Help-Seeking Attitudes and Academic Stress Among Undergraduate Students

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

University students' mental health and academic performance are significantly impacted by academic stress. This study looked at the academic stress levels, counseling experiences, emotional support networks, and help-seeking attitudes among 102 Indonesian undergraduate students between the ages of 19 and 24. The majority of students (71.6%) chose to ask friends for help, followed by parents (29.4%) and self-help (21.6%), according to the findings. Approximately half (52%) had sought counseling services, mostly in high school or college. Although some students expressed displeasure, the majority of counseling experiences were viewed as beneficial (60.4%). Only 4.9% of students reported high levels of academic stress, compared to the majority (81.4%) who reported moderate levels. Students who attended counseling did not significantly differ from those who did not in terms of their academic stress. This can happen due to limited respondents. While older students were more likely to seek therapy, stress levels and age did not significantly correlate. The results underline the value of peer support and draw attention to obstacles like stigma and accessibility that prevent people from formally seeking help. To further promote student well-being and academic success in Indonesian higher education, the study suggests expanding peer support programs, raising mental health awareness, and improving culturally relevant counseling services.

Introduction

University students face several cognitive and emotional obstacles in their academic lives, particularly as they manage growing academic demands, life changes, and intricate social expectations. Among all of these challenges, academic stress has become one of the most common problems impacting students' academic performance and mental health (Chyu & Chen, 2022; Gao,

2023; García-Ros et al., 2023; Karaman & Watson, 2017; You, 2018). When a student feels that the demands of their studies are too great or surpass their capacity for coping, it is referred to as academic stress. Stress from schoolwork can cause mental health issues like anxiety or depression if it is not managed. It can also hinder motivation and focus.

Students frequently resort to a variety of official and informal help-seeking methods in reaction to academic stress. The act of actively looking for support, guidance, or help in handling psychological distress or problematic circumstances is known as "help-seeking." (Putri et al., 2018) Even though many institutions offer professional psychological services like therapy, studies continually demonstrate that students are more likely to rely on unofficial sources like friends and family. Cultural values, stigma, accessibility, and efficacy views frequently influence these decisions. Peer and family ties are especially crucial to emotional support networks in collectivist societies like Indonesia (Sutanti, 2019).

In many contexts, like Indonesia, the use of counseling services in higher education is still quite low, despite its increasing acknowledgment. Pupils may believe that counseling is superfluous, be concerned about confidentiality, or worry about being perceived as weak. Because of this, many students try to manage their stress on their own or only seek help when things have gotten out of hand. However, people who do use counseling services could have different opinions about how beneficial and significant they are. Designing more adaptable and student-centered mental health programs requires an understanding of how students see and assess these services (Olivera et al., 2023).

On the other hand, a number of behavioral and psychological effects have been linked to academic stress (Noh et al., 2020; Okechukwu et al., 2022). According to several studies, children may be motivated to perform well by moderate amounts of stress, but severe or ongoing stress can result in burnout, disengagement from school, and emotional exhaustion. Examining students' levels of academic stress and the variables that might affect it, such as age, gender, and counseling history, is crucial. Additionally, investigating the relationship between academic stress and help-seeking behavior may shed light on how students manage their stress levels and the efficacy of the mental health resources available today.

Although university students around the world are becoming more interested in mental health concerns, little study has been done to particularly examine how academic stress and help-seeking attitudes interact in Indonesia (Sutanti, 2019). Few studies examine how students seek help and how beneficial they believe that treatment to be, while the majority highlight the prevalence of stress or obstacles to counseling. This disparity emphasizes how important it is to look into students' real

behavior, preferences, and experiences-especially when it comes to formal counseling use and perceived results.

Examining undergraduate students' views toward requesting help, their sources of emotional support, their experiences using counseling services, and their present levels of academic stress are the objectives of this study. Furthermore, this study aims to determine whether counseling and age are associated with reduced academic stress. This study aims to offer significant implications for peer support programs, campus counseling services, and more general student welfare services in Indonesian higher education settings by analyzing these variables.

Method

This study examined undergraduate students' attitudes toward help-seeking and their academic stress levels using a quantitative cross-sectional research methodology (Creswell, 2009; Nguyen et al., 2019; Yee et al., 2021). Students' utilization of counseling services, social support, and opinions about counseling satisfaction were also investigated in this study. This design was chosen to document students' psychological reactions and actions throughout their academic careers.

A sample of 102 undergraduate students from one university in Indonesia participated in this study. Their average age was 21 years, with an age range of 19 to 24 years. The sample included students who had received therapy and those who had not. All students were guaranteed anonymity and secrecy during the study, and participation was entirely voluntary. Prior to their involvement, informed consent was acquired, and no personal data was gathered.

