

The Influence of Coping Strategies on Students' Mental Health in Facing Academic Stress in Higher Education

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the influence of coping strategies on college students' mental health in dealing with academic stress through a literature review approach. Academic stress remains a major psychological issue among higher education students due to increasing academic demands, including assignments, examinations, and thesis completion. Unlike previous reviews that mainly describe coping strategies in general terms, this study specifically identifies distinct coping clusters and examines how different forms of social support contribute to students' mental health outcomes. The method employed is a literature review by analyzing national and international scientific articles published within a specified period. The findings indicate that adaptive coping strategies, particularly problem-focused coping, planning, and active coping, are consistently associated with lower levels of stress, anxiety, and academic burnout, as well as higher psychological well-being. In contrast, maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance, procrastination, and self-blame, are linked to poorer mental health outcomes. Furthermore, the review reveals that social support differentially influences coping effectiveness, with face-to-face support from family, peers, and academic communities generally producing stronger protective effects, while digital support provides complementary benefits in maintaining emotional well-being. These findings suggest that interventions in higher education should promote adaptive coping skills and strengthen both offline and online social support systems to enhance students' mental health.

Keywords: Coping strategies, academic stress, mental health, college students, literature review, social support.

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a key aspect in determining an individual's overall well-being (Aloysius & Salvia, 2021). Mental health refers to a condition in which an individual's physical, intellectual, and emotional development grows, develops, and matures throughout life, enabling them to accept responsibility, achieve adjustment, maintain social norms, and behave appropriately within their cultural context. Mental health is an essential aspect of human life that is closely related to an individual's psychological and emotional conditions. A healthy mental state allows individuals to carry out daily activities optimally and improve their quality of life (Organization, 2022). Conversely, mental health disorders can have significant negative impacts on a person's life, including difficulties in adapting to their environment (Sarmini et al., 2023).

The mental health of college students, who are categorized as adolescents still in the process of identity formation, tends to fluctuate depending on various influencing conditions and factors. On the other hand, good mental health is essential for all student activities, particularly in fulfilling academic responsibilities such as studying and achieving academic success in their respective fields (Bimantara, 2024). According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), students experiencing academic stress usually show both physical and psychological symptoms. Physically, students may experience headaches, sleep disturbances, excessive fatigue, and decreased appetite. These symptoms often appear as the body's response to perceived pressure. Academic stress can reduce sleep quality and disrupt concentration, which in turn affects students' ability to complete assignments and examinations effectively (Mubarak et al., 2025).

The mental health phenomenon in Indonesia shows a concerning condition, where many individuals, including students, experience stress and anxiety due to social, academic, and financial pressures. Students are particularly vulnerable, especially those in their final year, due to high demands for completing their studies. However, many of them are not yet fully aware of the long-term impacts of stress on brain function and overall mental health (Setiawati et al., 2023).

Recent studies indicate that the prevalence of mental health problems among university students has increased globally. According to a survey conducted by the American College Health Association (2019), more than 60% of students reported experiencing overwhelming anxiety, while 40% reported depression that interfered with their daily functioning. In Europe, a study by (Auerbach et al., 2018) found that approximately 31% of first-year university students met the criteria for at least one common mental disorder.

From a stress psychology perspective, Lazarus and Folkman explain that stress occurs through a transactional process between the individual and the environment. Individuals evaluate (appraise) a situation to determine whether it is perceived as threatening or controllable. To cope with these pressures, individuals use coping strategies, defined as cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage internal and external demands that are perceived as exceeding one's resources. According to Lazarus and Folkman, coping strategies are classified into two main categories: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Suryana, 2022). The choice of coping strategy is determined by how individuals evaluate the situation and the resources they possess, both internal and external (Fikri et al., 2024). In an academic context, coping strategies help students remain productive and mentally healthy despite high levels of pressure (Immanuel et al., 2021).

Various studies show that coping strategies are significantly related to students' stress levels and mental health. Research by Immanuel et al. found that coping strategies contribute to reducing students' stress levels. Students who apply adaptive coping tend to have better adjustment abilities compared to those who use maladaptive coping strategies (Immanuel et al., 2021). Other studies indicate that problem-focused coping helps reduce academic stress because individuals actively seek solutions to the problems they face

(Kresnawan et al., 2021). Conversely, maladaptive coping strategies may increase the risk of academic burnout, anxiety, and psychological well-being problems (Sholekhah et al., 2026).

