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**SOCIAL SUPPORT, ADJUSTMENT AND ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG FIRST
YEAR STUDENTS IN SYIAH KUALA UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between social support, adjustment, and academic stress among first year students in Syiah Kuala University (UNSYIAH) and to identify the role of social support and adjustment in predicting academic stress. Data was collected through questionnaires. The respondents were first year students in UNSYIAH ($n = 364$) with ranging age from 16 to 21. Respondents completed the Multi Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Students Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), and Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI). Multiple Regression Analysis was used to analyze the contribution of social support aspects and adjustment aspects to academic stress. The results revealed that the sample reported moderate levels of social support, adjustment, and academic stress. Two aspects of social support and one aspect of adjustment, namely friend support, significant other support, and social adjustment significantly contributed to academic stress. In addition, friend support, significant other support, and social adjustment jointly contributed to academic stress. In this study, it is important to highlight that the social adjustment provided the biggest contribution to academic stress among first year students.



ABSTRAK**SOKONGAN SOSIAL, PENYESUAIAN, DAN TEKINAN AKADEMIK
DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR TAHUN PERTAMA DI UNIVERSITAS
SYIAH KUALA**

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji hubungan antara sokongan sosial, penyesuaian, dan tekanan akademik dalam kalangan pelajar tahun pertama di Universiti Syiah Kuala (UNSYIAH) dan untuk mengenal pasti peranan sokongan sosial dan penyesuaian dalam meramal tekanan akademik. Data dikumpul melalui soal selidik. Responden kajian ini adalah pelajar tahun pertama di UNSYIAH ($n = 364$) dengan julat umur antara 16 hingga 21 tahun. Responden telah melengkapkan soal selidik yang terdiri dari pada *Multi Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (MSPSS), *Students Adaptation to College Questionnaire* (SACQ) dan *Student Life Stress Inventory* (SLSI). Analisis regresi berganda telah digunakan untuk menganalisis sumbangan aspek sokongan sosial dan aspek penyesuaian terhadap tekanan akademik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa sampel melaporkan tahap sokongan sosial, penyesuaian, dan tekanan akademik yang sederhana. Hanya dua aspek sokongan sosial dan satu aspek penyesuaian, iaitu sokongan kawan, sokongan individu yang istimewa, dan penyesuaian sosial memberikan sumbangan yang signifikan terhadap tekanan akademik. Di samping itu, kombinasi sokongan kawan, sokongan individu yang istimewa, dan penyesuaian sosial juga memberikan sumbangan kepada tekanan akademik. Dalam kajian ini, penting untuk ditekankan bahawa penyesuaian sosial memberikan sumbangan terbesar kepada tekanan akademik dalam kalangan pelajar tahun pertama.

