

ACADEMIC STRESS AND GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING STRATEGIES IN MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Dina Adriani¹, Wenda Asmita², Sri Ratna Juwita³, Armansyah⁴, Mia Junita⁵, Yelsa Yulia Fitri⁶

¹²³⁴⁵⁶Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M.Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia, wendaasmita@gmail.com, dinaadriani7@gmail.com

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Abstract

Academic stress is a psychological condition commonly experienced by students due to the pressure of assignments, exams and demands for high achievement. This research aims to describe the symptoms of academic stress and counseling strategies for overcoming them. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data was obtained through in-depth interviews with seven students who experienced stress and had participated in counseling services. The results show that students experience study pressure, sadness due to academic failure, and discouragement. Counseling services are felt to be very helpful in managing stress through individual counseling, group counseling, and stress management training. The strategies implemented are able to increase self-awareness, strengthen positive thinking patterns, and build students' mental resilience. This research emphasizes the importance of the role of empathetic and sustainable counseling as a preventive and curative effort in maintaining student mental health, as well as encouraging improvements in the quality of counseling services in higher education.

Keywords: Counseling guidance, Mental health, Students, Academic stress.

1. Introduction

Academic stress is a common phenomenon experienced by students at various levels of higher education. High academic demands, social pressure, and expectations from the surrounding environment are the main triggers for stress. In the context of students, academic stress not only has an impact on learning performance, but also on overall mental health conditions (Sari N 2020). Disrupted mental health can cause a decrease in the quality of life and productivity of students, so it requires serious attention and treatment.

One form of academic stress that students often experience is pressure in studying. This pressure arises from the mounting workload, competing grades, and the need to graduate on time. Students who feel unable to meet academic demands tend to experience significant psychological stress (Fitriani D 2019). If not treated immediately, this pressure can develop into anxiety disorders and mild depression which interfere with the learning process.

Apart from pressure, sadness in studying is also an important aspect of academic stress. This sadness arises when students feel they have failed, are unable to understand the material, or feel left behind compared to their friends. This condition is often accompanied by feelings of helplessness and lack of self-confidence, which further worsens mood and motivation to learn (Wulandari T 2021). Prolonged sadness can interfere with focus and reduce students' enthusiasm for completing their studies. Students who experience discouragement generally show signs of losing interest in learning activities, procrastinating on assignments, and feeling like they do not have clear goals. This situation often leads to a decline in academic performance and even the decision to stop studying (Prasetyo A 2022). Therefore, it is important to identify and treat these symptoms early. In dealing with

academic stress, the role of guidance and counseling becomes very crucial. Guidance counseling is not only tasked with helping students in academic aspects, but also in managing their mental health. Effective counseling strategies can provide emotional support, help students find solutions to the problems they face, and improve their coping skills (Lestari R 2020). Thus, counseling guidance becomes an integral part of efforts to create a psychologically healthy learning environment. Apart from that, the strategies implemented by counselors can include individual counseling, group counseling, and stress management training. Through these approaches, students are invited to understand their condition, recognize factors that trigger stress, and develop positive ways to deal with it. (Rahmawati E 2018).

Applying this strategy systematically and continuously will help students build mental resilience in facing academic pressure. By paying attention to the complexity of academic stress and the importance of managing mental health, this article aims to discuss in depth the symptoms of academic stress and the strategic role of counseling in overcoming it. It is hoped that this article can make a positive contribution to the development of counseling services in the campus environment and become a reference for students in maintaining mental balance amidst the academic challenges they face. Therefore, academic stress is a psychological condition commonly experienced by students due to the demands of lectures, such as assignment loads, exams, and pressure to achieve high academic achievements. If not handled properly, this stress can have a negative impact on mental health, including the emergence of anxiety, depression, and even burnout. Therefore, appropriate interventions are needed to help students manage stress healthily, one of which is through guidance and counseling services. Guidance counseling not only acts as a place to vent, but also as a preventive and curative strategy to maintain emotional balance and increase students' resilience to academic pressure. (Ridwan M 2021). In addition, a cognitive-behavioral-based counseling approach has proven effective in changing students' negative thinking patterns to become more adaptive in facing learning challenges (Yuliana S 2022). Thus, guidance and counseling strategies are an important aspect in maintaining student mental health amidst the dynamics of the world of higher education

2. Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach which aims to describe in depth the conditions of academic stress experienced by students as well as the guidance and counseling strategies applied in managing their mental health. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the subjective meaning experienced by students in dealing with academic pressure, sadness and discouragement, and how they respond to this through counseling services. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with students and counselors, as well as observations of student behavior in the academic environment (Meleong L J 2017). Data analysis was carried out thematically by identifying patterns that emerged from the participants' narratives. A descriptive qualitative approach was chosen in this research because it allows researchers to understand the subjective meaning experienced by students in dealing with academic stress. According to (Creswell J. W. 2016), A qualitative approach is used when the researcher wants to explore a phenomenon in depth based on the participant's perspective. This method is considered appropriate because academic stress is personal and influenced by many internal and external factors that cannot be measured quantitatively. An in-depth interview process was carried out to comprehensively explore students' experiences, emotions and adaptation strategies, as explained by (Merriam S. B. & Tisdell E. J 2015), that interviews are the main technique in qualitative research to explore participants' subjective meanings and interpretations. The purposive sampling technique was chosen to capture relevant participants, because this technique

allows researchers to select informants who are considered to best understand the problem under study. (Patton M. Q 2015). Selain itu, analisis data dilakukan secara tematik melalui proses pengkodean dan categorization of field data as suggested by (Braun V. & Clarke. V 2006), which states that thematic analysis allows researchers to identify important patterns in the narrative of qualitative data.

Apart from that, the sampling technique in this research uses purposive sampling, namely the deliberate selection of subjects based on certain criteria that are in accordance with the research focus. Participants consisted of students who had experienced symptoms of academic stress and had attended counseling services at universities and in data collection techniques the researchers interviewed seven students. This criterion was chosen so that the data obtained is relevant and rich in information, thereby supporting a more comprehensive understanding of the issues raised. Purposive sampling is considered effective in qualitative research because it allows researchers to obtain informants who truly understand the context of the problem (Sugiyono 2018). Through this approach, research is expected to be able to provide a real picture of the efforts made by counselors in assisting students in facing academic pressure

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with several students who experienced academic stress and had participated in counseling guidance services at universities, several opinions were found. Informant 1 with the initials JJ, a student majoring in Guidance and Counseling, indicated that JJ felt burdened by assignments, exams and part-time work, with the main difficulty being time management which caused stress and fatigue. He once lost enthusiasm and wanted to give up after failing an important course. To overcome this, JJ made a schedule, rested, drew closer to God, and discussed things with those closest to him. He once participated in a BK service to find a solution to his problem. By participating in counseling services, he was able to obtain stress management training and academic policies that support mental health.

Informant 2 with the initials FH, Student of the Guidance and Counseling Study Program, FH felt that academic pressure was quite heavy, especially during exams and facing continuous assignments, he had difficulty managing his time and often compared himself to friends in class which made him lose his enthusiasm for studying. To overcome this, FH took part in Guidance and Counseling services to find a solution to the problem. From this service, FH is able to overcome his problems by carrying out scheduled activities and self-reflection by watching and resting. In resource person 3 with the initials DN, Constitutional Law study program students face high academic pressure due to piling up assignments, exams, and joining organizations. Difficulty managing his time made him stressed and lost his enthusiasm, and he even wanted to give up. DN carries out Guidance and Counseling service activities so that from this service DN is able to overcome stress with good time management by making activity schedules.

In resource person 4 with the initials NH, students from the Guidance and Counseling Study Program expressed challenges in the form of a heavy academic load, especially difficulties in working on reports, as a result NH often experienced lack of sleep due to revision assignments, and pressure to achieve satisfactory grades. Expectations from parents are also factors that cause stress and achievement of targets and lack of emotion and a decrease in academic grades. To reduce academic

stress, NH participates in Guidance and Counseling services, so that results can be obtained. Overcoming academic stress can be done with good time management, prioritizing health, and also seeking support from people closest to them such as parents and friends.

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with four students who experienced academic stress and had participated in Guidance and Counseling services at universities, it can be concluded that academic pressure such as assignments, exams, part-time work, as well as demands from the social and family environment are the main triggers for stress. The four interviewees indicated difficulties in time management as the dominant factor that causes fatigue, loss of enthusiasm for learning, and even the desire to give up. Through Guidance and Counseling services, students are able to obtain effective stress management strategies, such as making activity schedules, self-reflection, adequate rest, as well as spiritual and social approaches. Counseling services are proven to help them understand and deal with academic problems in a more focused manner, improve time management skills, and encourage the importance of maintaining a balance between academic demands and mental health.

Students feel that this pressure increases, especially before exams, when submitting final assignments, or when facing graduation targets. As explained by (Santrock J. W 2019), Academic pressure can cause complex psychological reactions, including feelings of anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and loss of motivation to learn. The majority of participants revealed that the mounting workload, competing grades between students, and worries about their academic future were the main triggers for the stress they experienced. When under pressure, students tend to experience feelings of inadequacy, withdraw from social environments, and experience problems concentrating. This is in accordance with opinion (Goleman D 2020), which states that stress that is not well managed can reduce a person's emotional and cognitive abilities in completing academic tasks. Symptoms commonly experienced by participants include: sleep disturbances, decreased motivation to study, excessive anxiety and worry, procrastination (procrastination of tasks), and feelings of failure and helplessness. (Baron R. A & Byrne D. 2018)

