

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESS AND EMOTIONAL EATING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN INDONESIA
Tinjauan Literatur: Hubungan Stres Dengan Emotional Eating pada Mahasiswa di Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: The prevalence of emotional mental disorders in adulthood has been increasing annually, with stress identified as a significant risk factor. **Purpose:** This study aims to investigate the correlation between stress and emotional eating among Indonesian university students. **Methods:** A systematic literature review was conducted using the PRISMA-P framework, analyzing relevant international and national articles from the Google Scholar database. **Results:** College students who experience stress have been shown to engage in emotional eating. Furthermore, emotional eating has been demonstrated to heighten the probability of obesity. **Conclusion:** The study confirms a significant correlation between stress levels and emotional eating behaviors among college students.

Keywords: emotional eating, college students, stress

ABSTRAK

Latar belakang: Prevalensi gangguan mental emosional pada usia dewasa meningkat dari tahun ke tahun. Salah satu risiko terbesar penyebab gangguan mental adalah stres. **Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hubungan antara stres dengan emotional eating pada mahasiswa di Indonesia. **Metode:** Penelitian ini menggunakan metode systematic literature review artikel internasional dan nasional tentang hubungan stres dengan emotional eating pada mahasiswa di Indonesia yang dipublikasikan pada database Google Scholar yang menggunakan metode PRISMA-. **Hasil:** Mahasiswa yang mengalami stres cenderung mengalami emotional eating. Selain itu, emotional eating berdampak pada peningkatan resiko obesitas. **Kesimpulan:** Stres pada mahasiswa berhubungan dengan perilaku emotional eating.

Kata kunci: emotional eating, mahasiswa, stress

INTRODUCTION

College students are more prone to stress. Basic Health Research shows that the prevalence of mental emotional disorders in people over 5 years of age was 6% in 2013 and increased to 9.8% in 2018. The Indonesian Health Survey, (2023) showed that the prevalence of mental emotional disorders at the age of 15 years and above was 15.7% (BKPK, 2023). One of the risk factors that plays a major role in causing mental disorders is stress (Manita *et al.*, 2019).

Academic stress is a common challenge faced by university students. The pressures associated with higher education—such as rigorous coursework, deadlines, and performance expectations—often lead to heightened stress levels (Kountul *et al.*, 2018). Academic stress was manifested from overwhelming demands of lecture assignments (Mutakamilah *et al.*, 2021). Impaired concentration, reduced academic ability, and problem-solving skills are all negative impacts of academic stress. There are many sources of stress for university students including academic pressure, time management issues, and separation from parents (Hamzah B & Hamzah, 2020). Challenges faced by students when compiling a thesis or final project such as difficulties in determining the appropriate title, finding relevant references, and collecting the necessary data. Sources of stress that are not addressed can lead to increased stress among students (Carsita, 2018).

Stress arises when individuals perceive a situation as threatening. In addition, stress can also be defined as an overall process that creates tension and exceeds one's ability to control it. Stress increases when a person cannot handle an undesirable situation (Hidayati & Harsono, 2021). Stress can lead to behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol, eating junk food, and even suicide (Sutijato *et al.*, 2015). An individual's

response to stress affects their coping strategies (Sugiarti *et al.*, 2024). Stress coping is a way to handle stress. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress coping consists of two categories: problem focused coping and emotional focused coping. Problem focused on coping is an individual's effort to solve problems. Individuals who use this type of stress coping when they feel that the situation or problem can still be controlled. Emotionally focused coping is an individual effort that focuses on modifying emotions rather than involving efforts to solve problems. The latter is typically employed when individuals perceive a situation as uncontrollable (Hardiyanti & Permana, 2019). When faced with a stressful situation, a person will evaluate the level of pressure faced and then choose an appropriate stress coping strategy.

