

BETWEEN SELF AND DEADLINES: STUDENTS' BATTLE TO PRESERVE MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the struggles of UIN Syahada students in maintaining mental health amidst the pressure of academic assignment deadlines. The methodology employed is qualitative with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews and participatory observation of several active students. The results indicate that students face significant challenges in managing stress and time pressure, but they strive to develop coping strategies such as time management, sharing feelings with friends, and engaging in relaxation activities. These findings emphasize the importance of social support and awareness of mental health among students as part of preventive efforts against academic stress. Academic pressure is often a significant source of psychological burden for university students, Affecting their mental health and emotional stability. This study aims to explore the strategies used by students to maintain inner balance amidst demanding academic responsibilities. A descriptive Qualitative approach was employed, using in-depth interviews with ten students from various Departments at a public university. The findings reveal that students cope with stress through several methods, such as meditation, religious practices, time management, and social support from family and peers. The study also found that students with strong self-awareness and environmental support are more likely to maintain emotional stability. It concludes that mental health efforts within campus life should not rest solely on individual responsibility but also require systemic support from Educational institutions. These results are expected to serve as input for universities to provide Spaces and policies that support students' psychological well-being in a sustainable manner.

Keywords: Mental Health, Deadlines, Students, Coping Strategies

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perjuangan mahasiswa UIN Syahada dalam menjaga kesehatan mental di tengah tekanan deadline tugas akademik. Metodologi yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipatif terhadap sejumlah mahasiswa aktif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa menghadapi tantangan besar dalam mengelola stres dan tekanan waktu, namun mereka berusaha mengembangkan strategi coping seperti manajemen waktu, berbagi perasaan dengan teman, dan melakukan aktivitas relaksasi. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya dukungan sosial dan kesadaran akan kesehatan mental di kalangan mahasiswa sebagai bagian dari upaya preventif terhadap stres akademik. Tekanan akademik kerap menjadi sumber beban psikologis yang signifikan bagi mahasiswa. Memengaruhi kesehatan mental dan kestabilan emosional mereka. Studi ini bertujuan untuk memahami strategi yang digunakan mahasiswa dalam membangun keseimbangan batin di tengah tuntutan akademik yang berat. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode wawancara mendalam terhadap sepuluh mahasiswa dari berbagai jurusan di perguruan tinggi negeri. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa menghadapi tekanan melalui berbagai cara, seperti meditasi, ibadah, manajemen waktu, serta dukungan sosial dari keluarga dan teman sebaya. Temuan juga menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa yang memiliki kesadaran diri dan dukungan

lingkungan yang kuat cenderung lebih mampu menjaga keseimbangan batin. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa upaya menjaga kesehatan mental di lingkungan kampus tidak hanya menjadi tanggung jawab individu, tetapi juga memerlukan dukungan sistematis dari institusi pendidikan. Hasil ini diharapkan dapat menjadi masukan bagi pihak kampus untuk menyediakan ruang dan kebijakan yang mendukung kesejahteraan psikologis mahasiswa secara berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Kesehatan Mental, Deadline, Mahasiswa, Coping Strategies

Introduction

In today's era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, the world of education has undergone significant changes, especially at the university level. Students as agents of change and the next generation of the nation are faced with various academic and non-academic challenges that they must face simultaneously. One of the main challenges that often causes pressure is deadlines or deadlines in completing assignments, research, and exams. This pressure can have a direct or indirect impact on students' mental health, making it an important concern in the context of higher education (Anwar & Rahman, 2022). In the ideal imagination, college is a fun and hopeful phase of life. It is at this point that a person begins to know their identity, gain knowledge, expand relationships, and prepare for the future. Students are considered as agents of change, who are not only required to be academically capable but also active in organizational activities, youth, and community service. The campus environment is positioned as a place that supports intellectual and emotional growth, forming independent, critical, and resilient individuals. In the context of this ideal, students should have enough time to study, socialize, pursue passions, and maintain a balance between physical and mental health.

