

## Problem-Focused Coping in Student Academic Stress

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**Abstract.** Academic stress is one of the problems faced by Psychology students of the Faculty of Public Health, Nusa Cendana University, especially when facing various academic demands. This study aims to examine the effect of *problem-focused coping*, a coping strategy centered on problem-solving, on academic stress. The research employed a quantitative explanatory approach with a survey design. Data were collected through questionnaires from 180 students. The analysis revealed that increased use of *problem-focused coping* was significantly negatively correlated with academic stress ( $p = 0.001$ ). These findings underscore the importance of implementing *problem-focused coping* strategies to reduce academic stress and support the improvement of students' well-being.

**Keywords:** *problem-focused coping, academic stress, university students*

**Abstrak.** Stres akademik merupakan salah satu masalah yang dialami oleh mahasiswa Psikologi Fakultas Kesehatan Masyarakat, Universitas Nusa Cendana terutama saat menghadapi berbagai tuntutan akademik. Penelitian ini bertujuan menguji pengaruh *problem-focused coping*, yaitu strategi koping yang berfokus pada pemecahan masalah, terhadap stres akademik. Pendekatan kuantitatif eksplanatori dengan desain survei digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dari 180 mahasiswa. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa peningkatan penggunaan *problem-focused coping* berhubungan negatif signifikan dengan stres akademik ( $p = 0,001$ ). Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya penerapan *problem-focused coping* dalam mengurangi stres akademik dan mendukung peningkatan kesejahteraan mahasiswa.

**Kata kunci:** *problem-focused coping, stres akademik, mahasiswa*

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## **Introduction**

Students are individuals who are formally registered in higher education institutions and are in a learning process that is scientific, critical, and directed to develop intellectual capacity, personality, and professional skills (Sari & Wibowo, 2016). Savitri & Swandi (2023) explained that a college student can be defined as a student enrolled in a university.

The learning process in higher education can be quite stressful for students, who often have various independent, group, and practicum assignments to complete. Conditions like this are predicted to trigger stress in students if they are unable to meet these demands (Siregar, 2020). Stress experienced by students in education is referred to as academic stress (Maulinda & Rahayu, 2022).

Oktavia et al. (2019) define academic stress as a response that arises because there are too many demands and tasks that must be done by students who make academic stress conditions caused by pressure to show achievement and excellence in conditions of increasing academic competition so that they are increasingly burdened by various pressures and demands.

Academic stress affects both the body and mind, resulting from environmental changes and life's demands. So, an individual needs to overcome this stress. The term is known as Stress Coping. Coping stress, according to Armajayanthi et al. (2017), can be defined as an attempt to change individual behavior and cognition continuously to control specific internal and external demands, which are considered a burden or something that exceeds one's ability to accept pressure.

Problem-focused coping or problem-focused stress coping strategy, according to Maryam (2017), is an action directed at solving problems that encourages individuals to tend to use this behavior if they assess the problems they face are still controllable and can be resolved. Problem-focused coping behavior tends to be done if the individual feels that something constructive can be done about the situation or he believes that the resources he has can change the situation (Maryam, 2017).

Based on this description, the researcher believes that problem-focused coping strategies play a significant role in helping students face and manage academic stress that often arises due to complex academic demands and the pressure of the lecture environment. Students as a group that is vulnerable to stress need an adaptive adjustment mechanism so as not to get trapped in prolonged psychological pressure due to academic stress.

### **Method**

The population in this study was students who were actively studying in the Bachelor's Degree in Psychology Study Program, Faculty of Public Health, Nusa Cendana University, as many as 725 people. The sampling technique used in this research is a non-probability sampling technique. Sampling in this study was conducted using the Krejcie-Morgan formula. The number of samples in this study amounted to 180 people with a margin of error of 0.5%. The characteristics of the sample who became respondents in this study were (a) an active student in the Psychology Study Program of Faculty of Public Health, Nusa Cendana University, (b) aged 17-25 years.

The research approach employed in this study is quantitative. Quantitative research, according to Sugiyono (2016), is a research method based on the philosophy of positivism, used to research certain populations or samples, sampling techniques are generally carried out randomly, data collection using research instruments, data analysis is quantitative or statistical with the aim of testing predetermined hypotheses. While this research design employs a cross-sectional design. Sugiyono (2019) explains that cross-sectional research is research conducted to determine the relationship or influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable, which is carried out only once at a certain time. The aim is to describe the situation, the relationship between variables, or the prevalence of a phenomenon at that time.

In this research, the design used is a survey research design. The data collected from the survey is then statistically analyzed to draw meaningful research

conclusions. Meanwhile, the data collection technique employed in this study utilized a questionnaire method, and the questionnaire itself employed a Likert scale. The Likert scale used in this study was distributed via a Google Form link, which was shared through the WhatsApp application.

