

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COPING STRATEGIES AND EMOTIONAL MENTAL DISORDERS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Emotional mental disorders (EMDs) are common among university students, with approximately 12.7% of students experiencing such conditions. Psychological problems in students may reduce productivity and quality of life and interfere with the learning process. **Objective:** To determine the relationship between coping strategies and emotional mental disorders among university students. **Methods:** This study employed a descriptive correlational design with a cross-sectional approach. The study population consisted of students at Universitas Sebelas April. A total of 373 respondents were selected using a non-probability sampling technique. Coping strategies were measured using the Brief COPE questionnaire, while emotional mental disorders were assessed using the Self- Report Questionnaire (SRQ-20). **Results:** Most respondents were female (67.8%) and aged 18–21 years (55.0%). The majority used problem-focused coping strategies (74.0%), and 61.7% showed indications of emotional mental disorders. Bivariate analysis showed a significant relationship between coping strategies and emotional mental disorders ( $p = 0.001$ ). **Conclusion:** There is a significant relationship between coping strategies and emotional mental disorders among university students. Students who used emotion-focused coping had a 5.753 times greater risk of experiencing emotional mental disorders compared with those using problem-focused coping. **Recommendation:** Universities should implement mental health policies and support systems to promote student well-being.

**Keywords:** coping strategies, emotional mental disorders, students

### INTRODUCTION

University students are generally in late adolescence or early adulthood, ranging from 18 to 24 years of age. During this developmental stage, individuals begin to focus more on themselves, their future, and their social environment (Safitri, 2021). Each stage of development includes developmental tasks that must be accomplished to ensure healthy progression to subsequent stages. Students are individuals pursuing higher education (Sagita et al., 2017). A student is considered fully mature when they are not only engaged in academic responsibilities but are also capable of participating productively in activities beyond academic tasks (Indriyani & Handayani, 2018).

The transition from high school to university is not an easy process. It requires students to adapt to a new environment and cope with various social, academic, and personal changes (Prasetio & Rahman, 2019). These adjustments include changes in learning methods, relocation, time management, making new friends, and modifying previous social relationships and life values.

Although students may be physically prepared for university life, they may not be mentally ready to face academic and social demands. This can lead to emotional mental

disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Kurniawan & Ngapiyem, 2020). Persistent stress can contribute to the development of emotional mental disorders (Sondakh & Theresa, 2020).

Several studies have reported high rates of emotional mental disorders among university students. Vidiawati et al. (2017) found that 12.7% of students experienced emotional mental disorders. Kurniawan and Ngapiyem (2020) reported varying levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among nursing students.

Mentally healthy individuals are able to perform daily activities normally, whereas individuals with emotional mental disorders may experience impairments in social, academic, and physical functioning. Chronic stress can result in both physical and psychological illness, reduced productivity, and poor interpersonal relationships (Tarehy et al., 2019).

Coping strategies are continuous cognitive and behavioral efforts used to manage internal and external demands perceived as stressful and exceeding an individual's resources. These strategies influence the extent to which stress affects physical and mental health (Sondakh & Theresa, 2020). According to Roy's Adaptation Model, students encounter various focal, contextual, and residual stimuli that affect their coping responses (Amidos, 2018). Therefore, students require effective coping strategies to manage stressors.

**Research Objective:** To determine the relationship between coping strategies and emotional mental disorders among students at Universitas Sebelas April.

## METHOD

### Study Design

This study employed a descriptive correlational design with a cross-sectional approach to investigate the relationship between coping strategies and emotional mental disorders (EMDs) among university students. The cross-sectional framework allowed for the simultaneous assessment of exposure (coping mechanisms) and outcome (psychological distress indications) at a single point in time, which is effective for screening psychological trends in educational settings (Prasetio & Rahman, 2019; Sondakh & Theresa, 2020).

### Participants and Sampling

The target population comprised active undergraduate students enrolled at Universitas Sebelas April. University students represent individuals in late adolescence or early adulthood who are undergoing a critical transition period, making them highly susceptible to academic and personal adjustments (Safitri, 2021). A total sample size of  $n = 373$  respondents was recruited using a non-probability sampling technique. To be eligible for participation, students had to provide informed consent and fully complete the study questionnaires.

### Measures and Instruments

Data collection was executed using two psychometrically validated, self-administered instruments:

1. **Coping Strategies:** The *Brief COPE Questionnaire* was utilized to identify the specific behavioral and cognitive methods employed by students to manage internal and external stressors. Coping strategies serve as critical behavioral efforts used to manage internal and external demands perceived as stressful and exceeding an individual's resources (Sondakh & Theresa, 2020). Responses were classified into two primary constructs based on established adaptive coping theories: *Problem-Focused Coping* and *Emotion-Focused Coping* (Tuasikal & Retnowati, 2019).
2. **Emotional Mental Disorders (EMDs):** The *Self-Report Questionnaire (SRQ-20)*, developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), was implemented as a screening

tool to assess the presence of psychiatric and somatic symptoms associated with anxiety, depression, and stress among the student population (Kurniawan & Ngapiyem, 2020; Sari & Susmiatin, 2023). Results were dichotomized into "Indication of EMD" and "No Indication of EMD" based on standard clinical cut-off scores.

### Theoretical Framework and Ethical Considerations

The conceptual framework of this study aligns with *Roy's Adaptation Model*, which posits that students constantly encounter focal, contextual, and residual stimuli in their academic environment that directly affect their coping responses and mental equilibrium (Amidos, 2018).

