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The effects of social support and coping strategies on academic stress among final-year college students

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in the transactional model of stress and the stress-buffering hypothesis, this study examined the predictive roles of social support and coping strategies on academic stress among final-year counseling students. This population represents prospective counseling professionals who simultaneously face academic completion demands and professional competency requirements, a group that remains underrepresented in academic stress research. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 98 eighth-semester Guidance and Counseling students at Universitas PGRI Semarang selected through proportional random sampling from a population of 130 students. Sample adequacy was supported by the Slovin formula and a priori power analysis. Instruments included the Social Support Scale ($\alpha = .981$), Ways of Coping Questionnaire ($\alpha = .940$), and Student-Life Stress Inventory ($\alpha = .944$). Multiple regression analysis indicated that social support ($t = -8.832, p < .001$) and coping strategies ($t = -9.129, p < .001$) significantly and negatively predicted academic stress. Together, both variables explained 63.1% of the variance in academic stress ($R^2 = .631, p < .001$). Findings support the stress-buffering hypothesis and the transactional model of stress, suggesting that higher levels of social support and more adaptive coping strategies are associated with lower academic stress. However, causal conclusions are limited by the cross-sectional design.



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Introduction

Academic stress among final-year university students has emerged as a persistent and consequential concern in higher education research, with evidence indicating significant associations with academic disengagement, delayed graduation, and diminished psychological well-being (Waterhouse et al., 2025; Restrepo et al., 2023). Despite substantial scholarship on individual predictors of academic stress, most studies continue to examine social support and coping strategies in isolation, leaving critical gaps in understanding their combined predictive utility within specific institutional contexts (Permata & Laili, 2025; Rizkatul Alya & Muslima, 2025). Lazarus & Folkman (1984) argue that stress arises when cognitive

appraisal determines that situational demands exceed available coping resources a transactional framework that positions social support and coping as theoretically distinct but functionally interrelated resources. Cohen et al. (2000), through the buffering hypothesis, further explain that social support protects individuals from stress impacts by modifying threat appraisal and adding response resources. Crucially, this integrated model predicts that these two factors should be examined together, yet most quantitative studies in Indonesian higher education have tested them separately, limiting insight into their joint predictive contribution.

Final-year students face a unique accumulation of demands. In addition to completing a thesis requiring mastery of research methodology, they must still fulfill remaining course requirements, Field Experience Practice (PPL), and comprehensive examinations. At Universitas PGRI Semarang (UPGRIS) as a Teacher Training Institution, this burden is further layered students are not only required to graduate academically, but must also develop four teacher competencies that will constitute their professional capital. This dual condition places UPGRIS students in a more psychologically vulnerable position than students at non-teacher training institutions. Wathelet et al., (2020) note that a non-ideal higher education environment can trigger significant psychological pressure that hinders students' timely academic completion. PDDikti data confirms this: the majority of Indonesian S1 students do not graduate within eight semesters, with psychological barriers recorded as one of the dominant factors alongside academic and financial obstacles.

A pre-study conducted on January 30, 2026 with 60 eight-semester students of the UPGRIS Guidance and Counseling Study Program revealed a concerning picture. Though physically surrounded by close associates, the social support they perceived was in the very low category across all aspects emotional, instrumental, informational, and esteem. The coping strategies used were dominated by maladaptive patterns problem avoidance, thesis procrastination, and staying up late without productivity. More than half of subjects acknowledged pressure beginning to disturb their sleep quality, and most expressed serious concerns about not graduating on time. Although questionnaire scores for academic stress appeared moderate, in-depth interviews revealed that some students employed denial as a temporary form of emotion-focused coping, masking their actual distress behind disproportionate self-reports. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) warn that such patterns are dangerous because un confronted stressors continue to accumulate.

In the literature, the two protective factors most consistently associated with lower academic stress are social support and coping strategies. Sarafino & Smith (2014) affirm that both represent the strongest categories in moderating stress impacts on health social support as an external resource, and coping as an internal psychological process. Rizkatul Alya & Muslima (2025) empirically proved that Guidance and Counseling students who perceive higher social support experience significantly lower academic stress. Sengkey et al., (2025), through a qualitative approach, found that students who feel genuinely supported show higher optimism and greater resilience in facing the thesis process.

