



THE CORRELATION BETWEEN PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND STRESS LEVELS AMONG FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Students often experience various challenges related to their studies at university. These challenges can disrupt their health, particularly psychological issues such as stress. Excessive or prolonged psychological stress may interfere with learning success. This study aims to determine the relationship between perceived social support and stress levels among first-year students at the Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan (UMKT), Indonesia. This study uses a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional method. The population of this study was 3253 first-year students of Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan, then the sample used in this study was 401 respondents who were selected using stratified random sampling technique. The measuring instrument in this study used the MSPSS (Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support) questionnaire and the DASS-42 (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale) questionnaire with an ordinal scale distributed via Google Form. Prior to use, both questionnaires were tested for reliability, resulting in a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.895 (>0.6) for the MSPSS questionnaire and 0.825 (>0.6) for the DASS questionnaire. Both questionnaires were assessed as valid questionnaires because they have been widely used at the international level. The data of this study were analyzed using frequency distribution analysis techniques and the Spearman Rank method. Based on the statistical analysis, perceived social support did not have a statistically significant relationship with stress levels among students ($p = 0.536, > 0.05$). Most of the respondents in this study were dominated by female (67.3%) rather than male students (32.7%), then the age of the respondents was mostly late teenagers (99%) with the age range between 17 to 25 years. Furthermore, respondents experienced high perceived social support (52.4%). Then, majority of respondents experienced normal stress levels (41.6%). Social support can be obtained from family, friends, and other special people. From a public health perspective, the importance of the relationship between social support and stress can be demonstrated using the principle of five levels of prevention to prevent the negative impacts caused by excessive stress.

Keywords: first-year students; mental health; perceived social support; stress level

How to cite (in APA style)

Ghozali, G., Ramadhan, E. N., Irwansyah, B., & Masnina, R. (2026). The Correlation between Perceived Social Support and Stress Levels among First-Year University Students. *Indonesian Journal of Global Health Research*, 8(4), 781–786. <https://doi.org/10.37287/ijghr.v8i4.1735>.

INTRODUCTION

Technology continues to experience massive developments over time, and the world of education continues to advance, from elementary to higher education. According to Upadhyay (2022), education plays a crucial role in developing human resources by broadening one's horizons and ensuring economic and social progress through increased productivity, innovation, and technical advancement. A student is someone studying at a university, whether public or private, or at another institution equivalent to a university. Meanwhile, a freshman is an individual on the path to adulthood, undergoing the transition from a pupil to a university student (Sepriani, 2020). Early in their education at university, students often face challenges such as the demands of adapting to the lecture system, new friends, a new environment, and a new culture (Suharsono, 2020). Therefore, students may be at risk of experiencing psychological problems such as increased stress. Stress is an unpleasant state that can elicit mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual responses (Ginata et al., 2023). Responses to stress can include physical, psychological, and behavioral changes (Savira et al., 2021). According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2022, the prevalence

of stress worldwide was 25%. In Indonesia, data shows that over 19 million people aged 15 and over experience stress (Tana, 2024). Stress can be felt by various groups, including students. Stress can have both positive and negative impacts on students. Excessive stress can cause serious problems such as decreased memory and concentration, difficulty solving problems, and academic difficulties (Ambarwati et al., 2027).

The stress experienced by first-year students can be influenced by several factors, including academic factors such as heavy workloads, difficult exams, and academic competition; personal factors such as financial problems, family issues, and social relationships; and environmental factors such as housing and social support (Rohmah, 2024). Individuals experiencing stress tend to seek to reduce or even eliminate that stress. Therefore, positive support from the surrounding environment, particularly social support, is necessary. Social support is behavior demonstrated by other individuals to assure a person that care, assistance, and comfort are always available when needed (Kurniawan and Eva, 2020). Social support is essential for individuals facing various challenges (Ramadani and Ghazali, 2021). According to Sarafino (Aprilia & Yoenanto, 2022), social support is divided into two forms: perceived social support and received social support. In perceiving an individual's social support, perceived social support is more reliable than receiving social support (Fredanni and Sofia, 2023). According to Zimet (2024), perceived social support is the support a person expects and refers to the perception that support will be available when needed. Family, friends, and significant others are sources of perceived social support (Fauzia and Pebriani, 2024). Rahman et al. (2024), who conducted a study of 83 psychology students in Bukittinggi, concluded that social support contributes to academic stress experienced by students.

Furthermore, referring to the research findings of Salsabila et al. (2022) aimed to reveal the role of academic stress and perceived social support in predicting the mental health of late adolescents in Bandung. It was concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived social support and mental health. Perceived social support plays a role in predicting the level of mental health in late adolescents. In another study conducted by Mclean et al. (2023) which analyzed the relationship between perceived social support and stress in first-year students in Ireland, evidence was obtained that students with higher levels of social support tended to experience lower levels of stress. This study aims to prove whether there is a relationship between the independent variable of perceived social support and the dependent variable of stress levels in first-year students at the Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan.