This study was strictly conducted in compliance with ethical principles for research involving human participants and approved by the appropriate institutional ethics review committee prior to data collection. Prospective respondents were thoroughly briefed on the study's objective, procedures, potential benefits, and the minimal risks involved. Participation was entirely voluntary, and formal written informed consent was acquired from each respondent before questionnaire distribution.

To protect participant privacy, a strict anonymity protocol was enforced; no personally identifiable information (PII) was collected or processed. Participants retained the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any point without academic or personal repercussions. Furthermore, given that persistent stress can severely impair social, academic, and physical functioning (Tarehy et al., 2019), a duty-of-care protocol was established: participants exhibiting high-risk indicators of significant psychological distress were actively advised to seek professional counseling or mental health support systems available at the university or local healthcare facilities.

### Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were executed using computerized statistical software, with the significance threshold set a priori at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The data analytic workflow proceeded as follows:

1. **Univariate Analysis:** Descriptive statistics (frequencies,  $N$ , and percentages, %) were calculated to summarize sample demographics (age, gender), the prevalence of coping strategy types, and the rate of EMD indications.
2. **Bivariate Analysis:** A Pearson Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of the association between independent coping styles and dependent EMD status. To determine the strength of the association and the relative risk magnitude, the *Odds Ratio* (OR) was computed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The general data are presented as follows:

### 1) Frequency Distribution of Student Characteristics

The student characteristics examined in this study were age and gender, which are presented as follows.

**Table 1.**  
Respondent Characteristics (n=373)

Kriteria	N	%
Age		
18-21	205	55,0

22-25	168	45,0
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	120	32,2
Female	253	67,8
Primary Data Source, 2023		

Based on the table above, it is known that the majority of respondents were female, totaling 253 respondents (67.8%). The respondents' ages in this study were divided into two groups. Based on age measurement, most respondents were in the 18–21 years age group, totaling 205 respondents (55.0%).

## 2) Frequency Distribution of Students' Coping Strategies

The coping strategies measured in this study were intended to assess students' ability to respond to stress. The results of the coping strategy analysis are presented as follows:

**Table 2**  
Frequency Distribution of Students' Coping Strategies (n=373)

Coping Strategies	N	%
<i>Problem Focused Coping</i>	276	74
<i>Emotional focused coping</i>	97	26
Primary Data Source, 2023		

Based on Table 2 above, it was found that the majority of students used problem-focused coping strategies, with a total of 276 respondents (74.0%).

## 3) Frequency Distribution of Students' Emotional Mental Disorders

**Table 3.**  
Frequency Distribution of Students' Emotional Mental Disorders (n=373)

<b>Emotional Mental Disorder (EMD)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Indication of EMD	230	61,7
No Indication of EMD	143	38,3
Primary Data Source, 2023		

Based on Table 3 above, it was found that the majority of students showed indications of emotional mental disorders, totaling 230 respondents (61.7%).

## 4) The Relationship Between Coping Strategies and Emotional Mental Disorders

**Table 4.**  
Relationship Between Coping Strategies and Emotional Mental Disorders (n = 373)

Coping Strategies	No Indication		Indication		Jml	P <sup>Value</sup>	OR
	EMD (F)		EMD (F)				
	F	%	F	%			
<i>Problem focused coping</i>	130	47,1	146	52,9	276	<b>0,001</b>	<b>5,753</b>
<i>Emotional focused coping</i>	13	13,4	84	86,6	97		

Sumber data primer 2023

Based on Table 4 above, it was found that 86.6% of students who used emotion-focused coping showed indications of emotional mental disorders, while 52.9% of students who used problem-focused coping showed indications of emotional mental disorders. The statistical test results showed a p-value of 0.001, indicating a significant relationship

between coping strategies and emotional mental disorders, with an odds ratio (OR) of 5.753. This means that students who used emotion-focused coping were 5.753 times more likely to experience emotional mental disorders compared with students who used problem-focused coping.

## LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design only describes the relationship between coping strategies and emotional mental disorders at one point in time and does not allow for conclusions about causality. Second, the study was conducted at a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the results to students from other institutions or regions. Third, the use of self-report questionnaires, including the Brief COPE and SRQ-20, may introduce response bias such as social desirability and recall bias. Fourth, this study did not examine other factors that may influence emotional mental disorders, such as socioeconomic status, family support, academic workload, personality traits, and previous mental health history. Therefore, future studies are recommended to use longitudinal designs, include a more diverse sample, and consider additional variables that may affect students' mental health.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Most students used problem-focused coping strategies, while a smaller proportion used emotion-focused coping. Students who used emotion-focused coping were 5.753 times more likely to exhibit emotional mental disorders compared with those using problem-focused coping. There is a significant relationship between coping strategies and emotional mental disorders among university students. These findings highlight the importance of implementing mental health policies and support services to help students develop adaptive coping strategies and prevent emotional mental disorders.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

His study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional ethics review committee prior to data collection. All participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and possible risks of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained from each respondent before completing the questionnaires. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. No identifying information was included in the data analysis or publication of the results. Participants were informed that they had the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time without any academic or personal consequences.

Because the study involved screening for emotional mental disorders, participants who showed signs of significant psychological distress were advised to seek professional counseling or mental health services available at the university or local healthcare facilities. All data were stored securely and accessed only by the research team.

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