Emotional eating is defined as the behavior of overeating not because of hunger but to improve emotional state (Gryzela & Ariana, 2021). Students often turn to emotional eating as a way to cope with stress. According to the Health Collaborative Center 2024 Mindful Eating Study on 1,158 respondents from 20 provinces in Indonesia, 47% of Indonesians are emotional eaters. In addition, 49% experience emotional eating at the age of under 40. Emotional eating serves as a form of individual coping with stress, anxiety, sadness, and loneliness. Despite not feeling hungry, a person engages in emotional eating to improve mood and reduce stress-related discomfort (Gusni *et al.*, 2022). An excessive increase in eating that is not to satisfy hunger or just to fulfill psychological comfort is the hallmark of emotional eating (Rohmah, 2022). The impact of emotional eating is the risk of increasing excess weight or obesity—a condition affecting 23.2% of Indonesians as of 2023.

State of the art in this study was using the variables of stress and emotional eating which is an important focus in mental health

in college students. Previous research showed that stress affects changes in eating behavior but there are not many studies that specifically examine the relationship between stress and emotional eating in college students in Indonesia using the systematic literature review method.

This study utilized reference sources in the form of articles published in 2021-2025 so that the articles remain relevant to the current condition of students. The novelty in this study entitled “The Relationship between Stress and Emotional Eating in College Students in Indonesia” lies in the research focus that explores emotional eating caused by stress. Thus, this study aimed to explain stress that can lead to emotional eating and its impact on university students who are a group of people at risk of experiencing stress that can lead to emotional eating through a Systematic Literature Review approach and is expected to provide appropriate recommendations in overcoming emotional eating.

METHOD

Literature Search Strategy

This research undertook a literature review using the PECO(S) framework to analyze international and national articles from the Google Scholar database on the relationship between stress and emotional eating among Indonesian university students. Researchers used the method of searching for article keywords through Boolean operations, namely “Emotional eating” AND “Stress” AND “Student” OR ‘College’ OR “Student”. After that, the articles were selected using the PRISMA-P method (Preferred Reporting Item for Systematic Review and Meta Analysis Protocol) to ensure they met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria in this study were articles published in 2021-2025, freely available and accessible in full text, and using Indonesian and English. Exclusion criteria were articles that did not meet the

PECO(S) design, namely Population: university students in Indonesia, Exposure: the level of stress experienced by university students, Comparison: low stress compared to severe stress, Outcome: the incidence of emotional eating in university students in Indonesia, Study design: qualitative and quantitative, and Language: Indonesian and English. Here is the PRISMA-P diagram to search for relevant articles.

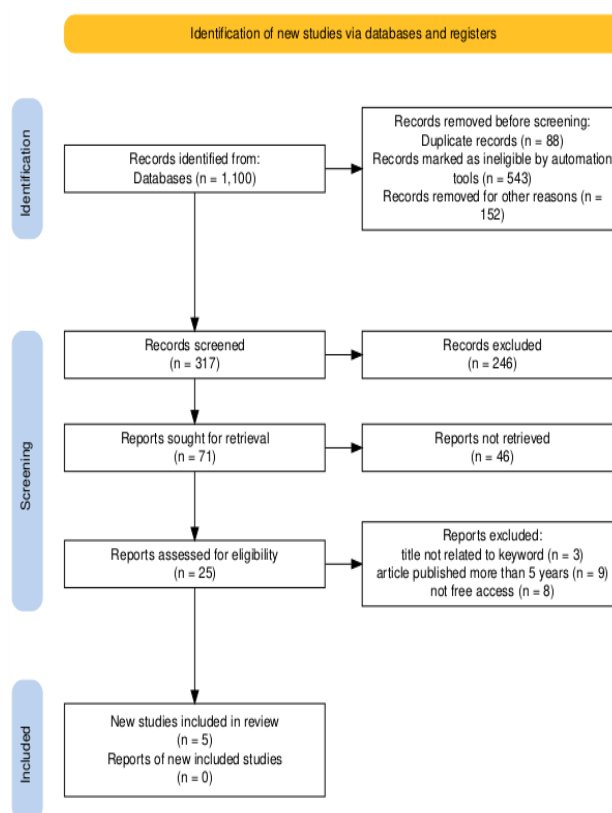


Figure 1. PRISMA-P (Preferred Reporting Item for Systematic Review and Meta Analysis Protocol)

The article search process using the PRISMA-P diagram began with searching for articles based on keywords in the Google Scholar database totaling 27,600 articles. Articles were selected based on the year of publication, starting in 2021, totaling 17,400. The author selected 16 articles based on the inclusion criteria. After that, 5 articles were obtained that were relevant to the topic and could be accessed in full text on the Google scholar database. The articles were analyzed

by identifying the title, author, year of publication, research methods, and research results. After that, the articles were synthesized by combining the findings to produce a comprehensive understanding of the topic under study.

