

Article

Collective Stressful Events and Adolescents' Future-Thinking: A Qualitative Study

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Highlights

What are the main findings?

- Adolescents are primarily concerned with war, climate change, the economic crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which could lead to uncertainty about their future plans, restrictions on personal freedom, worsening living conditions, job loss, rising prices, and fear of recurring trauma.
- To cope with the threats posed by these events to their future, adolescents adopt strategies such as taking action, staying informed, avoiding thinking about them, and seeking social support from parents, teachers, friends and institutions.

What is the implication of the main finding?

- The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted psychological interventions aimed at strengthening adaptive coping skills and safeguarding adolescents' capacity for future-oriented thinking.

Abstract

Recent collective stressful events have influenced adolescents' perceptions of the future; however, their impact on future-thinking and the coping strategies used to manage these challenges remain unclear. This study examines adolescents' future-related concerns in response to collective stressful events and the strategies they adopt to cope with them. In spring 2024, 12 focus groups were conducted with 97 high school students (46.4% females; Mage = 15.34; SDage = 1.06) in Italy. Participants discussed experienced collective stressful events, their main concerns about the future, and related coping strategies. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Students identified four major events: war, climate change, economic crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These events triggered concerns such as 'uncertainty about future plans and goals,' 'limitations on personal freedom,' 'deteriorating survival conditions,' 'the outbreak of sudden events and natural disasters,' and 'job loss and increase in prices.' Five coping strategies emerged: 'taking action,' 'staying informed,' 'avoiding overthinking,' 'seeking social support (from family, friends, and teachers),' and 'seeking support from institutions.' Findings highlight adolescents' future-related concerns and underscore the need for interventions promoting adaptive future-oriented thinking.



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1. Introduction

Future-thinking refers to how individuals envisage and plan for their future lives [1]. It represents the cognitive component of future orientation, alongside its motivational and behavioral components [1]. It involves mental representations of future possibilities and encompasses two underlying dimensions, namely hopes and fears. Because future events can be either positive or negative, these cognitive representations capture how individuals relate to their future in terms of approaching desired outcomes and avoiding undesired ones [1]. In the literature, future-thinking has been examined either as a stand-alone construct or implicitly as part of the broader construct of future orientation [2]. For instance, individuals may engage in future-thinking by imagining positive future scenarios, such as achieving educational or occupational goals, or by anticipating negative outcomes, such as failure or instability, which can guide present-oriented planning, preventive strategies, and avoidant behaviors.

An optimistic and goal-oriented future-thinking plays a key role in facilitating adaptation across various life domains, particularly during major transitions such as education, employment, and marriage [3]. It is associated with better self-regulation [4], lower engagement in risk-taking behaviors [5–7], and improved academic performance [8]. As a cognitive resource, a positive future-thinking supports well-being and mental health [9–11], especially in stressful situations [12]. This capacity is particularly important during adolescence, a period marked by rapid cognitive, emotional and social changes, because it supports identity formation and long-term decision-making, which are critical developmental tasks [1,11]. Indeed, according to Social Cognitive Theory [13], developing future-oriented thoughts and beliefs serves as a crucial psychological resource, particularly in challenging circumstances.

Given its role in adaptation, a positive future-thinking becomes especially significant during stressful times. Recent collective stressful events (e.g., terrorist attacks, wars, pandemics, economic crises, and climate change) have amplified concerns about the future, making it increasingly challenging for individuals to plan ahead. In this context, Italy has been notably impacted by a series of such events [14]. It was the first European country to face the COVID-19 pandemic [15], recording a total of 26,964,654 cases [16]. Soon after, it was deeply affected by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, with far-reaching social, economic, and political consequences [17]. At the same time, the growing frequency of extreme weather events—including earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods—has further intensified public concern. In particular, Tuscany regions experienced a series of devastating floods, causing extensive damage to homes and urban areas. Growing concerns over climate change and global warming have only deepened anxieties about the future of humanity [18]. Meanwhile, the ongoing effects of these issues continue to impact the global economy [19].

