

The Correlation Between Academic Stress and Psychological Well-Being Among High School Students in Indonesian Rural Areas

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Abstract

Introduction: Adolescents experience various pressures in meeting multiple demands in school life. As a result, adolescents can undergo academic stress. The emergence of academic stress affects psychological well-being.

Objective: This study examines the correlation between academic stress and psychological well-being experienced by high school students in rural areas. **Method:** This study applied a correlational design and cross-sectional approach. The samples in this study were 82 students from two senior high schools in rural areas with the criteria of students aged 15-19 years participating in the Adolescent Reproductive Health Information and Counseling Center (PIK-R) program. **Result and Discussion:** The results showed the value of $p = .003$ ($p < .05$) with correlation coefficient (r) = $-.319$. **Conclusions:** It shows the existence of negative correlation between academic stress and psychological well-being. It is hoped that students can overcome problems related to their academics with a positive response and that all parties involved in the school can carry out programs that help students overcome stress.

Introduction

Adolescents are children who are typically between 10 and 17 years of age although it has various definitions according to some experts, such as citizens under the age of 18 years based on the The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and aged 10 to 19 years old based on World Health Organization or WHO and the United Nations (UN) (Lucas, 2023). During adolescence, changes occur physically, psychologically, and cognitively which can cause problems if adolescents cannot adapt to dealing with them (Sudarsani et al., 2021). Data shows that 2.8% of people aged 15 years old and over experience mental health problem in Indonesia (Kemenkes, 2023). Adolescents who experience difficulties in dealing with their school life can also experience academic stress.

According to Sun et al. (2011 in Rohayati et al., 2022), academic stress is described as the pressure encountered by students due to concerns related to grades, school assignments, and various demands in the learning process. The needs faced by students are getting higher with increasing graduation standards with a passing rate that is expected to reach 100 percent, demands achievement, and excessive study load resulting in a feeling of stress (Taufik, 2021). Academic stress comes from individual perceptions related to academics which causes a feeling of depression and causes adverse reactions such as behavior, emotion, physical and cognitive (Achmad & Wahyudi, 2021). Haritay et al. (2025) found that 74% of students aged 13–15 experienced high levels of academic stress, while 17% reported moderate levels. Research conducted by Alsulami in 2018 (Safira & Hartati, 2021) found that academic stress is experienced by 10 to 30 percent of high school students. Academic stress causes the drop out of students and it will lead to decrease in earning potential and employment opportunities and also experiencing worse mental health (Gobena, 2024). The emergence of academic stress affects psychological well-being (Rohayati et al., 2022).

Ryff (1984, in Zahrah & Sukirno, 2022) states that individuals who can manage and control themselves and their environment are said to be in a state of psychological well-being. For students, psychological well-being can help them overcome all the problems they face and maximize their potential (Yusa, 2021). According to Ryff and Keyes in 1995 (Angelica et al., 2022), psychological well-being has several domains, such as life goals, environmental mastery, positive relationships with others, self-acceptance, autonomy, and the growth and self-development that sustainable. Stress management training can be an effective way to improve psychological well-being (Marasigan, 2023).

Academic stress is also experienced by adolescents who live in rural areas. Research by Gurung et al. (2020) on adolescents in rural areas of Nepal showed results in high academic stress. Adolescents who live in rural areas face a challenge of lower access to education and health facilities, especially health facilities. According to Hashim in 2003 (Gurung et al., 2020), suicide rates among adolescents in rural areas tend to increase due to academic failures. Based on the phenomena described, this study examines the correlation between academic stress and psychological well-being experienced by high school students in rural areas.

Method

This study applied a correlational design and cross-sectional approach. The study population consisted of students from two schools in Aceh Besar, Indonesia, from two different sub-districts. The total sample was 82 students from the two schools in Aceh Besar, with the criteria of (1) male and female students aged 15-19 years old and (2)

students participating in the Adolescent Reproductive Health Information and Counseling Center (PIK-R) program. The PIK-R program presents health-related material conveyed to students and provides counseling services that students can use to find solutions to their problems. Sampling was done randomly.

The data was collected in June 2022 at two public high schools. Questionnaires were given to students to fill out at home, and the questionnaire was accompanied by an informed consent form to be signed by the respondents and the parents of students under 17 years of age. The next day, students collected the completed questionnaires from the teacher, and the research team took the questionnaires.

The questionnaire used consisted of a demographic data questionnaire, an Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA) questionnaire to assess academic stress and a Psychological Well-Being Scale questionnaire. The demographic data questionnaire was developed by the researcher included school name, gender, and age. The ESSA questionnaire was developed by Sun et al. (2011), which contains 16 positive statement items with 5 Likert scales (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Furthermore, the Psychological Well-Being Scale Questionnaire was developed by Ryff, which consisted of 18 statement items with 7 Likert scales (from the answer choices of strongly agree to strongly disagree).