RESULT

Based on the results of searching for articles using the PRISMA-P method, 5 articles were obtained which were published in the Google Scholar database in the last 5 years, namely 2021-2025.

Table 1. Results of article review

Title and Author	Year	Method	Result
Title: <i>Hubungan Tingkat Stres Terhadap Kejadian Emotional Eating Mahasiswa Tingkat Akhir Fakultas Seni Rupa Dan Desain Universitas Trisakti Jakarta Saat Pandemi.</i> (The Relationship between Stress Levels and Emotional Eating Events of Final Year Students of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Trisakti University Jakarta During the Pandemic) Author: Renna Noviera Rahim dan Guntari Prasetya	2022	Qualitative approach and using descriptive method with cross sectional nature. The research sample was 91 people. Stress variables were measured using the PSS (Perceived Stress Scale) questionnaire while emotional eating variables used the DEBQ (Dutch Eating Behaviour) questionnaire.	Based on the results of the study, it shows the relationship between stress levels and the incidence of emotional eating in final year students with a p-value of 0.0001 ($p < 0.05$) and an r value of 0.328 which shows a positive pattern. In addition, the incidence of emotional eating is high by 81% and low by 19%. More stress experienced by students is stress caused by academics. Emotional eating behavior in this study is consuming more food to suppress ghrelin.
Title: <i>Hubungan Antara Stres dengan Perilaku Emotional eating pada Mahasiswa Semester Satu di Purwokerto.</i> (Relationship Between Stress and Emotional Eating Behavior in First Semester Students in Purwokerto) Author: Haliza Aulia Rachma, Wahyu Ekowati, dan Lita Heni Kusumawardani	2022	Quantitative approach with correlational studies and using a cross-sectional design. The sample in this study were 247 active students of class 2022. Stress variables were measured using the PSS 10 (Perceived Stress Scale) questionnaire while emotional eating variables used The Eating and Appraisal Due to Emotions and Stress (EADES) questionnaire.	The results of this study showed that the incidence of low emotional eating was 13, high 13.4%, and moderate 73.7%. In addition, this study shows a significant relationship between stress and emotional eating with a value of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$) and has an r value of 0.265 which means it has a fairly strong relationship in first semester students in Purwokerto. Stress experienced by new students due to the transition of life into a college environment. Emotional eating behavior in respondents of this study such as eating sweet and savory foods such as chocolate, ice cream, and snacks.
Title: <i>Hubungan antara Stres dengan Emotional Eating pada Mahasiswa Perempuan yang sedang Mengerjakan Skripsi</i> (Relationship between Stress and Emotional Eating in Female Students who are Working on Thesis) ‘/’ Author: Egananda Gryzela dan Atika Dian Ariana	2021	Quantitative-survey approach with 198 female student respondents who were working on their thesis. Stress variables were measured using the PSS 10 (Perceived Stress Scale) questionnaire and emotional eating using the Duth Eating Behavior Questionnaire (DEBQ) (DEBQ).	The results of this study showed that respondents who experienced moderate emotional eating were 37.88%, low by 7.07%, high by 24.24%, and very high by 6.06%. The results of the correlation analysis show that stress is positively correlated and tends to be weak with emotional eating which has a p value of 0.047 ($p < 0.05$) and an r value of 0.198 which means it has a positive but weak correlation. The stress experienced by female students is caused by working on the thesis. The emotional eating behavior that occurs is emotional over-eating.

