

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Source of Stress of Students During Pandemic COVID-19: a Qualitative Study

Susan Fitriyana, Titik Respati, Dewi Sartika

Department of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Islam Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic can lead to students' mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and stress. The government's policy for study from home exacerbates mental health problems. This study aimed to determine the source of student stress during the study from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study design used qualitative research. The sampling technique uses consecutive sampling. This research involved 36 students from the faculty of psychology and the faculty of medicine in Bandung city who underwent study from home (SFH). Data were collected by interviewing participants in May 2020. This study's results are the dominant thing that participants feel during the study from home is boredom, relaxed, and complicated; the things they missed during learning at home were friends, playing, and chatting; and they feel fear, sadness, and anxiety when heard the news about COVID-19. This study concludes that the source of student stress was being far from friends, limited communication and face-to-face contact with friends and lecturers, and did not get direct attention from friends or lecturers.

Key words: COVID-19 pandemic, mental health, stress source, students, study from home

Sumber Stres Mahasiswa Selama Masa Pandemi COVID-19: Penelitian Kualitatif

Abstrak

Pandemik COVID-19 dapat mengakibatkan masalah kesehatan mental untuk mahasiswa seperti kecemasan, depresi, dan stress. Kebijakan pemerintah untuk melakukan pendidikan jarak jauh (PJJ) telah memperburuk masalah kesehatan mental. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menentukan sumber stres mahasiswa selama menjalani PJJ di masa pandemi COVID-19. Desain penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif. Metode pengambilan sampel adalah *consecutive sampling* dengan melibatkan 36 mahasiswa dari fakultas psikologi dan fakultas kedokteran di Kota Bandung yang menjalani PJJ. Data diambil dengan melakukan wawancara kepada partisipan pada bulan Mei 2020. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah perasaan dominan yang dirasakan partisipan selama PJJ adalah bosan, santai dan tidak praktis; hal yang dirindukan selama masa kuliah di rumah adalah teman, bermain dan mengobrol; dan hal yang terlintas ketika mendengar berita tentang COVID-19 adalah takut, sedih dan cemas. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah sumber stres mahasiswa adalah merasa jauh dengan teman, komunikasi dan kontak tatap muka dengan teman dan dosen yang terbatas serta tidak mendapatkan perhatian langsung dari teman dan dosen.

Kata kunci: Kesehatan mental, mahasiswa, pandemi COVID-19, pendidikan jarak jauh, sumber stres

Received: 20 November 2020; Revised: 26 April 2021; Accepted: 26 April 2021; Published: 30 April 2021

Correspondence: Susan Fitriyana, dr., MMRS. Department of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Islam Bandung, Jln. Tamansari No. 22, Bandung 40116, West Java, Indonesia. E-mail: susanfitriyananugraha@gmail.com

Introduction

In early 2020, COVID-19, originating from China, began to spread throughout the world.¹ This disease is very easily transmitted through the air and can cause death. In a short time, COVID-19 increased the number of confirmed cases and deaths worldwide.² COVID-19 first entered Indonesia around March 2020. Based on the worldometer on April 11, 2021, Indonesia ranks fourth in Asia with the number of COVID-19 cases reaching 1,566,996 cases with a death toll of 154 cases per 1 million population.³

The increase in confirmed cases of COVID-19 and death rapidly has resulted in the emergence of psychological problems, such as anxiety, depression, and stress.² Government policies to limit mobility and community social activities through the work from home (WFH) and school from home (SFH) programs worsen people's mental health.⁴ One of the groups that are prone to experiencing psychological problems is students. The student world is a transitional period from adolescence to adulthood. At this time, students have not yet experienced emotional maturity.⁵⁻⁷

An online survey of students in Guangzhou, China, showed that 7.5% of students showed anxiety symptoms and 12.2% experienced symptoms of depression. Besides, students who have family members infected with the coronavirus, both confirmed and suspected, are more at risk of experiencing symptoms of depression.¹ The results of an online survey of students in Bangladesh showed that 26.6% of students experienced mild to very severe anxiety symptoms, 61.97% of students experienced symptoms of depression, and around 57.05% of students experienced mild to very extreme stress levels. Negative perceptions of pandemics, disruption of education, inadequate health service systems, and existing physical health conditions causing mental health problems to students.⁸

Researchers developed a game-based learning program that aims to reduce anxiety in students during the corona pandemic. At the beginning of the program, the researchers conducted an initial mapping to determine the source of participant stress. The purpose of this study was to determine the source of participant stress during the pandemic. This study's results have been presented in the 2020 Social and Humanities Research Symposium (SoRES) activities.

