

Mental Health Issues in Higher Education: Increasing Awareness, Access to Therapy, and Campus Support

Darmawati.R¹, Septin Maisharah K², Muhammad Umer Farooq Mujahid³

¹Universitas Sulawesi Barat and dwati8905@gmail.com

²Stikes Muhammadiyah Bojonegoro and chamaisharah09@gmail.com

³University of Health Sciences, Lahore and theansariuf@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the state of mental health among students at a leading university in West Java, Indonesia, focusing on the prevalence of mental health problems, awareness of available resources, access to therapy, and the effectiveness of campus support systems. A quantitative approach was employed, using a cross-sectional survey to collect data from a representative sample of 200 students. The results showed a significant prevalence of mental health challenges, including stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Worryingly, most students lacked awareness of available mental health resources. Access to therapy and counseling services is hindered by stigma and long wait times. While some campus support systems received positive feedback, others were deemed in need of improvement. To address these issues, recommendations included a comprehensive awareness campaign, efforts to reduce stigma, increased access to counseling services, and improved campus support systems. These findings underscore the urgent need to prioritize mental health support within the university community.

Keywords Mental Health, Higher Education, Increasing Awareness, Access, Therapy, Campus Support

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of mental health in the context of higher education. The university environment, with its academic demands, social dynamics and personal development, can provide both benefits and challenges for students. While academic success is the ultimate goal, it should not come at the expense of students' mental health [1]–[4]. In Indonesia, as in many other countries, there has been a marked shift in recognizing and addressing the mental health needs of university students [5], [6]. The transition to university life often brings a range of stressors, including academic expectations, financial burdens, and the need to adapt to new social and cultural environments. These stressors, if not managed well, can contribute to the development of mental health problems among university students [3], [7]–[9]. Therefore, understanding the prevalence of these issues and the support systems available to students is crucial to ensuring their overall well-being and academic success [10], [11].

Mental health problems are a global issue that affects individuals from various demographics, including university students [9], [12]. This study sought to shed light on the state of mental health among students at one of the leading universities in West Java, Indonesia. With the ever-increasing pressures and transitions that accompany university life, students often face unique challenges that can significantly impact their emotional and psychological well-being. Recognizing the importance of addressing these issues, our study investigated the prevalence of mental health challenges and evaluated the level of awareness, access to therapy, and effectiveness of campus support systems available to university students within a specific academic institution. The primary objective of this study is multi-faceted and designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of mental health issues among students at selected universities in West Java.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Prevalence of Mental Health Problems among College Students

The prevalence of mental health problems among university students has been a topic of concern worldwide. The unique challenges and stressors associated with the university environment can have a significant impact on students' mental health [9], [13], [14]. Several studies have examined this phenomenon, revealing that university students often grapple with stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues during their academic journey [15], [16]. In Indonesia, research has highlighted the high levels of stress experienced by university students [17]. Factors contributing to this stress include the academic demands of higher education, financial pressures, and social adjustment. This stress can manifest as mental health problems if left untreated. Therefore, understanding the prevalence of these issues is crucial to designing effective support systems.

2.2 Awareness of Mental Health Resources

Awareness of available mental health resources is essential to address mental health issues among college students. Students should know where and how to seek help when facing emotional or psychological challenges [18]–[20]. However, research shows that many students are unaware of the mental health services provided by their universities. In the Indonesian context, awareness and education campaigns around mental health are still limited, but are gradually gaining attention (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2016). It is important to explore the current level of awareness among university students, as this directly affects their likelihood to seek help when needed.

2.3 Access to Therapy and Counseling Services

Access to therapy and counseling services is an important component of mental health support for university students. Many universities offer these services as part of their support system. However, various barriers can prevent students from accessing the help they need. These barriers can include stigma associated with seeking mental health support, long waiting times for appointments, and limited availability of counsellors [10], [21]–[23]. Understanding the accessibility of therapy and counseling services is critical to designing interventions that can remove these barriers and provide timely assistance to college students facing mental health challenges.

2.4 Campus Support System

Campus support systems include a range of activities and services that aim to promote mental health among students. These systems may include awareness campaigns, peer support groups, academic accommodations for students with mental health conditions, and specialized counseling services. Research has shown that a supportive campus environment can significantly contribute to students' well-being and academic success [3], [7]–[9]. Therefore, it is imperative to evaluate students' perceptions of the effectiveness of existing campus support systems. This includes understanding how students perceive the impact of awareness campaigns, the value of peer support, and the accessibility and effectiveness of academic accommodations.

3. METHODS

This study used a quantitative research design to investigate mental health issues among students at a university in West Java, Indonesia. A quantitative approach allows us to systematically collect and analyse data to achieve research objectives [24]. This study used a cross-sectional design, which involves collecting data at one specific point in time, which provides an overview of the current state of mental health problems and support systems at the university.

3.1 Sampling

This study used a stratified random sampling technique to ensure the selection of a representative sample of the university student population. Stratification was based on several key factors, including gender, academic year, and faculty affiliation. This stratification allowed us to capture variations in mental health experiences and perceptions among different groups of students, a total of 200 students were involved in the study.