METHOD

The research design used in this study was quantitative with a cross-sectional approach. The study location was Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan, Samarinda City, Indonesia. The population in this study was all 3,253 first-year students at Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan in the 2024/2025 academic year. The sample used in this study was 401 first-year students, selected randomly using a stratified random sampling technique. This study employed primary data collection techniques using a questionnaire distributed to all respondents via Google Forms. The questionnaires used were the 12-item Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) questionnaire by Zimet et al. (2015) and the 14-item DASS-42 (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale) questionnaire by Lovibond & Lovibond as cited by Marsidi (2021). Prior to use, both questionnaires underwent reliability testing, yielding Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.895 (>0.6) for the perceived social support questionnaire and 0.825 (>0.6) for the stress questionnaire. This indicates that both questionnaires were suitable for use due to their high reliability. After data collection, univariate analysis was conducted using frequency distribution methods to describe the characteristics of the respondents and the characteristics of each research variable. This was followed by bivariate analysis using the non-parametric Spearman Rank test to examine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

RESULT

Table 1.

Distribution of Respondents Based on Gender, Age, Perceived Social Support, and Stress Level

Characteristics		f	%
Gender	Male	131	32.7
	Female	270	67.3
Age	Late Adolescence (17-25 years)	397	99
	Young Adult (26-35 years)	4	1
Perceived Social Support	Low	26	6.5
	Moderate	165	41.1
	High	210	52.4
Stress Level	Normal	167	41.6
	Mild	84	20.9
	Moderate	95	23.7
	Severe	41	10.2
	Very Severe	14	3.5

Table 1, it is known that the respondents in this study were predominantly female, with 270 respondents (67.3%). Meanwhile, the largest age group of respondents in this study was late adolescence (17-25 years), with 397 respondents (99%). The majority of students (52.4%) were in the high perceived social support category. Meanwhile, the largest proportion of students were in the normal stress level category, at 41.6%.

Table 2.

Bivariate Analysis: Relationship Between Perceived Social Support and Stress Level

		Stress Level						p-value	Correlation Coefficient
		Normal	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Very Severe	Total		
Perceived Social Support	Low	12	2	6	4	2	26	0.536	- 0.031
		46.2%	7.7%	23.1%	15.4%	7.7%	100.0%		
	Moderate	68	36	33	23	5	165		
		41.2%	21.8%	20.0%	13.9%	3.0%	100.0%		
	High	87	46	56	14	7	210		
		41.4%	21.9%	26.7%	6.7%	3.3%	100.0%		

Based on table 2, it can be concluded that the bivariate test results showed a p-value of 0.536 ($p > 0.05$), thus failed to rejecting H_0 , indicating there were no statistically significant relationship between perceived social support and stress levels among first-year students at the Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan.

DISCUSSION

According to Zimet, perceived social support is the support a person expects and refers to the perception that support will be available when needed. Family, friends, and special people are sources of perceived social support (Fauzia and Pebriani, 2024). Perceived social support can help individuals cope with stress. The social support an individual experiences can serve as a mediator between stressors and stress responses, helping individuals reduce or even eliminate reactions to stress. Stress is a form of adaptation mechanism that helps individuals adjust to certain situations. In general, stress occurs as an individual's response to conditions perceived as challenges or threats. This means that stress can arise when someone experiences pressure, faces problems, or feels threatened. The process of adjusting to various aspects of life can trigger stress, whether in the form of efforts to adapt, find solutions, or resolve problems. At mild levels, stress is not harmful, but if levels are too high, it can negatively impact physical health (Marsidi, 2021). The causes of stress can vary from person to person; stress is often triggered by environmental changes that require the body and mind to adapt. In college students, stress can place an additional burden on the brain, which acts as the central nervous system and the primary controller of the body (Ningsih & Rahyuni, 2023). This study aims to determine whether there is a relationship between the independent variable, perceived social support, and the dependent variable, stress levels, in first-year students at the Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan. Based on statistical analysis using the Spearman Rank test, the calculation results show a p-value of 0.536 ($p > 0.05$), indicating

no statistically significant relationship between perceived social support and stress levels. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient shows a value of -0.031 ($p > 0.05$), indicating a very weak and statistically insignificant relationship.

These results align with research conducted by Ikhwaningrum et al. (2022) using the same measurement tool, the MSPSS questionnaire based on the theory of Zimet et al. (1988), on the relationship between resilience and perceived social support and academic stress during online learning in college students. Based on the correlation test, this study revealed no significant relationship between perceived social support and academic stress. This finding suggests that other factors may be more influential in influencing academic stress in college students. Perceived social support only measures the level of support received from family, friends, and significant others. Meanwhile, stress can be influenced by other factors, such as academic stress responses and coping strategies, which were not examined in this study.

