

Implementation of Individual Counseling Services to Reduce Students' Academic Stress

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Abstract. *Academic stress is one of the major challenges frequently encountered by university students. It may arise from heavy coursework, performance pressure, adjustment to the campus environment, poor time management, learning difficulties, psychological factors, as well as personal and environmental problems. When unmanaged, this stress can negatively affect students' learning motivation, mental health, and academic achievement. Individual counseling is considered an effective intervention to help students cope with such stress. Through this service, students are provided opportunities to explore their concerns in a private setting, express emotions, identify stressors, develop their potential to function optimally, and obtain solutions tailored to their needs. This study applies a library research method by reviewing and analyzing books, scientific literature, and relevant research related to individual counseling and academic stress. Findings indicate that individual counseling is effective in helping students recognize stress sources, develop adaptive coping strategies, and improve emotional regulation. Therefore, the implementation of individual counseling can serve as a strategic alternative to reducing academic stress while supporting students' psychological well-being.*

Keywords: *Individual Counseling, Academic Stress, University Students, Library Research.*



INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the important aspects in the growth of individuals and society. According to Law No. 20 of 2003, education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning environment and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have religious spiritual strength, self-control, personality, anxiety, noble character, and the skills needed by themselves, society, the nation, and the state (Hamdan Ridwan, 2024).

The learning process is not only about imparting knowledge, but also shaping character, interpersonal skills, and the ability to manage thoughts and feelings. In the context of higher education, students experience and face various challenges that are not only related to learning, but also to their personal growth and social relationships. One of the main challenges that students often face is mental health issues, such as stress, anxiety, and difficulty managing emotions, which can interfere with their learning and quality of life.

Based on a survey conducted by Chegg in the 2025 Global Student Survey, 56% of students in Indonesia admitted to experiencing academic burnout, a condition of mental exhaustion due to constant pressure to study. In addition, 60% of students experience sleep disorders and 35% experience excessive anxiety, all of which are closely related to academic stress (Dataloka, 2025: Goodstats, 2025). The results of this survey show that the problem of academic stress is very significant and requires serious attention from higher education institutions

Academic stress is a form of psychological pressure experienced and felt by students when the academic demands they face exceed their ability to cope. This can occur for various reasons, such as heavy workloads, exam preparation, competition for grades, difficulty managing time, and expectations from parents and the surrounding environment (Rian Tasalim, 2021). One approach that has proven effective in overcoming and reducing academic stress is individual counseling.

Individual counseling is a face-to-face relationship between a counselor and a client, in which the counselor creates a learning environment that helps the client understand themselves, the problems they face, and their future. In this way, clients can utilize their potential to achieve happiness in their personal and social lives. This counseling is personal and aims to help clients solve the problems they face through a process of exploration, reflection, and strengthening their ability to face challenges (Jum Anidar et al., 2024). Individual counseling can reduce academic stress levels through techniques such as cognitive reframing, relaxation, and strengthening adaptive skills. Therefore, this service is very relevant and appropriate to be implemented in a college environment. This article was written with the aim of examining the implementation of individual counseling services as an effective way to overcome academic stress experienced by students. The discussion will

focus on the basic concepts of individual counseling, the mechanism of implementation in a college environment, and its impact on reducing student academic stress.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a library research approach, which is a method of collecting data and information by reviewing various scientific literature sources related to the research topic. The library research process was carried out by studying theories, previous research results, reference books, academic journals, and educational documents that discuss academic stress and individual counseling services.

The purpose of this method is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept of academic stress experienced by students and the effectiveness of individual counseling services as a psychological intervention strategy. The researcher studied various sources that have been officially published and are accessible to the public, both in print and digital form

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Individual Counseling

According to Willis S. Sofyan (2007: 18), counseling is an effort to provide assistance by a trained and experienced counselor to individuals who need help so that they can develop optimally, solve the problems they face, and adapt to a constantly changing environment.

According to Hallen in (Syafaruddin et al., 2019), individual counseling is a form of guidance service provided directly through face-to-face meetings between the counselor and the client. This service allows the counselee to discuss their personal problems in detail, so that the guidance counselor can help find solutions to the difficulties they are experiencing. More specifically, individual counseling is the process of providing psychological support through interviews between a professional (counselor) and an individual (client) who is facing certain problems.

