



The Relationship Between Social Support and Academic Stress Among Migrant University Students in Jakarta

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aimed to examine the relationship between perceived social support and academic stress among migrant university students in DKI Jakarta, Indonesia.

Methodology: This study employed a quantitative correlational design involving 386 migrant university students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using the Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Validity and reliability tests were conducted, followed by normality testing using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. Because the data were not normally distributed, hypothesis testing was performed using Spearman’s rank correlation analysis.

Main Findings: The results revealed a significant positive relationship between perceived social support and academic stress among migrant university students ($r = 0.627$, $p < 0.05$). The majority of respondents were categorized as having high levels of academic stress and high levels of perceived social support. The findings indicate that students reporting higher social support also tended to report higher academic stress.

Novelty/Originality of this study: Previous studies generally reported that social support was associated with lower academic stress. In contrast, this study found a positive relationship between social support and academic stress among migrant university students in a metropolitan setting. The findings provide new insights into the psychosocial dynamics of migrant students and suggest that social support may coexist with heightened academic pressure in urban higher education environments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of higher education institutions in Jakarta has positioned the city as one of the primary destinations for students pursuing tertiary education in Indonesia [1]. The concentration of prominent universities, broader academic opportunities, and expectations of future career mobility have encouraged thousands of students from various regions to migrate to Jakarta each year [2]. However, the transition from their hometowns to an urban metropolitan environment frequently places migrant students in psychologically demanding situations. In addition to facing academic workloads, competitive learning climates, and institutional demands [3], migrant students are also required to adapt to social [4], cultural, and economic changes simultaneously [5]. Separation from family, financial pressure, limited emotional attachment, and the necessity to establish new social networks often intensify psychological vulnerability among migrant students [6]. Under these circumstances, academic demands are no longer perceived merely as educational responsibilities, but also

as persistent stressors capable of triggering emotional exhaustion [7], anxiety, cognitive burden, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic functioning [8]. Consequently, academic stress has emerged as one of the most prominent psychological issues experienced by migrant university students [9], [10], specially in urban educational settings such as Jakarta [11].

Within the context of migrant students, social support plays a critical role in helping individuals manage academic pressure and psychological adjustment [12]. Social support refers to an individual's perception regarding the availability of emotional, informational, and interpersonal assistance obtained from family, peers, and significant others [13]. The presence of supportive social relationships may strengthen coping capacity, reduce feelings of isolation, and enhance psychological resilience when students encounter academic challenges [14]. Conversely, inadequate social support may intensify feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and maladaptive responses toward academic demands [15]. For migrant students, the need for social support becomes increasingly crucial because geographical separation from family often limits access to primary emotional resources that previously functioned as psychological protection [16]. In metropolitan environments characterized by high competitiveness and social anonymity, perceived social support may determine how migrant students interpret and respond to academic stressors [17].

Although studies examining academic stress and social support among university students have increased substantially, most have focused on general student populations. Chen et al. [18] and Prayitno et al. [19] consistently reported that higher social support was associated with lower levels of academic stress among university students. However, empirical evidence specifically addressing migrant university students living in highly urbanized environments remains limited, particularly in Indonesia. McLean [20] highlighted that domestic migrant students experience unique psychosocial challenges arising from academic competition, urban adaptation, financial pressures, and separation from their primary family support systems. Consequently, it remains unclear whether the conventional stress-buffering role of social support adequately explains academic stress among migrant students in metropolitan settings such as Jakarta.

The urgency of this study arises from the increasing number of migrant university students studying in Jakarta and the growing concern regarding student mental health in highly competitive urban higher education environments. Migrant students are simultaneously required to cope with academic demands, independent living, financial challenges, and social adaptation, making them particularly vulnerable to academic stress. Nevertheless, empirical investigations specifically focusing on this population remain scarce. Yuhuan [21] also emphasized the need for context-specific evidence to better understand psychosocial adaptation among migrant university students in Indonesia.