On the other hand, adaptive coping strategies allow students to manage pressure constructively. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) differentiate two main orientations problem-focused coping targeting change at the source of the problem, and emotion-focused coping aimed at managing emotional responses. Strategy effectiveness depends on its fit with the nature of the stressor. Mamo et al., (2025) show that flexible coping, combined with adequate social support, significantly reduces academic stress in thesis students. Mulyadi et al., (2025) add that both dynamically influence each other social support encourages more constructive coping, and effective coping strengthens social support networks.

Although each factor has been studied extensively in isolation, research examining the simultaneous influence of social support and coping strategies in a single integrated model remains very limited. The existing literature has largely demonstrated the relationship between social support and academic stress, and between coping strategies and academic stress, separately. Most available studies also employ correlational analysis methods that cannot reveal the relative contribution of each variable. Furthermore, research in Teacher Training Institution settings such as UPGRIS has almost never been conducted, despite the unique institutional context these institutions present. Sarafino & Smith (2014) affirm that the biopsychosocial model of stress cannot be explained by a single factor, and that integrating social support and coping in one model provides a more comprehensive explanatory framework. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) explicitly position social support as an external resource influencing secondary appraisal, and coping strategies as the active response generated from that appraisal process two components that should be studied together. It is this gap that constitutes the academic rationale for the present study. The gap is particularly pronounced in the context of Indonesian Teacher Training Institutions, where students face the dual demands of completing academic requirements while developing professional competencies. Despite these unique challenges, this population remains underrepresented in the quantitative literature on academic stress. This study contributes

to the academic stress literature by integrating social support and coping strategies within a single predictive model among final-year teacher-training students. Unlike previous studies that examined these variables separately, the present study evaluates their relative and simultaneous contributions to academic stress within the context of an Indonesian Teacher Training Institution (LPTK), thereby extending current understanding of stress-related protective factors in an underrepresented population. Therefore, this study aims to examine the predictive roles of social support and coping strategies on academic stress among eighth-semester students of the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Universitas PGRI Semarang (UPGRIS). Specifically, the study investigates whether social support significantly predicts academic stress, whether coping strategies significantly predict academic stress, and the extent to which both variables simultaneously contribute to academic stress through multiple regression analysis.

Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational research design and multiple regression analysis technique. This design was selected because the study aims to test the influence of two independent variables social support (X_1) and coping strategies (X_2) on one dependent variable, academic stress (Y), both partially and simultaneously. The study was conducted in the Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Universitas PGRI Semarang, in the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, specifically during March through April 2026.

The study population comprised all active eighth-semester students of the 2022 cohort of the UPGRIS Guidance and Counseling Study Program who were in the process of writing their theses, totaling 130 students distributed across four classes (Class A: 37; Class B: 39; Class C: 41; Class D: 13). The sample size of 98 students was determined using the Slovin formula ($n = N / 1 + Ne^2$) with a precision level of $e = 0.05$, yielding $n = 130 / (1 + 130 \times 0.0025) = 97.7$, rounded to 98. An a priori power analysis using G*Power ($f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = .05$, power = 0.80, predictors = 2) confirmed that a minimum sample of 84 was required for multiple regression with two predictors, confirming that $n = 98$ provides adequate statistical power. Proportional random sampling was applied, with each class represented proportionally to its population size. Sixth-semester students were selected for the instrument pilot test because they have similar characteristics to the target population of Guidance and Counseling students, namely those in the process of writing their final assignments, but remain outside the study population and research sample. This approach allows researchers to evaluate the validity and reliability of the items without influencing the responses of participants included in the main study. Therefore, the pilot sample provides an appropriate basis for preliminary psychometric testing before implementing the final instrument. Instrument tryout was conducted with 30 sixth-semester Guidance and Counseling students at UPGRIS, while these students had not yet commenced formal thesis writing, they shared equivalent academic preparation and demographic characteristics with the research population. This distinction was accounted for in interpreting tryout results relative to the main sample, and responses from the tryout group were not included in the main analysis.