An online self-administered survey disseminated through Google Forms was used to collect data. There were three major parts to the survey. First, students' levels of academic stress were measured using the Perceived School Stress Assessment (PSSA) (Cohen, 1994), which was divided into three categories: low, moderate, and high. Second, students' help-seeking behaviors were evaluated using a short questionnaire created by the researcher. It asked them if they had ever sought counseling, at what stage (e.g., elementary, high school, university), who they turn to in times of stress (friends, parents, or themselves), and how beneficial they thought those sessions were. On a scale of 1 to 10, respondents were also asked to score how satisfied they were overall with counseling. Third, to put the findings in context, demographic data like age and gender were gathered.

Following data collection, replies were examined for consistency and completeness. IBM SPSS Statistics were then used to examine the data. The patterns of help-seeking behavior and

academic stress levels were compiled using descriptive statistics including means, frequencies, and percentages. To determine if the stress scores were normally distributed, normality tests were performed using the Shapiro-Wilk method. Independent samples t-tests were used in inferential analyses to compare the academic stress levels of students who had and had not received counseling. When normality was not satisfied, non-parametric options such as Mann-Whitney U tests were employed. Furthermore, Spearman's rho correlation tests were used to investigate the connection between academic stress and age. The entire process adhered to ethical research guidelines, guaranteeing that each participant received respectful treatment and that the information gathered was used to provide useful suggestions for enhancing mental health support networks and services in higher education.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Among undergraduate students (N = 102), whose average age was 21 years old (range: 19–24), this study examined their attitudes toward requesting help and their levels of academic stress. According to the findings, most students preferred to turn to their friends (71.6%), parents (29.4%), themselves (21.6%), extended family members like siblings or grandparents (8.8%), God (6.9%), and romantic partners (3.9%) for help when they were under stress or experiencing emotional challenges. Table 1 displays this distribution.

Table 1 *Sources of Emotional Support Reported by Students (N = 102)*

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Friend	73	71.6%
Parent	30	29.4%
Self	22	21.6%
Family (siblings, grandparents)	9	8.8%
God	7	6.9%
Romantic Partner	4	3.9%

This excessive dependence on peers indicates that peer-based mental health initiatives may be especially successful and emphasizes the social orientation of undergraduate support networks. Barriers like stigma, accessibility, or mistrust of institutional support systems may be the reason why a comparatively small percentage of students turn to family or official figures (such as counselors) for assistance. Regarding obtaining professional assistance, 49 students (48.0%) said they had never sought professional therapy, whereas 53 students (52.0%) had done so at some time

in their life. Very few students received support during earlier phases, such as junior high school (2.9%) or elementary school (1.0%). The most common times to visit counseling were during university (24.5%) and high school (23.5%). Table 2 displays these data.

Table 2 *When Students Attended Counseling (N = 102)*

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
University	25	24.5%
High School	24	23.5%
Junior High School	3	2.9%
Elementary School	1	1.0%
Never Attended	49	48.0%

According to these results, professional counseling is still underutilized in the early years of education and becomes more available or required as students move through the academic system. Early school-based counseling promotion initiatives could improve early intervention and foster the development of mental health. Additionally, counseling-receiving students were asked to score how beneficial their sessions were. While some evaluated it as extremely useful (20.8%), very helpful (3.8%), slightly helpful (5.7%), or not helpful (9.4%), the majority (60.4%) thought it was helpful. All counseling clients had an average satisfaction rating of 6.64 out of 10. Table 3 provides a summary of these statistics.

Table 3 *Perception of Counseling Helpfulness (n = 53)*

Perceived Helpfulness	Frequency	Percentage
Helpful	32	60.4%
Quite Helpful	11	20.8%
Very Helpful	2	3.8%
Slightly Helpful	3	5.7%
Not Helpful	5	9.4%

These findings imply that counseling was largely seen as helpful by students who sought it out. However, the existence of some discontent suggests that more individualized, easily accessible, and culturally sensitive counseling services could be advantageous for students' needs and expectations. According to the Perceived School Stress Assessment (PSSA), the majority of students (81.4%) reported moderate levels of academic stress, whereas fewer indicated low (13.7%) or high (4.9%) levels. Table 4 shows the complete distribution.

Table 4. *Distribution of Academic Stress Levels (N = 102)*

Stress Level	Frequency	Percentage
Moderate	83	81.4%
Low	14	13.7%
High	5	4.9%

The prevalence of moderate stress suggests that while most students do not face extreme levels of academic pressure, it is a typical occurrence. However, the presence of a high-stress subgroup necessitates specialized assistance and preventive measures, particularly for those who are vulnerable to emotional burnout. There was no discernible difference in stress levels between students who had and did not attend counseling, according to statistical testing ($t(100) = -0.756$, $p =.451$; Mann–Whitney $U = 837.0$, $p =.676$). Without taking into account other elements like the caliber, scheduling, or length of therapy, this may suggest that the availability or utilization of counseling services by itself has no direct effect on academic stress levels.

