

Self-disclosure of Undergraduate Students with Mental Disorders

¹Rizky Pradita Manafe, ²Yeni Damayanti, ³Tesa Lolia Mita

¹⁻³Department of Psychology, ¹⁻³Universitas Nusa Cendana

e-mail : rizky.manafe@staf.undana.ac.id, yeni.damayanti@staf.undana.ac.id

Abstract. The primary challenges of university are that many students that has mental disorder hesitate to seek professional help and are unwilling to speak up about their condition. Self-disclosure is one of the factors that can help students deal with mental health problems. This study aims to determine the factors that influence undergraduate students with mental disorders (MDGJ) to do self-disclosure. This study is a qualitative study. The participants in this study were 9 students who were willing to do follow-up interviews after screening. The data collection technique used was semi-structured interviews. Data analysis used thematic analysis. The results of the study found that there were two factors that influenced MDGJ self-disclosure, namely inhibiting and supporting factors. Inhibiting factors consist of family neglect and cognitive distortion, while supporting factors consist of peer support and attempts to seek help. The implication of this study is to provide interventions, such as forming peer counselors.

Keywords: *Self-disclosure, Undergraduate students with Mental Disorder, Inhibiting Factors, Supporting Factors*

Abstract. Tantangan berat bagi perguruan tinggi adalah banyaknya mahasiswa yang mengalami gangguan mental yang ragu untuk mencari pertolongan profesional dan tidak mau berbicara mengenai kondisinya. Pengungkapan diri merupakan salah satu faktor yang dapat membantu mahasiswa mengatasi masalah kesehatan mental. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi mahasiswa S1 gangguan mental (MDGJ) untuk melakukan pengungkapan diri. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini berjumlah 9 mahasiswa yang bersedia melakukan wawancara lanjutan setelah dilakukan skrining. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan adalah wawancara semi terstruktur. Analisis data menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa terdapat dua faktor yang mempengaruhi pengungkapan diri MDGJ yaitu faktor penghambat dan faktor pendukung. Faktor penghambat terdiri dari penelantaran keluarga dan distorsi kognitif, sedangkan faktor pendukung terdiri dari dukungan teman sebaya dan upaya mencari pertolongan. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah memberikan intervensi, seperti pembentukan konselor sebaya.

Keywords: *Self-disclosure, Mahasiswa dengan Gangguan Jiwa, Faktor Penghambat, Faktor Pendukung*

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Introduction

Mental health problems and disorders have become a widely promoted issue after the COVID-19 case. The number of adolescents experiencing mental disorders is the highest (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). According to Research on Basic Health (Rikesdas) (Ministry of Health, 2023), depression is most common among 15–24-year-olds, with a prevalence of 2%. In addition, the data also shows that out of 2%, 0.39% of 15–24-year-olds have suicidal ideation, which is the highest percentage compared to other ages. The data show that undergraduate students fall within the age category of 15-24 years.

During the year 2023, many cases of suicide occurred in Kupang City. News reported in the mass media, Victory News, explained that in 2023, there were 11 suicides, the majority of which were committed by university students (Rambu, 2023). In a similar vein, Kewa Ama (2023) also explained in the online news on Kompas that there were three students committed suicide in October. The police said the cause of the tragedy was the thesis (Bria, 2023) mentioned by detik.com in the online news.

This phenomenon indicates the emergence of mental health issues in Kupang City, especially among undergraduate students. A comprehensive search on the Garuda portal on research in Indonesia focusing on students with mental disorders (MDGJ) shows that there are no studies focusing on them, rather research in Indonesia focuses on the stigma of students towards mental disorders (Pamungkas, Linawati & Sutarjo, 2016; Pangestika, Wendra & Simon, 2019).