The current climate of instability driven by collective stressful events [20] may significantly undermine individuals' future-thinking, leading them to develop a more negative and pessimistic view of the future. According to Life Course Theory [21], individual life trajectories are shaped by broader historical and social contexts, with major events influencing personal choices through the opportunities and constraints they impose. Consistent with this framework, a recent systematic review examining the relationship between collective stressful events and individual future orientation found that most studies in the literature report a negative association between these two variables [2]. One possible mechanism underlying this relationship is the reduction in optimistic bias which is defined as the cognitive tendency to believe that one is less likely than others to experience negative outcomes and more likely to experience positive ones. This belief tends to weaken following exposure to collective stressful events [22,23]. This issue is particularly concerning for adolescents, as this developmental stage is critical for shaping long-term goals related to education, career

paths, and future life paths [24]. Given that a positive future-thinking plays a fundamental role in these processes, understanding how it is influenced by current global challenges is crucial. Yet, little is known about how adolescents are affected by current collective stressful events, or which aspects of these experiences most strongly influence their future-thinking.

Furthermore, given that collective stressful events have been linked to difficulties in future-thinking, it is crucial to understand how adolescents cope with these challenges and which coping strategies they find most effective. Therefore, identifying effective coping and recovery strategies is crucial for fostering resilience and well-being [25]. Previous research broadly classified coping strategies in response to stress into four main types: problem-focused (e.g., active coping, planning), emotion-focused (e.g., positive reframing, acceptance), avoidant (e.g., denial, substance use), and socially supported coping (e.g., seeking emotional or instrumental support) [26,27]. Although all strategies are used in response to collective stress [28,29], social support is often the most common, as affiliation is a primary reaction to threat [30,31]. Strengthening social bonds fosters a shared social identity and mutually supportive behaviors [31]. The effectiveness of coping strategies may vary depending on personality and circumstances [32–34]. While prior research has largely examined coping strategies in relation to stress-related mental health problems [12], far less attention has been paid to how adolescents cope with the impact of collective stressful events on their future-oriented thinking. Identifying coping strategies that support adolescents' capacity to think about and plan for the future under collective threats is both theoretically and clinically important. Coping may not only alleviate immediate distress but also help preserve future-oriented thinking, a critical developmental resource that is particularly vulnerable during periods of collective uncertainty. Nevertheless, empirical evidence on which coping strategies effectively sustain positive and goal-directed future-thinking in adolescence remains limited.

Within this theoretical framework, the present study aimed to investigate adolescents' future-thinking in the context of collective stressful events, focusing on their concerns about the potential impact of such events on their future and on the coping strategies they perceive as helpful in addressing these challenges. Given the limited research in this area, the complexity of such events and the various ways in which adolescents may experience them, even without direct exposure, a qualitative approach was deemed particularly well-suited to this investigation. Adolescents' perceptions are shaped by a range of personal, cultural, and socio-economic factors, which influence how they interpret and respond to collective stressful events. While quantitative methods can identify commonly used coping strategies and their associations with mental health, qualitative inquiry allows us for a deeper examination of adolescents' subjective experiences, including how they mobilize coping strategies to maintain a positive and resilient future-oriented perspective. By capturing these in-depth reflections, qualitative methods provide valuable insights into how adolescents make sense of their future and seek to preserve it in the face of collective stressful events [35,36].