Methods

The design of this study is qualitative research conducted at the Universitas Islam Bandung (Unisba). The research sample used consecutive sampling involving 36 students from the Faculty of Psychology and the Faculty of Medicine Unisba who underwent Study from Home (SFH), each from the Faculty of Psychology and the Faculty of Medicine totaling 18 people. Participants come from students in semesters 2, 4, 6, and 8.

Data were collected by interviewing participants in May 2020. Researchers asked three questions to explore the sources of stress for respondents, consisting of: (1) what did participants feel during the study from home? (2) what is the most missed (feel lost) during the study from home? (3) what comes to mind when participants heard about COVID-19?

Results

We carried out a qualitative mapping of the sources of stress. Participants answer three questions about what participants felt during the study from home, things they missed during college, and what comes to mind when they heard about COVID-19. The first question is what the participants felt during the study from home. The dominant thing that participants feel during the study from home is boredom, relaxed, and complicated. For the second question, the things they missed during learning at home were friends, playing, and chatting. For the third question, they feel fear, sadness, and anxiety when they heard the news about COVID-19. The results of qualitative mapping can be seen in Figure.

Discussion

Figure in shows the initial mapping results to determine the source of the participants' stress. This figure shows that three things that respondents felt during the study from home were boredom, relaxed and complicated. The things they missed during their study from home were friends, playing, and chatting. What comes to mind when hearing news about COVID-19 is fear, sadness, and anxiety.

The dominant thing that participants feel during the study from home is boredom, relaxed, and complicated. Bored shows the initial stage of saturation, which will have an impact on



Figure Qualitative Mapping of the Source of Stress

decreasing motivation to learn. The condition of being far from friends, limited communication, and face-to-face contact were situations that unusual for the participants to experience. They need time to adjust to the problem. Therefore they feel bored, sleepy (don't have the energy), lazy to move, and feel complicated using technological media. This condition is not in line with the character of their age, which should quickly adapt to technology. It turns out that the social support factor remains essential in the student learning process.

Students who carry out learning activities from home cause students too much using smartphones and access social media. Too much information flow from social media can cause (mis)information overload, leading to mental health problems. Based on the results of a cross-sectional study of Chinese residents over the age of 18 during the Covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan, the research shows that 48.3% of respondents experienced depression, 22.6% experienced anxiety, and around 19.4% experienced a combination of depression and anxiety. Of these respondents, more than 80% are exposed to social media.⁹⁻¹¹

For the second question, the things they missed during learning at home were friends, playing, and chatting. That word shows their need to socialize. This condition is in line with feeling bored, lazy, and not excited (sleepy). It turns out that it is more due to the high need for socialization, so meeting online limited by space becomes an obstacle that makes its primary needs remain unfulfilled. The two data above show that most students on high affiliation motives. The

study from home requires that every student must be independent and understand the subject matter visually. However, it is not easy for some students who have high affiliation motivation, and they depend on the attention of friends, lecturers, and people around them. Therefore, it is essential to carry out an activity that requires interaction between individuals that stimulates them to give each other attention, empathy, and work together to achieve specific goals.

WHO recommends supporting each other, helping others when others need help can benefit both those who provide help or those who get help. The concept of please help can create social support. Numerous studies have shown that social support is essential for maintaining physical and psychological health.^{12,13} Besides, sharing feelings with other people, especially other people who also feel the same emotions at the same time, can reduce stress. Research says that sharing feelings in a threatening situation with someone in the same emotional state holds someone back from experiencing severe stress levels.¹⁴

For the third question, they feel fear, sadness, and anxiety when they heard the news about COVID-19. Expressions of fear, sadness, anxiety when hearing the information of COVID-19 is a natural expression for students. This expression happens not only among students but also for most people in general. This feeling does not seem too excessive they were still able to think objectively and control themselves in reacting naturally. However, we can saw the impact in their unusual learning behavior. This impact is also another source of stressors that make students have their problems.

Anxiety and other psychiatric problems can result in decreased immunity,^{18,19} which can increase the risk of being infected with COVID-19.¹² Also, unresolved student anxiety problems can reduce academic performance and increase the likelihood of dropping out of university. Increasingly severe anxiety will worsen academic performance, and worse academic performance will exacerbate anxiety. Anxiety was also positively correlated with depression and increased suicidal thoughts in college students.^{7,15-17}

Based on this, mental health intervention for students during the COVID-19 pandemic is urgently needed.²⁰ An online survey of students in Guangzhou, China, states that students need knowledge of mental health problems and interventions to overcome mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Recognizing this, the WHO launched guidelines for handling mental health, and the National Health Commission of China launched online mental health services to reduce mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic.^{2,12} The results of the meta-analysis study stated that e-mental health intervention could overcome mental health problems in students and also improve academic performance.⁷

Conclusions

This study concludes the source of student stress during the study from home in the COVID-19 pandemic was a social limitation that results in mental health problems. Therefore adequate mental health treatment is needed.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Psychology Universitas Islam Bandung, all students who participated in the study, and Kummara game studio who helped with this research.