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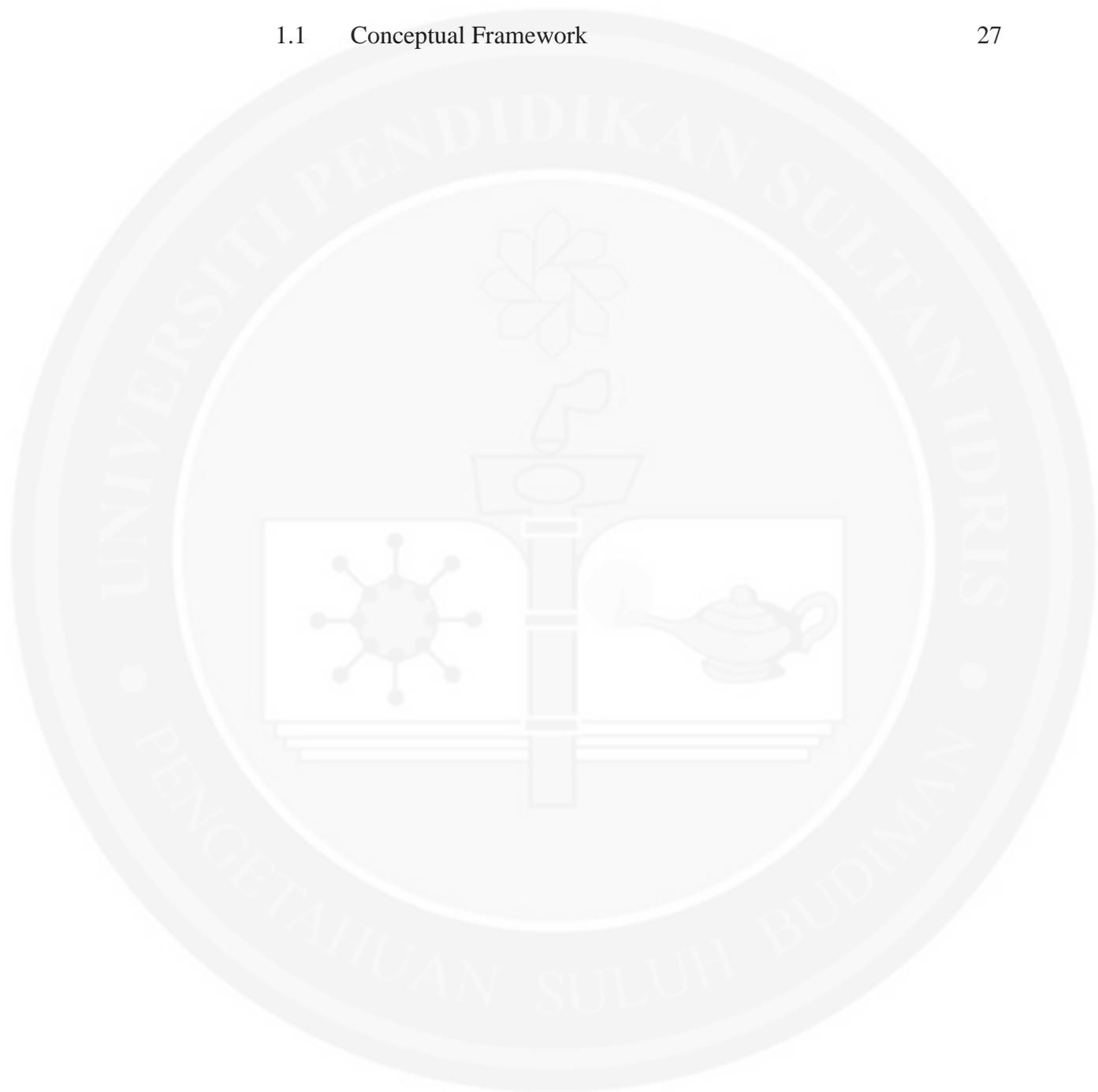
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------|---|
| <i>df</i> | Degree of freedom |
| M | Sample mean |
| MSPSS | Multi Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support |
| N | Population size |
| n | Sample size |
| <i>p</i> | Probability |
| SACQ | Student Adaptation to Collage Questionnaire |
| SD | Standard deviation |
| Sig. | Significant |
| SLSI | Student Life Stress Inventory |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for Social Science |
| UNSYIAH | Universitas Syiah Kuala |

LIST OF SYMBOLS

| | |
|----------|--|
| % | Percentage |
| < | Less than |
| > | More than |
| \leq | Equal less than |
| F | F distribution, Fisher's F ration |
| r | Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient |
| α | Cronbach's index of internal consistency |
| β | Population values of regression coefficients |
| R^2 | Multiple correlation squared |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the background of study, statement of problem, research objective, research question, significance of research, conceptual and operational definition of each variable, description about the theoretical approach, conceptual framework, and hypotheses. The summary of this chapter is presented at the end of the chapter.

1.1 Background of Research

In our real life, everybody experiences many changes. Human life cycle begins from the prenatal period to old age. It is always colored with various life changes. Some of these changes happen during the school period. Many transitions are experienced by students during their school, home to school, middle school to high school and high school to college or work (Galaway & Hudson, 1996). First-year university students faced with numerous challenges that caused by increasing the number of students in

developed countries (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). Students' life, especially during the first year, is a period of vulnerability during which young students establish, test and adjust new psychological identities (Bitz, 2010). Transition to university involves adapting to a new academic and social environment, this transition can be stressful for the students (Dalziel & Peat, 1998). Those who usually live with their family, a culture that embraced since childhood, everyday language, and with the community, must be moved to a new environment, away from family, joined the new culture that they do not yet know the rules contained in it, which they find a new place to live (Adams, Berzonsky, & Keating, 2006).

The transition to university life is often looked upon as a positive event but the changes in university life can sometimes be stressful to the student. Stress is a physical and mental response to everyday demands, particularly those associated with change (Agolla & Ongori, 2009). Among college students, stress can be viewed as a positive or negative experience that affects their life and performances (Jogarathnam & Buchanan, 2004). This is because academic work is never happened without stressful activities (Agolla & Ongori, 2009).