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

Overall, 97 high school students were involved in the current study. Of all students, 34% were 14 years old, 7.2% were 15 years old, 50.5% were 16 years old, 7.2% were 17 years old and 1% were 18 years old, ($M_{\text{age}} = 15.34$; $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.06$; $\text{Min}_{\text{age}} = 14$; $\text{Max}_{\text{age}} = 18$) drawn from 6 classrooms across 2 high schools, one located on Elba Island and the other in Florence. Notably, Elba Island is an area that has been grappling with environmental challenges such as pollution and rising sea levels for several years [37]. Of all participants, 46.4% ($n = 45$) were female and 53.6% ($n = 52$) were male. Most participants (85.6%; $n = 83$) were natives,

while 14.4% ($n = 17$) were students with an immigrant background (i.e., students with both parents born abroad and/or students born in Italy to foreign-born parents).

2.2. Procedures

Recruitment was carried out through a voluntary census following a call for participation addressed to all high schools across seven provinces in the Tuscany region: Lucca, Pisa, Massa Carrara, Firenze, Prato, Livorno, Pistoia. Specifically, schools in the surrounding area were contacted via email and invited to participate in the project with their classrooms. The first schools that agreed to participate were included in the study, continuing this process until the predetermined number of focus groups was reached. All students from the selected classes who gave their consent were included. The total number of focus groups was determined based on methodological recommendations from the literature to ensure sufficient coverage and depth of discussion [38]. The Helsinki Declaration of 1964 was followed in the procedures and the project was approved by the Ethic Committee of the University of Florence. In May 2024, a total of 12 focus groups were conducted. School administrators invited all students in each classroom to participate, with the number of participants per session ranging from 8 to 12. Participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous. Preliminary approval was obtained from each school principal, and all students provided informed consent by completing a consent form. An information sheet about the project was sent to all legal guardians, schools and students. Prior to participating in the focus groups, students also completed a brief demographic questionnaire. The focus groups were structured following the guidelines of [38]. They were led and moderated by a trained psychologist. The students were initially presented with the following definition of collective stressful events:

“Stress is a response to threatening events that generate an overload of physical and psychological tension. When individuals perceive a threat, it typically elicits concern and prompts the adoption of protective behaviors aimed at managing or mitigating the challenge. Stressful experiences can be either personal or collective, with the latter affecting groups of individuals within a society, city, or even an entire country. Today, we focus specifically on collective stressful events”.

Participants were asked three open-ended questions:

- (a) *“In your opinion, what are the collective stressful events or situations that we have experienced or are currently facing in this historical period?”*
- (b) *“When you think about the mentioned collective stressful events, what concerns you the most about your future?”*
- (c) *“Considering your future, what do you think could help you to manage the risks associated with collective stressful events?”.*

The three open-ended questions were initially designed to elicit adolescents' spontaneous reflections on their future in the context of collective stressful events, as well as the potential resources they perceive as helpful for coping. Before conducting the focus groups, the research team reviewed and refined the questions through internal discussions to ensure developmental appropriateness and clarity for a high school audience. During the focus groups, when participants needed additional clarification, the moderator used prompts to encourage discussion and elicit further insights. Each focus group session lasted between 45 and 60 min. Transcripts were created for each focus group session, all of which were audio-recorded. Research assistants meticulously reviewed the recordings to produce accurate transcripts for subsequent analysis. Students were instructed not to use their names during the sessions; however, if names were mentioned, the transcripts were anonymized (e.g., replacing names with identifiers such as “Student A,” and so on).

2.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen as the analytical strategy for the current study, with the aim of identifying the main themes and patterns in the data. This strategy has been used in previous qualitative investigations, since allows for theoretical flexibility regarding the level of detail and in depth at which the data is analyzed [39]. Consistent with these arguments, we believed that thematic analysis is the best solution for the current study. In conducting our analyses, we adhered to the guidelines for thematic analysis outlined by [40]. Two authors first familiarized themselves with the data, carefully reading and re-reading the transcripts. Using an inductive approach and the scissor-and-sort technique, we generated initial codes and collated relevant data (i.e., grouped excerpts from the transcripts corresponding to each code). This initial sorting process enabled the identification of broader themes, which were subsequently refined as necessary. The authors compared the identified themes, resolving any differences through discussion until consensus was achieved. Next, we outline the themes that emerged in response to each research question and provide representative examples of each theme. This coding procedure aimed to address the three research questions. The analysis was conducted using QCAmap 2020 [41], a qualitative data analysis software designed to support systematic coding and thematic categorization of textual data. To ensure accuracy and consistency, the coding procedures were regularly reviewed and discussed by the first and second authors. After the analyses were completed, another author conducted a random sampling of the full corpus for further validation.