The novelty of this study lies in its examination of the relationship between perceived social support and academic stress among migrant university students in Jakarta, a population that has received limited empirical attention in previous research. Unlike the studies conducted Chen et al. [18] and Prayitno et al. [19] and other previous researchers that predominantly investigated general university students and consistently reported the stress-buffering role of social support, the present study focuses specifically on domestic migrant students living in a metropolitan environment. Furthermore, this study identified a positive relationship between perceived social support and academic stress, providing an alternative perspective to the dominant findings reported in previous studies and extending current understanding of psychosocial adaptation among migrant university students. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the relationship between perceived social support and academic stress among migrant university students in Jakarta. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of psychosocial perspectives on student adaptation by demonstrating that the relationship between social support and academic stress may vary across sociocultural and educational contexts. Practically, the findings are expected to provide empirical evidence for universities, counselors, and mental health practitioners to strengthen early identification of academic stress, develop more responsive psychological support services, and design adaptation programs specifically tailored for migrant university students in metropolitan higher education environments.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research Design and Approach

This study employed a quantitative non-experimental design with a causality approach to examine the role of social support in predicting academic stress among migrant university students in Jakarta. The quantitative approach was selected because it emphasizes numerical data obtained through systematic measurement and statistical analysis procedures. Meanwhile, the causality approach was used to identify the predictive relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable without manipulating research conditions directly.

The study involved two primary variables, namely perceived social support as the independent variable and academic stress as the dependent variable. Academic stress referred to students' subjective perceptions of academic pressures accompanied by physiological, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive reactions emerging in

response to academic stressors. Meanwhile, perceived social support referred to students' perceptions regarding the availability of support from family, peers, and significant others.

2.2. Research Location and Time

The study was conducted in the Special Capital Region of Jakarta, Indonesia, during the 2025–2026 academic year. Jakarta was selected as the research setting because it represents one of the largest metropolitan and educational centers in Indonesia, attracting a substantial number of migrant students from various regions. Data collection was carried out over several months through online questionnaire distribution targeting university students residing and studying in Jakarta.

2.3. Population and Sampling

The population of this study consisted of all university students in Jakarta, totaling approximately 768,603 students in 2025. From this population, the sample size was determined using the Isaac and Michael formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a minimum sample requirement of 386 respondents. This study employed a purposive sampling technique because the participants were selected based on specific inclusion criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. The respondents were active undergraduate students enrolled in universities in Jakarta during the 2025–2026 academic year, particularly students in semesters seven to fourteen, aged between 18 and 25 years old, originating from outside Jakarta, not living with their parents, and categorized as migrant students.

2.4. Research Instruments

This study used two psychological scales, namely the Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Both instruments were administered in the form of self-report questionnaires using Likert-type response scales.

Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI)

Academic stress was measured using the Student Life Stress Inventory developed by Gadzella and adapted into the Indonesian language version [22]. The instrument measures two major dimensions consisting of stressors and reactions to stressors. The stressor dimensions include frustration, conflict, pressure, changes, and self-imposed demands, whereas the reactions to stressors include physiological, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive appraisal responses [23]. Initially, the instrument consisted of 51 items. After validity testing, 42 items were retained and used in the final data collection process. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always). The reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.889, indicating high internal consistency.

Table 1. Blueprint of Student Life Stress Inventory After Validity Testing

Dimension	Indicator	Item Numbers	Total Items
Stressors	Frustration	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7	6
	Conflict	8, 9, 10	3
	Pressure	11, 12, 13, 14	4
	Changes	15, 16, 17	3
	Self-imposed Demands	19, 20, 21, 22, 23	5
Reactions to Stressors	Physiological	24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 35, 37	10
	Emotional	38, 39, 40, 41	4
	Behavioral	42, 46, 47, 48, 49	5
	Cognitive Appraisal	50, 51	2
Total			42

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

Perceived social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support developed by Zimet and adapted into the Indonesian language version. The instrument measures students' perceptions regarding support received from family, peers, and significant others. The MSPSS consisted of 12 items measured using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated higher levels of perceived social support [24]. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.892, indicating strong internal consistency.

Table 2. Blueprint of Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

Dimension	Indicator	Item Numbers	Total Items
Family	Perception of family support	1, 2, 3, 4	4
Friends	Perception of peer support	5, 6, 7, 8	4
Significant Others	Perception of support from significant others	9, 10, 11, 12	4
Total			12

2.5. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted online using Google Forms distributed through WhatsApp groups, Telegram groups, social media platforms, and personal communication channels. The online distribution strategy was selected to facilitate broader access to migrant students dispersed across different universities in Jakarta. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Only respondents who met the inclusion criteria were allowed to participate in the study.

