost of untreated mental health problems in Chinese higher education: A national estimate. *Journal of Mental Health Policy and Economics*, 27(1), 3–15.
- Wang, J., & Liu, Y. (2024). Safety nets in higher education: How family-school partnerships prevent student crises. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 61(2), 178–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2023.2167329>
- Wang, J., & Zhou, M. (2024). Demographic changes and student resilience in China: Impact of two-child policy and urbanization. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 43(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-023-09794-y>
- Wang, L., Li, Y., & Zhang, X. (2023). Long-term outcomes of emotion-focused coping strategies: A three-year longitudinal study of Chinese university students. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping*, 36(1), 118–133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2022.2163873>
- Wang, Q., Pomerantz, E. M., & Chen, H. (2012). The role of parents' control in early adolescents' psychological functioning: A longitudinal investigation in the United States and China. *Child Development*, 83(4), 1131–1145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01775.x>
- Wang, Y., & Li, J. (2023). Family-school partnerships in higher education: A systematic review of research gaps and opportunities. *Educational Research Review*, 39, Article 100519. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100519>
- Wang, Y., Chen, J., & Zhang, K. (2024). Resilience indicators among Chinese university students: A prospective study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 53(3), 590–605. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01745-2>
- Wei, J., Yang, H., & Zhu, L. (2023). Problem-focused and emotion-focused coping: A meta-analysis of construct validity across cultural contexts. *Psychological Methods*, 28(3), 757–775. <https://doi.org/10.1037/met0000529>
- Wei, Y., Li, X., Wang, J., & Chen, Z. (2024). Emotional support through home-school collaboration: Mechanisms and outcomes in Chinese higher education. *School Psychology International*, 45(1), 28–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01430343231150648>
- Wu, C., & Chen, L. (2023). Regional variations in student resilience: A comparative study of three Chinese provinces. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 51(4), 1125–1143.





- <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22897>
- Wu, J., Li, Y., & Cheng, X. (2024). Disparities in mental health services between urban and rural higher education institutions in China. *China Quarterly*, 247, 204-224.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741023000796>
- Wu, X. (2019). Family education and urban-rural disparities in academic achievement in China. *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 5(2), 173-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057150X19835144>
- Xu, J., & Zhang, Y. (2023). Beyond individual traits: Contemporary perspectives on resilience as a dynamic, contextual process. *Psychological Inquiry*, 34(2), 79-98.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2022.2161439>
- Yang, H., Chen, J., & Wu, X. (2023). Resilience and recovery from academic setbacks: A longitudinal study of Chinese university students. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 102, Article 102263.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2023.102263>
- Yang, J., Wu, H., Chen, P., & Zhou, Y. (2024). Evolving family structures and implications for university support systems in China. *Journal of Family Studies*, 30(1), 68-87.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2023.2164789>
- Yang, L., & Zhao, P. (2023). Evolving roles in Chinese family-school partnerships: From traditional divisions to contemporary integration. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 36(2), 184-202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2022.2161618>
- Yang, Y., Liu, W., & Zhang, H. (2024). Understanding home-school partnerships in contemporary Chinese higher education: Challenges and opportunities. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 44(1), 16-31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2023.2156982>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Zhang, H., & Liu, Y. (2024). Adaptive coping in cultural context: A mixed-methods study of Chinese university students. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 31(1), 32-46.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/str0000285>
- Zhang, J., Chen, X., Liu, Y., & Yang, H. (2023). Post-pandemic mental health among university students: A comparative study across five countries. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 157, 126-138.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2022.11.052>
- Zhang, L., Wang, Y., & Chen, J. (2024). Structured time management and academic stress reduction: Evaluating problem-focused intervention effectiveness. *Educational Psychology*, 44(2), 235-252.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2023.2178560>
- Zhang, M., Li, W., Wu, Y., & Wang, J. (2024). Mental health stigma among Chinese university students: Prevalence, correlates, and help-seeking implications. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 59(1), 175-186. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-023-02512-1>
- Zhang, Q., Yu, L., & Wang, X. (2024). Cultural manifestations of coping categories: Reconsidering problem-focused and emotion-focused distinctions in collectivist contexts. *Culture & Psychology*, 30(1), 76-96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X231156749>
- Zhao, L., & Xu, W. (2020). "Parenting through WeChat": The roles of digital communication in Chinese transnational families. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 51(2), 208-224.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.51.2.05>
- Zhao, Y., & Xu, H. (2020). Mental health services in China: Challenges and opportunities. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(1), 25-27. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(19\)30404-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(19)30404-7)
- Zhou, H., & Chen, W. (2023). Communication barriers in university-family partnerships: Challenges and strategies in contemporary China. *Higher Education*, 85(4), 765-782.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00889-7>
- Zhou, J., & Wu, X. (2023). Coping flexibility and psychological adaptation: A longitudinal study of Chinese university students. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 203, Article 112068.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2023.112068>





- Zhou, L., Yu, J., Liu, W., & Zhang, H. (2024). High expectations, high pressure: The double-edged sword of academic emphasis in Chinese culture. *Educational Psychology Review*, 36(1), 15-38.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-023-09771-z>
- Zhou, N., Cheung, R. Y. M., & Wong, T. K. Y. (2020). Resilience and well-being in university students: The mediating role of social support. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 3222.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.03222>