Research conducted by Ningsih and Surawan revealed that students generally use a combination of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping when dealing with academic pressure arising from assignments, multiple responsibilities, and changes in learning systems (Ningsiha & Surawan, 2025). In addition, Fariz et al. found that final-year students use various coping strategies to manage stress during their thesis completion process (Fariz et al., 2025). Another finding from Oktavia shows that coping strategies have a significant negative effect on academic stress, meaning that the better the coping strategy used, the lower the level of stress experienced by students (Oktavia, 2026).

Various studies in Indonesia indicate that coping strategies play an important role in helping students deal with academic stress. Adaptive coping strategies are proven to be associated with reduced stress levels, improved adjustment abilities, and more effective stress management among students (Immanuel et al., 2021; Kresnawan et al., 2021). In addition, students who are able to apply appropriate coping strategies tend to have more stable psychological conditions compared to those who rely on maladaptive coping when facing academic demands.

However, most existing studies still focus separately on the relationship between coping strategies and academic stress or burnout, and there is still limited comprehensive research integrating psychological well-being, adaptability, and students' quality of life. Therefore, a broader literature synthesis is needed to better understand the role of coping strategies in the context of students' mental health in higher education (Fariz et al., 2025; Sholekhah et al., 2026).

This study is important because students' mental health not only affects academic achievement but also influences quality of life, social adaptation skills, and readiness to face post-graduation life challenges (Immanuel et al., 2021; Ningsiha & Surawan, 2025).

Based on the explanation above, this literature review aims to analyze and synthesize various research findings on the effect of coping strategies on students' mental health in dealing with academic stress in higher education. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of psychology and guidance and counseling, as well as serve as a basis for designing support programs that enhance students' mental health through strengthening adaptive coping strategies.

METHODS

This study employs a systematic literature review approach aimed at examining, analyzing, and synthesizing various research findings on the influence of coping strategies on college students' mental health in dealing with academic stress in higher education. According to Zed (2008), a literature review is a research method that utilizes various written sources as primary data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of a research phenomenon (Imah & Purwoko, 2018). To ensure accountability and transparency, the methodology is structured around explicit electronic database searches, predefined eligibility criteria, and systematic quality appraisal.

Search Strategy and Databases

Literature retrieval was systematically conducted across three prominent scientific electronic databases: Google Scholar, Garuda (Garda Rujukan Digital), and SINTA (Science and Technology Index). The search was performed using specific Boolean operators (AND, OR) and quotation marks for exact phrase matching to optimize precision. The finalized search strings applied to the databases are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Database Search Strategy

Database	Search String / Keywords
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Database	Search String / Keywords
Google Scholar	("academic stress" OR "burnout") AND ("coping strategy" OR "coping mechanism") AND ("mental health" OR "well-being") AND ("college student" OR "higher education")
Garuda & SINTA	("stres akademik" OR "coping strategi") AND ("kesehatan mental" OR "mahasiswa")

Eligibility Criteria

To ensure the gathered literature directly aligns with the research objective, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. Studies were screened based on publication timeline, target population, document type, and availability.

Table 2. *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Criteria	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication Period	Published within the last 5–10 years (2016–2026)	Published prior to 2016
Target Population	Active college/university students undergoing higher education	School-aged children, adolescents in primary/secondary education, or working adults
Study Focus	Explicitly examines the correlation or impact of coping strategies on academic stress and students' mental health	General stress without coping analysis, or coping mechanisms unrelated to academic domains
Document Type	Peer-reviewed national and international journal articles, and official academic proceedings	Book reviews, popular articles, mass media news, and incomplete/abstract-only text
Language & Access	Available in full-text format (Indonesian or English)	Non-accessible full-text or written in languages other than English/Indonesian

Quality Appraisal

To ensure the methodological rigor of the included studies, a quality appraisal was conducted using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) for empirical studies and relevant parts of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists for qualitative or review papers. This step guarantees that the synthesized findings are derived from high-quality, scientifically sound literature, filtering out papers with significant methodological flaws.