Research conducted by Auerbach (2016) revealed that 1 in 5 students in the world experience mental disorders, and only 16.4% of students utilize mental health services. This situation is likely to worsen as few MDGJ have the courage to seek mental health help (Ennis, et al., 2019). Stigma is one of the causes of MDGJ isolating themselves and not seeking help

(Mulfinger, et al., 2018). Meanwhile, MDGJ need social support from people around them to remain resilient. Previous research results from Bjørlykhaug, Karlsson, Hesook, & Kleppe (2021) showed that social support is a way for people with mental disorders to remain in a stable state.

The work by Taniguchi & Thompson (2021) explains that people with mental illness will be able to get social support if they do self-disclosure. Previous publications have explained the importance of self-disclosure for people with mental illness (Sonik-Włodarczyk, Anczewska, Grygiel, Stefaniak, & Świtaj, 2022). Gonsalves, Nair, Roy, Pal, & Michelson, (2023). These studies highlight the benefits of self-disclosure for people with mental illness. However, the studies that have been conducted use quantitative methods.

Self-disclosure is a way of conveying information either verbally or non-verbally, oral or written about the uniqueness of a person's personal self, the choices he makes, and or the parts that cannot be measured from oneself, such as feelings (Devito, 2017). Devito (2017) describes the factors that influence people to make self-disclosure, including the number of people in the group, feelings of liking, dyadic effects, competence, personality, topic, and gender. The purpose of this research is to determine the factors that influence the self-disclosure of undergraduate students with mental disorders.

Methods

Research Design

This is qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to find out the factors that have contributed to MDGJ's self-disclosure. Data collection is conducted through semi-structured interviews.

Participants

Initial screening of the students revealed that there were 16 people with mental disorders. The screening was to determine the number of students with mental disorders (MDGJ) in the Department of Psychology Universitas Nusa Cendana. However, only 9 participants were willing to participate in the interview. There were no specific criteria for MDGJ who continued the interview session. The interview process was conducted based on the willingness of MDGJ, who filled out the screening form.

Research Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The points of questions asked to participants relate to 1) the process of getting a diagnosis, 2) family conditions before and after diagnosis, 3) life in the campus environment, 4) treatment currently received, and 5) the hopes of participants in the future.

Research Procedure

To begin this study, an initial screening was conducted using a Google form with the following questions: 1) have you ever consulted a professional, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist? 2) are you currently taking medication from a psychiatrist? 3) what is the diagnosis that you received? Based on the screening results, 16 students responded to the screening, with the most common problems being anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. Following the screening, the researcher asked the participants who had participated in the screening to participate in an interview. The interview process began with informed consent. Participants were informed about the research procedure and their right to refuse if they were not ready to answer or if it would cause them discomfort.

Results

A. Demographics

Table 1.

Demographics of Participants

Initial	Age (Year)	Gender	Type of Disorder
Nuna	19	Female	Anxiety
Salfa	21	Female	Bipolar
Kina	21	Female	Depression
Rela	20	Female	Anxiety

Initial	Age (Year)	Gender	Type of Disorder
Iha	20	Female	Bipolar
Mena	21	Female	Depression
Jue	24	Female	Depression
Jaka	20	Male	Anxiety
Rika	22	Female	Schizophrenia

The participants in this study were all students from the psychology department. Based on their gender, 8 were female, and 1 was male. The most common psychological disorders experienced by the participants were anxiety and depression.

B. The results of the interview

Data analysis yielded two themes: identified as the inhibiting factors and supporting factors. The inhibiting factors consist of family neglect and cognitive distortions. On the other hand, supporting factors consist of peer support and attempts to seek help. The following is a thematic tree of self-disclosure of undergraduate students with mental disorders.

