



SCREENING FOR MENTAL EMOTIONAL DISORDERS: DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, AND STRESS AMONG FIRST-YEAR NURSING STUDENTS

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ABSTRAK

Background: Mental emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress are common among university students, especially during the transition from high school to higher education. Early detection is important to prevent more severe psychological problems. Objective: This study aimed to describe the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among first-year students. Methods: This study used a descriptive design with a cross-sectional approach. The research was conducted at STIKES Serulingmas Cilacap. A total of 150 first-year students were included using total sampling. Mental emotional disorders were measured using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-42). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results: The results showed that 30% of students experienced depression (18% mild, 9% moderate, and 3% severe). Anxiety was experienced by 67% of students (18% mild and 34% moderate). Meanwhile, 20% of students experienced stress (13% mild and 4% moderate). Conclusion: A considerable proportion of first-year students experienced mental emotional disorders. Early screening programs and psychological support services are recommended to improve students' mental health.

Keywords: Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Mental Health Screening, Students

INTRODUCTION

The transition period from high school to university is not easy for many first-semester students, as it requires adaptation to a new academic and social environment. This adjustment may become problematic when students experience difficulties meeting the expectations associated with university life. Over the past decade, the prevalence and severity of mental emotional disorders have increased globally. Approximately 300 million people worldwide suffer from depression, while 264 million experience anxiety disorders (WHO, 2017). Each year, nearly 800,000 people die by suicide, and many more engage in self-harm. Individuals with severe depression are more likely to attempt suicide; however, suicidal ideation can also occur among students with mild to moderate depressive symptoms (Cukrowicz et al., 2011). A study conducted at a university in Indonesia found that 77 students (56%) experienced extremely severe depression, 103 students (75%) experienced extremely severe anxiety, and 26 students (19%) experienced extremely severe stress (Sitanggang, 2025).

Various developmental changes experienced during adolescence place individuals under significant pressure, which may lead to adverse consequences not only physically but also psychologically. A study conducted among 7,915 students in Hong Kong revealed that mental health problems among adolescents and university students are a significant concern. The findings showed that 21% of the students experienced depression, 41% experienced anxiety, and 27%

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experienced stress. These figures indicate that nearly half of the respondents suffered from anxiety, highlighting that psychological distress among students is an important issue that requires attention from educational institutions, families, and healthcare professionals. Meanwhile, research conducted in Malaysia showed that 27.5% and 9.7% of students experienced moderate and severe depression. Additionally, 34% and 29% of students experienced moderate and severe anxiety, while 18.6% and 5.1% experienced moderate and severe stress (Astutik et al., 2020).

Mental emotional disorders among university students are also associated with social, demographic, behavioral, and educational factors. The most common disorders experienced by students include depression, anxiety, and stress. A study by Cao et al. (2020) involving 7,143 college students showed that 0.9% experienced severe anxiety, 2.7% moderate anxiety, and 21.3% mild anxiety. Depression is a condition characterized by disturbances in emotional functioning accompanied by symptoms such as sadness, changes in sleep patterns and appetite, psychomotor disturbances, impaired concentration, anhedonia, fatigue, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, and suicidal ideation (Kaplan, 2010). Depression may also manifest as decreased motivation, reduced activity and productivity, and slower cognitive functioning.

Anxiety is a feeling of fear that originates from internal or external sources and results in behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and physiological responses (Videbeck, 2011). Anxiety disorders may cause individuals to experience disturbances in thinking or concentration and may lead them to avoid situations that trigger worry (American Psychological Association, 2017). Stress is the body's response to situations that create pressure, change, or emotional tension (Koampa, 2015). Stress is considered one of the major barriers to academic performance. A study conducted among medical students in India found that most stressors were academic in nature (94.9%), including language barriers and changes in teaching methods. The higher the academic level, the greater the burden faced by students, including balancing academic responsibilities, personal life, and work, preparing for examinations, facing various assessments, and dealing with social, financial, relational, family, and extracurricular pressures.