However, reality often speaks otherwise. Many students face such immense pressure from various directions. Academic assignments pile up, deadlines come one after another, and the expectations from lecturers, family, and even yourself feel burdensome. Not a few also have to divide their time between college and side jobs to meet their economic needs. Not to mention the demands to continue to exist on social media, maintain friendships, and face identity crises. In this situation, students often feel trapped in an endless vortex of activities, which erode their energy, rest time, and even mental health.

Indications of this pressure seem to be increasingly evident from various studies and phenomena in the field. Annual reports from various counseling service institutions in colleges show a significant increase in the number of students experiencing chronic stress, anxiety disorders, and depression. Many of them experience overthinking, insomnia, emotional exhaustion, and even loss of motivation for life. Some college students begin to withdraw from social environments, feel worthless, or feel guilty about taking time for themselves. Ironically, the culture of "continuous

productivity," or toxic productivity, is often considered the standard of success, without regard for the mental well-being of the individual.

Seeing this condition, it is time for all parties to start paying serious attention to mental health issues among students. The solution does not only lie in individual students but also involves the active role of higher education institutions, teaching staff, and the campus community at large. Campuses need to provide a comprehensive support system, from the provision of responsive and unpaid counselling services and stress management training to flexibility in the learning and assessment systems. Lecturers and academic managers also need to be trained to recognize signs of mental distress in students and create an empathetic learning environment.

On the other hand, students need to be equipped with self-management skills, such as time management, relaxation techniques, the ability to set boundaries, and the courage to say no to excessive pressure. It's also important to create a safe space, both physically and digitally, where students can share, support, and feel accepted without stigma. Understanding that mental health is an important part of educational success will bring about a more humanist paradigm shift in the academic world.

Students' mental health is a crucial aspect that affects their academic, social, and personal developmental success. When students are unable to manage the stress and pressure of deadlines, this can lead to various psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion. This condition not only affects the quality of life of students but also has the potential to hinder their learning process and academic achievement optimally. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of students' struggles in maintaining mental health is very important to be studied in depth (Dewi & Sari, 2020).

UIN Syahada, as one of the state universities in Indonesia, has its own challenges in supporting students to stay mentally healthy. Students at this institution are faced with various academic tasks that demand discipline and good time management, in addition to the demands of social life and religious activities. Their struggle to balance academic demands and psychological conditions is an interesting phenomenon to study, especially in the context of the coping strategies they use to survive and stay mentally healthy (Fajar & Kusuma, 2023).

College students often experience an internal conflict between the desire to complete assignments on time and maintaining their psychological well-being. Many of them feel depressed and anxious as deadlines approach, so they need strategies to reduce stress. Some common coping strategies include better time management, sharing feelings with peers, doing physical and spiritual activities,

and seeking support from the surrounding environment. However, there are still major challenges in managing these pressures in a sustainable manner.

The importance of the role of educational institutions and the social environment in supporting students to maintain their mental health. Supportive programs such as psychological counseling, stress management training, and strengthening awareness of the importance of mental health need to be actively developed. In addition, students themselves need to be educated about the importance of maintaining a balance between academic tasks and mental health so that they are able to overcome deadline pressures effectively without sacrificing psychological well-being.

This research is important to improve understanding of students' mental dynamics in facing academic deadlines. Through a qualitative approach, it is hoped that a deeper and more authentic picture of their struggle can be obtained. It is hoped that the results of this study can be a valuable input for the development of more effective strategies in supporting students to stay mentally healthy so that they can achieve academic success and personal well-being at the same time.

The novelty of this research lies in its in-depth focus on the struggle of UIN Syahada students in maintaining mental health amid the pressure of academic deadlines, an aspect that has not been explored specifically in the context of the university. The research not only identifies the challenges students face but also highlights the coping strategies they apply practically and contextually, such as time management and sharing of feelings, that can be the basis for the development of mental health support programs in academic settings.

In addition, the use of a qualitative approach with in-depth interview techniques and participatory observation provides a richer and more authentic picture of the student experience, resulting in more relevant and applicable findings in academic stress prevention efforts that are in accordance with the needs of students directly. Thus, this research offers a new contribution in understanding the dynamics of students' mental health in times of high academic stress, while opening up opportunities for innovation of more personalized and contextual intervention strategies.