Moreover, Fisher (1994) explains that change and transition are common features of life, but the process of change may have powerful negative effect on well being and health. Fisher and Cooper (1991) also explain that the change and transition are stressful because a person experiences, if only transiently, loss of control over the new environment. The new environment will have new experiences in most cases and the individual needs to adapt to new places, faces and routines. In some cases, as with culture shock, the individual may be required to adapt to a new cultural climate that

includes new language, behavior and social customs. The impact of this can sometimes be startling. Fisher (1994) also presented the sources of problems associated with university were categorized as academic (65%), university routines (35%), financial restraints (18%), social (24%), future career at university (9%), missing people (6%), health (9%), and family (3%). Kwan and Faulkner (2011) explain that students acknowledged that there were many changes associated with the transition into university, and they noticed a shift in priority towards “academic”.

Similarly, Tinto (1995) found that the first year appears to be the most important year in overall degree progression, as 75% of the students who do not complete their degrees attribute the reasons for this to problems experienced in the first year of study. This stage may be more or less stressful and difficult, depending on the degree to which the new environment of the university relates to the old environment in which students have previously been operating. For some students, this process may be minor, and relatively seamless, but for others transition may take considerable time and effort (Hillman, 2005).

Kausar (2010) and Suldo, Friedrich, White, Farmer, Minch, and Michalowski (2009) explain that more academic stress is felt by students who have been overloaded with work or academic tasks, academic requirements and demands of various environmental influences.

A similar case was presented by Tennant (2002) who explained that academic stress, experienced by the students come from demands related to academics that exceed the resources or capabilities that are available to individuals. If students cannot

effectively cope with academic stress, the consequences of health problems psycho-social-emotional can occur. Further, Ward, Perry, and Menec (2000) explains that a life filled with stress, such as students at universities will be at risk of mental and physical health problems, which make poor academic performance to increasing academic stress.

There are many causes of stress related to academic among first year students at university. In Aceh particularly at Syiah Kuala University (UNSYIAH), besides the changes in first year students during the transition period, the semester credit system in university is also one of the changes experienced by first-year students. Semester credit system (SKS) provides an opportunity for students to determine the subjects according to their interests, talents, and capabilities (BJM UNSYIAH). Therefore, this system demands a great responsibility on the student in determining the number of credit to be taken. Besides, the high demands of academic were also felt by the new students, the student must obtain a minimum GPA 2.0 in first and second semester. If the students obtain less than 2.0, they may be terminated from UNSYIAH. The conditions described above are very similar to the condition that causes stress (Greenberg, 1981). Greenberg (1981) explains that the stressors that exist in the first year students were a change in lifestyle, values, the number of courses taken, and the problem of academic.

According to Dwyer and Cummings (2001), first year students need social support to be able to succeed in their academic pursuit. Social support may be especially important in buffering stressors, because students experience an array of stressors in academic and personal domain (Parrack & Preyde, 2009). Besides, social

support is very important for individuals in their life and also have been recognized to have significant impact on the achievement of the students (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2010).

In fact, perceived social support seems to be an effective moderator of the stress experienced by university students. Social support received by students assist the coping of students who are highly stressed (Lawson & Fuehrer, 2001). For students, social support may be derived from parents, friends, classmates and teachers (Bokhorst, Sumter, & Westenberg, 2009).

Furthermore, social support emerged as the most important contributing factor in helping students' adjustment to university. Specifically, it was revealed that students made a sound adjustment to the social and academic domains of university when they experienced social support. In fact, other than social support, adjustment to the university environment is also regarded as an important factor in encouraging academic persistence in the students and predicting university outcomes (Petersena, Louw, & Dumont, 2009).

Moreover, Lidy and Khan (2006) have shown that students who have emotional stability, social courage, has a personality that is more practical reported that they feel a greater social support and have a better adjustment, especially at the time of entry to college in the first semester.

In fact, students who have a higher level of social support may feel better academic adjustment because they believe the professor, classmates, and other colleagues are available in helping them in completing academic tasks (Lidy & Khan, 2006). When students have greater perceived social support, it would have a better

adjustment. Furthermore, students who report high level of adjustment to university are more capable to reduce academic stress and show greater academic achievement (Pritchard, Wilson, & Yamnitz, 2007; Shankland, Genolini, Franc, Guelfi, & Ionescu, 2010).

Some researchers in Asia have shown that social support plays an important role in managing psychological problems. Lack of social support has been found to be one of the factors that lead to many psychological problems among students (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2010). Besides, support received by the students either from the family and friends can contribute to the academic performance at the university. It is indeed important to realize that students' performance in academic is determined not only by academic-related matters but also the social support that they get from people around them (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2011). Lack of social support affect the emergence of academic stress not only impedes academic performance but also adversely affects the overall adjustment of students (Hussain, Kumar, & Husain, 2008). Abdullah, Elias, Mahyuddin, and Uli (2009) reported that throughout a period of one semester, first year students' academic achievement found to be significantly predicted by college overall adjustment, academic adjustment, and personal-emotional adjustment.

