

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Stress is a psychological condition caused by pressure from both internal and external sources. Persistent anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and cognitive decline are symptoms, which can negatively impact a person's physical and mental health. Globally, stress has become a significant public health problem. According to 2023 data from the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 1 in 4 people experience mental health disorders, including high levels of stress. This figure has reportedly increased by 25% in the past ten years due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic insecurity, and climate change.

A study by Gallup, (2024) Studies show that 38% of the global adult population experiences significant levels of daily stress. This phenomenon shows a significant increase in developing countries. Furthermore, a study published in the journal *The Lancet Psychiatry* confirms that prolonged stress has negative consequences for productivity worldwide, resulting in trillions of dollars in economic losses annually. Therefore, several effective preventive measures are needed. (Kessler et al., 2022).

In the student environment, stress is a significant issue, impacting psychological development and academic achievement. A study in the *Journal of Affective Disorders* indicates that the proportion of students in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, experiencing high levels of stress ranges from 40% to 55%. This condition often manifests as emotional exhaustion, decreased motivation to learn, and mental health disorders. Triggering factors include excessive academic workload, intense competition, and minimal social support. (Ibrahim & others, 2023).

Students often face pressure from study obligations. For those in their final year of college, the most common source of stress stems from the process of designing, composing, and completing a thesis or dissertation. Several factors can trigger stress in these students when facing a final assignment, including

anxiety, decreased motivation, low self-confidence, and external influences such as support from their peers.(Kurniasani & Wahyudi, 2023).

A survey conducted by the Indonesian Psychological Association(API, 2024)indicates that 50-60% of the student population in the archipelago experiences stress related to studies, with an estimated total number of students reaching 8 million people, so it is estimated that there are around 8 million individuals affected, information obtained from the Indonesian Medical Journal reported that 75% of these subjects experienced significant levels of stress during the pandemic period, along with an increase in the potential for extreme fatigue (burnout) of up to 40%.(Wulandari et al., 2024).

Students in their final years of study are particularly vulnerable to academic stress, as they are in a crucial phase of completing their education. At this stage, students are expected to complete their theses on time, achieve optimal academic performance, and meet the expectations of their parents and social circle. These demands often trigger psychological stress, including anxiety, fear of failure, and emotional exhaustion. If these conditions are not managed effectively, they can negatively impact mental health, academic productivity, and students' ability to complete their studies efficiently.(Antara et al., 2024).

Academic stress is one of the most common mental health problems experienced by students worldwide, including in Indonesia. In higher education settings, students often face a heavy academic burden, such as intensive assignments, regular exams, and career preparation, which can potentially lead to prolonged stress.(Sari & Putri, 2023). A study by(Sari, A et al., 2024)in the International Journal of Nursing Education shows that nursing students in Indonesia experience stress levels 60-70% greater than students in other fields of study because as a health education institution, final year students are usually involved in clinical practice activities, so early preventive measures are needed to avoid long-term consequences that impact the quality of their learning and career preparation.

The impact of academic stress on final-year nursing students is multifaceted, affecting psychological, physical, and social dimensions. Psychologically, stress can trigger disorders such as depression, prolonged anxiety, and decreased motivation to learn, which ultimately impact academic performance and the ability to complete studies on schedule.

A study by (Putwain et al., 2021) in the Indonesian Nursing Journal revealed that final-year nursing students commonly experience chronic burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased individual performance, with long-term consequences such as reduced empathy for patients and the potential for future clinical errors. From a physical perspective, academic stress also contributes to health problems such as insomnia, high blood pressure, heart disease, and a weakened immune system.

A study by (Sari & Putri, 2023) in the journal of mental health and human behavior found that academic stress increases the risk of sleep disorders and chronic diseases among healthcare students, with nursing students being the most affected group due to clinical practice often involving night shifts and exposure to patient stress.

Midwifery students are a group of healthcare students with a relatively high academic and clinical workload. In addition to theoretical learning, midwifery students are also required to undertake laboratory and field practice, as well as clinical practice in hospitals and other healthcare facilities. In the final semester, these demands become even more complex as students must complete research or a thesis alongside their professional practice obligations. This situation can lead to psychological pressure, which can lead to academic stress. (Al hayat et al., 2025)

The Bengkulu Ministry of Health Polytechnic of Health is one of the universities in Bengkulu with a large number of nursing students. One indicator of academic stress is student learning outcomes. Data collected in August showed that 27% of students experienced a decline in their Academic Achievement Index (GPA) with an average decline of 0.24 points. Researchers

interviewed five students from grades 2, 3, and 4. They found that students reported academic stress due to excessive assignments given by lecturers and declining exam scores. In an effort to guide students experiencing a decline in GPA, the department will summon students for scheduled guidance sessions with the academic or student affairs department.(Lastri, 2025).

Pharmacological interventions to address academic stress in final-year health students generally include the use of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) antidepressants, such as sertraline or fluoxetine. These medications work by increasing serotonin levels in the brain, aiming to alleviate symptoms of stress-related anxiety and depression.(Johnson & Lee, 2021). There is also another option, namely benzodiazepines, which can be given for a limited period to treat sleep disorders or severe anxiety during exam periods. The mechanism of action of benzodiazepines is by supporting the activity of Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid (GABA), thereby providing a calming effect on the central nervous system. Overall, pharmacological interventions show short-term effectiveness (4-8 weeks) with an effect size of 0.3-0.5, but are less sustainable than non-pharmacological interventions. This causes a decrease in the cortisol stress response.(Garcia et al., 2023).

