

Islamic-Based Coping to Manage Stress among University Students: Online Training

Libbie Annatagia*

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Socio-Cultural Sciences,
Universitas Islam Indonesia

*Corresponding author email: libbie.annatagia@uii.ac.id

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Abstract: In completing various academic tasks, university students are faced with various stressors that can potentially cause stress. Many studies have found the important role of religion in stress management. This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of online Islamic-based coping training to reduce stress levels in university students. This study used the one group pre-test post-test design. Participants were six university students (one male and five female) aged 24-25 years who are Muslims and experienced stress. Data were collected using questionnaires of Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) and analyzed using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. The results of this study found that there is a significant difference in level of stress in participants, before and after given the online training of Islamic-based coping ($p < 0.05, p = 0.027$). This study concluded that the online training of Islamic-based coping can significantly reduce stress levels in participants.

Keywords: Islamic-based coping, stress, university students, online training

1. Introduction

For many students, the university years can be very stressful. David (Kumar & Bhukar, 2013) stated that the university years are more stressful than the years at other stages of life. Research has found that many university students are suffering from stress, from moderate stress level (Asif, Mudassar, Shahzad, Raouf, & Pervaiz, 2020; Yikealo, Tareke, & Karvinen, 2018; Y, P, Fauzan, & B, 2018) to high/severe stress level (Asif, Mudassar, et.al., 2020; Reddy, Menon, & Thattil, 2018). In general, there are four factors that can be a source of stress for university students including: academic factors (e.g., getting good grade, delaying in marking and feedback, pressure to work regularly and properly, to maintain their good quality work



and also to complete their assignments on time without fail, accessing learning materials, exam stress, inadequate educational materials, understanding the expectation of teaching staff, achieving academic goal, workload, and demand from lecturers) (Azila-Gbettor, Atatsi, Danku, & Soglo, 2015; Irshad, Saleem & Mahmood, 2015; *Yikealo, Tareke, & Karvinen, 2018*), intrapersonal and self-stressors (e.g., fear of failure, personal inadequacy, dealing with personal issue, and study skills (Azila-Gbettor, et.al., 2015; Bataineh, 2013; Reddy, Menon, & Thattil, 2018), relationship interpersonal and social stressors (e.g., academic competition, interpersonal difficulties, social support, and demand from friends and family), (Azila-Gbettor, et.al., 2015; Irshad, Saleem & Mahmood, 2015; Reddy, Menon, & Thattil, 2018), and environmental stressors (e.g., college transition, challenges in daily life, campus adjustment, and inadequate study facilities (Azila-Gbettor, et.al., 2015; Pariat, Rynjah, Joplin, & Kharjana, 2014; Reddy, Menon, & Thattil, 2018; *Yikealo, Tareke, & Karvinen, 2018*). Covid-19 pandemic has also added to the source of stress including: inadequate internet signals and limited quotas for internet (Asmuni, 2020; Muhajir, 2020; Ulfa & Mikdar, 2020), decreased creativity and productivity (Argaheni, 2020), overwhelming amount of information and concepts, too many assignments from lecturers (Argaheni, 2020; Asmuni, 2020), uncertainty related to exams and assessments at the end of the semester (Moawad, 2020), and difficulty to understand the lecturer's presentation in the virtual class (Asmuni, 2020).

These situations can lead people to experience stress. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stress is defined as an individual's physical and psychological reaction caused by an event or object that is considered a threat. There are two categories of stress; eustress and distress. Eustress is positive stress that motivates individuals to continue working. This positive stress serves to encourage and facilitate learning, where the ideal stress level can improve learning abilities. On the other hand, distress is negative stress which occurs when the stress becomes too much to handle and overwhelms the individual. Distress has negative effects in inhibiting and suppressing learning, so it needs to be stopped and avoided (Yusoff, 2010). Distress conditions need to be handled because they can have an impact on many aspects of life, namely: irregular sleep, blood pressure, stomach acid, irregular eating patterns, feeling depression (Abdurrahman, Lubis, Tanjung, & Lubis, 2021), academic performance (higher level of stress impact students' function of learning (Bennett, 2003; Elias, Ping, & Abdullah, 2011; Taylor and Owusu-Banahene (2010), illness and boredom (Jaradat & Ajlouni, 2021; Sobirin, 2020; Subedi & Subedi, 2020). This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of Islamic-based coping training to reduce stress levels in university students. Hypothesis of this study is that there is a difference in the pretest and posttest scores of participants, before and after being given online Islamic-based coping training.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Stress Coping