Method

In this study, the approach used is qualitative because it aims to explore students' subjective experiences in maintaining their mental health in the midst of the pressure of academic deadlines. This approach allows researchers to deeply understand the processes, perceptions, and coping strategies that students apply in dealing with these challenges. By focusing on the experiences and meanings provided by students, this methodology is suitable for describing the dynamics of their struggle comprehensively. The object of this research is a fourth-semester student at the Islamic

University of Sheikh Ali Hasan Ahmad Padangsidimpuan which totals 16 students. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observations. The data obtained from the interviews will be analyzed hermeneutically and narratively, highlighting the main themes that emerge from the student experience. Open and axial coding techniques are used to identify their patterns of coping, feelings, and perceptions of mental health. The results of this analysis will be presented in the form of an in-depth description that describes the process of student struggle in a contextual manner.

Results and Discussion

The data analysis in this research yielded several themes, as shown in the following table:

Themes	Subthemes
1. Emotional and Psychological Responses to Academic Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of enthusiasm, dizziness, restlessness, anxiety, panic, stress- Mixed feelings and confusion- Physical effects: pain, difficulty sleeping, decreased appetite, fatigue, staying up late- Feeling depressed and burdened with thoughts due to tasks and deadlines
2. Time and Task Management Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manage task schedules and priorities- Divide time effectively (e.g. divide tasks into multiple sessions)- Create lists/to-do lists and use calendar applications- Assign assignments and work on tasks early- Set realistic deadlines and distribute deadlines evenly throughout the semester
3. Coping Mechanisms and Stress Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on doing tasks that can be completed first- Get enough rest and a healthy lifestyle (eat regularly, exercise)- Listen to Qur'anic verses, prayers, music that builds the spirit- Entertainment such as watching funny videos, playing games, taking leisurely walks- Venting and sharing stories with friends, family, or loved ones- Worship and prayer as mental reinforcement and calmness
4. Social Support and Motivational Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parental support as a primary motivation- Support from friends and family- The role of parents, siblings, and loved ones in helping to reduce stress- Self-motivation to encourage and cope with academic pressure- Intrinsic motivation and the role of the social environment in mental resilience

Themes	Subthemes
5. Academic Load and Its Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accumulated many tasks and deadlines- Academic pressure due to exams and concurrent assignments- Difficulty managing heavy academic loads- Desire for the task system to be improved, such as a more evenly distributed deadline, or a reduction in the number of assignments- The impact of accumulated tasks on the balance between academic and personal life
6. Balance Between Academic and Personal Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The importance of academic balance with personal life- Trying to maintain balance despite the pressure of tasks and deadlines- Difficulty achieving balance at certain times (e.g. before exams)- Physical and mental activities that help maintain balance (sports, worship, entertainment)

Based on the table, the answers to each research question in this research are:

1. How do students experience academic pressure related to deadlines?

Students report experiencing various forms of intense psychological distress when facing assignment and exam deadlines. The most common feelings that arise are anxiety, stress, dizziness, panic, and even loss of spirit and restlessness. For example, one of the respondents stated, "My hardest experience with academic pressure is deadlines, sometimes to the point where I stay up late a lot" (Respondent 7). This pressure also has an impact on physical conditions, such as difficulty sleeping, decreased appetite, and excessive tiredness, which was also expressed by other respondents: "I often find it difficult to sleep, and my appetite decreases due to the number of tasks in a short period of time" (Respondent 16). This condition shows that deadlines not only cause mental stress but also affect the physical health of students.

This phenomenon is in line with the theory of academic stress according to Misra and McKean (2000), which states that time pressure and task load are two of the main triggers of stress in students. In addition, the results of Putwain's (2007) research also confirm that accumulated deadlines contribute significantly to the level of academic anxiety.

2. What strategies do students use to maintain mental health when facing deadlines?

Students adopt various strategies to overcome deadline pressure, ranging from time management and planned task sharing to psychological and physical coping techniques. One of the main strategies is scheduling and prioritizing tasks, as revealed by respondents: "I divide my time into three hours for campus assignments, three hours for other priorities, and the rest for rest" (Respondent 12). This strategy reflects the concept of effective time management, which, according to Britton and Tesser (1991), can reduce stress levels and increase productivity.