Continuation of Table 1. Results of article review

Title and Author	Year	Method	Result
Title: <i>Hubungan Tingkat Stres dengan Emotional Eating pada Mahasiswa Fakultas Kedokteran Universitas YARSI Angkatan 2020 dan Tinjauannya Menurut Islam.</i> (Relationship between Stress Level and Emotional Eating in YARSI University Faculty of Medicine Students Class of 2020 and its Review According to Islam) Author: Salman Shiddiq, Werda Indriarti, dan Ali Ma'sum.	2023	A quantitative approach that is observational analytic in nature conducted in YARSI University Faculty of Medicine students' class of 2020 as many as 138 people. Stress variables were measured using the PSS 10 (Perceived Stress Scale) questionnaire while emotional eating used the DEBQ questionnaire (Dutch Eating Behavior Questionnaire).	The results of this study indicate the incidence of emotional eating in students is 44.9%. In addition, it shows the relationship between stress levels and emotional eating in 2020 YARSI University Faculty of Medicine students with a p value of 0.003 ($p < 0.05$) and an r value of 0, 254 which means it has a positive but weak correlation. The majority of students experience severe and very severe stress. This study explains that higher levels of stress will tend to consume sweet foods, sweet drinks, fast food, and canned food.
Title: <i>Hubungan tingkat stres dengan Emotional Eating saat Pandemi Covid-19 pada Mahasiswa Fakultas Kedokteran dan Ilmu Kesehatan Universitas Warmadewa</i> (The relationship between stress levels and Emotional Eating during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Students of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Warmadewa University) Author: Pande Luh Made Devi Savitri, Putu Asih Primatanti, dan Anny Eka Pratiwi	2022	Analytics with a quantitative approach and cross-sectional design. The sample of this study was 218 people.	The results of this study indicate the incidence of emotional eating in students is 45.9%. This study shows the relationship between stress and emotional eating with a p value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$) and a correlation coefficient of 0.747 which means it shows a very strong relationship. The form of stress experienced is academic stress due to lectures. Emotional eating behavior in students is consuming food excessively.

Stress and emotional eating in students in these 5 articles show the relationship between stress and emotional eating with different questionnaires. Research conducted on final year students of the faculty of fine arts and design at Trisakti University Jakarta shows a relationship between stress and emotional eating with a p value of 0.001 and an r value of 0.328 which shows a positive relationship (Rahim & Prasetya, 2022). Research conducted at Semarang State University showed a relationship between stress and emotional eating with a p-value of 0.018 (Rohmah, 2022). Research conducted on first semester students in Purwokerto showed a significant relationship between stress and emotional eating which has a p-value of 0.000 and a value of $r = 0.265$ which shows a positive direction (Rachma *et al.*, 2021). Research conducted on female students

who are working on a thesis showed a significant relationship, namely p-value = 0.047 and $r = 0.198$ which shows a positive relationship direction (Gryzela & Ariana, 2021). Research conducted on Faculty of Medicine students class of 2020 showed a significant relationship, namely with a p-value of 0.003 and a value of $r = 0.254$ which means it has a positive relationship direction. Furthermore, research conducted on undergraduate students of the Faculty of Nursing found that respondents who had emotional eating behavior experienced moderate stress by 80%, severe stress by 12.5%, and 7.5% experienced mild stress so that stress was related to emotional eating behavior (Gusni *et al.*, 2022). Research conducted on students of the faculty of medicine and health sciences at Warmadewa University revealed a significant relationship,

namely with a p-value of 0.001 and a value of $r = 0.747$ which shows a positive relationship direction (Savitri *et al.*, 2022).

Articles that used PSS questionnaire to measure stress and DEBQ or EADES to measure emotional eating showed a positive relationship between stress and emotional eating. In addition, based on the results of the review, it is explained that the stress experienced by students is mostly caused by academic demands such as working on theses, practicum work, and other lecture assignments, so it is called negative stress. Stress in students is also exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Savitri *et al.*, 2022). The stress experienced causes negative emotional reactions that can encourage a person to eat which ultimately leads to emotional eating. The results of the article review also show that female students tend to experience emotional eating when they feel stressed such as boredom. All articles in this study described that emotional eating behavior in college students tend to consume delicious foods such as sweet foods, sweet drinks, fast food, and processed foods. However, there are other studies that show that stress can reduce appetite (Wijayanti *et al.*, 2019)

DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review, the 5 articles show several findings, namely that there is a positive relationship between stress and emotional eating in students with different questionnaires. Stress conditions in students are also exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stress experienced can cause negative emotional reactions that cause the urge to eat, called emotional eating. The results of the article review also show that women tend to experience emotional eating when they feel stressed such as boredom. The majority of emotional eating behaviors in the results of the article review consume excessive

and delicious foods, such as processed foods, fast food, sweet foods, and sweet drinks.

