

Research Article

The Role of Social Support and Hardiness on Academic Stress Among Final-Year College Students During COVID-19 Pandemic

Fadhila Devani* and Edilburga Wulan Saptandari

Magister Psikologi Profesi, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

ORCIDFadhila Devani: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3152-1816>**Abstract.**

Writing a thesis during the pandemic added to the burden on student's minds to the point of causing academic stress. This study is a quantitative survey that aims to determine the role of social support and hardiness on academic stress levels in final-year college students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires using the Google Form platform which involved 203 subjects. Data processing was carried out using multiple regression techniques. The results showed that social support and hardiness together contributed to academic stress in final-year college students by 10.8% ($F = 12.107$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis proposed in this study is accepted. The implication of this research is an additional information for final-year students that getting social support from an informational standpoint and having hardiness from a commitment standpoint can relieve academic stress experienced while working on their thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: academic stress, COVID-19, final-year college students, hardiness, social support

Corresponding Author: Fadhila Devani; email: fadhiladevani@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has issued various regulations in the form of restrictions on outdoor activities to minimize the spread of COVID-19 infections. Many sectors have been affected by this, especially in the field of education, particularly at the university level. Students who are required to complete their final assignments have encountered significant difficulties in doing so because the completion process requires a great deal of physical, time, financial, and emotional preparation. [1] Moreover, if this process is carried out under abnormal conditions such as the current pandemic, it has further compounded the challenges faced by final-year students in completing their final assignments.

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The researcher conducted a preliminary study using a quantitative survey method in July 2020, involving 110 final-year students from various universities in Indonesia. The results revealed that 77% of the students encountered difficulties in completing their final assignments during the implementation of online distance learning (PJJ). Some of the challenges mentioned by these students during the pandemic included feeling “confused,” experiencing slow responses from their supervising professors, having difficulty comprehending explanations from professors during virtual guidance sessions, being unable to collect data directly in the field, facing difficulties accessing laboratories and libraries due to campus closures, and other similar issues.

The obstacles that occur during the process of completing the final assignment during the pandemic can result in an extension of the study period needed solely for final assignment completion. This aligns with the statement, [2] which asserts that one of the impacts of difficulties in completing final assignments is the prolongation of the study duration. Consequently, final-year students may be at risk of dropping out or incurring additional tuition fees to continue into a new semester. Both of these circumstances can serve as sources of psychological pressure in the form of stress.

According to Oman et al, [3] prolonged stress in students can lead to anxiety and depression, suicidal thoughts, unhealthy lifestyle choices, sleep disturbances, headaches, and feelings of helplessness. This is exemplified by a final-year student in Malang who attempted suicide, presumably due to the prolonged stress caused by an unfinished thesis. [4] If these issues experienced by students are not promptly addressed, they can disrupt daily activities and hinder the learning process as well as the completion of final assignments to their fullest potential. [5] Stress represents a significant threat to a student’s quality of life, making it essential to identify the causes, symptoms, and consequences of the stress experienced by these students. [6]

Stress is a condition where individuals feel unable to cope with the demands in their surroundings, leading to feelings of tension and discomfort. Stress does not always have a negative impact on individuals; it can also have a positive effect. [7] Negative impact stress is referred to as distress, while positive impact stress is called eustress. According to the Yerkes-Dodson law, [8] a certain amount of stress can generate positive strength that enhances individual productivity and facilitates personal development. However, once it reaches an optimal point, stress becomes destructive and has negative effects on individuals.

Specifically, stress originating from the academic world is referred to as academic stress. According to Busari, [9] academic stress occurs when individuals are confronted with situations they perceive as overwhelming and insurmountable within the school

or college environment, such as pressure to complete assignments within limited time frames. The negative impacts, particularly experienced by students, can lead to anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, disruptions in lifestyle, and feelings of helplessness. Students with poor adaptation abilities due to academic stress not only experience effects on their physical and psychological health but also on their long-term academic and career goals, including the risk of drop-out or failure to graduate.

