

The Impact of Academic Stress on Student Mental Health: A Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT

Background: Academic stress is a prevalent issue among university students and has been widely associated with adverse mental health outcomes. Increasing academic demands, transitional challenges, and performance pressure place students at higher risk of experiencing psychological distress. Given the growing global concern regarding student mental health, this study aimed to examine the impact of academic stress on mental health among university students. This literature review sought to synthesize existing evidence and identify key trends related to academic stress and mental health outcomes.

Methods: This study employed a narrative literature review design. Relevant articles published within the last ten years were identified through electronic databases using keywords related to academic stress, mental health, and university students. Studies were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria focusing on undergraduate and postgraduate students. Data were analyzed through critical reading and qualitative synthesis of findings from peer-reviewed journals. Ethical approval was not required as the study used secondary data.

Results: The reviewed literature consistently demonstrated a strong association between academic stress and negative mental health outcomes. High levels of academic stress were linked to increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, sleep disturbances, and reduced psychological well-being. Academic workload, examinations, time pressure, and insufficient academic support were identified as major stressors. Protective factors such as coping strategies, resilience, and social support were reported to reduce the negative effects of academic stress.

Conclusion: This literature review highlights the significant impact of academic stress on university students' mental health. The findings emphasize the need for promotive and preventive mental health strategies within higher education institutions. Future research should focus on intervention-based and longitudinal studies to strengthen mental health support systems for students

ABSTRAK

Latar Belakang: Stres akademik adalah masalah umum di kalangan mahasiswa dan telah banyak dikaitkan dengan hasil kesehatan mental yang merugikan. Meningkatnya tuntutan akademik, tantangan transisi, dan tekanan kinerja menempatkan siswa pada risiko lebih tinggi mengalami tekanan psikologis. Mengingat meningkatnya kekhawatiran global mengenai kesehatan mental mahasiswa, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dampak stres akademik terhadap kesehatan mental di kalangan mahasiswa. Tinjauan literatur ini berusaha untuk mensintesis bukti yang ada dan mengidentifikasi tren utama yang terkait dengan stres akademik dan hasil kesehatan mental.

Metode: Penelitian ini menggunakan desain tinjauan literatur naratif. Artikel relevan yang diterbitkan dalam sepuluh tahun terakhir diidentifikasi melalui database elektronik menggunakan kata kunci yang terkait dengan stres akademik, kesehatan mental, dan mahasiswa. Studi dipilih berdasarkan kriteria inklusi yang telah ditentukan sebelumnya yang berfokus pada mahasiswa sarjana dan pascasarjana. Data dianalisis melalui pembacaan kritis dan sintesis kualitatif temuan dari jurnal peer-review. Persetujuan etis tidak diperlukan karena penelitian ini menggunakan data sekunder.

Hasil: Literatur yang ditinjau secara konsisten menunjukkan hubungan yang kuat antara stres akademik dan hasil kesehatan mental yang negatif. Tingkat stres akademik yang tinggi dikaitkan dengan peningkatan gejala kecemasan, depresi, kelelahan emosional, gangguan tidur, dan penurunan kesejahteraan psikologis. Beban kerja akademik, ujian, tekanan waktu, dan dukungan akademik yang tidak memadai diidentifikasi sebagai stresor utama. Faktor pelindung seperti strategi koping, ketahanan, dan dukungan sosial dilaporkan mengurangi efek negatif stres akademik.

Kesimpulan: Tinjauan literatur ini menyoroti dampak signifikan dari stres akademik terhadap kesehatan mental mahasiswa. Temuan ini menekankan perlunya strategi kesehatan mental promotif dan preventif di institusi pendidikan tinggi. Penelitian masa depan harus fokus pada studi berbasis intervensi dan longitudinal untuk memperkuat sistem pendukung kesehatan mental bagi siswa

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INTRODUCTION

College students are individuals who are in the transition phase to adulthood, generally in the age range of 18–25 years. At this stage, students have responsibility for their development, including in preparing for an independent life in adulthood. As individuals who are studying in universities, both public and private, students are seen as having a high level of intellect, critical thinking skills, and skills in planning and taking action quickly and appropriately in facing various academic and life demands (Hulukati & Djibran, 2018). Students are a young adult age group that is vulnerable to experiencing various psychological pressures during higher education, due to high academic demands such as assignment loads, exams, and expectations of academic achievement that continue to increase. This causes students to often experience academic stress, which is a psychological response when academic demands exceed individual adaptability (academic stress) which can affect their mental well-being (Rahmadi *et al.*, 2024).