The questionnaires were distributed through enumerators, individuals tasked with collecting data from respondents who act as a liaison between researchers and data sources to ensure that the information collected is accurate and in line with the research objectives.

The distributed questionnaire contains 30 questions using the problem focused coping scale, Academic Problem Focused Coping (APFC) developed by Christianto (2019), which has a total of 14 question items and the scale used in measuring academic stress using the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA) scale developed by Sun et al. (2011) which was adapted in the Indonesian version by Sihotang (2021) which contains a total of 16 question items.

The data analysis technique employed in this utilizes uses simple linear regression analysis techniques. Simple linear regression analysis is a statistical method used to understand the relationship between one dependent variable and one independent variable. The main purpose of simple regression analysis is to determine how strong the influence is between the independent variable and the dependent variable, and to model the relationship in the form of a mathematical equation that can be used to predict the value of the dependent variable based on the value of the independent variable.

## **Result**

### **1. Overview of Respondent Characteristics**

The participants in this study were students from the Psychology Study Program, Faculty of Public Health, Nusa Cendana University, with a sample size of 180 individuals, representing a total population of 725. The general description of the

characteristics of respondents in this study includes gender, age, and year of college entry.

Table 1.

*Distribution of Samples Based on Gender*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Male	63	35%
Female	117	65%

The gender distribution table above shows that the gender of the respondents in this study consisted of 63 respondents (35%) who were male and 117 respondents (65%) who were female.

Table 2.

*Distribution of Samples Based on Age*

<b>Age</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
17	1	0,6%
18	6	3,3%
19	30	17%
20	43	23%
21	35	20%
22	26	13,9%
23	24	13%
24	14	8,8%

Based on the age distribution table above, it shows that the age of respondents in this study was 1 respondent (0.6%) aged 17 years, 6 respondents (3.3%) aged 18 years, 30 respondents (17%) aged 19 years, 43 respondents (23%) aged 20 years, 35 respondents (20%) aged 21 years, 26 respondents (13.9%) aged 22 years, 24 respondents (13%) aged 23 years and as many as 14 respondents (8.8%) aged 24 years.

Table 3.

*Distribution of Samples Based on The Year of Entering College*

<b>Year of enrollment</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
2018	14	7,8%
2019	12	6,7%
2020	24	13,3%
2021	26	14,4%
2022	54	30%
2023	50	27,8%

From the table of the distribution of the year of entering college, it shows that the year of entering college from the respondents, namely as many as 14 respondents (7.8%) entered college in 2018, 12 respondents (6.7%) entered college in 2019, 24 respondents (13.3%) entered college in 2020, 26 respondents (14.4%) entered college in 2021, 54 respondents (30%) entered college in 2022 and as many as 50 respondents (27.8%) entered college in 2023.

## **2. Description of Data Categorization**

### ***(a) Problem-Focused Coping Variable***

The problem-focused coping scale consists of 14 items. Data description in the problem-focused coping variable consists of four answer choices, namely Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree, which are scored 1-3 with low, medium and high categories.

Table 4.

*Data Categorization Level of Problem-Focused Coping Variable*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Low	38	21,1%
Medium	142	78,9%
High	0	0,00%

From the data analysis above, it shows that 38 respondents (21.1%) used problem-focused coping as low stress coping, 142 respondents (78.9%) and used

problem-focused coping as stress coping with a moderate level and 0 respondents (0.00%) used problem focused coping as stress coping with a high level.

**(b) Academic Stress Variable**

The scale consists of 16 items. The data description in the academic stress variable consists of four answer choices, namely Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree which are scored 1-3 with low, medium and high categories.

Table 5.

*Data Categorization Level of Academic Stress Variable*

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low	82	45,6%
Medium	90	50,0%
High	8	4,4%

Based on data analysis, it shows that 82 respondents (45.6%) have low academic stress, 90 respondents (50.0%) have moderate academic stress, and 8 respondents (4.4%) have high academic stress.

**3. Data analysis results**

**(a) Hypothesis test results**

Hypothesis testing was analyzed using the t-test method on software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 30.0.0 (trial version) for Windows 11.

Table 6.

*Hypothesis Test Results*

<i>Unstandardized B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
-,698	-11,460	<,001

Based on the p-value for the Problem-Focused Coping coefficient is <0.001, which means that the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is accepted, and the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected. This indicates a significant negative correlation between Problem-Focused Coping and Academic Stress in Psychology Study Program students, Faculty of Public Health, Nusa Cendana University, with a p-value smaller than the significant standard value of 0.05 ( $p = 0.001 < 0.005$ ).

The negative coefficient ( $p = 0.698$ ) indicates that the higher the use of coping strategies that focus on problem-solving, the lower the level of academic stress experienced with each increase in problem-focused coping will reduce the level of academic stress by 0.698 points.

### ***(b) Simple Linear Regression Analysis Results***

The simple linear regression test was analyzed using software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 30.0.0 (trial version) for Windows 11.