In line with the preliminary study results conducted by the researcher, it was found that some students experienced stress while working on their final assignments at home due to various reasons. These included demands from their parents to engage in multiple activities while at home, the absence of peers to work on final assignments together, and delayed responses from supervising professors due to the inability to meet in person. Additionally, some students felt demotivated when their final assignments required numerous revisions and experienced a sense of helplessness or were prone to giving up when facing difficulties in contacting their supervising professors or obtaining references for their final assignments. From the aforementioned factors, it can be observed that the causes of stress in students vary from one individual to another. The factors that can lead to academic stress can be categorized as internal and external factors. Internal factors originate from within the individual student, such as their physical condition, motivation, and personality type. External factors come from outside the individual, such as family, work, facilities, environment, professors, and others. [10] Steven suggests that other external factors affecting academic stress include time and money, education, living standards, social support, and daily life issues. [10] Additionally, internal factors that can influence academic stress include self-efficacy, hardiness, and optimism. [10]

Therefore, students require stress coping mechanisms to effectively address the academic stress they experience. Lazarus and Folkman [11] contend that someone who successfully confronts or finds effective coping strategies during stressful moments is better able to adapt to demands in various situations. According to Lazarus and Folkman, [11] seeking social support can be one coping strategy. Social support is the perception that an individual feels cared for by others, has someone to turn to for assistance, and belongs to a mutually supportive group. [12] The forms of this support can encompass emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, friendship support, and non-instrumental support. [13]

In addition to social support, the personality trait of hardiness, also known as resilience, is said to influence individuals in facing existing demands. [14] The construct

of hardiness was initially introduced by Kobasa [15], who defined it as a form of personality that serves as a source of resilience when individuals encounter stressful situations. Hardiness behavior encompasses three fundamental aspects: control, commitment, and challenge. [15] Individuals with strong hardiness personalities are more likely to adopt adaptive coping approaches and engage in fewer maladaptive coping strategies compared to those with weaker hardiness personalities. [16]

The explanation above is in line with the views of Segun-Martin and Dennis, [17] who suggest that social support and hardiness personality traits share a similar connection in terms of the mechanisms of stress tolerance. However, the relationship between these two variables may not necessarily have the same impact on academic stress as it did before the pandemic compared to during and after the pandemic. Several studies have found that academic stress has increased among students since the onset of the pandemic. [18] The heightened academic stress during the pandemic has led to increased anxiety and decreased motivation among students in completing their theses. [19]

This has prompted the researcher to investigate whether social support and hardiness can play an equally significant role in addressing academic stress among final-year students, as they did before the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed in this study is that social support and hardiness, when considered together, influence the level of academic stress among final-year students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Method

This research employed a quantitative approach with a survey design. Due to physical distancing restrictions during data collection, the questionnaire was distributed using the Google Forms platform. The analysis technique used in this study was multiple regression analysis to understand the relationship between two or more independent variables and one dependent variable. In this research, there are two independent variables used: social support and hardiness, while the dependent variable is academic stress. Sampling in this study utilized purposive sampling, which involves selecting samples based on predefined categories or criteria to be measured by the researcher. The criteria for participants in this study were undergraduate (S1), diploma (D3), and diploma four (D4) students from both public and private universities across Indonesia who were currently or had already completed their final assignments and had lived with their families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important to note that methods must be written in the same order in the results section. The order of writing methods must also be logical according to the type of research. The method for one type of research will be very different from other studies. For example, writing survey research methods is very different from laboratory test research methods that involve a lot of equipment and materials. The method section can be created with several separate subtitles such as materials, tools, and data collection procedures.

Data collection was conducted using three scales: an academic stress scale developed by Pangestu and modified by the researcher based on the aspects of academic stress according to Busari's theory [9]; a social support scale developed by the researcher based on the aspects of social support according to Sarafino's theory [12]; and a hardiness scale developed by Dakhi and modified by the researcher based on the aspects of hardiness according to Kobasa's theory [15]. The researcher made modifications to the original research scales due to differences in context and conditions between the previous study and the current research. Before making modifications, the researcher sought approval from the original scale's creator to adapt it for this research. The results obtained from the pilot testing revealed that 21 items ($\alpha=0.900$) for academic stress, 19 items ($\alpha=0.886$) for social support, and 18 items ($\alpha=0.894$) for hardiness were reliable for data collection in the research.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Results

Data collection took place from April to July 2021. Analysis was conducted on 203 questionnaires that met the research participant criteria. Based on the data collection process that was carried out, the following results were obtained:

In Table 1 above, it can be concluded that out of 203 participants, the majority of them are female, with a total of 166 participants, accounting for 81.8%. Furthermore, the most common age among participants is 22 years, with 93 participants, representing 45.8%. The highest number of participants, 199 in total or 98%, are pursuing a Bachelor's Degree (S1). Additionally, the highest participation rate is from students in their 8th semester, with 147 participants, making up 72.4%.

Before conducting hypothesis testing, the researcher performed assumption tests as a prerequisite for multiple regression analysis. The assumption tests conducted included normality test, linearity test, multicollinearity test, and heteroskedasticity test.

TABLE 1: Frequency Distribution of Participants Based on Demographic Characteristics in Final-Year Students.