Based on a study conducted by Kurniawan and Ngatiyem in 2020, 30% of students experienced depression, 67% experienced anxiety, and 20% experienced stress. University students are highly vulnerable to emotional and mental health disorders; therefore, guidance and monitoring by academic advisors are essential. Furthermore, when more advanced support is needed, educational institutions should collaborate with psychological services or mental health professionals.

The results of a study conducted by Triasari et al. (2025) showed that 21% of students experienced mild anxiety, 50% experienced moderate anxiety, 10% experienced severe anxiety, and 7% experienced extremely severe anxiety. These screening results provide a clear overview of the need for psychological support and anxiety prevention programs within the university environment. The high prevalence of anxiety among first-year students highlights the importance of universities developing orientation programs that focus not only on academic introduction but also on psychosocial adjustment and stress management. In addition, universities should provide accessible and proactive counseling and psychological services so that students can seek help at an early stage. Institutions are also encouraged to organize workshops or seminars on anxiety management, relaxation techniques, and adaptive coping skills, as well as to create a supportive

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and inclusive campus environment where students feel comfortable sharing their experiences and seeking support.

METHODS

The research design used in this study was a descriptive study with a cross-sectional data collection method. This research was conducted at STIKES Serulingmas Maos, Cilacap, with a sample of 150 first-year students. The sampling technique used in this study was total sampling.

This study assessed respondents using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale 42 (DASS-42) questionnaire. The level of stress was measured using the DASS-42 instrument, which consists of 42 items covering three subvariables: depression, anxiety, and stress (Crawford & Henry, 2003). The questionnaire categorizes the levels of each variable into normal, mild, moderate, severe, and extremely severe. The interpretation of the total DASS-42 score follows the guidelines established by the Psychology Foundation of Australia (2018) and Lovibond (1995).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristic

Table 1. Respondent Characteristic

Respondent Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	25	15
	Female	124	85
Age	17 Year	3	2
	18 Year	75	50
	19 Year	51	34
	20 Year	17	11
	23 Year	1	1
	24 Year	1	1
Last Education	26 Year	1	1
	Senior High School	53	36
	Vocational High School	96	64

The results presented in Table 1 show the characteristics of the respondents based on gender, age, and educational background. The majority of respondents were female students, accounting for 124 individuals (85%), while male students comprised 25 respondents (15%). This indicates that most of the first-year students participating in this study were female.

Based on age distribution, most respondents were 18 years old, totaling 75 students (50%), followed by 19-year-old students with 51 respondents (34%). Meanwhile, respondents aged 20 years accounted for 17 students (11%), and only a small proportion were aged 17 years (2%). A very small number of respondents were aged 23, 24, and 26 years, each representing 1% of the sample. Regarding educational background, the majority of respondents graduated from vocational high schools (SMK), with 96 students (64%), while 53 students (36%) graduated from general senior high schools (SMA).

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Table 2. Overview Of Screening Result for Emotional Mental Disorders : Depression, Anxiety and Stress among First Year Student

Mental Disorder	Normal		Mild		Moderate		Severe		Extreme Severe		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Depression	100	67	33	22	16	11	0	0	0	0	149	100
Anxiety	60	40	55	37	34	29	0	0	0	0	149	100
Stress	120	81	50	34	30	20	0	0	0	0	149	100

Table 2 presents the results of screening for emotional mental disorders among first-year students using the DASS-42 instrument, which includes depression, anxiety, and stress. The results show that the majority of students were in the normal category for depression, with 100 respondents (67%). Meanwhile, 33 respondents (22%) experienced mild depression and 16 respondents (11%) experienced moderate depression. No respondents were found in the severe or extremely severe categories of depression. Regarding anxiety, the results indicate that 60 respondents (40%) were in the normal category. However, a considerable proportion of students experienced anxiety symptoms, with 55 respondents (37%) categorized as having mild anxiety and 34 respondents (29%) categorized as having moderate anxiety. Similar to depression, no respondents were found in the severe or extremely severe anxiety categories.