Academic stress is a condition when individuals experience excessive pressure and demands in lecture activities, such as worries about exams and academic assignments, making it difficult to manage academic obligations properly due to the busy schedule (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2020). Academic stress arises due to the existence of academic stressors, which are sources of stress that come from the learning process. These factors include pressure to get high grades, long study duration, a lot of assignments, low grades or achievements, and anxiety in facing exams. Academic stress experienced by students continuously can have an impact on decreasing immunity, so that students become more susceptible to health problems (Harahap *et al.*, 2020). One of them is mental health.

Mental health is a state when a person does not experience a mental disorder. Individuals who have good mental health are able to live their daily lives normally and can adjust to facing various life problems by utilizing their stress management skills (Masyah, 2020). Mental health disorders can affect many aspects of human life. Depression that lasts for a long time with moderate to severe severity can develop into a serious health problem. This condition causes sufferers to experience deep suffering and difficulties in carrying out daily activities, both in the work, educational, and family environments. The most fatal impact of depression is an increased risk of suicide. Every year, nearly 800,000 people die by suicide, and this condition is the second highest cause of death in the age group of 15–29 years (Suryanto & Nada, 2021).

Although various studies have addressed academic stress and student mental health, most studies still focus on a quantitative approach with research conducted at a specific time period, as well as examining the relationship between academic stress and one or two indicators of mental health separately, such as anxiety or depression. In addition, existing research results are still scattered across a variety of contexts, populations, and measurement instruments, making it difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions about the impact of academic stress on students' overall mental health. Studies that specifically summarize, compare, and synthesize previous research findings related to academic stress and various aspects of student mental health are still limited, especially in the perspective of public health and prevention of mental health problems in the university environment. Therefore, the purpose of writing this article is to review and synthesize the results of previous research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of academic stress on students' mental health, as well as to review its implications in the context of public health and prevention efforts in the university environment.

Based on these gaps, this article offers a novelty in the form of a narrative review literature review that integrates the results of research over the past ten years related to the impact of academic stress on various aspects of students' mental health, including anxiety, depression, and burnout. This study not only summarizes the relationship between academic stress and mental health, but also places the issue in the context of public health, emphasizing its implications for future study success and quality of human resources. Thus, this article is expected to provide a more comprehensive picture and become a conceptual basis for the development of prevention and promotion strategies for mental health in universities.

METHODS

Types of Research

The type of research used is *narrative literature review*. This study aims to review, analyze, and synthesize the results of previous research relevant to the topic of the impact of academic stress on students' mental health, without collecting primary data in the field.

Research Location and Time

This research does not have a physical research location, because it uses secondary data in the form of scientific articles published online. The search, selection, and literature analysis process will be carried out in December 2025.

Population and Sample

In this study, there was no population and research sample as in the field research. The object of study is in the form of scientific articles and research journals that discuss academic stress and student mental health. Therefore, ethical clearance is not necessary, as it does not involve human subjects directly.

Data Collection

Data collection is carried out by identifying, selecting, and reviewing scientific articles that meet the inclusion criteria. The information collected included: authors, year of publication, research objectives, methods, variables studied, and key findings related to academic stress and student mental health. The data sources in this study were obtained from national and international scientific articles relevant to the study topic. Article searches are conducted using the Publish or Perish application with the Google Scholar database. The keywords used in the search process included academic stress, academic stress and mental health, academic stress and college students, academic stress, and student mental health. The articles used in this study are limited to publications in the last ten years and are available in full text form to ensure the up-to-date and completeness of the information analyzed.