Variable	Number (n)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	37	18,2%
Female	166	81,8%
Age (years)		
20	6	3%
21	63	31%
22	93	45,8%
23	24	11,8%
24	13	6,4%
25	3	1,5%
26	1	0,5%
Educational Level		
S1	199	98%
D4	3	1,5%
D3	1	0,5%
Semester		
6 (D3)	1	0,5%
8	147	72,4%
10	36	17,7%
12	14	6,9%
14	5	2,5%

TABLE 2: Normality Test.

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	P	Remarks
1,281	0,075	Normal Distribution

In this study, it can be observed in Table 2 that the residual values for all three variables (academic stress, social support, hardiness) have a Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance value of 0.075, indicating that the data follows a normal distribution.

TABLE 3: Linearity Test.

Model	Sig.	F	Remarks
Academic Stress with Social Support	0,057	1,637	Linier
Academic Stress with Hardiness	0,248	1,192	Linier

Based on Table 3 above, it can be observed that the linearity test results indicate a linear relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. This is demonstrated by the linearity test results for social support with academic stress,

which has a linear deviation value of $F = 1.637$ and $p = 0.057$ ($p > 0.05$), as well as the linearity test results for hardiness with academic stress, which has a linear deviation value of $F = 1.192$ and $p = 0.248$ ($p > 0.05$).

TABLE 4: Multicollinearity Test.

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Social Support	0,905	1,104
Hardiness	0,905	1,104

In Table 4 above, it is shown that the variables social support and hardiness have a Tolerance of 0.905 and a VIF of 1.104. This can be concluded that the independent variables in this study are not interrelated.

TABLE 5: Heteroskedasticity Test.

Variable	Significance	Remarks
Social Support	0,305	No heteroskedasticity
Hardiness	0,873	No heteroskedasticity

Based on the heteroskedasticity test using the Glesjer method, the variable social support has a significance of 0.305, and hardiness has a significance of 0.873. It can be concluded that there is no heteroskedasticity in the data because the significance values are > 0.05 .

TABLE 6: Hypothesis Testing.

Model	R	R ²	F	p	R ² Change (Social Support)	R ² Change (Hardiness)
Regression	0,329	0,108	12,107	0,000	0,084	0,024

Based on the multiple regression analysis results, a value of $F = 12.107$ with $p < 0.05$ was obtained, as shown in Table 6. These results indicate that social support and hardiness together can influence academic stress in final-year students. It can be concluded that social support and hardiness together play a role in academic stress. Therefore, the hypothesis in this study is “accepted”.

Then, the contribution of both independent variables to the dependent variable can be seen in Table 10 based on the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.108 or 10.8%. This can be interpreted as the combined role of social support and hardiness in final-year students accounting for 10.8% of academic stress. Social support contributes 8.4% to the academic stress of final-year students, while hardiness contributes 2.4%, with the remaining 89.2% influenced by other variables outside the scope of this study.

3.2. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate whether social support and hardiness together play a role in academic stress among final-year students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the analysis results, it was found that social support and hardiness together contribute to academic stress among final-year students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both social support and hardiness have a role in academic stress, whether considered together or separately. This supports the research conducted by Oktavia et al. (2019), which indicates that one of the sources of stress resilience that can reduce academic stress is social support (external) and hardiness (internal).

Zimet et al. [20] stated that social support is an individual's belief that they are supported by their closest people, including family, friends, or individuals in their vicinity. It seems that during periods of increased stress experienced by individuals, social support may be a way to shield individuals from the harmful effects of prolonged stress. [21] Melrose et al. [22] mentioned that the benefits of social support are greater for individuals who perceive the presence of support from others (perceived support) compared to individuals who only receive support without feeling supported by others (received support). For instance, someone may feel more assisted if someone offers help even if they cannot provide immediate assistance, as opposed to someone who helps out of obligation and not their own initiative. The perceived presence of others can be an important predictor of academic stress experienced by students, as they help students reduce the stress they experience. [23]

In addition to external factors, internal factors such as hardiness personality traits also play a role in influencing academic stress. Baumeister [24] stated that hardiness, as part of an individual's personality trait, is characterized by the ability to manage and respond to stressors in a way that transforms them from negative experiences into opportunities for growth and learning. Maddi [25] described individuals with hardiness personality traits as having a strong commitment to their endeavors, good control over events in their lives, and a positive attitude toward challenges and change as opportunities for personal development. Spiridon & Evangelia [26] showed that individuals with low levels of hardiness personality traits tend to experience academic stress, whereas those with high levels of hardiness personality traits are better equipped to cope with high-pressure situations such as academic stress. Another study by Putri & Sawitri [27] also found a significant negative relationship between hardiness personality traits and academic stress.