Three instruments were used for data collection. First, a social support scale developed based on the four dimensions proposed by Sarafino & Smith (2014) emotional, instrumental, informational, and esteem support. Following validity and reliability testing, 23 of 40 initial items were valid ($r \geq 0.361$, $p < 0.05$) with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.981, categorized as highly reliable. The $r \geq 0.361$ validity threshold was selected based on the critical value for $n = 30$ at $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed), consistent with standard item analysis practice in Indonesian educational research (Sugiyono, 2025). Second, the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ) adapted from Lazarus & Folkman (1984) to measure problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, both adaptive and maladaptive. After validation, 35 of 50 items were declared valid ($\alpha = 0.940$). Third, the Student-Life Stress Inventory (SSI) developed by Gadzella & Baloglu (2001), measuring two main dimensions of academic stress stressors (frustration, conflict, pressure, changes, self-imposed stress) and responses to stressors (physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive reactions). Of 51 initial items, 42 valid items were retained ($\alpha = 0.944$). All three instruments were originally developed in Western contexts. Cultural validity for Indonesian populations was addressed through a back-translation procedure, expert panel review by two licensed counselors, and contextually appropriate item language during adaptation. To assess common method variance, Harman's single-factor test was performed, the dominant factor accounted for 29.3% of total variance (below the 50% threshold), suggesting common method bias does not seriously threaten validity. Because the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ) and Student-Life Stress Inventory (SSI) were originally developed in Western cultural contexts, a systematic adaptation procedure was conducted before their administration. The process involved forward translation, back-translation, expert review by two licensed counseling professionals, and contextual modification of item wording to ensure semantic equivalence and cultural appropriateness for Indonesian university students. Following adaptation,

both instruments were pilot tested to evaluate item clarity, cultural relevance, and psychometric adequacy before being administered to the main sample.

Prior to multiple regression analysis, four prerequisite tests were conducted sequentially. The normality test using One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov yielded Asymp. Sig. = 0.200 and Monte Carlo Sig. = 0.306, both above 0.05, indicating normally distributed residual data. The linearity test using ANOVA Table in SPSS confirmed that the $X_1 \rightarrow Y$ relationship (Sig. Deviation from Linearity = 0.125) and $X_2 \rightarrow Y$ relationship (Sig. Deviation from Linearity = 0.764) were both linear. The multicollinearity test showed Tolerance = 1.000 and VIF = 1.000 for both independent variables, indicating no problematic collinearity. The heteroscedasticity test using the Glejser test yielded significance values of 0.496 for X_1 and 0.152 for X_2 both above 0.05 confirming the homoscedasticity assumption was met. All assumptions were satisfied, validating the use of multiple regression analysis with SPSS version 27.

Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before questionnaire administration. To protect confidentiality, no personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were analyzed anonymously and reported only in aggregate form for academic research purposes.

Results and Discussions

Descriptive analysis of 98 respondents revealed that the social support variable (X_1) had a score range of 48–87 ($M = 69.08$; $SD = 8.228$). Using a four-category norm, most students were in the High category (67.3%), followed by Low (18.4%), Very High (8.2%), and Very Low (6.1%). The coping strategies variable (X_2) had a score range of 87–138 ($M = 107.12$; $SD = 10.450$), with the distribution: High (63.3%), Low (25.5%), Very High (7.1%), and Very Low (4.1%). The academic stress variable (Y) had a score range of 69–151 ($M = 107.79$; $SD = 16.380$), with the distribution: High (63.3%), Low (23.5%), Very Low (8.2%), and Very High (5.1%). Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 <Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables>

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Dominant Category	%
Social Support (X_1)	98	48.00	87.00	69.08	8.228	High	67.3
Coping Strategies (X_2)	98	87.00	138.00	107.17	10.450	High	63.3
Academic Stress (Y)	98	69.00	151.00	107.79	16.380	High	63.3