In terms of stress levels, most respondents were categorized as normal, with 120 respondents (81%). Meanwhile, 50 respondents (34%) experienced mild stress and 30 respondents (20%) experienced moderate stress. No respondents were categorized as having severe or extremely severe stress. These findings indicate that although most students were within the normal range, a significant proportion still experienced mild to moderate levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Table 3. Distribution of Emotional Mental Disorders : Depression Based on Demographic Characteristics of First Year Student

Respondent Characteristic		Depression					Total
		Normal	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Extremely Severe	
		N	N	N	N	N	
Gender	Mele	20	5	0	0	0	25
	Female	83	23	18	0	0	124
Usia	17 Years	3	0	0	0	0	3
	18 Years	52	15	8	0	0	75
	19 Years	37	12	2	0	0	51
	20 Years	10	3	4	0	0	17
	23 Years	1	0	0	0	0	1
	24 Years	1	0	0	0	0	1
Last Education	26 Years	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Senior High School	36	11	6	0	0	53
	Vocational High School	65	20	12	0	0	96

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The results presented in Table 3 show the characteristics of the respondents based on gender, age, and educational background. The majority of respondents were female students, accounting for 124 individuals (85%), while male students comprised 25 respondents (15%). This indicates that most of the first-year students participating in this study were female. Based on age distribution, most respondents were 18 years old, totaling 75 students (50%), followed by 19-year-old students with 51 respondents (34%). Meanwhile, respondents aged 20 years accounted for 17 students (11%), and only a small proportion were aged 17 years (2%). A very small number of respondents were aged 23, 24, and 26 years, each representing 1% of the sample. Regarding educational background, the majority of respondents graduated from vocational high schools (SMK), with 96 students (64%), while 53 students (36%) graduated from general senior high schools (SMA).

Table 4. Distribution of Emotional Mental Disorder : Anxiety Based on Demographic Characteristics of First Year Students

Respondent Characteristic	Normal	Anxiety				Total	
		Mild	Moderate	Severe	Extreme Severe		
	N	N	N	N	N		
Gender	Male	10	4	3	2	0	25
	Female	37	21	45	14	5	124
Usia	17 Years	1	1	1	0	0	3
	18 Years	26	12	26	7	2	75
	19 Years	18	10	14	6	1	51
	20 Years	1	1	6	3	2	17
	23 Years	0	1	0	0	0	1
	24 Years	1	0	0	0	0	1
Last Education	Senior High School	28	16	36	12	4	53
	Vocational High School	19	9	12	4	1	96

Based on Table 4, the distribution of anxiety levels among first-year students varies according to demographic characteristics. Based on gender, most female students experienced moderate anxiety (45 respondents), followed by mild anxiety (21 respondents), severe anxiety (14 respondents), and extremely severe anxiety (5 respondents). Meanwhile, among male students, most respondents were categorized as having normal anxiety levels (10 respondents), followed by mild anxiety (4 respondents), moderate anxiety (3 respondents), and severe anxiety (2 respondents).

Based on age, students aged 18 years showed the highest number of anxiety cases, with 26 respondents experiencing normal anxiety levels and another 26 respondents experiencing moderate anxiety. Additionally, 12 respondents experienced mild anxiety, 7 respondents experienced severe anxiety, and 2 respondents experienced extremely severe anxiety. Similar patterns were also observed among students aged 19 years, where moderate anxiety was found in 14 respondents, followed by mild anxiety in 10 respondents and severe anxiety in 6 respondents. Based on educational background, students with a senior high school (SMA) background tended to experience higher levels of anxiety,

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particularly in the moderate category (36 respondents), compared to students with a vocational high school (SMK) background, where moderate anxiety was reported by 12 respondents. Overall, the findings indicate that moderate anxiety is the most common level experienced by first-year students, particularly among female sZZtudents and those aged 18–19 years.