2.6. Data Analysis

Several statistical procedures were conducted to analyze the data obtained in this study. First, construct validity testing was performed by examining the correlation between item scores and total scores to assess the accuracy and appropriateness of the measurement instruments. Items with correlation coefficients greater than 0.30 were considered valid. Reliability testing was subsequently conducted using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to evaluate the internal consistency of the instruments. Instruments with reliability coefficients equal to or greater than 0.70 were considered reliable. Prior to hypothesis testing, assumption testing was conducted. Normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test to determine whether the data were normally distributed. Data were considered normally distributed when the significance value exceeded 0.05. In addition, linearity testing was performed to examine whether the relationship between perceived social support and academic stress followed a linear pattern. A significance value greater than 0.05 indicated that the relationship between the variables was linear. Because the normality test indicated that the data were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$), hypothesis testing was conducted using Spearman's rank correlation analysis. This non-parametric statistical technique was employed to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between perceived social support and academic stress among migrant university students in Jakarta. Statistical significance was determined using a significance level of 0.05.

2.7. Data Interpretation

The findings were interpreted based on the significance value and the correlation coefficient obtained from Spearman's rank correlation analysis. A positive correlation coefficient indicated that higher levels of perceived social support were associated with higher levels of academic stress, whereas a negative correlation coefficient indicated that higher levels of perceived social support were associated with lower levels of academic stress. The strength of the relationship was interpreted according to the magnitude of the correlation coefficient, while statistical significance was determined at $p < 0.05$.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study regarding the relationship between perceived social support and academic stress among migrant university students in DKI Jakarta. The results include respondent demographic characteristics, instrument testing, assumption testing, correlation analysis, and the categorization of academic stress levels experienced by the participants.

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	139	36.0
	Female	247	64.0
Age	18–20 years	68	18.0
	21–23 years	260	67.0
	24–25 years	58	15.0
University Type	Public University	87	23.0
	Private University	299	77.0
Semester	Semester 7	162	42.0
	Semester 8–10	170	44.0
	Semester 11–14	54	14.0
GPA Range	< 2.75	28	7.0
	2.76–3.50	208	54.0
	3.51–4.00	150	39.0
Total		386	100

The respondents in this study were predominantly female students (64%) and mostly aged between 21–23 years (67%). The majority of participants were enrolled in private universities (77%) and were in semesters 7 to 10 (86%), indicating that most respondents were in the later stages of undergraduate study. In terms of academic achievement, more than half of the respondents reported GPA scores between 2.76 and 3.50 (54%),

while 39% had GPA scores between 3.51 and 4.00. These findings indicate that the participants generally represented academically active migrant students who were experiencing advanced academic demands in higher education settings in Jakarta.

Table 4. Reliability and Assumption Testing Results

Variable	Valid Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Normality Test (p-value)	Interpretation
Academic Stress	42	0.958	0.000	Reliable, not normally distributed
Social Support	12	0.956	0.000	Reliable, not normally distributed
Variable	Valid Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Normality Test (p-value)	Interpretation

The reliability testing results showed that both instruments demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.95. A total of 42 items on the academic stress scale and all 12 items on the social support scale were retained after validity testing. Furthermore, the normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov indicated that both variables were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, non-parametric statistical analysis using Spearman correlation was employed to examine the relationship between social support and academic stress.

Table 5. Correlation Between Social Support and Academic Stress

Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Interpretation
Social Support – Academic Stress	386	0.627	0.000	Strong positive correlation

The Spearman correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between perceived social support and academic stress among migrant university students in DKI Jakarta ($r = 0.627$, $p < 0.05$). The findings indicate that higher levels of perceived social support were associated with higher levels of academic stress. The correlation coefficient also demonstrated a strong relationship between the two variables. Thus, the proposed hypothesis stating that social support is associated with academic stress among migrant students was accepted.

Table 6. Categorization of Academic Stress Levels

Score Range	Category	n	%
$x \leq 112$	Low	87	23.0
$112 < x \leq 140$	Moderate	86	22.0
$x > 140$	High	213	55.0
Total		386	100

The results of the group difference analyses indicated that academic stress did not significantly differ based on gender ($p = 0.42$), suggesting that male and female migrant university students experienced comparable levels of academic stress. In contrast, significant differences were found based on university type ($p = 0.01$) and semester level ($p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that academic stress varied across students enrolled in different types of universities and across different stages of study.