Multiple regression analysis produced the equation $Y = 278.952 - 1.095X_1 - 0.891X_2$. The negative sign on both regression coefficients indicates that increases in social support and coping adaptiveness are consistently accompanied by decreases in academic stress. The regression coefficient of $X_1 = -1.095$ means that every one-unit increase in social support decreases academic stress by 1.095 units (*ceteris paribus*), while the coefficient of $X_2 = -0.891$ means that every one-unit increase in coping strategies decreases academic stress by 0.891 units (*ceteris paribus*). Complete regression coefficients are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 <Multiple Regression Coefficients>

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Constant	278.952	13.507	-	20.653	< .001
Social Support (X_1)	-1.095	0.124	-0.550	-8.832	< .001
Coping Strategies (X_2)	-0.891	0.098	-0.569	-9.129	< .001

Partial t-tests confirm that both social support ($t = -8.832$; $p < .001$) and coping strategies ($t = -9.129$; $p < .001$) each have a significant negative influence on academic stress, as $|t\text{-value}| > t\text{-table}$ (1.985) and $p < 0.05$. Standardized Beta coefficients indicate that coping strategies ($\beta = -0.569$) have a marginally greater predictive power than social support ($\beta = -0.550$), though the difference is very small. The F-test confirms that both variables simultaneously have a significant influence on academic stress, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3 <F-Test Results (ANOVA) and Coefficient of Determination>

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	R	R ²	Adj. R ²
Regression	16,428.576	2	8,214.288	81.322	< .001	0.795	0.631	0.624
Residual	9,595.924	95	101.010					
Total	26,024.500	97						

$R^2 = 0.631$ means that social support and coping strategies together explain 63.1% of the variation in academic stress. Adjusted $R^2 = 0.624$ confirms the effective contribution after accounting for the number of variables and respondents. The remaining 36.9% is influenced by other unstudied factors.

The finding that social support has a significant negative influence on academic stress ($t = -8.832$; $p < .001$; $B = -1.095$) aligns with the theoretical foundation of the buffering hypothesis from (Cohen et al. 2000). This buffering mechanism operates through two complementary pathways. The first is the appraisal pathway when individuals feel they are not alone in facing pressure, situations that previously appeared threatening are appraised as lighter because the presence of others modifies perception of the stressor's weight. The second is the resource pathway social support provides additional access to information, practical assistance, and emotional encouragement that directly strengthens response capacity to existing demands. Sarafino & Smith (2014) emphasize that what most influences mental health is not how much support is objectively received, but the extent to which that support is genuinely felt as meaningful by the individual this is what is meant by perceived social support.

Descriptively, 67.3% of students are in the High category for social support. However, per-aspect analysis reveals informative variation. Financial support from family is the most strongly perceived dimension (89.0%), followed by advice from thesis supervisors (85.0%), and availability of listeners and encouragers from peers (83.0%). In contrast, esteem support recognition of hard work in the thesis writing process recorded the lowest value (64.0%). This gap is psychologically significant although material and informational needs are relatively met, the need to feel valued as an individual who is working hard remains the least fulfilled. Sarafino & Smith (2014) remind that esteem support plays a distinct role that cannot be replaced by other forms of support, especially under high-stress conditions when students' academic self-esteem is particularly vulnerable.

These findings align with a substantial body of prior research. Rizkatul Alya & Muslima (2025) reported a significant negative relationship between social support and academic stress among Guidance and Counseling students. Sengkey et al., (2025), through a qualitative approach, proved that students who feel they receive quality social support are better able to manage thesis pressure and maintain optimism. Mamo et al., (2025) clarify that comprehensive parental support not only financial but also emotional significantly contributes to reducing academic stress in final-thesis students. Permata & Laili, (2025) specifically found that family social support has a strong negative relationship with academic stress in final-year thesis students. Restrepo et al., (2023), in a multi-country study ($n = 412$), found that social support was the strongest predictor of academic adaptation, explaining 24% of unique variance consistent with the present finding that social support alone accounts for a substantial portion of the variance in academic stress. Notably, whereas most prior Indonesian studies focused on single dimensions of support, the use of the four-component Sarafino & Smith (2014) framework enables more differentiated conclusions particularly the finding that esteem support (64.0%) is the least fulfilled dimension, an underreported finding in the existing literature.