It is necessary to make efforts to cope with stress because the impact of stress could affect an individual's health and function in daily life. Prior to 1960, the term coping in medical and social contexts referred to the emergence of positive responses to the stresses

experienced in life. Since the 1960s, research has focused on the subject of coping. In the sixties and seventies, researchers began to link coping strategies to stress, instead of focusing on extreme conditions. In the Eighties, research on coping was conducted through the study of various responses and measurement methods (Achour, Bensaid, & Nor, 2015). Coping is a cognitive and behavioral effort to manage external and/or internal demands that are considered to burden or exceed an individual's resources (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Meanwhile, according to Kihlstrom (1987) and Haan (1982) coping is defined as an individual's response to external stressful events. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) describe the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping Theory as a model that provides an appraisal of threat, danger/harm, and challenge, which then results in the process of coping with stress. Situational appraisals, which involves a judgment about whether internal or external demands exceed resources, and ability to cope when demands exceed resources, determine the level of stress experienced by an individual, in terms of thoughts, feelings, emotions and behavior. Coping mechanism plays a significant role to overcome or decrease the stress level experienced by individuals. Adler and Park (2003) stated that appropriate and effective coping could buffer the effect of stressful circumstances on an individual's physical and mental health. In stressful situations, coping mechanisms have a role as a stabilizing factor that could support an individual in psychosocial adaptation (Bamuhair et al., 2015). Coping strategies used as a means to minimize the effects of stress (Belal et.al., 2009).

2.2. Islamic-Based Stress Coping

Koenig (2012) identified 454 studies before 2000 and during 2000 to 2010. Many studies report that religion/spirituality helped people to cope with a wide range of illnesses or in a variety of stressful situations. Most studies report that religion/spirituality is helpful. Religion/spirituality has an impact on mental health through many different mechanisms. Religion increase the amount of positive emotions and reduce the possibility that stress will result in emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety disorder, suicide, and substance abuse by providing resources for stress coping. Yousofi (2011) stated that religion helps people dealing with loneliness and despair. Religion also prevents people from despair, dissatisfaction, sadness and so on. It is associated with the belief that Almighty God is able and good enough to support him beyond his imagination. It also related to the faith that God could give His kind and limitless support to the believer. Koenig (2012) explains that powerful cognitions (strong beliefs) give meaning to difficult life situations and provide a sense of purpose. Strong belief that religion gives is the emergence of optimism. The thought of a transcendental power (God) who loves and cares for humans and answers human needs. This perspective also makes people feel in control of an event (for example, if someone prays it can affect the situation positively, because the prayer is heard by God who is in control, can influence the situation, and is influenced by prayer).

Religion can also provide satisfying answers to existential questions for this life and life after death, so it can help normalize loss and change and provide an example for

people suffering from the same or similar problems. This is stated in religious scriptures. It can be argued that religious beliefs have the potential to influence cognitive appraisal of negative life events, so that individuals are less depressed (Koenig, 2012). Religious beliefs and practices provide support (both social and emotional), help people find goal and meaning of life, offer comfort in times of grief, as well as offer moral and ethical guiding lines for human beings (Dweep & Atul, 2017). Religion encourages humans to love others, be compassionate, and take altruistic actions. This prosocial behavior can buffer stress and lead to human support. Religion also encourages humans to do virtues such as forgiveness, forgiveness, gratitude, patience, and dependence, which can also increase positive emotions and neutralize negative emotions directly. In many studies, religion/spirituality is associated with greater well-being, improved coping with stress, and better mental health (Koenig, 2012).

Religious coping is defined as the use of religious beliefs or practices to cope with stressful life circumstances (Pargament, Magyar-Russell, & Murray-Swank, 2005). Previous research has shown that religious beliefs and practices can help people cope with difficult situations in life (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001), cope with stress and depression (Abernethy, Chang, Seidlitz, Evinger, & Duberstein, 2002; Loewenthal, Cinnirella, Evdoka, & Murphy, 2001; Smith, McCullough, & Poll, 2003). Individuals who use religious coping are more able to manage their condition effectively than individuals who do not (Paloutzian, 2014). Religion is useful in the process of reconstructing traumatic events and has a framework for understanding the most senseless accidents, unendurable pain, or the most unfair outcomes in life (Emmons, 2003). If the individual relies on a higher power, then he will feel less pressure to control situations and to worry about results (King, Marston, McManus, Brugha, Meltzer, & Bebbington, 2013). Studies have found that people with higher levels of religiosity tend to use religious beliefs and strategies more often than other ways of coping. Many previous studies have found a positive relationship between the use of religious coping and physical/mental health (Koenig, Dana, & Verna, 2012).