Table 5. Distribution of Emotional Mental Disorder, Stress Based on Demographic Characteristic of first Year Students

Respondent Characteristics		Stress					Total
		Normal	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Extremely Severe	
		N	N	N	N	N	
Gender	Male	18	0	1	0	0	25
	Female	95	18	5	4	0	124
Usia	17 Years	3	0	0	0	0	3
	18 Years	57	11	3	2	0	75
	19 Years	39	6	2	2	0	51
	20 Years	11	1	1	0	0	17
	23 Tahun	1	0	0	0	0	1
	24 Tahun	1	0	0	0	0	1
Last Education	Senior High School	74	15	4	3	0	53
	Vocational high School	39	3	2	1	0	96

Table 5 presents the distribution of stress levels among first-year students based on demographic characteristics. The results show that the majority of respondents were in the normal stress category. Based on gender, most male students were in the normal category (18 respondents), while only one male student experienced moderate stress. Among female students, 95 respondents were categorized as normal, 18 experienced mild stress, 5 experienced moderate stress, and 4 experienced severe stress.

Based on age, most respondents aged 18 years were categorized as normal (57 respondents), while 11 respondents experienced mild stress, 3 respondents experienced moderate stress, and 2 respondents experienced severe stress. Among respondents aged 19 years, 39 students were categorized as normal, while 6 experienced mild stress, 2 experienced moderate stress, and 2 experienced severe stress. Meanwhile, respondents aged 17, 23, 24, and 26 years were mostly categorized in the normal stress level.

Based on the last education level, most respondents who graduated from senior high school (SMA) were categorized as normal (74 respondents), while 15 respondents experienced mild stress, 4 respondents experienced moderate stress, and 3 respondents experienced severe stress. Similarly, most respondents who graduated from vocational high school (SMK) were also in the normal category (39 respondents), while 3 respondents experienced mild stress, 2 respondents experienced moderate stress, and 1 respondent experienced severe stress. Overall, the findings indicate that most first-year students experienced normal levels of stress, although a small proportion of students experienced mild to severe stress across different demographic characteristics.

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DISCUSSION

Overview of Emotional Mental Disorder Screening: Depression

Emotional mental disorders such as depression can occur in anyone, at any time and in any setting. The screening results showed that 33 respondents (22%) experienced depression in the mild category. Depression was more frequently experienced by female respondents, with 23 respondents categorized as having mild depression, 12 respondents moderate depression, and 4 respondents severe depression. These findings are consistent with John W. Santrock (2003), who reported that women are twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression compared to men.

Based on age, mild depression was most commonly found among respondents aged 19 years (11 respondents). Meanwhile, moderate depression (8 respondents) and severe depression (3 respondents) were most frequently identified among respondents aged 18 years. According to John W. Santrock (2003), younger age groups such as adolescents and young adults are at greater risk of experiencing depression. This condition may occur because individuals at this stage face several important developmental tasks and transitions, including the transition from childhood to adolescence, adolescence to adulthood, school to university or work life, as well as other life changes related to puberty and early adulthood.

When viewed from the respondents' last educational background, mild depression was most commonly found among respondents who graduated from senior high school (19 respondents), followed by moderate depression (11 respondents) and severe depression (3 respondents). The learning environment in higher education differs significantly from that of senior high school or vocational high school, requiring students to adapt to new academic demands and learning systems.

According to Leodoro J. Labrague (2013), stress that leads to depression in nursing education has become one of the major issues in modern education. Nursing students tend to be more vulnerable to experiencing depression due to significant lifestyle changes, academic pressure, and adjustments to the new learning environment.