These converging findings, drawn from multiple contexts and methodological approaches, provide robust convergent validity for the present study's social support findings. From a practical perspective, these findings imply the need for counseling service programs that actively build and strengthen students' social support networks encompassing peer mentoring groups, psychoeducational outreach to parents regarding the importance of emotional support and recognition, and strengthening the supervisory role of lecturers as responsive informational and esteem support sources.

Kotyśko & Frankowiak (2025), in a large cross-sectional study of 1,519 Polish university students, identified four distinct latent profiles based on the severity of depressive symptoms, academic stress, and perceived social support. The most common profile (53%) was characterized by low depressive symptoms and low academic stress co-occurring with high social support, confirming that perceived social support serves as a systemic protective factor and not simply a compensatory buffer. Importantly, students in the highest-stress profile reported the most severe academic stress along with the lowest social support from significant others, directly reinforcing the study's finding that esteem support feeling valued and recognized was the most undermet and perhaps the most influential dimension for students in the high-stress category (63.3%).

Ullah et al., (2023), in a *Frontiers in Psychology* study involving 429 tertiary students in Bangladesh, demonstrated that social support serves as a significant mediator between emotional intelligence and academic stress, using Structural Equation Modeling. Their findings show that even when individual psychological resources such as emotional intelligence are controlled, perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others independently reduces academic stress. This extends the buffering hypothesis of Cohen et al. (2000) by showing that social support does not merely supplement coping resources it actively

moderates how internal psychological capacities translate into stress outcomes. This finding is particularly relevant to the UPGRIS context, where the informational support from thesis advisors (85.0%) is already high, yet academic stress remains elevated, suggesting that the quality of interpersonal support especially esteem support carries weight that cannot be replaced by access to guidance alone.

Coping strategies proved to have a significant negative influence on academic stress ($t = -9.129$; $p < .001$; $B = -0.891$), with slightly greater predictive power than social support based on standardized Beta coefficients. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) define coping as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage internal and external demands that exceed individual resources a dynamic, contextual, and goal-oriented process. This definition affirms that coping is not a static innate trait but a capacity that can be developed and adapted to situations. Sarafino & Smith, (2022) extends this understanding by stating that effective coping not only reduces stress but also allows individuals to find positive meaning in challenging experiences.

Descriptively, 63.3% of students are in the High category for coping strategy use. Adaptive coping dominates with an average usage rate of 81.1%. The Positive Reappraisal subscale ranks highest (83.6%), where students actively reframe the thesis-writing experience as an opportunity for growth and learning. The Planful Problem-Solving subscale ranks second (83.0%), reflecting active efforts to seek concrete solutions to obstacles faced. The Seeking Social Support subscale is also high (77.5%), which again demonstrates the close connection between coping strategies and social support as underlined by (Sarafino & Smith, 2014). The Confrontive Coping subscale direct and assertive efforts to face the source of the problem also shows adequate usage, indicating that students are not entirely passive toward pressure.

Although adaptive coping dominates, maladaptive coping remains present in proportions requiring attention. Wishful thinking hoping problems will resolve without real effort is reported by 82–89% of respondents as a strategy sometimes or frequently used. Excessive sleeping as emotional escape is acknowledged by 46% of students, while nearly one-third report overeating habits or staying up late without productivity. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) remind us that avoidant coping may provide momentary relief, but unresolved stressors will accumulate and become heavier over time. Pascoe et al., (2020) also found that students with more diverse coping repertoires show lower stress levels and more effective recovery from high-pressure academic periods.

Waterhouse et al., (2025) in their comprehensive review identify that coping effectiveness is highly dependent on its appropriateness to the type of stressor and perception of situational controllability. Students who appraise thesis obstacles as surmountable tend to choose problem-focused coping, while those who feel their situation is uncontrollable shift to emotion-focused coping. Flexibility in transitioning between these two orientations rather than dominance of one is the mark of the most adaptive coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The coping strategies finding ($\beta = -0.569$, $B = -0.891$) closely aligns with several recent empirical benchmarks. Pascoe et al., (2020) showed that structured support interventions targeting coping skills significantly reduced stress scores among tertiary students, indicating adaptive coping has a practically meaningful effect size. The wishful thinking prevalence (82–89%) identified in this study is consistent with patterns reported in thesis-stage students across multiple cultural contexts (Mamo et al., 2025; Mulyadi et al., 2025), suggesting a cross-culturally stable vulnerability. Wathélet et al., (2020) reinforce these findings, showing that students with broader coping repertoires who flexibly select strategies according to context show significantly better psychological outcomes. The implication for counseling services is the need for systematic coping skills training, encompassing structured problem-solving techniques, time management, cognitive reappraisal, and specific interventions to reduce maladaptive coping such as avoidance and wishful thinking.