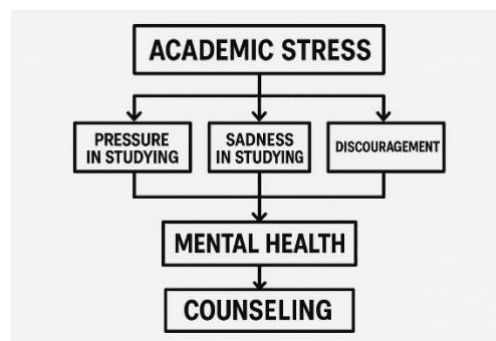
In facing these conditions, participants felt that the presence of counseling services really helped them to manage pressure. Individual counseling is felt to provide a safe space to express feelings and thoughts without fear of being judged. Apart from that, group counseling provides social support which makes them realize that the problems they face are not experienced alone. Meanwhile, stress management training introduces them to techniques such as relaxation, time planning, and strengthening positive thinking patterns. In line with opinion (Corey G. 2021), Counseling that is carried out empathetically and provides solutions can equip students with skills to deal with stress and build psychological resilience. Students also value the importance of continuity of counseling sessions, because through a structured and continuous approach, they feel more confident and ready to face academic challenges (Schmidt J. J. 2020).

Overall, the results of this study indicate that:

1. Academic stress is a real condition that has a serious impact on students' mental health;
2. Appropriate, empathetic and sustainable counseling strategies have been proven to help students manage academic stress effectively;
3. It is necessary to improve the quality and accessibility of counseling services in higher education so that the benefits can be felt by more students, especially those who are psychologically vulnerable.

3. 2 Discussion

Academic students generally of continuous arises because of lecturers, parents students feel they perfect. According (2021), Academic trigger for student workload and grades. In this condition, students often feel anxious and lose control of their time, which ultimately impacts sleep quality and study concentration. Guidance counseling plays a role in helping students recognize the limits of their abilities and develop time management strategies so that study pressure does not turn into dangerous mental stress.



stress experienced by stems from the pressure studying. This pressure high expectations from and themselves, so have to always appear to (Hardiansyah R pressure is the main stress due to excessive targets for achieving high

Sadness in studying is often a psychological effect of students' inability to meet academic demands. This happens when students fail an exam, don't understand the course material, or feel left behind by their peers. (Putri V. M 2022) stated that students who feel sad in the learning process will experience a decrease in motivation and begin to question their abilities. In this situation, counseling has a strategic role to strengthen students' affective aspects through an empathetic emotional approach. Counseling services that facilitate self-reflection and positive acceptance of failure have proven effective in reducing sadness and restoring students' self-confidence (Nugroho A 2021)

Symptoms of discouragement experienced by students as part of academic stress are a further form of unmanageable pressure and sadness. Students who are discouraged tend to lose their academic vision, are reluctant to attend lectures, and even intend to stop studying. As explained by (Amalia S & Suryani D 2020) , Discouragement arises when students feel that all efforts are fruitless. In this case, the presence of counselors is really needed to revive students' hopes and goals through a sustainable counseling program. According to (Rakhmat J W 2007) , counselors must facilitate realistic academic planning and inject personal resilience values so that students are able to rise from adversity. Consistent counseling intervention is able to encourage students to develop a positive mindset and realize that failure is not the end, but rather part of the process of academic and mental growth.

This picture shows the flow of academic stress experienced by students, starting from pressure, sadness, and feelings of hopelessness in studying which have an impact on mental health, where the research results in the article confirm that intervention through counseling services is very important to help students manage academic stress and restore their psychological well-being. In addition, pressure in studying arises due to high academic demands, such as piling up assignments, difficult exams, and high expectations of achievement, which can trigger excessive stress. This has a direct impact on students' mental health, so guidance and counseling strategies are needed to help them manage this pressure (Sarafino E. P 2011). Distress in

studying can arise from academic failure, feelings of being left behind by peers, or lack of motivation, all of which can reduce a student's enthusiasm for learning. This condition indicates the important role of counselors in providing emotional support to maintain students' mental well-being (Santrock J. W 2007). Students often experience discouragement when they experience repeated failures or feel that their efforts are not producing results, which leads to a loss of academic motivation. Through appropriate counseling, students can be directed to rebuild their self- confidence and enthusiasm for learning (Corey. G 2013)

4. Conclusion

This research confirms that academic stress is a serious problem that has a negative impact on students' mental health, especially in the form of study pressure, sadness and discouragement. An important contribution of this research is that it shows that counseling services have a strategic and effective role in helping students recognize, understand and manage the psychological pressure they experience. Through an empathetic, sustainable and individual needs-based approach, counseling has been proven to be able to build students' mental resilience and improve their quality of life amidst complex academic challenges.

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