Overview of Emotional Mental Disorder Screening: Anxiety

The results of the emotional mental disorder screening indicated that anxiety was experienced by a considerable proportion of respondents. The findings showed that 25 respondents (18%) experienced mild anxiety, while 48 respondents (34%) experienced moderate anxiety. Anxiety problems were more frequently experienced by female respondents, with 21 respondents categorized as having mild anxiety, 45 respondents moderate anxiety, 14 respondents severe anxiety, and 5 respondents extremely severe anxiety. These findings are consistent with the theory proposed by Gail W. Stuart (2007), which states that women tend to have higher levels of anxiety than men because women are generally more sensitive to emotional experiences, making them more vulnerable to feelings of anxiety. Based on age, the highest prevalence of anxiety was found among respondents aged 18 years. In this age group, 12 respondents experienced mild anxiety, 26 respondents moderate anxiety, 7 respondents severe anxiety, and 2 respondents extremely severe anxiety. This finding suggests that younger students may experience greater psychological pressure as they transition into higher education and adapt to new academic and social environments.

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When viewed from the respondents' last educational background, anxiety was most commonly found among respondents who graduated from senior high school (SMA). In this group, 16 respondents experienced mild anxiety and 36 respondents experienced moderate anxiety. The learning environment in higher education differs significantly from that of senior high school or vocational high school, requiring students to adapt to new academic demands and learning systems. One of the main adjustments experienced by respondents after entering university is the difference in learning methods. Students who graduated from general senior high schools typically have less exposure to health-related subjects compared to those from vocational schools specializing in health or pharmacy. Consequently, individuals with limited prior knowledge in health-related fields may experience higher levels of anxiety when confronted with more complex academic material.

Overview of Emotional Mental Disorder Screening: Stress

Based on the screening results, several respondents experienced stress, with the highest proportion categorized as mild stress (19 respondents; 13%), followed by moderate stress (6 respondents; 4%), and severe stress (3 respondents; 2%). Similar to depression and anxiety findings, stress was more frequently experienced by female respondents. Among them, 18 respondents experienced mild stress, 5 respondents moderate stress, and 4 respondents severe stress.

In terms of age, stress was most commonly found among respondents aged 18 years. In this group, 11 respondents experienced mild stress, 3 respondents moderate stress, and 2 respondents severe stress. According to Mary C. Townsend (2009), age is one of the predisposing factors associated with stress. Stress can affect individuals regardless of age; however, certain age groups are considered more vulnerable, particularly those between 18 and 33 years. Individuals in this age range often experience significant life transitions, including academic, social, and personal adjustments.

From the perspective of educational background, stress was most commonly experienced by respondents whose last level of education was senior high school (SMA). In this group, 15 respondents experienced mild stress, 4 respondents moderate stress, and 3 respondents severe stress. According to Mary C. Townsend (2009), educational background is also considered a predisposing factor for stress, as differences in educational preparation may influence an individual's ability to adapt to academic challenges in higher education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion of the screening for emotional mental disorders—namely depression, anxiety, and stress—among first-year students, the findings indicate that a proportion of students experienced emotional mental health problems. The results showed that 42 students (30%) experienced depression, consisting of 25 students (18%) with mild depression, 13 students (9%) with moderate depression, and 4 students (3%) with severe depression.

In addition, 94 students (67%) experienced anxiety, with 25 students (18%) categorized as having mild anxiety and 48 students (34%) as having moderate anxiety. Meanwhile, 28 students (20%) experienced stress, including 19 students (13%) with mild stress and 6 students (4%) with moderate stress. These



findings highlight that emotional mental health problems, particularly anxiety, are relatively common among first-year university students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Emotional mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress may occur at any time and can affect individuals across different age groups, particularly adolescents and young adults. University students are considered a vulnerable population for experiencing emotional mental health problems due to academic demands and life transitions. Therefore, guidance and monitoring by academic advisors are essential to support students' mental well-being. When necessary, educational institutions are encouraged to collaborate with professional psychologists to provide further consultation and psychological support services.

Early screening for emotional mental disorders—depression, anxiety, and stress—using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-42) can be implemented during the orientation or introduction program for new students. Early detection may help identify students who require psychological support and contribute to the promotion of better mental health among students. For future research, the findings of this study may be expanded by examining the influence of academic programs on emotional mental disorders among university students. In addition, further studies could explore the relationship between students' residential status or domicile and the occurrence of emotional mental health problems.

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