3. Results

3.1. Collective Stressful Events

During the focus groups, after being presented with the definition of collective stressful events and asked to identify what they considered such events, most students first mentioned war and climate change, while economic crises and the COVID-19 pandemic were raised by fewer adolescents.

3.2. Future-Thinking and Collective Stressful Events

We used thematic analysis to identify the most prominent and significant themes reflecting adolescents' concerns about the future in relation to collective stressful events. Below, we present the findings organized into five main categories. The first two categories relate to concerns about personal life (e.g., uncertainty about future plans and goals, and the loss of personal freedom), while the other three pertain to social dimensions (e.g., the worsening of living conditions, the outbreak of sudden events and natural disasters, and the loss of jobs and increase in prices).

Uncertainty about future plans and goals

Most students immediately identified concerns about the uncertainty and the potential need to modify their future plans and goals due to collective stressful events. These plans and goals cover many areas, such as career, education, and family. However, there is a pervasive fear that such events might force them to change their plans and reshape the course of their lives. Here are some examples:

"For example, I would like to study medicine, but it's 6 years, and if something like a war were to happen while I'm in my third year. . . I would have wasted all those hours only to end up doing nothing because everything would be stopped by the war".

"It could happen that I study hard, but when I grow up and can finally do my dream job, another pandemic breaks out, and I can no longer achieve it".

“For me, for example, I would really like to work in digital fields, but with the economic crisis, it will be very difficult”.

“If Italy were to go to war, I might be drafted, which would prevent me from pursuing my plans”.

“A personal life plan for the family can be challenging to implement under these circumstances”.

Limitations on personal freedom

An additional theme that emerged from the thematic analysis of the focus groups is the students' concerns about the potential loss of personal freedom in the future due to collective stressful events. Below are some examples:

“Even in daily life during a war, you couldn't go dancing, hang out with your friends, or even just go to school.”

“Going out freely; I would be scared to have a curfew like during COVID-19.”

“Staying home all day and not being able to go out.”

“Not going out”.

Deteriorating survival conditions

The third theme identified from the thematic analysis of the focus groups is students' concerns about the worsening of survival conditions due to collective stressful events. Students explained that these events lead to changes that threaten the survival of the species (e.g., climate change) or increase the risk of death (e.g., pandemics and war). Below are some examples:

“The Earth's temperature might rise by at least half a degree. The tides will no longer behave as they used to, and animals, vegetation, and even the seasons will undergo significant changes. As a result of the planet no longer functioning as it should, there will also be serious repercussions on food systems”.

“There will be no future, and if climate change worsens too much, it could lead to the extinction of the species.”

“There is always the fear that the pandemic might return, or that something else might come, causing more deaths again.”

“If Italy enters into war, it will inevitably alter our future. It could lead to internal conflicts within the country, putting not only the nation at risk but also our loved ones.”

The outbreak of sudden events and natural disasters

Another theme that emerged from the thematic analysis of the focus groups is the students' concerns about the potential outbreak of sudden events or natural disasters in the future, triggered by collective stressful events. Below are some examples:

“Events like floods could occur more frequently.”

“The rising sea levels, which could also trigger tsunamis.”

Job loss and rising prices

Finally, a smaller proportion of students expressed concerns that, in the future, collective stressful events could lead to rising prices and job losses, making living conditions more difficult. Below are some examples:

“In the future, with this economic crisis, prices could rise, and life will become difficult”.

“I am also worried about an increase in costs, such as higher utility bills caused by using air conditioning for longer periods.”