The significant difference based on university type suggests that institutional characteristics may be associated with variations in academic stress among migrant students. Likewise, the significant difference across semester levels indicates that academic stress is not experienced uniformly throughout students' academic journeys. Students in different semesters may face distinct academic demands, responsibilities, and graduation-related pressures, which contribute to varying levels of academic stress.

Because significant differences were identified for university type and semester, these variables may represent important contextual factors that should be considered when understanding academic stress among migrant university students in Jakarta. However, gender does not appear to be a distinguishing factor in academic stress levels within the present sample.

Table 7. Differences Based On Gender, Semester, And University Type

Variable	p
Gender	0.42
University Type	0.01
Semester	0.00

The categorization results showed that the majority of migrant university students in DKI Jakarta experienced high levels of academic stress, with 213 respondents (55%) classified in the high category. Meanwhile, 23% of respondents were categorized as having low academic stress, and 22% were categorized as moderate. These findings indicate that academic pressure among migrant students tends to be relatively high, particularly among students who are simultaneously managing academic demands, adaptation processes, and independent living in an urban educational environment.

The positive relationship identified in this study should be interpreted cautiously because it differs from the dominant findings reported in the literature, where social support is generally associated with lower levels of academic stress [25], [26]. One possible explanation is the phenomenon of reverse causality. Given the cross-sectional nature of the present study, it is not possible to determine the direction of the relationship between the variables. Rather than social support increasing academic stress, it is equally plausible that students experiencing higher levels of academic stress actively seek greater support from family members, friends, and significant others. In this perspective, social support may emerge as a consequence of stress rather than its antecedent. A second explanation relates to the support mobilization effect. Previous research has suggested that individuals tend to activate and utilize their social networks more intensively when encountering stressful situations. Students facing substantial academic demands may increase communication with parents, seek advice from peers, or rely more heavily on emotionally significant relationships [27], [28]. Consequently, higher levels of perceived social support may coexist with higher levels of academic stress because support-seeking behavior intensifies in response to stress exposure. This interpretation may be particularly relevant for migrant students who are required to navigate academic challenges while simultaneously adapting to a new social and cultural environment [29], [30].

The Indonesian cultural context may also contribute to understanding the present findings. Indonesia is characterized by collectivistic cultural values that emphasize interdependence, family connectedness, and mutual assistance. Within such contexts, family members often remain actively involved in students' educational experiences despite geographical separation. While this involvement may provide emotional and instrumental support, it may also increase expectations regarding academic achievement and future success. As a result, social support and academic pressure may coexist rather than operate as opposing forces. For migrant students, frequent communication with family members may simultaneously provide comfort and reinforce perceived obligations to perform well academically [31]. Several methodological considerations should also be acknowledged. First, all variables were measured using self-report instruments administered at a single point in time, creating the possibility of common method bias. Respondents who tended to provide consistently high ratings across questionnaires may have contributed to inflated correlations between perceived social support and academic stress. Second, response bias cannot be completely ruled out. Students experiencing heightened emotional concerns may have been more attentive to both the support available around them and the academic pressures they faced, thereby increasing the likelihood of reporting high scores on both constructs [32].

Although the majority of previous studies have reported a negative association between social support and academic stress, several researchers have suggested that social support may increase under conditions of heightened psychological distress. Sailo, et al. found that individuals experiencing greater psychological pressure tended to mobilize support from family members and peers as part of their coping process [33]. Similarly, Schimedi, et al. reported that perceived social support may coexist with elevated stress [34] because individuals actively seek emotional and instrumental assistance when facing demanding life situations [35]. These findings support the interpretation that social support does not always function solely as a stress-buffering factor but may also reflect adaptive coping and support mobilization [36]. Therefore, the positive relationship observed in the present study may represent the increased utilization and perception of available social support among migrant university students experiencing substantial academic stress [37]. Although uncommon, positive associations between social support and psychological distress have been reported in certain contexts [38]. Previous studies have suggested that support may increase during periods of elevated stress because individuals actively mobilize social resources when facing difficulties [39], [40]. Such findings indicate that the relationship between social support and psychological outcomes may be more dynamic and context-dependent than traditionally assumed. Therefore, the present study contributes to the growing body of evidence suggesting that social support does not always function solely as a protective factor but may also reflect adaptive coping processes among individuals confronting substantial stressors [41].

