Mental Health as The Key Point of Student Achievement: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Mental health is a very important matter, but it seems to be neglected by many, for example, in educational instances such as university. Students often face many problems while getting involved in learning process at university. Mental health awareness has increased but we still face a world where people with mental health problems face discrimination, and face challenges in getting the help they need. Many people who have a hard time try to hide their feelings for fear of how others will react. Fear of discrimination and feelings of shame are among the main reasons people give for not telling others about their mental health problems. This study is aimed to analyze what to do towards students' mental health so that students will perform better achievement. The subject of this study is university students with various background and age. This study is a descriptive qualitative research: focus group discussion and library study as the method to collect data.

Keywords: mental health, learning strategy, awareness, achievement

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a crucial matter but neglected by many at times, mainly in educational instances such as university. According to Pieper and Uden (2006), mental health is a condition in which people do not experience feelings of guilt about themselves, have a realistic estimate of themselves and can accept their shortcomings or weaknesses, able to deal with problems in their life, have satisfaction in their social life, and find happiness in their life. In brief, mental health is a way of thinking and feeling capable of dealing with ups and downs. Frequently students face many problems while getting involved in learning process at university.

Mental health awareness has grown but people with mental health problems still face discrimination, and face challenges in getting the help they need. Many people who are struggling to hide their feelings for fear of how others will react. Fear of discrimination and feelings of shame are among the main reasons people give for not telling others about their mental health problems. However, this study is aimed to analyze what to do towards students' mental health so that students will perform better achievement. Creating a study place culture where people can be themselves can make it easier for others to talk about mental health issues without fear, and it's easier for them to seek help when needed. It's important that university becomes an environment where people feel safe to be themselves.

At university, students may look or feel very tired. isolates or avoids other students, procrastinates more, or rushes tasks or assignments and becomes chaotic. More obvious signs of mental health problems in students may be seen, such as outbursts of anger or emotion, being absent from many classes, not keeping up their usual appearance or seeing signs that they are not getting enough sleep. A healthy *study place* will not prevent or reduce all mental health problems. Genetics, life experiences, and past trauma all play a role in the development of mental illness. Mental health awareness at educational instances should be combined with learning strategies in order to boost students' performance. According to Jasmina Hasanbegovic (2006), learning strategies refer to students' self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions, which are systematically oriented towards attainment of their goals. Therefore, implementation of appropriate learning strategies is related to student's self-regulation behaviour which in turn should be encouraged by pedagogical designs.

In order to make this research more accurate and reliable, the researcher considers that this study cannot stand without any references. This consideration has brought the researcher to gather several journal articles which are related to this study. The first related study is by Talapko, Peric and Vulic (2021). The journal article mainly discusses the similar topic with this study, which entitled "Mental Health and Physical Activity in Health-Related University Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic". The journal article focuses on mental health and physical activity in health related university students. The limitation of the research is the sample was biased toward women, which is a consequence of the current student body consisting dominantly of female students. Furthermore, the sample was biased towards undergraduate students because they represent the majority of enrolled students. However, the similarities of the research and this study are making university students as the subject and discussing mental health as the research main factor.

The second journal article related to this study is by Soria and Horgos (2021). The journal article mostly discusses a quite similar topic with this study. The title of the journal article is "Factors Associated With College Students' Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic". The journal article focuses on factors which were associated with college student's mental health. The limitation of this research is a limited number of independent variables that makes the study reaches less wide area. What are found similar between the research and this study are having students which the similar age range as the subject and taking mental health as the main object.

What differs this study to the previous study is this study discusses strategies to act towards students' mental health in order that students will perform better achievement. The first study discusses mental health and physical activity in university students during the Covid-19 pandemic and the second related to the factors associated with colleagues' students' mental health. The method used is also different. The data collection method of both related researches is mixed of quantitative and qualitative, while this study applies a full of qualitative method. In brief, the purpose of this study focuses on strategy to cure or to lessen mental health problems so students will improve.

2. METHODS

This study is a descriptive qualitative research. The method used to collect data are library study and focus group discussion (FGD). The subject of this study is university students with various background and age. The data were collected by applying purposeful sampling. According to Creswell (2007, p.125), purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research. Purposeful sampling is employed for the identification and selection of information for the most effective use of limited resources. It is a method which the researcher purposely selected to the limited numbers that can be served as primary data source.

The researcher uses the students opinion through library study and focus group discussion which were conducted online through Zoom Meeting. The topic raised was about how to deal with students mental health at university. There are 40 university students from different background and age (19-24) who participate on the discussion. The discussion was held in 4 sessions with 10 students in each session. The discussion was interactive and all students were given time to speak up related to the raised topic.

The students involved with the research are those who are university students in all semesters. They come from different cities in such as Yogyakarta, Semarang, Surabaya, Jakarta, Bandung, and NTT. They are gathered because they are friends of researchers and friends of researchers' friends. At first researcher asked whether they are interested to be involved in the research. Fortunately, all students who had been asked approved to join the focus group discussion with theme: students mental health.