Based on the initial search using these keywords, 200 articles were obtained. Furthermore, an initial screening was carried out based on the title, year of publication, and type of article so that 68 articles were obtained. The next stage was an abstract review to assess the suitability of the topic and the subject of the research, so that the number of articles remaining became 49 articles. From the results of the full text review, as many as 20 articles were declared to meet the criteria and were used in this literature review. The information gathered from each article included the author's name, year of publication, research method, variables studied, as well as key findings related to academic stress and student mental health.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

1. Inclusion Criteria

- a. Research articles that discuss academic stress in college students
- b. Articles that examine aspects of mental health (anxiety, depression, burnout, psychological well-being)
- c. Articles published in the last 10 years (2015-2025)
- d. Fully accessible article

2. Exclusion Criteria

- a. Articles that are not relevant to the topic
- b. Articles in the form of opinions, editorials, or non-scientific reports
- c. Articles with subjects other than students

Data Processing and Analysis

Data were analyzed using narrative descriptive analysis, by grouping research findings based on key themes, such as sources of academic stress, impact on mental health, and their implications on students' academic lives. The results of the analysis are then presented in the form of narrative descriptions and summary tables of previous research to facilitate understanding and comparison between studies.

RESULTS

Based on the characteristics and main findings of the 20 articles analyzed regarding the relationship between academic stress and student mental health are presented in Table 1. The table contains information related to the author and year of publication, research method, variables studied, and the main results of each study.

Tabel 1. Ringkasan Studi tentang Stres Akademik dan Kesehatan Mental Mahasiswa

No	Author	Research Subject	Research Methods	Variables studied	Key Results
1.	Mustikawati & Putri (2018)	Medical Faculty Students	Metode <i>Correlational research</i>	Academic stress and attitudes towards workload	Perceived high workload is related to the increased academic stress of medical students
2.	Agustiniingsih (2019)	Nursing students (DIII and S1) at STIKes Kepanjen Malang	Descriptive method. Sampling was carried out by purposive sampling technique	Academic stress and coping strategies	Most students (47.06%) experience moderate stress
3.	Aprilia & Yoenanto (2022)	Students who are working on their thesis at several universities in Indonesia.	Quantitative method with <i>cross-sectional survey research design</i> .	Regulation of emotions, perceptions of social support, and academic stress.	Emotion regulation and perception of social support together have a significant negative effect on academic stress
4.	Ladapase & Sona (2022)	Students of Nusa Nipa University Indonesia	Descriptive quantitative method	Academic stress from Bisht	Most students are in the moderate stress category (52.5%)
5.	Dwiyanti <i>et al.</i> , (2023)	Final semester student at Trunojoyo University Madura	Survey research <i>methods</i>	Academic stress and psychosocial factors related to mental health	Academic stress for final year students is triggered by the demands of final projects and obstacles to guidance
6.	Fahri & Daud (2023)	New Student of the Faculty of Psychology, State University of Makassar	Quantitative methods	Adapting to academic demands and academic stress	Better adjustment is associated with lower levels of academic stress in freshmen
7.	Saifudin <i>et al.</i> , (2023)	Yatsi Madani University nursing student	Quantitative methods with analytical descriptive design and <i>cross-sectional approach</i>	Demographic characteristics, learning motivation, and academic stress levels	Most students experience moderate academic stress
8.	Rahmadina & Putri (2023)	Final level nursing students	Comparative descriptive method with	Academic stress levels	Final year nursing students are under moderate stress