In Indonesia, there are also studies related to adjustment, social support, and academic problems. According to Christyanti, Mustami'ah, and Sulistiani (2010), adjustment to the academic demands have a negative relationship. This meant that, if students have high level of adjustment then they will perceive low level of academic demands. In fact, effective contribution of adjustment to the academic demands was

16.2%. Furthermore, another research from Aceh by Fauziah (2012) examined the

influence of parents support on students studying in higher education. Result showed that there was an influence of parental support towards the ability of students to face academic demands at university.

There has been a considerable amount of research that conducted related to social support, adjustment, and academic stress in different countries. However, in Indonesia especially in Aceh, research related to social support, adjustment, and academic stress are still very rare. So, the researcher is interested in conducting a study to identify the relationship between social support, adjustment and academic stress among first year students in Syiah Kuala University (UNSYIAH) in Banda Aceh.

1.2 Statement of Problem

First-year university students face numerous challenges (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). The students found the teaching methods are different from what obtained in the high school level. For students, college classes are generally more difficult than high school classes. These situations can lead to emotional tension. So, some students trying to deal with violations on college rule that lead to maladaptive behaviors and academic stress (Salami, 2011).

Lin, Lin, Wang, and Chen (2009), explains that academic stress of college students occur when students experience academic problems, and frustrations or problems faced at university. In reality, the experience of stress among college students is considered normal. But if stress is severe, prolonged, and not handled

properly, it can reduce academic performance, interfere with a student's ability to participate in and contribute to campus life, and increase the likelihood of substance abuse and other potentially damaging behaviors (Richlin-Klonsky & Hoe, 2003).

There are many factors that influence stress experience among students, especially in academic areas, namely social support and adjustment. In fact, social support is often considered a buffer against the negative effects of stress, including stress in an academic context (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). Moreover, students also need a good adjustment in order to be able to learn fast and to adjust to the new school and new learning environments. Apart from that, social support and adjustment seem to predict students academic stress in the new learning environment (Faleel, Tam, Lee, Har, & Foo, 2012).

Many studies have been carried out related to social support, adjustment, and academic stress. However, not many research try to find the links among the three. Therefore, the focus of this study is to examine the relationship among social support, adjustment, and academic stress among first year students.

1.3 Research Objectives

As discussed earlier, it is understood that continue education to university can bring both positive and negative impacts on student. Since the psychological effects differ

between individuals, some students may feel very stressful, but some may even enjoy their transition to the university (Hillman, 2005). Social support network appears to be an important means for students to make adjustments to this new environment (Lidy & Khan, 2006). In addition, social support also seems to predict student's academic stress in the new learning environment (Faleel et al., 2012).

Therefore, the aims of this study are to examine the:

- i. relationship between social support and academic stress among the first year students.
- ii. relationship between adjustment and academic stress among the first year students.
- iii. contribution of social support which consist of family support, friend support, and significant others support in academic stress among the first year students.
- iv. contribution of adjustment which consist of academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal adjustment, and institutional attachment in academic stress among the first year students.
- v. joint contribution of social support aspects and adjustment aspects in academic stress among the first year students.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions of this study are as follows.

- i. Are there any relationship between social support and academic stress among first year students?
- ii. Are there any relationship between adjustment and academic stress among first year students?
- iii. Are there any contribution of social support which consist of family support, friend support, and significant others support in academic stress among first year students?
- iv. Are there any contribution of adjustment which consist of academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal adjustment, and institutional attachment in academic stress among first year students?
- v. Are there any joint contribution of social support aspects and adjustment aspects in academic stress among first year students?

1.5 Significance of Research

Significance of this study consist of two aspects, namely theoretically and practically and they are as follows.

1.5.1 Theoretical Aspect

Theoretically, this study could provide two benefits.

1. This study is useful in developing Psychology science, especially Clinical Psychology and Educational Psychology.
2. This study will also provide a new knowledge, especially in the academic stress, social support, and adjustment among university students.

1.5.2 Practical Aspect

Practically, this study could provide three benefits.

1. The results of this study could assist the student to know the types of social support and adjustment needed to reduce their academic stress.
2. This study may help students to improve their learning productivity and quality.
3. The results of this study could assist university counselor to design intervention programs to improve social support and adjustment of students, specifically by focusing on social relationships, social skills, and communication skill.

1.6 Definition of Variables

There are three main variables that are used in this research work. The first is social support while the second is adjustment. These two variables are independent