After the discussion was held, the researcher observes the pattern of students' response from the notes and recordings taken during the focus group discussion. The data is being analyzed by reflecting to the results of focus group discussion and doing library study in order to make the research more reliable. The design applied is suitable for the problem formulation. The sampling that has been chosen is appropriate for the data, since the students involved in this research have various background and age and also have different problems, so it is suitable for the research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By having good mental health, we are able to make the best use of our potential to deal with what happens in life. Mental health is not always the same, it can fluctuate as circumstances change and as we move through different stages in life. Different mental health problems affect people in different ways. Obviously, stress is not good for the brain, and improving mental health practices can reduce the risk. To avoid this, mental health must be considered and maintained. Mental health has crucial benefits, including: reducing anxiety, improving mood, thinking clearly, creating peace within oneself, reducing risk of depression, and improving relationships. The concept of mental health is not necessarily new, but it certainly has more areas of growth in scientific research. This is probably because in history, medicine has studied what went wrong and can then be cured.

Looking up to the focus group discussion that has been held to collect the data, around 70% of students indicates that they are struggling to study well at university because they are tired of the formal routines in class, stressful assignments, extra classes till the evening, a lot of outcomes and also *dramas* that happened around them so when they get home they are already tired and do not have time for themselves and their family. One of the student even said in Indonesian

> *"Aku pernah mau nyerah sama kuliah karena capek aja gitu, tapi aku keinget sama pengorbanan ortu yang luar biasa jadi ya aku berusaha untuk bangkit dan bahkan mencari **dukungan pihak lain**. Alangkah baiknya kalau di **kampus kesehatan mental lebih diperhatiin** sih, karena banyak banget yang di posisi sama kayak aku, bahkan yang lebih parah juga banyak."*

It means that this student is tired with university life, but he remembers how his parents sacrifice so he raised up and even look for supports from others. He suggested that it may be very helpful if more attention towards students mental health are given in university, because many students are in the similar situation or even worse. The word *tired* indicates the mental health problem. Other student said,

> *"Aku rasa diskusi tentang **kesehatan mental penting banget** sih dan banyak hal yang harus dilakuin untuk ngejaga itu. Belum lama ini ada kasus bunuh diri mahasiswa, bukan nggak mungkin kalau penyebabnya karena tekanan yang ada saat kuliah atau yang berhubungan dengan kuliah."*

It means that mental health is really important and people have to act about it. Recently, there was a university student who committed suicide, it is not impossible if the cause of it is the pressure in studying at university or university related matters. It can be simplified that students improvement depends on mental health and there should be strategies made by the university side.

After doing library study and focus group discussion, it can be concluded that there are several strategies that can be used to create a mentally healthy *study-place*. The first one is promoting *life balance* or a balance between studying in class and life. Life balance is an important antecedent of college students' mental health. Educational institutions should place more importance on assisting students with work-life balance in order to improve their college experience (Sprung & Rogers, 2021). Without a healthy life balance, productivity tends to decrease, and students are more likely to burn out. Everyone should develop a rich and full life outside the university such as doing hobbies, spending time with loved ones, and taking time to take care of themselves.

The second strategy is discussing mental health with peers. According to Stiles (1980), the ability to both give and receive valuable advice increased the perceived depth (e.g., power and impact) of guided chats. The ability to chat openly about shared interests and experiences in unguided chats promoted a sense of personal connection that contributed to smoothness, which has also been shown to be an important dimension of success in traditional therapy sessions, as cited in O'Leary, Schueler, Wobbrock, & Pratt (2018). There is no need to be afraid of or worried to raise issues related to stress, depression, anxiety, or other mental illnesses. Explain that everyone struggles sometimes to stay mentally healthy.

The third strategy is making health a priority. Exercise, eat healthy, and doing recreational activities are some simple ways to build mental strength and improve mental health. Encouraging students to develop good habits such as offering bonuses to students who participate in wellness programs, or offering yoga class. Intentional exercise has the benefit of improving mental health, which is a response to chronic stress at epidemic levels (McLaughlin, Gomez, Baran, & Conrad, 2007).

The last one is organizing *in-service* programs. Providing *in-service* to students on self-care, stress management, and resilience. Hiring a therapist to give a half-day workshops several times a year can go a long way in preventing problems and emphasizing the importance of building healthy strategies into everyday life. Training *in-service* can help students to reach their greatest potential. According to Weist, Meilin, Chambers, Lever, Haber, & Blaber (2012), school-employed mental health professionals are trained to deliver a range of preventive and intervention services, but position constraints may prevent them from doing so. By joining all the 4 strategies at school, students mental health should be better and it will help students to improve. Having a good mental health will assist students to achieve their maximum potential.

4. CONCLUSION

Overall, data reveals that many students have mental health problems and agree that mental health is very important and educational instances such as universities need to put more attention to create a mentally healthy studying environment. The strategies that can be applied to help students to reach their maximum potentials are by promoting life balance, discussing mental health among peers, making health a priority, and organizing *in-service* events. Paying attention to and maintaining health in the studying environment will certainly have a positive impact on students' performance and willingness to study.

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