

Analysis of Mental Health Literacy in College Students

Allia Putri Prabudi ¹, Aprilia Rahmawati ², Nastiti Anggraini ³, Natasya Fitri ⁴, Nur Asiah ⁵, Muhammad Wabil ⁶, Tiara Puspita⁷

¹²³⁴⁵⁶⁷Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University of Riau
Jl. HR Soebrantas No. 155 KM. 15 Simpang Baru Panam Pekanbaru, 28293

Prabudialliah@gmail.com

Abstract. *Mental health is very important to support the quality of life and academic achievement of students. However, many students still lack understanding about mental health, making it easy for them to experience stress, anxiety, or depression without proper help. This study aimed to determine students' level of understanding of mental health and the factors that influence it. The study was conducted by collecting numerical data through a survey of students from various majors, as well as through in-depth interviews as a qualitative approach. The results showed that most students understood the basics of mental health, but still struggled to recognize early signs of mental health disorders and choose appropriate support services. Factors such as access to information, support from the social environment, and stigma towards mental health have a big influence on the level of understanding about mental health. These findings suggest that mental health education programs on campus are needed to raise awareness, prevent psychological problems, and encourage a culture of caring about mental health among students.*

Keywords: *Mental Health, Help Seeking, Attitude, Knowledge.*



INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a crucial aspect in supporting an individual's quality of life, particularly for students transitioning to early adulthood. Based on *Basic Health Research (Riskesdas)* data, the prevalence of emotional disorders in the Indonesian population increased from 6% in 2013 to 9.8% in 2018 (Azedarach & Ariana, 2022). This indicates that mental health problems are on the rise, including among adolescents and young adults, the majority of whom are students (Azedarach & Ariana, 2022). Unfortunately, low mental health literacy remains a major barrier to treatment. Mental health literacy is defined as knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that aid in the process of recognizing symptoms, preventing them, treating them, and seeking appropriate help. (Novianty & Rochman Hadjam, 2017). This low literacy often makes students unable to recognize the psychological symptoms they are experiencing, and they are reluctant to seek professional help due to stigma and false beliefs (Azedarach & Ariana, 2022).

Several studies have shown that mental health literacy levels are related to help-seeking attitudes and behaviors. (Novianty & Hadjam, 2017) found that mental health literacy, along with community attitudes, significantly influenced formal help-seeking (Novianty & Hadjam, 2017). Similar findings were also described by Handayani et al. (2020), who stated that individuals with better mental health literacy were more likely to utilize mental health services than those with lower literacy (Handayani et al., 2020).

Specifically, among college students, mental health literacy is associated with help-seeking intentions. Research has emphasized that, although not always statistically significant, students with higher mental health literacy tend to have positive attitudes toward help-seeking (Azedarach & Ariana, 2022). This suggests that mental health literacy can be a protective factor in improving students' psychological well-being. Thus, it is important to conduct a study of mental health literacy in students. First, because students are in a vulnerable period to academic, social, and personal pressure. Second, because low literacy risks increasing delays in treatment, worsening psychological conditions, and reducing quality of life. Therefore, this study seeks to better understand how mental health literacy plays a role in students' mental health conditions and their tendency to seek help.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a quantitative method with a descriptive design. The research population was students, with a sample of 30 people selected purposively. The research instrument used a questionnaire with a Guttman scale to obtain explicit data (yes/no). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the research results simply and clearly. The research design used in this study is quantitative descriptive. A descriptive design was chosen because this study aims to describe a specific phenomenon or condition as it is based on data obtained from respondents. In descriptive research, researchers do not provide special treatment *or* manipulation of variables, but instead focus solely on data collection and presenting results in numerical or percentage form.

By using this design, researchers can obtain a clearer picture of the characteristics, attitudes, or conditions of respondents related to research variables. Data collected through research instruments in the form of questionnaires were then analyzed quantitatively to show the tendencies, frequencies, and distribution of respondents' answers. The results of research with a descriptive design are expected to provide factual, systematic, and accurate information about the phenomena being studied without intending to find causal relationships between variables

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that students have a relatively good level of mental health literacy, with a dominance in the **high category (80%)**. Students in this category show the following indicators: Good Conceptual Understanding Students are able to define mental health not just as the absence of mental disorders, but as a condition of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. They understand that mental health is related to the ability to manage emotions, build healthy social relationships, and function optimally in academic activities and daily life. Early Detection Skill Respondents with high literacy tend to be able to recognize early signs of psychological disorders, such as prolonged stress, excessive anxiety, persistently low mood, or significant behavioral changes. This awareness is crucial for prevention efforts, as they can take action sooner before the problem becomes more serious. Awareness of Help Resources: Students in this category not only understand the importance of maintaining mental health but also have information about support resources. They understand the differences between the roles of psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors, and are aware that both campus and public

health agencies offer counseling services. Some students even showed an openness to seeking help when needed, indicating a decreasing stigma around mental health issues.