3.2 Data Collection

Data will be collected through the distribution of self-administered survey questionnaires to selected students. The questionnaire will be designed to collect comprehensive data on various aspects related to mental health issues, awareness, access to therapy, and perceptions of campus support. The survey instrument will include a combination of closed-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, and 1-5 Likert-scale items.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis will be conducted using SPSS version 19 as appropriate to gain meaningful insights from the data collected. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, will be used to provide an overview of the prevalence of mental health problems and students' awareness of available resources. This analysis will also include the distribution of demographic variables within the sample.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic Respondent

Demographic	Percentage
Age Group	
18-20 years	30%
21-23 years	40%
24-26 years	20%
> 26 years	10%
Academic Years	
Freshman (1st year)	25%
Sophomore (2nd year)	20%
Junior (3rd year)	30%
Senior (4th year)	25%
Faculty	

Faculty of Bisnis and Humaniora	30%
Faculty of Psychology	25%
Faculty of food industry technology	20%
Faculty of Geology Engineering	25%

Source: Primary Data (2023)

Based on the table above, the demographic characteristics of the respondents show the diversity of university students in terms of age, academic year, and faculty affiliation. These demographic factors may play an important role in shaping university students' experiences of mental health challenges and their interactions with support systems. Therefore, future analyses should consider these demographics to develop targeted strategies to promote mental health and improve support systems within universities.

4.1 Prevalence of Mental Health Problems

Analysis of the survey data showed a significant prevalence of mental health problems among students at selected universities in West Java. Approximately 62% of students surveyed reported experiencing moderate to high levels of stress, while 48% reported symptoms of anxiety. In addition, 38% of respondents indicated experiencing symptoms indicative of depression.

Demographic factors played a role in these findings. Female students reported slightly higher levels of stress and anxiety, with 66% experiencing moderate to high stress compared to 58% of male students. In addition, senior students reported higher levels of stress and anxiety (67%) compared to freshmen (54%).

These results are in line with previous research [3], [5], [6], [8], [9], and emphasize the urgent need for mental health support within universities.

4.2 Awareness of Mental Health Resources

The survey results showed a significant gap in awareness among students regarding mental health resources available at the university. 45% of respondents reported not being aware of any mental health services provided by the university.

Gender differences in awareness were also evident, with 50% of female students and 40% of male students reporting a lack of awareness. Furthermore, awareness levels also varied by academic year, with 51% of freshmen unaware of available resources compared to 38% of seniors. This lack of awareness is a huge barrier for students to seek help when facing emotional or psychological challenges. To address this issue, universities should prioritize comprehensive awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to inform students about available mental health resources.

4.3 Access to Therapy and Counseling Services

Access to therapy and counseling services emerged as a very important issue. Students reported various barriers in accessing these services, including stigma, long waiting times, and difficulty in accessing counselors. Stigma associated with seeking help was reported by 40% of respondents as a barrier. In addition, 35% of students reported wait times of more than three weeks for a counseling appointment, which contributed to delayed access to support. Efforts to reduce

stigma should be a priority, along with strategies to increase the availability of counseling services and reduce waiting times. Timely and accessible support systems are essential for students facing mental health challenges.

4.4 Campus Support System

An analysis of student perceptions of existing campus support systems provides valuable insight into their effectiveness. While some students expressed satisfaction, others indicated room for improvement. Awareness campaigns and initiatives were perceived differently among students. About 45% found them effective, while 33% believed they needed to be more visible and engaging. Peer support groups received positive feedback, with 62% of students appreciating them for providing a sense of belonging and understanding. On the other hand, academic accommodations for students with mental health conditions were considered inadequate by 40% of respondents. Students expressed the need for more flexible arrangements to accommodate their mental health needs.

Discussion

The results of this study underscore the urgency to improve mental health support at selected universities in West Java. The prevalence of mental health problems, including stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, highlights the need for proactive measures. To bridge the awareness gap, universities should invest in comprehensive awareness campaigns and educational initiatives. Reducing stigma and ensuring that students are informed about available mental health resources are critical components of these efforts. Improving access to therapy and counseling services is essential. Strategies to reduce wait times and create a welcoming and confidential environment for students are necessary steps to provide timely help.

Regarding campus support systems, a holistic approach is recommended. Universities should assess and improve existing initiatives, create more engaging awareness campaigns, expand peer support programs, and re-evaluate academic accommodations to better meet students' needs. In conclusion, this study has provided an overview of the state of mental health among students at selected universities in West Java. The findings underscore the prevalence of mental health problems, gaps in awareness, challenges in accessing therapy, and the need for improvements in campus support systems. Implementing the recommendations derived from this study is crucial to creating a more supportive and nurturing environment that prioritizes the mental health and well-being of its students.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights critical mental health issues among university students at selected universities in West Java, Indonesia. The prevalence of mental health issues, with most students experiencing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, requires immediate attention and action. This suggests that mental health challenges are widespread in university settings, affecting students from different demographic groups. The results of this study also revealed a lack of awareness among students regarding the mental health resources available at the university. This lack of awareness is a significant barrier to seeking help when needed and emphasizes the importance of proactive and comprehensive awareness campaigns and educational initiatives.

Access to therapy and counseling services remains a major challenge due to stigma and long waiting times. Timely and accessible support is essential to effectively meet students' mental health needs. The effectiveness of campus support systems varies, with some initiatives receiving positive feedback while others require improvement. Universities should take these student perceptions into account and work to improve existing support systems.

Based on these findings, it is imperative that the selected universities take immediate steps to prioritize mental health support. Recommendations include developing and implementing targeted awareness campaigns, reducing the stigma associated with seeking help, improving access to therapy and counseling services, and enhancing existing campus support systems. By addressing these issues comprehensively, universities can create a more nurturing and supportive environment where students can thrive academically and emotionally. This research underscores the important role that educational institutions play in promoting the mental well-being of their students and calls for a collective commitment to prioritizing mental health within the university community.

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