The findings of this study have important implications for student assessment and support services in higher education. Universities should avoid assuming that students who report strong social support are automatically protected from academic stress. Assessment and counseling services should evaluate both psychosocial resources and stress experiences simultaneously [42]. Students who appear socially connected may still experience considerable academic pressure and therefore require targeted psychological and academic support [43]. Early identification of stress symptoms, especially among migrant students and those in advanced semesters, may help institutions provide more effective interventions and prevent adverse academic and mental health outcomes [44], [45].

This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the complexity of the relationship between social support and academic stress among migrant university students in a metropolitan setting. Nevertheless, several limitations should be considered. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, while the use of self-report measures may introduce common method and response biases. In addition, the study focused exclusively on migrant students in DKI Jakarta, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other student populations and cultural contexts. Future research is encouraged to employ longitudinal designs and incorporate additional variables such as coping strategies, resilience, homesickness, financial stress, and academic self-efficacy to better understand the mechanisms underlying academic stress among migrant students.

The findings revealed no significant difference in academic stress between male and female students. This result suggests that academic stress among migrant university students may be experienced relatively similarly regardless of gender [46], [47]. The academic demands, adaptation challenges, financial responsibilities, and pressures associated with living independently appear to affect both male and female students in comparable ways [48]. This finding is consistent with studies indicating that academic stress is more strongly influenced by situational and academic factors than by demographic characteristics alone [49]. In contrast, significant differences were found based on university type and semester level. Students enrolled in private universities tended to report higher levels of academic stress than those studying in public universities [50]. One possible explanation is that private university students may face additional financial concerns related to tuition fees and educational expenses, which can intensify academic pressure. Furthermore, institutional differences in academic policies, learning environments, and performance expectations may contribute to variations in students' stress experiences. The significant differences across semester levels further indicate that academic stress varies throughout the academic journey. Students in advanced semesters are generally confronted with more complex academic responsibilities, including thesis completion, internship requirements, graduation preparation, and career uncertainty. These increasing academic and transitional demands may explain why academic stress tends to be more pronounced among students in later stages of study. For migrant students, such pressures may be compounded by ongoing adaptation challenges and limited access to direct family support, thereby increasing their vulnerability to academic stress.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. This study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causal direction between variables. Furthermore, the use of self-report instruments may increase the possibility of response bias and subjective interpretation. The study was also limited to migrant students in DKI Jakarta, meaning that the findings may not be fully generalizable to different cultural or regional educational contexts. Future research is therefore encouraged to examine additional variables such as resilience, coping strategies, self-efficacy, financial stress, homesickness, and urban adaptation in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of academic stress among migrant university students.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that perceived social support has a significant positive relationship with academic stress among migrant university students in DKI Jakarta. The findings reflect that social support in migrant student populations may not only function as a stress-buffering factor but may also emerge as part of a support mobilization process when students experience higher academic and psychological pressure. This finding expands the theoretical understanding that the relationship between social support and academic stress is contextual and may operate differently within metropolitan and migrant student environments.

The study also revealed that most migrant students experienced high levels of academic stress, indicating the substantial academic, social, and adaptation demands faced by students living away from their families. Therefore, universities are encouraged to strengthen psychological support services, academic counseling, peer-support programs, and adaptation assistance specifically designed for migrant students. In addition, higher education institutions should implement early screening programs to identify students experiencing elevated levels of academic stress, particularly those in advanced semesters and students studying in private universities, who may be more vulnerable to academic pressures. Efforts to promote stress management skills, resilience, and adaptive coping strategies should also be integrated into student development programs.

For migrant students, maintaining healthy communication with family members, building supportive peer networks, and seeking professional assistance when experiencing academic difficulties may help facilitate psychological adjustment and academic persistence. Future researchers are recommended to examine additional variables such as coping strategies, resilience, homesickness, financial stress, and self-efficacy using broader participant characteristics and longitudinal approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of academic stress among migrant university students. Longitudinal and mixed-method studies are particularly recommended to clarify the directionality of the relationship between social support and academic stress and to explore the mechanisms underlying the support mobilization process observed in this study.

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