Open and Non-Stigmatic Attitudes: High literacy is also reflected in students' attitudes, who do not view mental disorders as a weakness or something taboo to discuss. Instead, they tend to be more open in supporting peers experiencing psychological difficulties and view seeking help as a form of courage, not weakness.

Ability to Use Healthy Coping Strategies Students with high literacy tend to rely on adaptive coping strategies, such as sharing stories with trusted people, doing physical activities, managing study and rest time, or getting involved in positive activities (e.g., organizations, arts, or spiritual activities).

The dominance of the high category (80%) has several important meanings: **Success of Mental Health Campaigns** High percentages indicate that mental health campaigns, whether through social media, webinars, or campus programs, have successfully reached students. **The Role of the Digital Generation** Today's students are part of the digital generation who are familiar with the internet. Information about mental health is widely disseminated through digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, making it easy for students to gain understanding quickly and engagingly.

Supportive Campus Environment: universities are beginning to address student psychological issues through counseling services, seminars, and self-development programs. This support contributes to high levels of mental health literacy.

Social Capital for Prevention and Support Students with high literacy can be agents of change in their environment. They are not only more concerned about their own mental health, but are also able to provide social support to peers in need. The results of the study showed that most students were in the moderate mental health literacy category (16%). Students in this category have a basic understanding of mental health, but still have limitations in detecting symptoms, accessing help, or implementing adaptive coping strategies.

Moderate literacy indicators can be described through the following aspects: **Partial Conceptual Understanding** Students in this category generally understand that mental health is important for everyday life, but still tend to equate mental health with simply "the absence of mental disorders." Understanding of the emotional, psychological and social aspects of well-being is not yet fully developed.

Limited Early Detection Capabilities : Respondents in this category can recognize common signs, such as stress and anxiety, but often have difficulty distinguishing between normal symptoms due to academic stress and those that point to serious problems. This makes them less alert in taking early preventive measures.

Awareness of Sources of Help is Still Low : Students are generally aware that campus counseling services and professionals like psychologists are available, but they lack clear information about how to access these services. Some students are also hesitant to seek help due to feelings of shame or fear of stigma.

Ambivalent Attitudes Towards Mental Health Issues : In this category, students tend to be neutral. They do not completely consider mental health issues as taboo, but they are also not yet open to discussing them freely. This ambivalent attitude has the potential to hinder the formation of a culture of healthy discussion regarding psychological issues in friendship circles.

Mixed Coping Strategies : Students with moderate literacy use a combination of adaptive coping strategies (such as light exercise, worship, or confiding in friends) and non-adaptive ones (such as procrastinating, withdrawing, or excessive use of social media). This shows that their skills in dealing with pressure still need to be improved.

The dominance of the medium category (16%) has several important meanings: **Challenges in Implementing Mental Health Education.** This percentage shows that although information about mental health is widely available, not all students are able to absorb and interpret it comprehensively. This means that the education provided still needs to be developed to be more applicable.

Gaps in Access to Information : Not all students have the same digital literacy skills . Some still struggle to sort out valid information related to mental health, resulting in a fragmented understanding.

The Need for More Concrete Support from Campuses : Although counseling services are available, students with moderate literacy are not optimally facilitated. This indicates the need for campuses to be more active in conducting outreach, opening discussion spaces, and bringing psychological services closer to students.

Opportunities for Improved Literacy : Students in this category actually have the potential to be upgraded to a higher category, considering that they already have basic awareness. Through interventions such as education, mentoring, and empowerment, this

group can become an important part of building a culture of mental health on campus. The results of the study showed that only a small proportion of students were in the low mental health literacy category (4%). Although they are a minority, this group is important to pay attention to because they potentially face higher risks in terms of psychological well-being.

Students with low mental health literacy have the following characteristics: Minimal Conceptual Understanding Students in this category tend not to be able to define mental health in its entirety. They still think of mental health as just “not being crazy” or “not having a mental illness.” This narrow view leads to a lack of awareness of the importance of emotional, psychological and social well-being.

Difficulties in Early Detection : This group is often unable to recognize the early symptoms of psychological disorders. Prolonged stress, anxiety, or significant behavioral changes are considered normal and left untreated. As a result, potential problems can develop into more serious problems because they are recognized too late.

Limited Access and Knowledge of Assistance Sources : Students in this category have almost no information about the role of psychologists, psychiatrists, or counselors. In fact, there is a tendency to avoid mental health services because they consider them taboo or scary. The negative stigma is still very strongly attached to this group.