Research conducted by Rohmah, (2022) showed a relationship between stress and emotional eating in Semarang State University students with a p-value of 0.048. This is in line with the results of the article review in this study. In addition, the article review explains that stress in students is exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in line with research conducted by Adrian *et al.*, (2021) which conducted on S1 Nursing students at STIKes Baiturrahim Jambi explained that during the COVID-19 pandemic students experienced mild to severe stress. The results of the article review in this study explained that women tend to experience emotional eating when they feel stressed. The results of this article review are in line with research conducted by Rohmah, (2022) which explains that women tend to experience emotional eating. Research conducted by Wijayanti *et al.*, (2019) explained that stress can reduce appetite. This is not in line with the results of the review in this study which explains that stress can increase overeating behavior and tend to consume delicious foods, such as sweet foods, sweet drinks, fast food, and processed foods.

The results of this research article review are in line with research by Rohmah, (2022) which explained that there is a relationship between stress and emotional eating in college students. When individuals experience stress, it will increase negative emotional reactions. Someone who experiences negative emotions will try to vent in various ways, one of which is through emotional eating. Someone who has emotional eating behavior will consider eating as the right way to solve problems. The results of this article review are in line with research Adrian *et al.*, (2021) that student stress increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The obstacles experienced by students during the

COVID-19 pandemic are caused by a large load of coursework without in-depth explanations, causing students to not understand and the lecture process is carried out online which is monotonous, causing boredom. In addition, the results of this article review explain that emotional eating tends to be experienced by women. This is in accordance with research Rohmah, (2022) which described that women use more emotion-focused coping strategies. Emotional eating behavior in the results of the article explains that individuals who experience stress will experience emotional overeating like foods that are high in calories, high in sugar content, and high in fat. The results of this article review are in line with Rohmah, (2022) which explained that stressed individuals prefer to eat savory, sweet, salty, and sugary foods. Foods that are high in sugar, salt and fat are addictive. This happens because the brain releases dopamine which causes a sense of pleasure, making a person want to eat more even though you are not hungry (Rachmawati *et al.*, 2023). However, other studies explain that stress can lead to emotional under eating which can reduce appetite (Wijayanti *et al.*, 2019). Stress that can cause emotional under eating is acute stress. Stress that occurs in a short time with strong enough pressure will increase the secretion of the hormone noradrenaline which can reduce appetite. While chronic stress will increase the hormone cortisol which can increase hunger.

The impact of emotional eating will lead to an increased risk of being overweight or obesity. Therefore, it is necessary to make efforts to overcome stress that causes emotional eating. Efforts that need to be made are students must be able to manage their time well, eat in moderation in accordance with balanced nutritional guidelines, and get enough exercise (Ilmi *et al.*, 2023). Students need assistance in managing stress so that they

can prevent emotional eating behavior (Gusni *et al.*, 2022).

The five articles that have been reviewed show an explanation of the relationship between stress and emotional eating in students from various faculties and use different research methods. This study has limitations, which only use the Google Scholar database in finding articles. The implications of this study can be used as a reference source for readers about the relationship between stress and emotional eating in university students in Indonesia. The results and weaknesses of this study can be used as a reference for further research.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The present study hypothesizes that stress in college students is associated with emotional eating behavior. Individuals who engage in emotional eating tend to consume foods with high caloric, sugar, and fat content, such as chocolate, ice cream, and other snacks.

It is imperative that government entities and educational institutions allocate greater resources to address the issues of stress and emotional eating experienced by students. This imperative necessitates the implementation of comprehensive mental and emotional support services, such as counseling, as well as educational initiatives promoting healthy eating patterns.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This article has no conflict with any party.

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