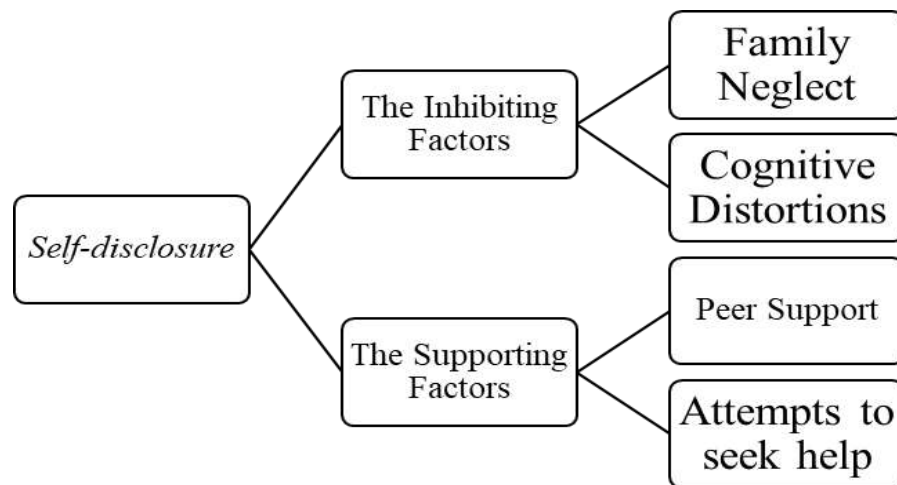


Figure 1.

The thematic tree of *Self-Disclosure* of Undergraduate Students with Mental Disorders.

The Inhibiting Factors

Family Neglect

The participants' families were abusive and ignored their psychological condition. The family members also tended to underestimate the mental condition experienced by the participants.

"When I realized that I was experiencing mental health issues, I told my mother and asked her to take me to a psychiatrist. However, she responded as if I had nothing better to do. She said I wasn't busy enough with activities. She also got angry." (Salfa, 21)

"My birth was indeed not desired by my father. He had wanted a son, but I was the one who was born. So, it was unlikely that my family would care about me. My parents constantly belittled me. They also often fought at home, which made me feel uncomfortable there." (Jue, 24)

"It was my father who made me this way. He demanded that I always appear perfect. He never saw the good in me. Whenever I failed, he would only focus on my failures. He never cared about how much effort I put in." (Nuna, 19)

Cognitive Distortions

Recurring negative thoughts and jumping to conclusions about what happened prevented participants from engaging in self-disclosure.

"I tend to suppress my feelings so that I appear fine to my friends. I'm afraid my mom or dad will find out. My dad is also busy with work. I once wanted to end my life and even tried to do so by taking 6 paracetamol pills, 8 CTM tablets, and 12 painkillers." (Iha, 20)

"I don't trust other people, which is why I prefer to keep to myself." (Kina, 21)

"I want to stop taking the medication because I'm not sick. I want to be free from the medication." (Rika, 22)

The Supporting Factors

Peer Support

Support from their friends is important to the participants.

I'm happy because my friends always support me. When I face problems like this, the first people I tell are my friends. They're always there for me, especially when I'm feeling down, (Mena, 21).

When my mood drops, I try to attend classes. I feel happy because I get to see my friends. We all support each other, so I enjoy sharing things with them, (Salfa, 21).

Attempts to Seek Help

Participants have been advised to seek help from professionals, but participants have not yet been willing to do so.

"I often feel unwell, with shortness of breath, and I frequently end up in the hospital. Medical tests show that there is nothing physically wrong with me. The doctor suggested that I see a psychiatrist. However, my parents refused and wanted me to see a psychologist first. I agreed to see a psychologist first. I don't want to start taking medication right away." (Rela, 20)

"I have been having regular counselling sessions with a psychologist. The psychologist has also suggested that I see a psychiatrist, but I'm not ready yet because I'm still not willing to take medication." (Jaka, 21)

Discussion

The objective of this study was to determine the factors that have contributed to the self-disclosure of MDGJ. The results revealed that help-seeking and peer support were supporting factors for MDGJ's self-disclosure, while cognitive distortion and family neglect were inhibiting factors for MDGJ's self-disclosure.