In addition, students also use relaxation and entertainment activities as a stress reduction mechanism. For example, some respondents cited listening to music, watching funny videos, exercising, or doing worship as ways to maintain mental balance. One of the respondents said, "I maintain my mental health with worship and convince myself that I am capable of this task" (Respondent 11), while the other shared, "Confiding with friends and taking a leisurely walk really helps reduce stress" (Respondent 14). This strategy is in line with the approach to emotional coping and relaxation described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which emphasizes the importance of managing emotions in the face of stress.

3. What factors help or hinder students in managing deadline-related stress?

The main factor that helps college students in managing stress is social support from family, friends, and close people. Many respondents cited the role of parents and friends as an important motivator in dealing with academic pressure. "Parents and close friends are very important in helping me keep my spirits up" (Respondent 13). This social support is in line with the buffering effect theory of Cohen and Wills (1985), which states that social support can reduce the negative impact of stress on mental health.

On the other hand, the inhibiting factors include the workload that accumulates at the same time and the uneven distribution of deadlines. This makes it difficult to maintain a balance between academic and personal life. "I feel that my academic and personal life balance is still often disturbed, especially if there are three deadlines in one week" (Respondent 13). In addition, the inability to manage time optimally is also an obstacle, as expressed: "It is difficult to manage time when tasks come at once and deadlines are very tight" (Respondent 7).

A. Academic stress levels and students' feelings

Students face an increasing level of academic pressure as the academic demands in college increase. The load of tasks, exams, and large projects often come together, creating situations that demand good time management and mental resilience. Many students admit to feeling anxious when

approaching the deadline for an important assignment or exam. This feeling of worry arises from the worry of failing to achieve the expected academic targets, as well as pressure from the surrounding environment that demands the best performance.

The pressure is not only academic but also emotional. College students often feel psychologically depressed, which can lead to stress and mental exhaustion. This feeling is sometimes accompanied by a feeling of not being able to meet the expectations of oneself or others. Another factor that amplifies the pressure is the uncertainty of the future and the high competition in the lecture environment. Students feel that they have to show their best achievements in order to get good career opportunities, thus increasing the mental burden.

The discomfort that arises due to this pressure can affect the physical and emotional health of students. Some of them experience sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, or even feel hopeless. This level of pressure is also influenced by personal factors such as the student's own personality and stress management skills. Students with low levels of resilience tend to feel burdened and depressed more easily.

B. Coping Strategies Carried Out by Students

Students develop a variety of coping strategies to deal with academic pressure. One of the most common is disciplined time management, such as creating study schedules and setting task priorities. Additionally, many college students utilize relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, or light exercise, to reduce tension and calm the mind.

Sharing feelings and experiences with peers is also an important strategy. They feel that talking about problems can reduce the emotional burden and get advice or moral support. Spiritual activities, such as worship and prayer, are also often used as effective coping mechanisms. Students feel that this activity helps them gain peace and mental strength (Irawan, D., & Putri, R. (2022)).

Some students also adopt a positive mindset and do self-reflection to increase resilience and motivation. They try to focus on small achievements as a step towards big success. Other strategies include avoiding procrastination, improving sleep patterns, and maintaining a healthy diet to support physical and mental health during stress.

Although various strategies have been implemented, not all students are able to manage stress optimally. Therefore, support from the environment, such as institutions and families, is indispensable to support their coping success.

C. The Role of the Social Environment and Institutions

Social environments, such as family and friends, have a big role to play in helping students cope with academic pressure. Emotional support and motivation from those closest to you can increase students' mental resilience. Peers are often a place to share grievances and experiences, helping to reduce loneliness and emotional burden. This social interaction serves as an important coping mechanism.

Lecturers and academic staff also have a strategic role in creating a supportive learning environment. Providing motivation, direction, and understanding to students can reduce their stress levels. Facilities and services from institutions, such as counseling centers and stress management training, are important supporting factors. Students who access these services feel better able to manage their stress and emotions.