Table 7.

*Simple Linear Regression Analysis Test Results*

<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>Std. Error of the Estimate</b>
.652	.425	.421	8.437

The results of the regression analysis indicate that the problem-focused coping variable has a significant influence on academic stress in students, as evidenced by an R value of 0.652, which suggests a strong relationship between the independent variable (problem-focused coping) and the dependent variable (academic stress). The R-Squared value is 0.425 which indicates that 42.5% of academic stress can be explained by problem-focused coping.

Additionally, the Adjusted R-squared value of 0.421 indicates that this regression model is quite effective in explaining the existing data. The value of Std. The error of estimate of 8.437 indicates the level of standard error in estimating this regression model. Based on these results, Problem-Focused Coping has a significant influence on academic stress among students in the Psychology Study Program, Faculty of Public Health, Nusa Cendana University.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study indicate that there is a significant negative influence of problem-focused coping on academic stress. This means that the more students use problem-focused coping strategies, the lower the level of academic stress they



experience. This finding supports the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which explains that stress is the result of the interaction between individuals and their environment. When individuals perceive that they have sufficient internal and external resources to handle stressors, they are more likely to use problem-focused coping strategies, which in turn reduces stress levels.

In addition, this finding is consistent with the Cognitive Appraisal Theory, which emphasizes that individuals will assess whether a situation is a threat, a challenge, or neutral. When the situation is perceived as manageable or solvable, individuals tend to employ problem-focused coping (Lazarus, 1991). In the context of this research, students who perceive academic demands as challenges rather than threats are more likely to use constructive coping strategies such as planning, seeking information, and problem solving—thereby reducing academic stress.

Empirically, this study aligns with the research by Novitasari (2022), who found that problem-focused coping significantly reduces academic stress in students writing their thesis. Similarly, Lestari & Purnamasari (2022) reported that students with stronger problem-solving strategies tend to experience lower academic stress. Saputri & Wulanyani (2019) also support these findings by showing that problem-focused coping contributes to 54.4% of the variance in academic stress levels among psychology students.

Furthermore, the regression results show that problem-focused coping explains 42.5% of the variation in academic stress. This suggests that while problem-focused coping plays a major role, there are still 57.5% other influencing factors that need to be explored. This aligns with the findings of Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker (2020), who emphasize that academic stress is multidimensional, influenced not only by coping strategies, but also by social pressure, learning environments, and individual psychological resilience.

The distribution of stress levels among students also reflects the diverse capacity of students to manage academic demands. Students with low levels of stress

are likely have stronger support systems or better time-management skills. Meanwhile, students with moderate stress may be in a transition phase of adapting to academic demands. Those with high stress may lack both coping mechanisms and social support, making them more vulnerable to burning out.

Thus, the findings reinforce the importance of equipping students with adaptive coping strategies, especially those focusing on problem-solving. Strengthening these abilities can help students reappraise academic challenges as manageable and reduce the psychological burden of academic demands.

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that problem-focused coping has a significant negative influence on academic stress among students, with a contribution of 42.5%. Students who are able to assess academic demands as manageable and apply constructive strategies such as planning, seeking solutions, and time management tend to experience lower academic stress. This supports the theoretical framework of Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping as well as the Cognitive Appraisal Theory, which emphasizes the role of individual appraisal and coping resources in managing stress.

The findings also indicate that while the majority of students are in the moderate category for both problem-focused coping and academic stress, a noteworthy proportion of students still experience high levels of stress, possibly due to limited coping abilities or lack of social and psychological support. Therefore, promoting the development of adaptive coping strategies, especially those that focus on problem-solving, is crucial to enhance student well-being and prevent adverse outcomes such as anxiety, fatigue, or burnout.

Given that 57.5% of the variation in academic stress remains unexplained in this study, it is recommended that future research explore additional contributing factors, including emotion-focused coping, social support, and psychological

resilience, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of academic stress in university students.

*Suggestion*

Based on the results of this study. Students are advised to develop a concrete plan for dealing with stress, such as creating a realistic study schedule, seeking help from lecturers or friends when needed, and learning stress management techniques. Social support is also important, for example, by sharing problems and asking for advice from peers and lecturers.

For further researchers, the researcher also suggested to explore other coping strategies that affect academic stress, such as emotion-focused coping, social support coping, avoidance coping, or meaning-focused coping, as well as other relevant variables. Future researchers are also advised to use a qualitative or mixed-method approach to gain a deeper understanding. Additionally, the use of a longitudinal design should be considered to observe changes in coping and stress over time and understand causal relationships more accurately.

Higher education institutions are advised to be able to expand psychological services by increasing the number of counselors and psychologists and actively promoting counseling services to students. In addition, higher education institutions can improve teaching quality, offer constructive feedback, and provide effective academic guidance programs.

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