Psychological Distress among Emerging Adults:

A Descriptive Study

Frida Condinata[1] Monty P. Satiadarma[2,*] P. Tommy Y. S. Suyasa[2]

[1] *Master's Program in Clinical Psychology, Universitas Tarumanagara, Indonesia*
[2] *Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Tarumanagara, Indonesia*
[*]*Corresponding author. Email:* montys@fpsi.untar.ac.id

ABSTRACT

University is a place where individuals obtain knowledge and experience. During their study, many college students may experience issues related with being independent to deal with life challenges. This period is known as emerging adulthood. Learning to be independent in dealing with life challenges may lead to psychological distress in their daily life. The aim of this study is to describe psychological distress among emerging adults. This study involved 210 undergraduate and postgraduate students in Indonesia using an online survey. It was found that most of the subjects have a moderate level of psychological distress (M= 2.98). Psychological distress has two dimensions, the first dimension called factor of depression with M=2.95, it showed that most of the subjects have a moderate level of depression. The second dimension is factor of anxiety with M=3.04, it means that most of the subjects have a moderate level of anxiety.

Keywords: Psychological distress, College students, Emerging adulthood.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'emerging adulthood' is often confused with the term 'early adulthood', because emerging adulthood and early adulthood start at the same age. Emerging adulthood has an age range of 18 to 25 years [1], while early adulthood has an age range from 18 to 40 years [2]. Emerging adulthood has other characteristics, especially in the United States. These characteristics include independence and separation from living together with parents. The difference between American culture and Indonesian culture is that American culture is an individualistic culture, while Indonesian culture is a family-oriented culture. In the US, by the time they reach the age of 18, they move out and become more independent, while in Indonesia many of them still live with their parents at the age of 18 years old [3]. Even though in Indonesia not all individuals in this age live separated from their parents, they are relatively independent in making decisions. Therefore, in this study, which

focuses on the age range of 18 to 25 years old, the term emerging adulthood is used.

This period can cause stress among students [4], especially in facing the challenges of being independent while being used to taking refuge in their parents. Stress is a condition where an individual feels anger while being threatened by external and internal circumstances [5]. Stress is divided into two types, namely eustress and distress. Independent learning may cause eustress, because they feel independent and free from dependence on parents. Eustress is a positive stress, leading to an increase in performance and health [6]. On the other hand, independence may also cause distress. Distress is negative stress, resulting in poorer performance, health and disrupted relationships with other people [6].

In psychology, there is a term called psychological distress. Psychological distress is a state of emotional

suffering characterized by symptoms of depression and anxiety [7].

Students in the emerging adulthood phase must face the challenges of psychological distress. If they are unable to cope with the conditions, they may suffer from depression or anxiety. The prevalence of psychological distress is rather significant and is increasing every year. Psychological distress in students is a prolonged issue that exists until now throughout the world [8]. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Health also obtained data on the prevalence of depression in 2018. The 2018 Basic Health Research data revealed that the prevalence of depression in Indonesia was 6 percent of the total population. Depression is also common among young people aged 15 to 24 years. As many as 6.2 percent of millennials are prone to depression [9].

There are two factors or dimensions of psychological distress, namely anxiety and depression. Anxiety consists of nervousness, inability to calm down, restlessness and inability to stay still. Depression is marked by a state of fatigue, hopelessness, worthlessness, anhedonia, and individuals feel that everything they do requires a lot of effort [10].

There are two factors that influence psychological distress, namely; intrapersonal and situational factors. Intrapersonal factors affect a person's level of distress, where these intrapersonal factors consist of personality traits in which there are personality traits related to individual emotional tendencies, while situational factors are causes of distress which are usually influenced by an event or situation that can be dangerous to individual well-being. This has different impacts depending on the individual and the occasion. These situational factors can be further divided into three parts, namely physiological, cognitive, and social factors, Physiological factor includes the distress response displayed by individuals that is influenced by several parts of the brain. Cognitive factor, which includes beliefs and individual expectations can determine the psychological and physiological impact of environmental stressors. Lastly, social factor is the factor that has the most potential to cause distress that includes obstacles in social relationships of individuals such as grieving, unemployment, and many more [11]. .

Based on the explanation above, it is likely that the prevalence of psychological distress increases every year. Therefore, this study aims to describe psychological distress among emerging adults.

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

A total of 210 active undergraduate and postgraduate students aged 18-25 years were involved in this study. Based on the demographic data of the participants, most of the participants were female (73.8%). Most of the participants were 20 years old (31%). Most of the participants were active undergraduate students (85.2%), and most of the subjects were unemployed (63.8%).

Table 1. Participant's Demographics Data

Characteristics		N (210)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	155	73.8%
	Male	55	26.2%
Age (years)	18	9	4.3%
	19	18	8.6%
	20	65	31.0%
	21	48	22.9%
	22	30	14.3%
	23	16	7.6%
	24	11	5.2%
	25	13	6.2%
Educational Status	Undergraduate	179	85.2%
	Postgraduate	31	14.8%
Employment Status	Employed	76	36.2%
	Unemployed	134	63.8%

2.2. Measurement

Psychological distress was measured by the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). The K10 measuring instrument aims to measure the psychological distress experienced by an individual [12]. Questions were presented using a 5-options Likert scale (all of the time = 5, most of the time = 4, some of the time = 3, a little of the time = 2, none of the time = 1). The K10 measuring instrument has two factors, namely the depression factor and anxiety factor. Depression factor includes item number 1, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10 (e.g. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel tired out for no good reason?) with a total of six items, and the anxiety factor includes item number 2, 3, 5, 6 (e.g. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel nervous?) for a total of 4 items. In this study, the K10 measuring instrument was translated into Indonesian by the researcher and verified by experts. To determine the feasibility of the measuring instrument used, a reliability test was conducted, using the Cronbach's Alpha technique on SPSS for Windows version 26. Cronbach's Alpha

value for the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) measuring instrument in this study was 0.915.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Spearman correlation technique is used in this research. The test results showed that the level of psychological distress experienced by emerging adulthood college students was moderate with a mean value of 2.98.

Table 2. Description of Psychological Distress

	M	SD	Cl 95%		
			LL	UL	Category
Psychological Distress	2.98	0.920	2.88	3.12	Mode-rate

In this study the mean value is higher than previous studies [13]. Previous research has a mean value of 1.45, which may be explained and caused by the difference in the number of participants and the different characteristics of participants.

Furthermore, the mean value of the factor of depression is 2.95, which shows that college students have moderate depression.

The mean value of the factor of anxiety is 3.04, the mean value obtained shows that emerging adulthood college students have moderate anxiety.

Table 3. Description of Dimensions

	M	SD	Cl 95%		
			LL	UL	Category
Factor of Depression	2.95	0.924	2.87	3.12	Mode-rate
Factor of Anxiety	3.04	1.063	2.85	3.14	Mode-rate

In this study, 56 subjects (26.7%) show a low level of psychological distress, 92 subjects (43.8%) show a moderate level of psychological distress and 62 (29.5%) subjects show a high level of psychological distress.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results, it can be concluded that most of the subjects show moderate levels of psychological distress with a total of 92 subjects (M=2.98, SD=0.920).

The advantage of this research is that in this study, the researcher presents the mean value of the dimensions of psychological distress.

Further researchers can utilize qualitative research methods to explore the dynamics of psychological distress experienced by individuals, such as finding out other variables that lead to moderate psychological distress among college students.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

FC, MPS, and PTYSS led the project. FC and MPS found the urge of specific sample for further research. FC and PTYSS conducted all statistical analyses. All authors reviewed the final manuscript.

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