No	Author	Research Subject	Research Methods	Variables studied	Key Results
			<i>a cross-sectional approach</i>		
9.	Uroidli <i>et al.</i> , (2024)	Final year students of the Master of Islamic Religious Education Study Program	Quantitative and qualitative mixed methods with a case study approach	Self-motivation, campus environment, workload, family conditions, and academic stress levels	Self-motivation has a significant effect on academic stress, with personal and environmental factors contributing 80.7%
10.	Saniya & Wahyuni (2024)	Nursing students in Pekanbaru	Descriptive methods of analytics	Academic stress levels	Most college students experience mild stress (62.5%)
11.	Rivaldi (2024)	Students from diverse backgrounds	Phenomenological approach method	Stress-causing factors and their impact on mental health	Academic burden and psychosocial factors contribute to academic stress and student mental health disorders
12.	Manery <i>et al.</i> , (2024)	Nursing students of STIKES Pasapua Ambon	Descriptive quantitative method	Academic stress levels	The majority of students are in the category of moderate stress
13.	Djoar & Anggarani (2024)	Final year student of STIKES Catholic St. Vincentius A Paulo Surabaya	Observational analytical methods with <i>a cross-sectional approach</i>	Factors that affect academic stress	The majority of final year students experience moderate academic stress, mainly influenced by motivating factors
14.	Rahmawati <i>et al.</i> , (2025)	Early semester students	Descriptive quantitative methods of analytics and <i>cross-sectional approaches</i>	Mental health status and academic performance	Mental health disorders are more experienced by female students and the age group of 17–18 years old
15.	Fitriani Iskandar (2025)	& UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Student	Descriptive quantitative method	Academic stress and mental health	Increased academic stress is associated with decreased student mental health
16.	Rahmawati <i>et al.</i> , (2025)	Students of the Medicine and Nursing program at Lambung Mangkurat University	Descriptive analytical method with <i>Cross Sectional research design</i>	Academic stress levels	52.2% of students experience moderate academic stress

No	Author	Research Subject	Research Methods	Variables studied	Key Results
17.	Gisela <i>et al.</i> , (2025)	Final semester students who experience graduation delays	Quantitative methods with correlational design	Academic stress and psychological well-being	There is a significant negative correlation between academic stress and student psychological well-being
18.	Arfandi <i>et al.</i> , (2025)	Students from 13 universities in Samarinda City	Quantitative descriptive methods with <i>cross-sectional design</i>	Depression, anxiety, and stress	The majority of respondents were in the normal category for depression and anxiety, but more than half experienced stress
19.	My <i>et al.</i> , (2025)	Final year student at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training UIN STS Jambi	<i>Mixed methods</i> , combining quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (in-depth interview) data	Stress levels, stress-causing factors, coping strategies, quality of life, and mental well-being	Tight deadlines, academic workload, and personal issues are the main causes of stress in college students
20.	Widyawati <i>et al.</i> , (2025)	Students from various study programs	Descriptive quantitative method	Academic stress and aspects of student mental health	The majority of students experience high academic stress, latent anxiety, sleep disturbances, and mental fatigue, along with low perceptions of campus mental health services

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that academic stress is a phenomenon that is widely experienced by students from various levels and study programs, with stress levels generally in the medium to high category. This condition is mainly triggered by the burden of academic tasks, the demands of completing thesis or final project, the pressure of achievement achievements, and obstacles in the academic guidance process. This phenomenon is consistent with the research of Aziz *et al.*, (2024) that academic stress is closely related to the perception of academic stress and psychological well-being, where students who experience high academic stress also show a decrease in their psychological well-being.

In addition, research by Murtaza *et al.*, (2025) found that there is a significant association between academic stress and mental health problems such as anxiety and sleep disorders, as well as a negative relationship between academic stress and general mental health conditions, which reinforces the finding that academic stress has a broad impact beyond just the workload. Another study by Handayani & Lusida (2025) showed that academic stress is significantly related to aspects of student life such as sleep quality, where students with higher levels of stress are more likely to experience poorer sleep quality an additional indicator of how academic stress can affect biological and behavioral functioning outside of the academic context itself. Other quantitative research has also found that there is a negative relationship between academic stress and mental health, where the higher the level of academic stress, the worse the mental health condition of students (Azizatunnisah & Subardjo, 2024).

The impact of academic stress is also seen in relation to students' emotional and behavioral conditions. Faturahman *et al.*, (2023) report that college students with high levels of academic stress tend to exhibit significant academic procrastination behaviors, which in turn is associated with a fear of academic failure. In addition, other studies have shown that academic stress contributes to sleep disorders, which further impacts students' eating behaviors and physical well-being. This condition is

listed in the findings of Sahid *et al.*, (2023) who associate academic stress with poor sleep quality and unhealthy diets, showing that the influence of stress is not only limited to psychological aspects but also physical health holistically.