Research Instrument and Procedure

The primary research instrument used in this study is a structured literature review matrix, which serves to identify, categorize, and organize critical information from each analyzed article. The aspects recorded include article identity (authors and year), research objectives, research methods, participant characteristics, variables studied, and specific findings related to coping strategies, academic stress, and students' mental health. The use

of this matrix helps the researcher systematically organize data and compare findings across studies, thereby facilitating a rigorous synthesis process (Kresnawan et al., 2021). The research procedure followed four sequential stages:

1. Identification: Formulating the focus of the study and executing the search strings across Google Scholar, Garuda, and SINTA.
2. Screening: Removing duplicates and evaluating titles and abstracts based on initial relevance.
3. Eligibility: Reviewing full-text articles against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 2).
4. Inclusion: Subjecting the final pool of articles to quality appraisal using MMAT/CASP before data extraction.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis with a qualitative descriptive approach. The analysis process included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, relevant information related to the research focus was selected and classified using the literature review matrix. Subsequently, the data were presented in a descriptive narrative form describing the main findings from previous studies. Finally, all findings were synthesized to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the influence of coping strategies on college students' mental health in dealing with academic stress in higher education (Fariz et al., 2025; Immanuel et al., 2021; Ningsiha & Surawan, 2025; Sholekhah et al., 2026).

RESULTS

Based on the analysis of the reviewed literature, academic stress is identified as one of the most common problems experienced by university students. Academic stress arises from various educational demands, such as heavy assignment loads, examinations, academic achievement targets, limited time, and pressure in completing final projects. Research by (Immanuel et al., 2021) shows that coping strategies contribute significantly to students' stress conditions. Students who are able to use coping strategies effectively tend to experience lower levels of stress compared to those who are less capable of managing the pressures they face.

In addition, (Aulia et al., 2025) found that increased academic stress among students is often accompanied by higher levels of anxiety and decreased concentration, particularly during examination periods and thesis writing. This finding indicates that academic stress affects not only psychological aspects but also students' academic performance. Students experiencing high levels of stress tend to have difficulties in time management, reduced learning motivation, and lower academic satisfaction.

Other studies indicate that the most commonly used coping strategies among students are problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping involves identifying the source of the problem, developing plans to resolve it, and taking actions considered effective in reducing academic pressure. Meanwhile, emotion-focused coping includes emotional regulation, self-acceptance, seeking social support, and engaging in relaxation activities to reduce psychological tension caused by academic stress (Kresnawan et al., 2021; Sholekhah et al., 2026).

In line with these findings, (Fauzi et al., 2021) reported that during online and hybrid learning conditions, students tended to use a combination of coping strategies due to unstable academic demands and rapid changes in the learning system. This finding reinforces the view that students' coping strategies are dynamic and influenced by their academic environment.

Research findings show that problem-focused coping plays a significant role in reducing students' academic stress. Students who use this strategy are more capable of identifying and directly solving the sources of their problems, thereby enhancing their

adaptability to academic demands (Sholihah et al., 2023). (Aisya et al., 2024) also emphasized that students with strong problem-solving skills tend to experience lower stress levels and demonstrate higher self-control when facing academic pressure.

In addition to problem-focused coping, several studies have shown that emotion-focused coping can also positively affect mental health when used adaptively. This strategy includes self-acceptance, positive thinking, spiritual activities, meditation, and relaxation techniques. Students who are able to regulate their emotions effectively tend to experience lower levels of anxiety and are better able to maintain psychological stability when facing academic challenges (Zahara & Abdullah, 2025).

Furthermore, several studies indicate that coping strategies are not only associated with academic stress levels but are also closely related to students' overall mental health. Students who apply adaptive coping strategies tend to exhibit better psychological well-being, lower levels of anxiety, and greater adjustment abilities. Conversely, the use of maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance, procrastination, or social withdrawal, may increase the risk of academic burnout and emotional exhaustion (Aisya et al., 2024).

Research conducted by (Sholekhah et al., 2026) further supports these findings by demonstrating that avoidance coping is strongly associated with increased emotional exhaustion and academic burnout among students, particularly those with heavy academic workloads, such as students completing their theses.

Several studies also reveal differences in coping strategy utilization based on student characteristics. Senior students are more likely to employ problem-focused coping because they have accumulated greater academic experience. In contrast, first-year students tend to rely more on emotion-focused coping as they are still adapting to the university environment (Pradiri et al., 2021).

By Folkman & Moskowitz (2004) in addition to academic level, gender has also been reported to influence coping strategy selection. Female students tend to use emotion-oriented coping strategies and seek social support more frequently, whereas male students are more likely to employ problem-solving-oriented coping strategies. However, the effectiveness of coping depends more on the appropriateness of the strategy to the situation rather than on gender alone.