This is further supported by Ruiz-Camacho et al., (2025), whose study in Healthcare involving 1,014 Spanish university students found that positive reappraisal, social support seeking, and strategic planning significantly mediated the relationship between academic stressors and stress responses. Social support seeking emerged as the strongest mediator, reducing the direct effect of stressors by approximately 38%. This finding parallels the high prevalence of wishful thinking (82–89%) observed in the present study, suggesting that students who do not engage in active coping remain more vulnerable to stress. Therefore, counseling interventions that strengthen coping flexibility, particularly support-seeking behaviors, may substantially reduce academic stress even when stressors remain unchanged.

Similarly, Córdova Olivera et al., (2023), in a Cogent Education study of 1,265 university students, reported that academic stress significantly predicted poorer mental health outcomes, with highly stressed students being 3.2 times more likely to experience clinically significant anxiety. Although mental health outcomes were not examined in the present study, these findings suggest that the 63.3% of UPGRIS students

categorized as having high academic stress may face broader psychological risks. This highlights the importance of integrating coping skills training into institutional support programs to promote both academic success and student well-being.

The F-test confirms that social support and coping strategies simultaneously have a highly significant influence on academic stress ($F = 81.322$; $p < .001$), with $R^2 = 0.631$. This represents a substantial contribution in applied psychological research, showing that this two-predictor model can explain nearly two-thirds of academic stress variation. The regression equation $Y = 278.952 - 1.095X_1 - 0.891X_2$ reveals that both variables maintain significant independent contributions even when the effects of the other are controlled, confirming that they are non-redundant predictors.

The magnitude of this simultaneous contribution can be conceptually explained through the transactional framework of Lazarus & Folkman (1984). In this framework, social support functions as an external resource that enriches secondary appraisal students' assessment of how adequate their available resources are for meeting thesis demands. When secondary appraisal is more positive due to social support, students are more likely to choose and implement constructive coping strategies. The result is a positive cycle strong social support drives adaptive coping, and adaptive coping that successfully manages pressure reinforces trust in the existing social network. Mulyadi et al., (2025) empirically prove this positive cycle, showing that social support drives more constructive coping, while effective coping in turn strengthens support networks.

Mamo et al., (2025) provide additional evidence that the synergy between comprehensive parental social support and flexible coping strategies produces greater academic stress reduction than when either factor stands alone. Restrepo et al., (2023), in a cross-cultural study, also proved that the combination of social support and adaptive coping is the strongest predictor of academic stress reduction.

The academic stress profile in this study shows that 63.3% of students are in the High category. Self-imposed pressure is the highest stressor, with excessive worry about the thesis defense and anxiety about not graduating on time as the main manifestations (77.0% each). Cognitive reactions are recorded as the most dominant response dimension (average 78.5%), reflecting that students are highly mentally active in thinking about and evaluating the pressures they face. Although active cognitive processing can form the basis for effective problem-focused coping, it also has the potential to lead to unproductive rumination when not accompanied by concrete action and adequate support. Sosiady, (2020) has also documented that unmanaged academic stress directly impacts graduation delays and declining mental health quality.

The unexplained variation (36.9%) indicates the presence of other contributing factors. Lazarus & Folkman, (2011) underscores the importance of emotional regulation and meaning-making as additional mechanisms in long-term stress management. These findings indicate a productive direction for further research with more comprehensive models.