It's interesting to note that there was a significant age difference between students who had and had not attended counseling (Mann–Whitney $U = 508.0$, $p =.012$), which may indicate that older students are more willing or have more opportunities to seek professional help. Age, however, did not significantly influence how students experience academic pressure, as evidenced by the lack of a significant connection between the two variables (Spearman's $\rho = -.088$, $p =.378$). When everything is considered, the results highlight how crucial it is to increase access to counseling, encourage students to seek help early in their academic careers, and fortify peer support networks as an additional tactic to lessen academic stress.

Discussion

According to this study, friends are the main source of emotional support for Indonesian undergraduate students who are struggling academically. Peer support is strongly preferred (71.6%), which is consistent with Indonesia's collectivist cultural beliefs (McCarthy, 2005; Sutanti, 2019; Widaningtyas & Sutanti, 2022), which place a strong emphasis on social ties and group belonging. Peer counseling can be a useful strategy in innovating mental health services on campus. Universities may want to consider formalizing peer counseling or support groups to capitalize on current social dynamics (Fahmi et al., 2019).

More than half of college students have sought professional help from available counseling services, but overall utilization is still low. Access to counseling services is relatively low due to a variety of reasons such as stigma, confidentiality issues, and the perception of inaccessibility. This

shows how important it is for universities to massively advance mental health literacy and reduce the stigma associated with counseling. More students may use services if campaigns about the benefits of counseling services and normalizing seeking help are encouraged (Cheng et al., 2020; Kurniawan et al., 2022; Saadah et al., 2023).

In addition, the study showed that during the transition from high school to college, the presence of counseling tended to increase. This pattern suggests that during the transition, students tend to be encouraged to seek help. However, the low use of counseling in the early stages of education suggests a gap in opportunities for early intervention. Therefore, increasing mental health initiatives in primary and secondary education could help children become more resilient and better prepared to handle future academic demands (Bjørnsen et al., 2019).

The majority of students reported having positive experiences with counseling. Their opinions about counseling were generally good. The fact that some participants expressed dissatisfaction suggests that counseling may not fully meet the various requirements of each student. Individual counseling with attention to cultural sensitivity, understanding of their clients' expectations and backgrounds tends to increase their satisfaction (Chen et al., 2022; van Dis et al., 2020; Wolf et al., 2022).

The high study load of college students causes the majority of students to report experiencing moderate levels of academic stress. Prolonged or extreme stress can lead to burnout and alienation, although mild stress can sometimes have a positive impact and even inspire students. However, college students tend to be more susceptible to negative impacts on mental health. In fact, a small group of students report high levels of stress that require special attention. To prevent the situation from getting worse, it is necessary to create special support for these students (Voltmer et al., 2021).

Interestingly, there was no significant difference between the levels of academic stress of students who received counseling and those who did not. This study found that simply receiving therapy may not be enough to reduce stress. Many factors influence the success of counseling such as the therapeutic relationship, frequency of sessions, and timeliness of the intervention, likely influence how effective counseling is. Future research should look at these factors to see what makes counseling more effective in reducing academic stress.

Although age did not influence stress levels, the finding that older students were more likely to seek counseling suggests that maturity or increased awareness may impact help-seeking behavior. Younger students may not be aware or confident enough to seek professional help, even when their stress levels are similar. Therefore, colleges should promote mental health literacy and

early engagement strategies aimed at younger groups. Student mental health can be improved by encouraging proactive help-seeking early in college (Choi et al., 2010).

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into Indonesian undergraduate students' counseling experiences, academic stress levels, and help-seeking behaviors. Peer networks are crucial for children's emotional coping, as seen by the preference for unofficial friend support. Despite being widely regarded as beneficial, counseling is still not widely used, particularly in the early years of education. While most students experience moderate levels of academic stress, some are extremely stressed and require extra support. Less academic stress was not directly associated with counseling attendance, suggesting that counseling services alone may not be sufficient if quality, accessibility, and cultural relevance are not taken into account. The findings demonstrate that colleges need to improve social support networks, lessen stigma, and increase access to mental health care in order to effectively address students' psychological well-being. If higher education institutions in Indonesia have an improved comprehension of students' actual help-seeking, they may be able to create more adaptable and successful strategies that support early intervention, mainstream mental health services, and ultimately improve student welfare and academic achievement.

Acknowledgment

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