3. Method

This study used a quasi-experimental, the one group pre-test post-test design. A single pretest observation or a pretreatment assessment is taken on a group of participants (01), Treatment (X) then occurs, and a single posttest observation or a second assessment called post-test on the same measure (02) follows (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002; Thyer, 2012).

3.1 Sample

Participants were six university students (one male and five female) aged 24-25 years who are Muslims and experienced stress.

3.2. Measurement Tools, Data Analysis, and Procedure

Data were collected using questionnaires of Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) and analyzed using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. Due to restrictions on offline activities during the Covid-19 pandemic, this training is carried out online using video conference media. Participants are in different locations. This training contains four sessions, and is carried out for three hours. Sessions in this training: introduction to training materials, problem identification, Islamic-based coping, and summary and closing. In each session, participants reflect and work on worksheets.

4. Results and Discussion

As many as six participants (one male and five female) were involved in this study. Participants were university students aged 24-25 years, and had stress scores in the categories of severe stress (four people), and mild stress (two people).

Table 1. Pre-test and post-test scores

No	Name	Age	Gender	Stress Score (Pretest)	Stress Level (Pretest)	Stress Score (Posttest)	Stress Level (Posttest)
1	A	24	Female	15	Low	7	Normal
2	B	25	Female	28	Severe	23	Moderate
3	C	24	Female	32	Severe	29	Severe
4	D	24	Female	27	Severe	19	Moderate
5	E	25	Male	27	Severe	23	Moderate
6	F	25	Female	16	Low	14	Normal

The table above describes the changes in participants' stress scores before and after receiving Islamic-Based Coping Training. Prior to the training, four participants were in the severe stress category, two in the low stress category. After being given the training, two participants were in the normal stress category, three were in the moderate stress category, and one was in the severe category. Participant A got a pre-test score of 15 and a post-test score of 7. Participant B got a pre-test score of 28 and a post-test score of 23. Participant C got a pre-test score of 32 and a post-test score of 29. Participant D got a score of pre-test 27 and post-test score 19. Participant E got a pre-test score of 27 and a post-test score of 23. Participant F got a pre-test score of 16 and a post-test score of 14. Based on descriptive statistics, it is known that at the time of the pretest, the mean: 24.1667, SD: 6.96898. Based on the normality test, it was known that the data was not normal ($p=0.047$, $p<0.05$), then the data analysis was carried out using a non-parametric test.

**Table 2. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
Test Statistics^a**

Posttest - Pretest	
Z	-2.207 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.027

The results of this study found that there is a significant difference in level of stress in participants, before and after given the Islamic-based coping training ($p < 0.05$, $p = 0.027$). This study concluded that the online Islamic-based coping training can significantly reduce stress levels in participants. The results of this study support previous studies on the role of coping, especially religious coping, in dealing with stress. Turashvili and Japaridze (2013) found that if the university students know how to cope with stress, then they will be able to reduce the negative effect of stress. Pariat et.al (2014) found that those students with good coping skills tend to have low psychological problems, otherwise those students who do not have healthy coping strategies are more potential to have a worse risk of health problems or even antisocial behaviors. Triwahyuni & Kadiyono (2020) found that 86% of employees in their research used Islamic religion-focused coping as a strategy to deal with work stress. Abdurrahman et.al. (2021) found that students who received Islamic counseling containing spiritual guidance sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith as a form of stress coping strategy (emotional focused) experienced lower levels of stress than before. This treatment helps students to relieve individual emotions caused by stressors as well as regulate emotional responses to stress. Stress coping strategies through Islamic counseling can relieve stress symptoms in students, thus the students are expected to be optimal in the learning process. Munif, Poeranto, and Utami (2019) found that Islamic spiritual mindfulness as an adaptive coping strategy was effective in reducing stress among nursing students working on the thesis. There were significant differences in stress levels between the intervention group and the control group ($p = 0.001$, $p < 0,05$). The effect size was 0.59, so it can be concluded that the level of influence was in the medium category. Studies among medical students in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia found that the respondents that used coping strategies such as acceptance, planning, reframing religious activities as well as interacting with friends and family could manage stress during their training (Al-Dubai, et.al, 2011; Soliman, 2014). Zakaria, Rezal, Aziz, Shukor, Othman, and Hamid (2021) found that there are three specific religious coping behaviors that are used by students to cope with their academic stress, namely: worship in the heart, worship verbally and worship by action. This research also finds that cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects are the aspects that are influenced by religious coping.