"I am worried because many people will lose their jobs."

"If the price of something increases, it starts to become a problem."

Notably, almost no participant presented a completely carefree or optimistic view of their future. However, many students emphasized that their level of concern varied across collective stressful events; for instance, they reported being more worried about war as a current and ongoing event than about the COVID-19 pandemic, which was often perceived as belonging more to the past.

3.3. Coping Strategies, Future-Thinking and Collective Stressful Events

The first two categories involve students actively addressing these risks (i.e., doing something, get informed), while the third category involves avoiding the problem (i.e., do not think about it). The fourth and fifth categories relate to the support systems around students: the fourth focuses on close social networks, such as family, friends, and teachers (i.e., social support), while the fifth encompasses broader institutional support (i.e., support from institutions).

Taking action

In this category, students identify actions they can take as coping strategies to address the risks associated with collective stressful events. These actions are preventive and counteract the impact of collective stressful events, and are described as a way to maintain a sense of control over their future, allowing adolescents to feel that their current behaviors could positively influence long-term outcomes. Below are some examples.

"Saving water [...], buying second-hand items [...], purchasing organic food [...], recycling [...]".

"Getting vaccinated to prevent infections."

"Saving money".

Staying informed

In this category, students propose gathering information and studying about these collective stressful events and their potential impact as a coping strategy, describing it as a way to better anticipate future risks and consequences and to feel more prepared when thinking about their future. Below are some examples:

"Seeking more information about it".

"Raising awareness about issues".

"Spreading awareness to increase people's sensitivity".

"Study".

Avoiding overthinking

This category, reported by a small proportion of students, includes students' responses that refer to avoiding the problem as a coping strategy, specifically by not thinking about collective stressful events, in order to reduce emotional distress related to the future and to distance themselves from future-oriented thoughts. Below are some examples:

"Sleep and don't think about it."

"I don't keep myself informed at all because, on some level, it makes me feel quite anxious, and I can't really handle seeing all the images or news. So, I never engage in such discussions."

Seeking social supports (family, friends and teachers)

This category identifies support from the students' microsystem, including family, friends, and teachers, as a coping strategy that helps students feel emotionally supported

when thinking about the future and facing uncertainties related to collective stressful events. Below are some examples:

“To have a group of friends”

“Meeting up with friends and family is definitely a form of support.”

“The support of family, friends, or even teachers.”

Seeking support from institutions

This category identifies support from the macrosystem and the institutions to which the students belong as a coping strategy that contributes to a sense of protection and stability when adolescents think about their future in the context of collective stressful events. Below are some examples.

“Perhaps a policy where there is a bit more attention given to us and our needs.”

“Knowing that there is a political agreement that protects us, not just at the regional level, but throughout all of Italy.”

“Perhaps knowing that our country rejects war in its constitution.”

Social and institutional support are among the coping strategies most frequently mentioned by students.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to explore adolescents' future-thinking in the context of collective stressful events, focusing on their concerns about the potential impact of such events on their future and on the coping strategies they perceive as helpful in addressing these challenges. A thematic analysis was conducted on data from 12 focus groups held with high school students in the spring of 2024.