Prayitno (2005: 52) states that the general objective of individual counseling is to help clients reframe the problems they face, understand their lifestyle, and reduce negative self-judgment and feelings of inferiority. Furthermore, counseling also helps clients improve the way they perceive their environment, so that they can direct their behavior and

redevelop their social interests. The main goal of this process is to resolve the problems faced by clients (Lota, 2020).

Academic Stress

According to Gadzella (in Gadzella & Masten, 2005), academic stress is an emotional condition often experienced by students during lectures and how a person perceives things that cause stress in learning and how he responds to them. This response includes physical reactions, feelings, actions, and thoughts towards academic pressures. According to Gupta and Khan (in Kadapatti & Vijayalaxmi, 2012), academic stress is mental pressure that arises from frustration due to failure in learning, fear of failure, and the awareness that failure can occur.

Based on the results of the study, the implementation of individual counseling services can reduce the academic stress experienced by students. This is done by applying several counseling techniques, namely:

a. Introduction Stage

At this stage, counselors need to establish a warm and empathetic relationship with clients in order to create a sense of security and trust. When clients feel accepted without judgment, they will be more open in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and problems. Trust is the main foundation in the counseling process, because without trust in the counselor, clients tend to close themselves off or hide important information that can affect the effectiveness of the intervention. Therefore, counselors must demonstrate active listening, empathy, and non-judgmental attitudes so that clients feel valued and fully heard. This process of building a relationship is known as rapport building, and is a crucial initial stage that determines the success of the subsequent counseling process.

b. Exploration Stage

During the exploration stage, counselors play an important role in creating a conducive atmosphere so that clients feel comfortable and willing to engage in the counseling process. Exploration is the initial phase in which counselors begin to get to know clients in general, including their background, character, and the issues they wish to discuss. In this stage, it is important for counselors to be friendly, open, and show sincerity in listening. The goal is to foster a sense of security and reduce any awkwardness that clients may feel during the initial meeting.

During the exploratory stage, counselors not only gather basic information, but also begin to build rapport or a positive initial relationship with clients. This is an

important foundation before entering the core stage of counseling. If the exploratory process is done well, clients will find it easier to open up, feel valued, and show trust in the counselor. Therefore, the success of this stage greatly determines the smoothness of the subsequent stages in the individual counseling process.

c. Interpretation Stage

The interpretation stage is the phase where the counselor begins to help the client gain a deeper understanding of the problems they are facing. At this stage, the counselor and client together analyze the data or information that has been collected during the previous stage, such as emotions, thought patterns, and behaviors that arise in various situations. The main objective of this stage is to uncover the meaning behind the problems presented by the client, so that the client can see their problems more objectively and comprehensively.

In this process, counselors provide reflective and interpretive feedback, while remaining mindful of ethics and sensitivity to the client's emotional state. The counselor does not jump to conclusions, but rather encourages the client to think critically, establish cause-and-effect relationships, and recognize the internal and external factors that influence their condition. Accurate interpretation can lead to new insights for the client, which are very important in supporting the process of change. If the interpretation stage is carried out carefully and with empathy, clients will feel supported and motivated to make positive changes. Conversely, if the interpretation is too hasty or judgmental, clients may feel misunderstood and become closed off. Therefore, the counselor's communication skills and psychological understanding are essential in this stage to ensure that the counseling process is effective.

d. Development Stage

The development stage is the core part of the counseling process, where the counselor actively helps clients develop more adaptive ways of thinking, attitudes, and behaviors to deal with the problems they face. After clients gain a clearer understanding of their problems through the interpretation stage, the development stage focuses on guiding clients to apply problem-solving strategies and build new skills that support the process of self-change.

In this stage, the counselor acts as a facilitator who encourages clients to try new approaches in dealing with difficult situations, including techniques for managing emotions, decision making, and action planning. Clients are invited to set short-term and

long-term goals, then gradually guided to achieve these goals through practice, evaluation, and reflection.

The coaching stage also includes providing reinforcement for the positive changes that clients have achieved, so that their motivation to continue developing is maintained. In addition, counselors help clients recognize obstacles or relapses that may occur, and prepare strategies to overcome them.