Negative or Stigmatic Attitudes : Low literacy is reflected in students' perceptions of mental disorders as weaknesses or shameful. As a result, they are reluctant to open up, either to themselves or to others experiencing similar issues.

Use of Maladaptive Coping Strategies : Students with low literacy more often use unhealthy ways to deal with stress, such as escaping into excessive entertainment, avoiding problems, withdrawing from social environments, or even destructive behavior.

The dominance of the low category (4%) has several important meanings: There are still vulnerable groups. Although small in number, the existence of this group indicates that there are still students who are vulnerable to being neglected. They are at risk of experiencing psychological disorders without having the capacity to seek help.

Limited Reach of Education : This data suggests that existing mental health campaigns and programs have not reached all students. Groups with low literacy may have less exposure to information or come from backgrounds where discussing psychological issues is still taboo.

The Urgency of More Intensive Intervention : Special strategies are needed for this group, such as preventive counseling, direct (face- to-face) socialization, and a simpler and more down-to-earth approach so that they can understand the importance of mental health.

The Importance of Reducing Stigma : Increasing mental health literacy in this group also means reducing stigma. Support from the campus, family, and surrounding environment is needed to create a safe atmosphere so that students dare to open up about psychological issues

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that most students already have a good understanding of mental health. Around 80% of students fall into the high literacy category, meaning they understand the importance of maintaining mental health, are able to recognize early symptoms of psychological disorders, and demonstrate an open attitude towards seeking professional help. In addition, they also generally have good access to information and use healthy ways to cope with stress. Despite this, some students still fall into the moderate and low literacy categories. They tend to struggle to fully understand mental health, recognize symptoms of disorders, and are hesitant or unsure how to seek appropriate help. This indicates that current information and education do not yet reach all students equally. In addition, stigma and shame are still obstacles for some people to open up or seek help. Such as easy access to digital information, support from the surrounding community, and intensive mental health campaigns, play a significant role in increasing student understanding. However , challenges remain in eliminating stigma and ensuring that all students receive appropriate and easily understood education. Therefore, universities have a crucial role in providing sustainable mental health education programs that reach all students, without exception. The education delivered also needs to be more relevant to students' daily lives, free from intimidation, and able to foster a sense of security for discussion. In this way, students are not only able to maintain their own mental health, but can also be part of an environment that supports each other and cares about each other's psychological well-being.

REFERENCE

- Nasrianti, Citra Sari, et al. (2024). Overview of Mental Health of Adolescents in Selected High Schools in Semarang City . *Indonesian Journal of Nutrition* . Vol. 1 , No. 2
- Fadkhurosi, Adnan, et al. (2024). Mental Health Research Trends in Indonesia 2022-2023: Bibliographic Analysis. *National and Educational Science Scientific Journal*. Vol. 13, No. 2
- Irawan, Teguh, et al. (2024). Mental Health Overview of Second Semester Public Health Students at Pekalongan University. *Malahayati Medical Journal*. Vol. 8 , No. 4
- Fakhriyani, Diana Vidya. (2024). The Influence of Mental Health Literacy on Mental Health in College Students. *Journal of Psychology*. Vol. 19 , No. 1
- Permana, Andi Fajrin, et al. (2023). An Exploratory Study of Mental Health Literacy in Nursing Students. *IMELDA Nursing Scientific Journal*. Vol. 9, No. 1
- Nugroho, Indra Prapto, et al. (2020). The Role of Mental Health Literacy on the Intensity of Help-Seeking Behavior Among Street Children in Palembang City. *Ar-Rahman Guidance and Counseling Journal*. Vol.6, No.2
- Putri, Cindi Maelani Putri Maelani, et al. (2025). Mental Health Literacy and Self-Diagnostic Behavior in College Students. *Journal of Health Promotion and Behavior*. Vol.6, No.2
- Novianty, Anita. (2017). Mental Health Literacy: Public Knowledge and Perceptions Regarding Mental Disorders. *Journal of Master of Psychology*. Vol. 9, No. 2
- Syafitri, Diany Ufieta & Rahmah, Laily. (2021). Online Peer Counselor Training to Improve Students' Mental Health Literacy at XY Islamic High School, Semarang. *Journal Of Professional Psychology*. Vol.7, No.1
- Fonna, Zahara, et al. (2024). Factors Associated with Mental Health Literacy in College Students. *Journal Of Public Health Innovation*. Vol.5, No.1
- Setyano, Arif Tri, et al. (2024). Student Mental Health: Monitoring, Prevention, and Treatment. UNS Press.