This research got through an ethical test by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing, Universitas Syiah Kuala, on May 2022 (Ethical Clearance number 113002300322). Demographic data analysis used frequency and percentage. Based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test results, academic stress, and psychological well-being data are typically distributed. Therefore, the correlation between academic stress and psychological well-being was analyzed using the Pearson Correlation test.

Result and Discussion

1. Result

A total of 82 students from two schools in Aceh Besar participated in this study. The study findings are presented below:

Table 1
The Distribution of Demographic Data (n=82)

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
School		
- 1 st high school	38	46.3
- 2 nd high school	44	53.7
Gender		
- Female	70	85.4
- Male	12	14.6
Age		
- 15 years old	9	11.0
- 16 years old	36	43.9
- 17 years old	33	40.2
- 18 years old	4	4.9

The results of data analysis for demographics data in Table 1 show that the majority of respondents came from MAN 1 Sibreh (53.7%), were female (85.4%) and were 16 years old (43.9%).

Table 2

The Correlation Between Academic Stress and Psychological Well-Being Among High School Students in Rural Areas (n=82)

	<i>P</i> value	<i>r</i>
Academic Stress	.003	- .319
Psychological Well-Being		

Based on Table 2, the data analysis result shows correlation between academic stress and the psychological well-being of students from rural areas with a value of $p = .003$ ($p < .05$). The value of the correlation coefficient (r) = - .319 indicates a negative correlation between academic stress and psychological well-being. It implies the higher the academic stress, the more psychological well-being will reduce, and vice versa.

2. Discussion

Academic stress is the pressure experienced by students due to all the demands of their school life. This study's outcome shows that there is a correlation between academic stress and psychological well-being. This result aligned with the research by Yusa (2021), which found a negative correlation between academic stress and the psychological well-being of high school students. Academic stress on students in the study was in the moderate category, but they were able to respond positively so that it did not interfere with their psychological well-being. Another study conducted by Zahrah and Sukirno (2022) also found similar results, namely a negative correlation between psychological well-being and academic stress among students.

Low academic stress will have an impact in the form of high psychological well-being. Barbayannis, et al. (2022) found the correlation between perceived academic stress and mental well-being, indicating that academic stress factors, such as expectations for achievement, workload and grading pressures, and students' perceptions of their academic abilities, play an equally significant role in psychological well-being. High level of academic stress can lead to physical and psychological problems, such as anxiety, nervousness, stress-related illness, and depression. Those problems will negatively affect students' academic performance (Aziz et al., 2024).

Academic stress can be managed by using several strategies, such as relaxation techniques, stress management and giving education related to coping mechanism (Masduki, 2025). The negative impacts of academic stress can be mitigated through the availability and effective use of coping strategies, such as social support networks, counseling services, time management skills, and stress reduction techniques (Ki et al., 2024). Reducing academic stress will boost the students' psychological well-being and improve interpersonal interaction (Aziz et al., 2024).

Psychological well-being refers to a person's positive mood and their experience of happiness and life satisfaction and it is a concept within positive psychology which was introduced by Seligman (Munir et al., 2015). High psychological well-being allows a person to be independent, control himself with the surrounding environment, develop self-abilities, set goals in life, build relationships with other people, and accept himself (Aulia & Panjaitan, 2019). Students who have high psychological well-being are able to reach their full developmental potential (Wati & Hazim, 2024). Students with high psychological well-being also tend to adopt adaptive coping strategies, such as seeking emotional or instrumental support (Sovia & Hardiansyah, 2024).

According to Ryff, psychological well-being has several dimensions, namely having a positive attitude towards oneself (self-acceptance), having an independent attitude (autonomy), being able to manage good connection with others (positive relations with other people), having a purpose in life (objective), able to handle the environment (environment mastery) and have an open attitude in developing themselves (personal growth) (Sitorus & Maryatmi, 2020). According to Buchanan & Bowen in 2008 (Fahmawati et al., 2022), students' psychological well-being can be improved with support from various parties, such as family, friends, and the surrounding environment. Stress-management, time-management, and academic literacy skills will also help students cope with the challenges and demands of the academic system, particularly in the absence of strong social support structures (Rimonda et al., 2025). Furthermore, incorporating resilience-building initiatives can benefit all students by helping them develop essential coping strategies needed to manage academic stress effectively (Chen, 2024).

Based on the result of this study, most respondents were female students. Research conducted by Rahayu et al. (2021) concluded that female adolescents have higher levels of academic stress compared to male adolescents. The difference between gender may be linked to the tendency for female to place a higher value on academic achievement (Tran et al., 2024). On the contrary, based on the results of research by Taufik (2021), there is no remarkable difference between the academic stress experienced by female and male students. His study also found that students who attend school in the suburbs experience moderate academic stress. There is no remarkable difference in academic stress levels based on the school's location, whether in the suburbs or downtown.

Conclusion

This study shows a negative correlation between academic stress and psychological well-being. It means the higher the academic stress experienced, the lower the psychological well-being among high school students in rural areas and vice versa. Therefore, it is hoped that students can overcome problems related to their academics with a positive response and that all parties involved in the school can carry out programs that help students overcome stress.

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