Patterns of violence and neglect in the home impact the ability to self-disclose in children. Adolescents' perceptions of their parents affect self-disclosure to their parents (Tokić & Pećnik, 2011). Meanwhile, another study conducted by Putri, Mazdalifah & Kurniawati (2024) showed that there was a negative relationship between verbal and non-verbal violence and children's ability to self-disclose. MDGJ experienced verbal and non-verbal abuse from their parents or family, who underestimated their conditions.

Neglect in the family can lead adolescents to be reluctant to engage in self-disclosure. MDGJ were ignored when telling their parents about their condition, which made it difficult and even reluctant for MDGJ to self-disclose. MDGJ were afraid of getting inadequate evaluations or comments when conveying the problems they experienced. Devito (2017) explains that the factors that determine a person's self-disclosure are feelings of liking and dyadic effects. The family did not provide a comfortable dyadic effect for MDGJ, making it challenging for them to self-disclose. This research shows that rejection in interpersonal

relationships, as well as unrealistic expectations from others cause a person to have cognitive distortions (Şimşek, Koçak, & Younis, 2021).

Cognitive distortion is one of the barriers to self-disclosure of students with mental health disorders (MDGJ). Cognitive distortions cause individuals to feel lonely and comfortable with that loneliness (Fitri & Anggita, 2015). Devito (2017) explains that one of the factors that determine a person's self-disclosure is personality. Cognitive distortions are influenced by one's personality. Research conducted by Maheshwari & Chadha (2021) shows that cognitive distortion has a relationship with personality. Cognitive distortions cause a person to have personality traits that tend to be neurotic. This is a factor inhibiting MDGJ from self-disclosure.

However, this study shows that other students or friends of MDGJ who study psychology provide social support for MDGJ. Psychology students also have knowledge related to mental health and mental disorders and how to cope with it. The knowledge they have helps them to understand the condition of friends who experience mental disorders. In addition, stigma and bullying related to mental illness are also not experienced by MDGJ. Students are more capable of empathizing with MDGJ's condition. Empathy can reduce stigma and help individuals to self-disclose (Clinton & Pollini, 2021; Hecht, Kloß, & Bartsch, 2022). Feelings of liking and dyadic effects are determinants of MDGJ self-disclosure.

Peer support encouraged MDGJ to seek professional help (Wang, Bergren, & Dong, 2023). MDGJ made an effort to seek help. All participants were psychology students, so they understood the importance of seeking help. MDGJ was familiar with what to do when experiencing problems with their psychological condition. Knowledge about mental health has a positive correlation with help-seeking (Nggalamanu, et al, 2024).

This study also found that MDGJ were more likely to trust professionals, especially psychologists. MDGJ preferred to see a psychologist rather than a psychiatrist. MDGJ refused to see a psychiatrist because of medication consumption. MDGJs understand the long-term effects of taking medication. This finding is also consistent with Devito's (2017) theory, which explains that a person's competence will affect self-disclosure. MDGJ believe that psychologists have different competencies from psychiatrists and have beliefs related to the

effects of medication when meeting with psychiatrists. Earlier research conducted by Hinson & Sawnsen (1993) found that discussions with counselors can motivate people to practice self-disclosure.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the factors influencing self-disclosure consist of two categories: inhibiting and supporting factors. The inhibiting factors are cognitive distortions and family neglect. The results of this study are in accordance with the theory of Devito (2017) The results of this study are based on Devito's (2017) theory, that the factors that influence self-disclosure are feelings of liking, dyadic effects, personality and competence.

Suggestions

Based on these findings, it is recommended to design psychological interventions, such as peer counselors, to help undergraduate students with mental disorders (MDGJ) to have a friend to talk to. Furthermore, another implication of this study is that education about mental health is essential, thus helping the community to fully understand MDGJ's condition and encouraging MDGJ to seek treatment both medically and psychologically. Although this study has limitations, as it was conducted only on psychology students, further research can be conducted on students from other disciplines.

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