On the other hand, academic stress is also related to students' emotional eating behavior, where academic stress triggers an increase in eating responses as a coping mechanism against negative emotional stress (Ramadhani & Mastuti, 2022). Research by Putri *et al.*, (2022) underlines that academic stress not only affects the mental and physical aspects of students, but is also related to *help-seeking* behavior and social support. For example, final year students with higher academic stress reported lower or suboptimal *patterns of help-seeking* behavior, indicating a need for psychosocial interventions to improve access to professional and social support. This association expands the understanding that the effects of academic stress can trigger behavioral changes that are potentially detrimental to long-term health.

Some studies also emphasize the importance of protective factors such as resilience and adaptive coping strategies in reducing the impact of academic stress. A literature study by Antara *et al.*, (2025) found that academic resilience can help college students adjust positively to academic pressure and lower the risk of mental health disorders. Similarly, *the mindfulness* approach has been shown to assist students in managing emotions and academic stress, which suggests that psychological interventions can be an important component of students' mental health promotive strategies (Khairunnisa & Dewi, 2025).

Promotive and preventive efforts in maintaining students' mental health are very important considering their role in improving psychological well-being and reducing the risk of mental disorders. Promotive approaches that are integrated in the campus environment, such as mental health education and health literacy improvement programs, can increase students' awareness of their mental state and encourage their involvement in preventive mental health activities (Mahendra *et al.*, 2024). Promotive and preventive approaches have proven to be important components in maintaining students' mental health because they are able to improve psychological well-being and reduce the risk of mental disorders before they develop into more serious conditions.

A systematic review by Abulfaraj *et al.*, (2024) shows that various models of mental *health-promoting* interventions applied in university settings, including coping skills-based activities, psychosocial, and *peer support support*, can significantly reduce symptoms of stress and anxiety and strengthen general well-being among students. In addition, evidence from a wide-scale review also suggests that physical activity-based interventions as one of the health-promoting strategies have the potential to reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress in college students, although stronger intervention designs are still needed (Huang *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, the development of comprehensive promotive and preventive programs in higher education institutions is not only relevant, but also a need for a public health strategy to overcome the increasing mental health challenges among students.

Colleges also have a significant strategic role in creating a healthy academic environment because higher education institutions are not only places of formal learning, but also serve as integrated health promotion forums, which can affect students' physical, mental, and social well-being. Campuses must actively integrate health policies into the daily activities of the academic community and provide facilities, services, and supports that support the well-being of the campus community as a whole, including support for student mental health (Utami *et al.*, 2024). This approach is supported by the findings of Berrío-quispe *et al.*, (2024) that a well-designed campus environment filled with supportive facilities such as green open spaces, counseling centers, and health promotion programs correlates with improved emotional well-being as well as a reduction in anxiety and stress symptoms among students. Another study by Djannah *et al.*, (2025) shows that policies and institutional structures that support student health, including the preparation of holistic and participatory health programs, are strategic steps to create a healthy academic atmosphere so that students can develop optimally in academic and psychosocial aspects. Thus, the role of universities in forming a healthy academic environment is very important to improve student welfare and reduce the risk of mental health disorders in the higher education environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In closing, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the impact of academic stress on students' mental health through a synthesis of findings from various scientific studies. The results of the study show that academic stress contributes significantly to the emergence of various mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, emotional fatigue, sleep disorders, and decreased psychological well-being. The analysis carried out by linking the results of the study to the existing literature enriches

the treasure trove of knowledge in the field of international health, especially in the context of mental health in the higher education environment. These findings have important implications for the development of mental health practices, policies, and interventions in higher education, especially through promotive and preventive approaches that focus on strengthening resilience, adaptive coping strategies, and institutional support. Further research is expected to develop longitudinal designs and evidence-based interventions to deepen understanding of academic stress and formulate more effective strategies in maintaining students' mental health.

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