The success of the coaching stage is highly dependent on the quality of the relationship between the counselor and the client, as well as the client's commitment to undergoing the counseling process consistently. If done effectively, this stage can produce real and lasting changes in the client, especially in the context of reducing academic stress, increasing self-confidence, and improving self-management skills.

e. Assessment Stage

The assessment stage is a phase in which the counselor and client evaluate the extent of progress and change that has occurred during the counseling process. At this stage, the counselor reflects on the results that have been achieved, whether in terms of reducing academic stress, improving self-management skills, or changes in the client's mindset and behavior. This assessment is important to ensure that the mutually agreed counseling goals can be achieved properly.

During the assessment stage, counselors typically use various methods to measure progress, such as evaluation interviews, questionnaires or measurement scales, and direct observation of changes in the client. In addition, counselors may also ask clients to conduct self-evaluations to see if they feel more capable of dealing with their academic problems. The assessment stage also serves to identify areas that still require further attention or follow-up, whether in the form of further counseling sessions or the development of more appropriate strategies. If it is found that there are aspects that still need improvement or change, the counselor can adjust their approach and set new, more relevant goals.

This assessment process helps ensure that counseling does not stop at short-term changes, but also focuses on long-term impacts that can support the client's future personal development. This evaluation also provides an opportunity for clients to express their experiences, including whether they are satisfied with the services provided or if there are things that need to be improved in the counseling process.

The results of the analysis and synthesis of various literature sources related to individual counseling strategies in dealing with academic stress in students show a number of important findings, as follows:

1. Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation techniques, such as breathing techniques, meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation, have been proven effective in reducing academic stress levels in students. Regular practice of relaxation techniques can help reduce anxiety, improve concentration, and promote psychological well-being in students.

2. Time Management

Effective time management strategies can help students better organize their study schedules, assignments, and academic responsibilities. Setting priorities, using calendars or planners, and allocating time appropriately can help reduce pressure and increase learning efficiency.

3. Learning Skills Development

Improving learning skills, such as organizing information, problem solving, and task management, can help students cope better with academic stress.

4. Counselors can help students identify and develop the appropriate learning skills according to their individual needs.

5. Social Support

Social support from peers, family, and campus staff can help students cope with academic stress. Counselors can help students access appropriate sources of social support, such as mentoring programs or support groups, which can provide emotional and practical support.

6. Self-Regulation

The ability of students to regulate themselves and manage stress effectively is very important. Individual counseling can help students develop self-regulation strategies, including goal setting, self-motivation, and emotion management.

7. Development of Adaptive Mindset

Strengthening an adaptive and positive mindset can help students change their perceptions of academic stress. Counselors can help students identify unhealthy mindsets and replace them with more adaptive and constructive ones.

According to Sarafino and Smith (Wildani 2019), stress can be understood as a condition in which a person feels unable to cope with the demands of their environment,

resulting in tension and discomfort. Each individual has a different level of stress even when facing similar situations. Academic stress is influenced by two factors, namely internal factors such as mindset, personality, and beliefs, and external factors, such as high achievement demands, social status pressures, busy class schedules, and pressure from parents. Sarafino and Smith divide stress into two main aspects, namely biological and psychological aspects.

Biological Aspects

Biological symptoms of stress appear in physical form, such as headaches, insomnia, indigestion, eating problems, skin disorders, and excessive sweating. In addition, muscle tension, irregular heartbeat and breathing, nervousness, anxiety, restlessness, changes in appetite, and even stomach ulcers may also occur.

Psychological Aspects

Cognitive stress can interfere with thinking functions, such as decreased memory, difficulty concentrating, low self-esteem, fear of failure, anxiety about the future, and unstable emotions. Individuals become more irritable, experience excessive anxiety, feel sad, and even depressed. Stressful behavior can change daily behavior to become less adaptive, such as difficulty cooperating, loss of interest, inability to relax, and being easily startled.

From this description, it can be understood that stress encompasses biological and psychological aspects. Biological aspects are demonstrated through physical symptoms, while psychological aspects include cognitive, emotional, and behavioral disorders.

CONCLUSION

Academic stress is one of the main challenges faced by students and can reduce motivation, mental health, and academic achievement if not handled properly. Individual counseling services have been proven effective in helping students reduce stress, as they provide a space to understand the source of the problem, express feelings, and find solutions that suit personal needs. Through counseling, students are also helped to develop self-management skills, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping strategies. Thus, the implementation of individual counseling can be a strategic alternative in supporting psychological well-being while improving student academic success

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