Students were first asked to identify collective stressful events, after a brief explanation of the concept. Four main categories emerged: war, climate change, economic crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. This aligns with the socio-political and environmental context in Italy during spring 2024 [42], when national discourse focused on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the region had recently experienced severe flooding causing family displacement [43], and the country faced economic challenges partly due to the pandemic. The students' responses thus reflect the most salient collective stressors at the time [22]. Analysis of adolescents' future-thinking revealed five thematic categories, spanning personal and societal concerns. On a personal level, participants reported uncertainty about future plans and a perceived loss of freedom. While uncertainty is not inherent to all traumatic events, it is central after natural disasters and strongly linked to psychological distress [44,45], affecting relationships and family planning [46] as well as career choices [47]. Reduced personal freedom mainly stemmed from restrictions during events, particularly COVID-19 school closures and remote learning, which are especially distressing for adolescents [48]. At a societal level, participants expressed concerns about economic and social instability, including deteriorating living conditions, job insecurity, and rising costs. These reflect the combined effects of climate change, whose impact has been increasingly evident in Tuscany [43], and large-scale crises, which elevate unemployment and inflation [49]. In Italy, already strained by COVID-19, these challenges were intensified by global events like the Russia-Ukraine war, contributing to rising consumer prices [50]. Such macroeconomic shifts shape adolescents' perceived life opportunities and decision-making, consistent with the social causation hypothesis [51]. Finally, a recurring theme was fear of recurring traumatic events [52]. This anticipation can distort risk perception [53], keeping adolescents in a persistent state of alert and undermining future-thinking. Their plans and aspirations may feel fragile, emphasizing the urgent need for interventions to strengthen protective resources.

Four main categories of coping strategies emerged regarding how adolescents perceive help in mitigating the impact of collective stressful events on future-thinking. The first two categories, taking action and staying informed, reflect active engagement with the threat and align with problem-focused coping. Taking action has been shown to enhance individuals' sense of agency and control, fostering psychological empowerment [1], which is essential for goal-directed, future-oriented thinking [54]. Similarly, seeking information is a common response in crisis situations, motivated by a desire to reduce uncertainty and regain predictability [55,56]. By increasing predictability, informational coping may support adolescents in anticipating future risks and maintaining a coherent representation of their future. Conversely, a lack of access to trustworthy information has been associated with heightened uncertainty, diminished perceived control, and increased stress [56]. The third category is avoidance, defined as disengagement from or denial of stressors. Although it may provide temporary emotional relief, avoidance is generally considered maladaptive in the long term [29,57], as it typically does not address the root of stress and may exacerbate psychological distress. From a future-thinking perspective, avoidance may serve as a short-term protective function by reducing emotional overload and limiting ruminative thoughts about an uncertain future. This temporary distancing from future-related concerns may allow adolescents to focus on immediate tasks and proximal goals, which are closely linked to their future goals. At the same time, prolonged reliance on avoidance may hinder long-term future-thinking by reducing engagement with future planning and proactive coping, consistent with finding linking avoidant coping to anxiety and depressive symptoms. For this reason, evidence-based psychological interventions—such as cognitive-behavioral therapy—prioritize more adaptive strategies, including cognitive reappraisal and active problem-solving [58]. Finally, the fourth and fifth categories pertained to seeking support through both interpersonal relationships (e.g., family and peers) and institutional contexts. The protective role of social support in stressful events is well established. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social support helped mitigate negative mental health outcomes [31]. Similarly, after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in China, perceived social support significantly predicted individuals' self-efficacy in coping with the event [59]. In terms of future-thinking, social support may help adolescents maintain hope and contextualize collective threats by drawing on shared experiences and intergenerational narratives. This process can normalize uncertainty and reduce catastrophic expectations about the future. These findings align with Bowlby's theory of attachment and stress [30], which contrasts with earlier models that viewed stress as socially isolating. According to Bowlby's attachment theory [30], in threatening situations individuals naturally seek proximity to trusted attachment figures as a coping mechanism, often persisting beyond the immediate crisis [60,61]. Supportive relationships help adolescents feel safe and plan for the future despite collective stressors. When threats are shared, fear spreads within the group, creating collective stress, and the group may form a shared social identity to cope [31].