Non-pharmacological interventions are more recommended for managing academic stress in final-year health students because they have a higher level of safety, are easy to implement, and can support the development of coping and adaptive skills sustainably over the long term. Data show high effectiveness, with a focus on Journaling Therapy and Self-Compassion Training. This approach involves psychological, behavioral, and mindfulness techniques that can be applied in educational settings. Journaling Therapy, also known as expressive writing, is a psychological technique that involves regularly writing about emotional experiences, stress, and personal introspection to process trauma or psychological burdens. This technique was introduced by(Pennebaker, 1997)in the 1980s and has been shown to be effective in reducing stress through systematic expression of emotions. The mechanism involves cognitive processing, where writing helps organize ideas,

minimize repetitive negative thoughts, and increase self-awareness, which ultimately stabilizes the brain's cortisol stress response.(Smyth et al., 2021).

Self-Compassion Training is a mindfulness approach that guides individuals to treat themselves with compassion, especially when facing failure or stress, based on Kristin Neff's concepts of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Its mechanism of action involves reducing self-judgment and inner criticism, which helps increase psychological resilience and manage emotional responses to stress.(Neff, 2023).

Based on an initial survey regarding academic stress conducted by researchers in September 2025 By distributing a Google Form questionnaire to final-year Nursing and Midwifery students at the Bengkulu Ministry of Health Polytechnic, data was collected from 40 respondents. The survey results showed that 18 (45%) students experienced moderate stress, and 22 (55%) students experienced severe stress.

Preliminary studies conducted by researchers in September 2025 The Nursing and Midwifery Department at the Bengkulu Ministry of Health Polytechnic of Health involved interviews with 31 respondents, final-year nursing and midwifery students, who experienced moderate to severe stress. The interviews revealed that they felt overwhelmed by the numerous assignments given with short deadlines, and overthinking the difficulty of writing theses and scientific papers was also a major source of stress. Their efforts to cope with stress varied, including traveling, hanging out with friends, sleeping, browsing social media, and self-rewarding. The 31 respondents experienced physical symptoms such as headaches, hypotension, fatigue, and insomnia. They also experienced psychological symptoms such as restlessness, excessive anxiety, difficulty concentrating, decreased motivation to learn, burnout, and changes in eating patterns. The interviews revealed that the 31 respondents reported not knowing about journaling therapy and self-compassion training.

Based on the description above, the researcher is interested in conducting research related to the influence of journaling therapy and self-compassion

training on the academic stress levels of final year nursing and midwifery students. The researcher also wants to know whether providing journaling therapy and self-compassion training can be used as an alternative for academic stress levels in final year nursing and midwifery students.

B. Formulation of the problem

Based on data obtained by researchers in September 2025 from final year students at the Ministry of Health Polytechnic of Health, Bengkulu, as many as 18 people (45%) of students experienced moderate stress, 22 people (55%) of students experienced severe stress. A follow-up survey through interviews with 31 respondents revealed a similar pattern, with 31 people experiencing moderate to severe stress. It was found that their efforts to overcome stress varied, such as going for walks, gathering together with friends, sleeping, and browsing social media. So far, no researchers have combined non-pharmacological journaling therapy and self-compassion training to address academic stress in final-year nursing and midwifery students at the Bengkulu Ministry of Health Polytechnic. So the problem formulated in this research is "Is there an influence of journaling therapy and self-compassion training on reducing academic stress levels in nursing students and midwifery final year at the Ministry of Health Polytechnic of Bengkulu?"

C. Research purposes

1. General purpose

The effect of journaling therapy and self-compassion training on reducing academic stress levels of final-year nursing and midwifery students at the Ministry of Health Polytechnic of Bengkulu is known.

2. Special purpose

- a. The characteristics of the respondents are known, namely the gender and age of the respondents at the Ministry of Health Polytechnic of Bengkulu.
- b. It is known that the average academic stress score of respondents before and after the Journaling Therapy and Self Compassion

Training interventions were carried out in the intervention group and Benson therapy in the control group.

- c. It is known that there is a difference in the average academic stress scores of respondents between the intervention group and the control group before and after the intervention.

D. Benefits of research

1. For Nursing and Midwifery Students of the Ministry of Health Polytechnic

The results of this study are expected to increase knowledge and information for students experiencing academic stress by implementing journaling therapy and self-compassion training which are alternative non-pharmacological therapies that can handle the level of academic stress in nursing and midwifery students.

2. For Educational Institutions

The results of this study are expected to add to the literature related to non-pharmacological approaches in handling academic stress, especially through journaling therapy and self-compassion training interventions that can reduce the level of academic stress in final year nursing and midwifery students.

3. For Health Services

The results of the study are expected to provide information to Mental Health Nursing services regarding alternative non-pharmacological therapies in academic stress levels using journaling therapy and self-compassion training for nursing and midwifery students who experience academic stress.

4. For Other Researchers

The benefits of this research for other researchers are that it can be a reference, source of information and reference material for further research so that it can be further developed.