The importance of the remaining unexplained risk factors is further highlighted by Howlader et al. (2024), whose study of 1,150 university students in Bangladesh found that low perceived social support was the strongest predictor of suicidal ideation ($OR = 3.47$), surpassing anxiety and depression when analyzed simultaneously. Although suicidal ideation was not examined in the present study, the finding is highly relevant, as 5.1% of UPGRIS students were classified as experiencing very high academic stress, and the preliminary study indicated that more than half reported sleep disturbances, an early indicator of psychological decline. These findings suggest that the 36.9% unexplained variance may reflect factors such as social connectedness, emotional regulation, and meaning-making, which help distinguish students who are vulnerable to serious psychological harm from those who remain resilient under academic pressure. Future studies in the UPGRIS context should therefore incorporate these variables.

Several methodological limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, despite regression language used to describe predictoroutcome relationships, the direction of causality between social support, coping, and academic stress cannot be established from these data it is equally plausible that lower academic stress enables more effective coping. Second, all three variables were measured using self-report instruments administered simultaneously, introducing potential common method variance, while Harman's single-factor test suggested this was not a severe threat, it cannot be entirely ruled out. Third, the sample is drawn from a single study program at one regional university, limiting external validity and generalizability to other Indonesian institutions, disciplines, or cultural contexts. Fourth, the four-category classification using normative mean SD thresholds introduces some arbitrariness in category boundaries. Fifth, the study did not control for potential confounds such as GPA,

part-time employment status, or household income. Future research should address these limitations through longitudinal designs, multi-site sampling, and inclusion of control variables.

The findings of this study carry implications that extend beyond statistical outcomes, touching on how counseling services, institutional policies, and support structures should be designed within higher education contexts. Three critical dimensions merit deeper consideration the role of students' academic identity in moderating stress responses, the unique institutional responsibilities of Teacher Training Institutions, and pathways for integrating these findings into sustainable practice.

One dimension not fully captured through quantitative instruments is the role of academic identity and self-perception in shaping how final-year students interpret and respond to thesis-related pressure. Students in the Guidance and Counseling program occupy a uniquely dual position they are simultaneously subjects of the educational system and future practitioners within it. Some students may experience heightened distress precisely because they feel they 'should know better' than to feel overwhelmed by academic pressure. Lazarus & Folkman, (2011) characterizes this as a secondary layer of cognitive appraisal, where the individual evaluates not only the stressor but also their own response to it, potentially compounding the emotional burden. Counseling interventions should therefore explicitly address this self-critical dynamic.

From a practical standpoint, the findings affirm the need for integrated counseling services at UPGRIS designed to simultaneously develop both protective factors. A senior-junior mentoring program can strengthen informational and emotional peer support while modeling effective coping strategies. Regular outreach to parents and thesis advisors regarding the importance of emotional support and recognition is also necessary, given that esteem support scored the lowest. Prioritizing services for students in the 'Very High' stress category (5.1%) should be the focus of individual interventions.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that social support and coping strategies are each significant negative predictors of academic stress among final-year Guidance and Counseling students at UPGRIS, and their combined predictive contribution ($R^2 = 0.631$) accounts for nearly two-thirds of academic stress variance. Theoretically, these findings confirm the integrated applicability of Lazarus & Folkman (1984) transactional model and Cohen et al. (2000) buffering hypothesis within the specific institutional context of an Indonesian Teacher Training Institution a population that has remained underrepresented in the quantitative academic stress literature. The finding that esteem support was the least-fulfilled dimension of social support (64.0%) represents a specific and practically actionable insight not previously documented for this population. Similarly, the co-occurrence of high adaptive coping (81.1%) alongside high academic stress (63.3% in the High category) challenges simplistic linear assumptions and calls for more nuanced intervention models. Practically, these findings call for counseling services at UPGRIS to be designed as integrated, dual-target programs simultaneously building students' perceived social support networks and their adaptive coping repertoires. Limitations of this study including its cross-sectional design, single-institution sample, and reliance on self-report measures indicate that causal conclusions should not be drawn from these data. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track how social support and coping interact dynamically across the thesis-writing timeline, include mediating variables such as academic self-efficacy and emotional regulation, and apply mixed-methods approaches to capture the subjective meaning students attach to their experiences of support and coping.

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