The insignificant results of the relationship between perceived social support and stress levels in this study also align with research by Nugroho & Soetjiningsih (2023), who stated that there was no relationship between social support and academic stress in out-of-town students. Academic stress levels can be influenced by various factors, such as high academic expectations from parents and faculty, excessive workloads, and students' self-perceptions, which can exacerbate the pressure they feel. Furthermore, internal and external factors also influence students. In contrast to these results, research by Fauzia & Pebriani (2024) using the same measurement tool, the MSPSS questionnaire, revealed that perceived social support had a significant negative effect on academic anxiety in first-year students at Padjadjaran University. This means that first-year students at Padjadjaran University who perceived high levels of social support tended to experience reduced anxiety related to their academic activities. The existence of social support such as family, friends, and other people who are considered special can provide support to students to reduce the fear caused by the academic anxiety they feel.

Furthermore, the results of this study are inconsistent with research conducted by Abdul Aziz et al. (2023), which showed a significant negative relationship between stress levels and social support levels in undergraduate health sciences students. This means that students experiencing high levels of stress tend to perceive a lack of social support from those closest to them, including family, friends, and significant others in their lives. Conversely, students with high levels of social support tend to experience lower levels of stress. Based on these research findings, social support can influence students' perceptions of stress. Thus, with adequate social support, students will be better able to cope with stress when stressful situations arise. Based on the findings of this study, several points can be made regarding the lack of a significant relationship between perceived social support and stress levels, both internal and external. During the research, field conditions were not always linear, which may have led to differences in the results of previous studies. There are strong assumptions as to why this might occur, one of which can be seen from the questions contained in the research instruments used in this study, namely the MSPSS questionnaire and the DASS-42 questionnaire. The findings showed that in the MSPSS questionnaire, out of 12 questions on perceived social support, the highest score was obtained from the question about family support for the respondent and the lowest score was obtained from the question about communicating problems with parents. Meanwhile, in the DASS-42 questionnaire, out of 14 questions on stress, the item with the highest score was the question about feelings of anxiety due to disturbances and the lowest score was the item about being unable to understand things that hinder the completion of the task at hand.

These results indicate that in general, even though respondents have high social support obtained from family support, respondents will still experience stress due to high stimuli caused by feelings of anxiety due to disturbances from various factors. Comparing the items in the same questionnaire, comparing the highest and lowest scores, it can be concluded that in the MSPSS questionnaire, the question about family support had the highest score. However, this result was inversely proportional

to the score on the question about comfort in communicating with family about personal problems, which showed the lowest score in the MSPSS questionnaire. Therefore, it can be concluded that family support is less effective in reducing stress levels in new students at Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan. This is because students are unable to share their emotional burdens and personal problems with their families due to a lack of communication.

On the other hand, the MSPSS questionnaire assesses the perception of social support in general, while the DASS-42 questionnaire measures stress more specifically and in-depth. Therefore, there are differences in the focus of the research in this study, and therefore, the data from these two measurement tools cannot be mutually reinforcing. New students who experience stress are not solely influenced by external factors, but are more likely due to other factors. Internal factors are assumed to be one of the triggers of stress in new students. This is due to the adaptation from being a high school student to being a university student, resulting in increased academic demands. As a result, new students experience stress and personal anxiety that cannot be fully addressed through social support.

Social support is conceptually a factor that can help students reduce stress levels in the world of college. Social support also contributes to students' mental health. With support from parents, peers, significant others, and the surrounding environment, students can build self-confidence and find solutions to the problems they face (Nugroho and Soetjningsih, 2023). However, perceived social support is not the primary factor influencing stress levels; many other factors can influence stress both internally and externally. From the public health perspective, stress is a problem that can affect a person's psychological well-being. Untreated stress can seriously impact both the physical and mental health of students. According to the WHO, mental health is a state in which a person feels well, understands their potential, is able to cope with the stresses of daily life, works productively, and contributes positively to their community (Haryanti et al., 2024). Mental health is a crucial aspect of the overall concept of health, therefore, public health principles and efforts need to be effectively implemented in this regard. Various public health approaches can be used to address mental health issues (stress) in students, one of which is the Five Levels of Prevention approach developed by Leavel & Clark (1958). This approach consists of health promotion, specific protection, early diagnosis and prompt treatment, disability limitation, and rehabilitation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research conducted on the relationship between perceived social support and stress levels in first-year students, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant relationship between perceived social support and stress levels in first-year students at the Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan. Social support is not the only predictor that can influence stress in students. There are other factors that have not been studied that are assumed to have a greater influence on increasing stress in first-year students, such as academic pressure, adaptive coping skills, economic factors, and others.

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