Research found that religious clients benefit from the process of facilitating positive coping, psychological well-being, and resilience through religion as a medium (Brewer-Smyth & Koenig, 2014). Identification with religion influences stress-related outcomes. Religion makes it easy for individuals to see both good and bad events in life as opportunities

for growth. Religion also sees bad and good events as part of God's plan for their lives. This can give a person meaning and purpose in life (Merrill, Read, & LeCheminant, 2009). Religious coping helps individuals through the stages of the coping process. Religious coping changes individual cognition towards more rational, realistic, and balanced thinking. This process has a positive impact, namely reducing symptoms and increasing adaptability and functionality (Zakaria, Rezal, Aziz, Shukor, Othman, & Hamid, 2021).

In Islamic-Based Coping Training, participants were taught several Islamic-based coping strategies. The first relates to cognitive processes. Participants understand that all events in life occur with the permission of God (Allah). Stressors also come from Allah, and humans need to understand that only Allah can turn hardship into ease. The stressor is seen as an opportunity for worship. For a Muslim, doing daily activities and tasks is a form of worship to Allah. In the Quran there is an injunction for a Muslim to place their complete faith in Allah. It is important for a Muslim to believe that Allah is in control of human beings and that Allah is the one who protects humans (Achour, Bensaid, & Nor, 2015). The following is a verse of the Quran which explains that humans are commanded to believe in Allah's destiny, to seek Allah's protection, and to put their trust in Allah:

“Say, “Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us; He is our protector.” And upon Allah let the believers rely.” (Qur'an 9:51).

Awareness of God's power has an important role in the coping process. Munif, Poeranto, & Utami (2019) explain that Islamic spiritual mindfulness as an adaptive coping strategy can be used to reduce many negative psychological reactions to stress by building an awareness that it is Allah who has control of life by determining problems that one's face today. Zakaria, Rezal, Aziz, Shukor, Othman, and Hamid (2021) also explain that having knowledge and awareness of internal and external stressors can also help students to identify the best solutions and coping mechanisms to manage stress. This coping behavior also helps students to have a better understanding of how religious coping can affect students in terms of cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Achour, Bensaid, & Nor (2015) stated that for Muslims, dependence on Allah (*tawakul*) will be very helpful in living life, especially during times of stress and hardship. Depending on Allah (*tawakul*) is one of the most effective ways to direct motivation and improve behavioral performance. Individuals need to believe that God's plan is wise and perfect, and need to believe that only God can change individual conditions for the better. The principle of belief in Allah also helps Muslims engage with their work while remaining aware of their own human potential and limitations. In the face of life's difficulties, dependence on God can be a powerful tool for stress management. The verse below explains the promise of Allah, that after hardship there is ease:

“So, undoubtedly, along with the hardship there is ease. Undoubtedly, along with the hardship there is ease.” (Quran: 94:5-6)

The second Islamic-based coping strategy which is given in the Islamic-based coping training is related to behavioral processes. One example of a coping strategy is doing

remembrance of God (dhikr). At the time of feeling the pressures and burdens of life, Muslims turn their faces to God and remember God. Zikr, i.e. all forms of remembrance of Allah, prayers, reading and listening to the Qur'an, praise and glorification of God (tasbih) and reflection on the universe and creation, can help Muslims to cope with life problems such as stress, anxiety, and work-family conflict (Achour, Bensaid, & Nor, 2015). The following is a Quranic verse that explains the need for remembrance for a person:

“Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.” (Qur'an 13: 28).

Islamic-based coping training also involves the role of emotional processes, in addition to cognitive and behavioral processes. Zakaria, Rezal, Aziz, Shukor, Othman, and Hamid (2001) explain how religious coping helps students overcome stress and obstacles in their study process. Religious coping helps individuals control and change their emotions to become more calm and peaceful, and become less nervous and stressful. The existence of religious coping helps individuals to believe in God, a superior transcendental power. It also makes individuals begin to have a positive vision and attitude towards life, academic tasks and challenges. Belief in God Almighty makes individuals more confident and strong, and less vulnerable. For students, this condition makes it easier to face life's problems, especially in the study process.

However, this study has limitations, among others, that it only consisted of one experimental group (without a control group), and no follow-up was carried out. It can be said that research results have not been able to prove that the effects of training will last for a long time. In addition, caution should be exercised in generalizing the results of this research, due to the small number of participants. Further research may be conducted in a larger sample.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the results of this study found that there were significant differences in stress levels among participants before and after being given the online Islamic-based coping training, so it can be concluded that the hypothesis is accepted. There are some suggestions for the development of this research in the future: increasing the number of participants, involving a control group as a comparison, and conducting follow-up measurements to determine the long-term effects of online Islamic-based coping training.

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