Overall, the present study offers an in-depth understanding of adolescents' fears and future-thinking in the context of collective stressful events. The findings indicate that such events significantly shape not only adolescents' personal expectations and life planning but also their broader concerns about societal well-being. From a theoretical perspective, these results extend the Life Course Theory [21], by illustrating how social and historical context influence adolescents' life trajectories, affecting both personal and societal domains. The coping strategies identified reflect the several ways in which adolescents attempt to manage the psychological impact of these events in their future. Indeed, according to Social Cognitive Theory [13], developing future-oriented thoughts and beliefs serve as a crucial psychological resource, particularly in challenging circumstances, highlighting the importance of adopting effective coping strategies. The results highlight the importance of

equipping adolescents with adaptive coping mechanisms and ensuring access to support systems, especially during collective stressful events. Based on these findings, several practical implications emerge. Programs should encourage active and informed coping strategies, such as problem-solving and information-seeking, to help adolescents maintain a sense of control and plan for the future. Strengthening social support networks can provide essential emotional resources. Finally, interventions should address maladaptive avoidance, guiding adolescents to replace temporary disengagement with adaptive coping strategies.

Despite the valuable insights on an unexplored topic offered, this study presents several limitations. First, the sample was drawn exclusively from high school students in two schools, limiting the geographical and demographic diversity of the participants. This excludes a significant portion of Italian adolescents from other regions who may be differentially affected by collective stressful events depending on their local context. Second, the study does not account for adolescents who are not currently engaged in formal education, a group that may face unique challenges and hold different perspectives. Additionally, while the study addresses collective stressful events at a general level, it does not consider potential variations in impact related to individual vulnerabilities or personal characteristics. Future research should aim to replicate and extend these findings across more heterogeneous samples, including adolescents with different personality characteristics, different coping and resilient skills and coming from various regions of Italy and from a range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Such efforts are essential to developing a more comprehensive understanding of how adolescents across different contexts experience and respond to collective stressful events, and how best to support their future-thinking. Another limitation concerns the phrasing of the interview question, which focused on adolescents' concerns. This may have directed responses toward potential negative outcomes. Similarly, the question about strategies may have introduced a subtle bias, as participants could interpret it primarily in terms of managing worries rather than actively addressing or coping with the risk itself. While this was consistent with the study's aim, a more neutral phrasing could capture both concerns, positive expectations and various coping strategies, which future research could consider. Additionally, focus group did not include questions specifically assessing how adolescents perceive the personal threat of collective stressful events. As a result, while we captured their reflections and concerns about these events, we cannot determine the extent to which they feel personally at risk. Future research could address this by using quantitative measures designed to assess perceived risk and its potential impact on individual futures. Moreover, it would be valuable to broaden the scope of future-thinking by exploring the interaction between personal and collective experiences. Specifically, future studies could investigate whether these two types of experiences differ in their impact on adolescents' future-thinking, and whether one category may serve as a moderator for the influence of the other. Additionally, future research could provide a more nuanced understanding by examining how adolescents plan for their future, how they experience this process emotionally, and how collective threats influence both their planning and the coping strategies they adopt. Again, the present study considers collective stressful events as a whole, without asking specific questions about each one. In fact, depending on the event, its impact, its potential consequences, and attitudes towards the future may be affected differently, and different coping strategies may be employed. Future studies could replicate the present research by specifically analyzing each individual collective stressful event. Last but not least, the general limitations of qualitative research should be noted: findings are context-specific and not fully generalizable. The suggestion to include a more heterogeneous sample reflects this consideration.

5. Conclusions

This study provides an in-depth understanding of how collective stressful events influence adolescents' future-oriented thinking. Participants reported concerns ranging from personal uncertainty and loss of freedom to fears of socioeconomic decline and the recurrence of traumatic events. The coping strategies they identified reflect active engagement and the pursuit of social and institutional support, while also highlighting the use of avoidance—a less adaptive strategy in the long term. Overall, the findings underscore the urgent need to design and implement intervention programs that foster future-oriented thinking and strengthen adolescents' protective resources, alongside accessible support systems to mitigate the long-term psychological impact of collective stressful events. This study is among the first qualitative investigations to present the influence of collective stressors on adolescents' future thinking through their own narratives, highlighting its originality and contribution to the field.

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Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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