Another By Hartley (2011) important finding indicates that students' resilience serves as a protective factor against the negative effects of academic stress. Students with high levels of resilience are generally more capable of recovering from academic setbacks, maintaining learning motivation, and employing adaptive coping strategies. In contrast, students with lower resilience are more vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion.

In the context of mental health, numerous studies have reported that poorly managed academic stress may increase the risk of psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and academic burnout. These conditions may result in decreased academic performance, lower learning satisfaction, and even an increased likelihood of dropping out of university (Yin et al., 2018).

Other findings suggest that social support from family, peers, and the academic environment plays an essential role in enhancing the effectiveness of students' coping strategies. Social support provides emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance needed to cope with academic pressure. Students with strong social support systems tend to manage stress more effectively and exhibit more positive psychological conditions compared to those who receive insufficient support (Mutolib et al., 2026).

This finding is further supported by (Ningsiha & Surawan, 2025), who stated that social support plays a crucial role in strengthening students' coping abilities, particularly when dealing with complex academic tasks and continuous academic pressures.

In addition to direct social support, recent studies have shown that digital social support is increasingly being utilized by students in coping with academic stress. Students use social media, online communities, and online counseling services as sources of

emotional support and mental health information. Nevertheless, face-to-face social support is still considered more effective in enhancing students' psychological well-being.

The synthesis of the literature also demonstrates that a supportive academic environment plays an important role in helping students develop effective coping strategies. University environments that provide counseling services, academic mentoring, and positive interpersonal relationships between students and lecturers can significantly enhance students' psychological well-being. Conversely, unsupportive academic environments may exacerbate students' academic stress.

Overall, the literature synthesis indicates that coping strategies, particularly problem-focused coping, along with adequate social support, play a crucial role in maintaining students' mental health. The combination of these factors helps students reduce academic stress, improve adaptability, and maintain psychological well-being throughout their higher education experiences.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this literature review indicate that academic stress remains one of the most prevalent psychological challenges experienced by university students. Academic demands such as examinations, assignments, academic achievement expectations, and thesis completion often exceed students' perceived capabilities, resulting in psychological distress. This finding is consistent with Indonesian studies showing that academic stress is significantly associated with anxiety, depression, and decreased psychological well-being among university students (Fitriani, A., & Nurjannah, 2021; Putri, R. A., & Sari, 2020). Students who perceive academic demands as overwhelming are more likely to experience negative mental health outcomes, highlighting the importance of effective stress management strategies.

The present review demonstrates that coping strategies play a significant role in determining students' mental health outcomes when facing academic stress. In particular, problem-focused coping appears to be the most effective strategy in reducing stress and promoting psychological well-being. Students who actively identify problems, seek solutions, organize priorities, and manage their time effectively tend to experience lower stress levels and better psychological adjustment. Indonesian research also shows that problem-focused coping is positively related to academic adjustment and resilience among university students (Rahmawati & Hidayat, 2022).

Furthermore, this review reveals that emotion-focused coping can also contribute positively to students' mental health when employed adaptively. Strategies such as emotional regulation, self-acceptance, positive thinking, and spiritual coping are commonly found among Indonesian students. Several studies indicate that religious coping and emotional regulation significantly reduce stress and improve psychological well-being (Utami, 2020). Therefore, emotion-focused coping should not be viewed as a passive strategy, but rather as a complementary approach that supports psychological adaptation.

Conversely, maladaptive coping strategies such as avoidance, procrastination, and denial are associated with poorer mental health outcomes. Indonesian studies report that students who rely on avoidance coping tend to experience higher academic burnout and stress levels. Avoidance coping only provides temporary relief and fails to address the root cause of stress, thereby increasing long-term psychological burden.

Another important finding is the crucial role of social support in enhancing coping effectiveness. Social support from family, peers, and lecturers significantly contributes to students' psychological adjustment. Indonesian research confirms that students with strong social support systems tend to experience lower stress levels and better mental health outcomes. Social support therefore functions as a protective factor that buffers the negative impact of academic stress.

Interestingly, digital social support has also become increasingly important among university students. Online platforms, social media, and online counseling services are now widely used as alternative sources of emotional and informational support. Studies in Indonesia show that although digital support increases accessibility, face-to-face interaction remains more effective in providing emotional closeness and psychological comfort (Lestari & Wahyuni, 2023). This indicates that a combination of online and offline support systems may provide the most effective approach for student mental health services.