However, there are still shortages in institutional services related to mental health. Some students feel that the facilities available are inadequate or not widely known, so they are reluctant to take advantage of them. The role of the social and institutional environment is not only limited to providing facilities but also in building an open culture and supporting students to seek help when facing pressure.

D. The Impact of Stress on Emotional Well-Being

High academic pressure can lead to a variety of negative impacts on students' emotional well-being. Anxiety and fear of failure are common experiences that are often felt. Prolonged feelings of overwhelm and stress can worsen mental states, causing students to feel helpless and lose motivation to continue learning (Ahmad & Nurhadi, 2021).

This emotional impact often leads to sleep disorders, eating disorders, and other physical health problems, all of which contribute to a decrease in the quality of life of students. Some college students experience anxiety disorders and depression due to uncontrollable stress. They feel that the burden is too heavy to deal with alone.

This impact can also affect their social relationships. Stress and mental fatigue make students more irritable and withdrawn from the social environment. Impaired emotional well-being also has an impact on academic performance. Students who are unable to manage stress well tend to experience decreased achievement and motivation to learn.

E. The Role of Rituals and Spiritual Activities

Many students use spiritual activities as a way to cope with academic pressure. Worship and prayer are activities that give peace and inner strength. They feel that spiritual activities help reduce feelings of anxiety and increase confidence in facing academic challenges.

This activity is also believed to be able to strengthen confidence and peace of mind so that students are able to think clearly and focus when studying or facing exams. In addition, spiritual rituals are often performed as a form of self-control and as a reminder that they are not alone in facing difficulties.

Spiritual activities also help increase gratitude and positive thinking, which contributes to the emotional stability of students. In certain cultural contexts, spiritual activities such as meditation, prayer, and religious rituals become an integral part of effective coping. This role of spirituality not only helps reduce stress but also strengthens students' morals and ethics in undergoing their educational process.

F. Barriers to Managing Stress

The main barriers to managing stress among college students include a lack of knowledge about effective coping strategies. Many students do not know how to manage stress optimally. Limited access to supportive facilities, such as counseling centers or stress management training programs, is another obstacle. Many educational institutions do not provide adequate and accessible services.

Stigma towards mental health is also an important barrier. Students are reluctant to seek help for fear of being seen as weak or embarrassed. Unsupportive environmental conditions, such as family or cultural pressures that put academic success above all else, exacerbate these barriers.

Lack of time and a heavy academic load make it difficult for students to spend time doing relaxation or spiritual activities. They feel rushed and exhausted. Lack of skills in managing emotions and stress is also an inhibiting factor. Many students have not been taught coping techniques from an early age. These barriers require attention from institutions and the environment to create a supportive environment and improve students' ability to manage stress.

G. Students' Perceptions of the Role of Universities

Students view college as an institution that is not only responsible in the academic aspect but also in supporting their mental and emotional well-being. Most students expect that the campus provides adequate facilities and services to help them cope with academic pressure and stress.

A positive perception of the role of colleges in providing stress management training, counseling, and self-development programs is essential to improving student well-being. However, there are also students who feel that the role of universities is still not optimal, especially in terms of paying attention to the psychological aspects of students.

Some students consider that the competitive culture and high pressure on campus often overlook the importance of mental health and life balance. This perception encourages them to seek sources of support outside of the institution, which are sometimes not always available or adequate. Therefore, the role of universities must be strengthened with more holistic policies and programs, covering aspects of academic and student emotional well-being.

Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that UIN Syahada students face a fairly high academic deadline pressure, which often causes stress and challenges in maintaining their mental health. Nonetheless, they showed various coping strategies such as effective time management, sharing feelings with friends, and engaging in spiritual and physical activities in an effort to reduce stress and maintain psychological well-being. Support from the surrounding environment and awareness of the importance of mental health also play an important role in helping them better cope with these dynamics.

In addition, this study confirms that the role of educational institutions and the social environment is crucial in supporting students in maintaining their mental health. The development of supporting programs such as psychological counseling, stress management training, and increased awareness of mental health needs to be continuously improved so that students are able to effectively cope with deadline pressures without sacrificing psychological well-being. Thus, students' academic success and mental health can go hand in hand, creating a resilient generation that is ready to face future challenges.

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