References

1. Wang ZH, Yang HL, Yang YQ, Liu D, Li ZH, Zhang XR, et al. Prevalence of anxiety and depression symptom, and the demands for psychological knowledge and interventions in college students during COVID-19 epidemic: a large cross-sectional study. *J Affect Disord.* 2020;275(1023):188–93.
2. Liu S, Yang L, Zhang C, Xiang YT, Liu Z, Hu S, et al. Online mental health services in China during the COVID-19 outbreak. *Lancet Psychiatry.* 2020;7(4):e17–8.
3. Worldometer. COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic [Internet]. 2021 April 11 [cited 2021 April 11]. Available from: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus>.
4. Ravesloot, Ward B, Hargrove T, Wong J, Livingston N, Torma L, et al. Why stay home? Temporal association of pain, fatigue and depression with being at home. *Disabil Health J.* 2016;9(2):218–25.
5. Wahed WYA, Hassan SK. Prevalence and associated factors of stress, anxiety and depression among medical Fayoum University students. *Alexandria J Med.* 2017;53(1):77–84.
6. Cheung D, Tam KY, Tsang H, Zhang LW, Lit SW. Depression, anxiety and stress in different subgroups of first-year university students from 4-year cohort data. *J Affect Disord.* 2020;274:305–14.
7. Bolinski F, Boumparis N, Kleiboer A, Cuijpers P, Ebert DD, Riper H. The effect of e-mental health interventions on academic performance in university and college students: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Internet Interv.* 2020;20:100321.
8. Sayeed A, Kundu S, Al Banna MH, Hasan MT, Begum MR, Khan MSI. Mental health outcomes during the COVID-19 and perceptions towards the pandemic: findings from a cross sectional study among Bangladeshi students. *Child Youth Serv Rev.* 2020;119:105658.
9. Xiang YT, Yang Y, Li W, Zhang L, Zhang Q, Cheung T, et al. Timely mental health care for the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak is urgently needed. *Lancet Psychiatry.* 2020;7(3):228–9.
10. Cullen W, Gulati G, Kelly BD. Mental health in the COVID-19 pandemic. *QJM.* 2020;113(5):311–2.
11. Wang C, Pan R, Wan X, Tan Y, Xu L, Ho CS, et al. Immediate psychological responses and associated factors during the initial stage of

- the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic among the general population in China. *Int J Environ Res Public Heal*. 2020;17(5):1729.
12. World Health Organization. Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak [Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020 [cited 2021 January 20]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf>.
 13. Ozbay F, Johnson DC, Dimoulas E, Morgan CA, Charney D, Southwick S. Social support and resilience to stress: from neurobiology to clinical practice. *Psychiatry (Edgmont)*. 2007;4(5):35–40.
 14. Townsend SSM, Kim HS, Mesquita B. Are you feeling what I'm feeling? Emotional similarity buffers stress. *Soc Psychol Personal Sci J*. 2014;5(5):526–33.
 15. Marthoenis, Meutia I, Fathiariani L, Sofyan H. Prevalence of depression and anxiety among college students living in a disaster-prone region. *Alexandria J Med*. 2018;54(4):337–40.
 16. Vitasari P, Wahab MNA, Herawan T, Sinnadurai SK. Psychophysiological treatment in reduced anxiety with biofeedback training for university students. *Procedia Soc Behav Sci*. 2011;30:629–33.
 17. Mustafa S, Melonashi E, Shkempi F, Besimi K, Fanaj N. Anxiety and self-esteem among university students: comparison between Albania and Kosovo. *Procedia Soc Behav Sci*. 2015;205:189–94.
 18. Respati T, Irasanti SN, Sartika D, Akbar IB, Marzo RR. A nationwide survey of psychological distress among Indonesian residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. *IJPHS*. 2021;10(1):119–26.
 19. Respati T, Nugroho E, Setijono GW. Promoting health and brand awareness-an overview of integrated gamification approach on corporate sector. *Pertanika J Soc Sci Hum*. 2018;26(T):113–24.
 20. Marzo RR, Ismail Z, Nu Htay MN, Bahari R, Ismail R, Villanueva EQ III, et.al Psychological distress during pandemic Covid-19 among adult general population: result across 13 countries. *Clin Epidemiol Glob Health*. 2021;10:100708.