The review further highlights that individual characteristics such as resilience, emotional maturity, self-regulation, and previous experiences significantly influence coping effectiveness. Students with higher resilience tend to recover more quickly from academic setbacks and maintain motivation in stressful situations. Indonesian studies consistently identify resilience as a key protective factor that reduces the negative impact of academic stress and enhances psychological well-being (Hidayat et al., 2022; Sulastri & Firmansyah, 2021).

In addition to individual factors, environmental conditions also play a substantial role in shaping students' mental health. Supportive academic environments characterized by positive lecturer–student relationships, accessible counseling services, and academic mentoring programs facilitate adaptive coping development. Conversely, highly competitive and unsupportive academic environments may intensify stress levels. Higher education institutions therefore have a strategic responsibility to provide supportive systems that promote student well-being.

Beyond these factors, the rapid development of digital technology also contributes to students' academic stress experiences. The increasing use of online learning platforms, digital assignments, and social media multitasking often leads to higher levels of distraction and procrastination. Indonesian studies show that excessive social media use is associated with increased academic procrastination and stress among students (Saputra & Fadhilah, 2021). This highlights the importance of digital self-regulation in managing academic pressure.

Furthermore, student motivation plays an important role in determining how individuals respond to academic stress. Students with strong intrinsic motivation tend to perceive academic challenges as opportunities for growth rather than threats. In contrast, low academic motivation is often associated with emotional exhaustion and higher stress levels. Research in Indonesia indicates a significant negative relationship between academic motivation and academic stress.

In addition, counseling services in higher education institutions play a crucial role in addressing academic stress. Counseling interventions help students identify stressors, develop adaptive coping strategies, and improve emotional regulation skills. Indonesian studies confirm that both individual and group counseling are effective in reducing academic stress and improving students' psychological well-being (Setiawan & Rahman, 2019). This emphasizes the importance of strengthening mental health services in universities.

Finally, this review also highlights the relevance of positive psychology-based interventions as an additional strategy for reducing academic stress. Approaches such as gratitude practices, self-compassion, and optimism training have been shown to improve psychological well-being and resilience. Indonesian research suggests that positive psychology interventions can significantly reduce stress levels and enhance students' emotional well-being. Therefore, integrating positive psychology approaches into student development programs may be highly beneficial.

This literature review confirms that coping strategies play a crucial role in managing academic stress among university students. Adaptive coping strategies, particularly problem-focused coping, combined with strong social support, resilience, and supportive academic environments, significantly contribute to reducing psychological distress and enhancing students' well-being throughout their academic journey.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review on academic stress among university students, it can be concluded that academic stress is one of the most common psychological problems experienced by students in higher education. This stress arises as a response to high academic demands such as assignments, examinations, academic achievement expectations, and thesis completion, which often exceed students' adaptive capacity. This condition contributes to a decline in psychological well-being, including increased anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced learning motivation. Furthermore, the findings indicate that coping strategies play an important role in determining students' stress levels and their ability to adapt to academic demands. Problem-focused coping has been found to be the most effective strategy in helping students manage academic stress, as it directly addresses problem-solving, time management, and structured academic planning. Meanwhile, emotion-focused coping can also have a positive effect when used adaptively, such as through emotional regulation, self-acceptance, and religious coping, which help maintain psychological stability. However, maladaptive coping strategies such as avoidance, procrastination, and denial are found to worsen academic stress and increase the risk of burnout. Therefore, students' ability to select appropriate coping strategies is a crucial factor in maintaining mental health throughout their academic journey. In addition, social support from family, peers, and lecturers plays a protective role in reducing the negative impact of academic stress. Individual factors such as resilience, learning motivation, and self-regulation also influence students' ability to cope with academic pressure. Moreover, a supportive academic environment and the availability of counseling services in higher education institutions are essential in helping students manage stress more effectively. In conclusion, academic stress among university students is not only influenced by external factors such as academic demands, but also by internal factors such as coping strategies, resilience, and motivation, as well as environmental factors such as social support and the educational system. Therefore, efforts to address academic stress should be carried out comprehensively by strengthening adaptive coping strategies, enhancing social support systems, and optimizing counseling services in higher education institutions.

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