There is an interesting finding in this study, which is that social support plays a larger role in academic stress compared to hardiness. This result differs from the study conducted by Rahayu & Isrofin [28] on high school students who experienced full-day school under the 2013 curriculum. That study suggested that hardiness had a greater impact on academic stress than social support. The difference in findings between these two studies could be attributed to variations in the workload and the current situation, such as the ongoing pandemic. High school students may have tasks and exams that are more individual-oriented and do not involve as many external factors in their completion, leading them to rely more on their personal resilience rather than seeking extensive social support. In contrast, the final assignments of university students often require collaboration with multiple parties, including guidance from professors, understanding from parents, and assistance from peers.

This is also supported by the research conducted by Kurnia & Ramdhani [29], which indicates that social support contributes more significantly to academic stress than hardiness among students. In the study conducted by Jembarwati [30] on healthcare workers, it was found that during the pandemic, social support, such as prayers and good cooperation, was essential for them to better enjoy their work in such a stressful situation. The results also showed that healthcare workers used coping strategies focused on social support. By receiving substantial social support, healthcare workers felt less isolated, did not lose hope, felt valued by others, and developed feelings of friendship and understanding. This made individuals more motivated to fight and be proactive in facing challenging situations. [30] This experience could also apply to senior-level students who feel supported by others when they work on their final assignments together with peers who are also striving to complete their tasks, making academic stress more tolerable.

Research conducted by Hamre et al. [31] shows that students in their second, fourth, and fifth years who are exposed to stressors for an extended period are at risk of reduced levels of hardiness. Another study by Arishanti & Juniarily [32] also suggests that students who continue to be exposed to stressors, such as unresolved thesis issues, may experience a decline in their hardiness traits and their ability to adapt and cope with stress. These findings support the results of this research, which indicate that hardiness plays a smaller role in academic stress among senior-level students during the process of completing their final assignments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another supporting factor indicating why social support plays a more significant role than hardiness in coping with academic stress in this study is that the majority of senior-level students in this research showed high levels of social support, whereas in terms

of hardiness, most of them were only in the moderate category. This is what has led senior-level students in this study to experience only moderate levels of stress because they have a high level of social support and reasonably good hardiness traits to cope with academic stress while completing their final assignments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The researcher also conducted additional analysis and found that among the various aspects of social support, informational support had the most significant effective contribution to academic stress, accounting for 7.6%. This implies that informational support, in the form of sharing academic resources like journals and receiving detailed guidance from academic advisors, was most needed by senior-level students during the process of completing their final assignments amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding is supported by a statement from one of the respondents who mentioned that they felt stressed due to the difficulty in accessing journal references and the lack of detailed guidance from their academic advisors. Informational support, such as sharing journals and receiving guidance from academic advisors, can directly assist students in completing their final assignments. In contrast, emotional, material, and esteem support primarily contribute to an individual's well-being and may not play as direct a role in the process of completing academic assignments.

Furthermore, concerning the personality hardiness aspect of commitment, it had the most significant effective contribution to academic stress among other hardiness aspects, accounting for 6%. This suggests that commitment in terms of hardiness was the most needed trait for senior-level students during the process of completing their final assignments amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding is also supported by a statement from one of the respondents who mentioned that their determination to graduate quickly motivated them to persist in completing their final assignments despite challenging circumstances. Having a sense of responsibility as students and a strong commitment to not disappoint those who had sacrificed for them, such as their parents, allowed them to maintain a high level of commitment to finish what they had started, even when facing difficulties. On the other hand, the control aspect, which is influenced by external factors that are difficult to manage, sometimes led students to loosen control over themselves during the process of completing their final assignments. Additionally, in terms of the challenge aspect, students had already encountered numerous new challenges during the process of completing their final assignments amidst the pandemic, leading them to have less desire to seek additional challenges during this period.

The social support available during the COVID-19 crisis is essential for providing students with a sense of support and assistance during challenging and high-pressure

situations. This aligns with the idea that an individual's hardiness can emerge as a result of the support they receive from those around them, allowing them to transform difficulties into new experiences. [33] This support can help students become more resilient, strong, and stable while working on their final assignments, reducing the impact of stress and other negative influences.

However, there are several limitations to this study. The number of research participants is relatively small, considering that the sample consists of final-year students scattered across Indonesia. This has resulted in uneven distribution of research participants in terms of gender, age, educational level, semester, and domicile.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that the research hypothesis has been accepted. The research findings demonstrate that social support and hardiness together play a role in academic stress among final-year students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, social support was found to have a greater influence on academic stress among final-year students working on their thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to hardiness.

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