Social Support is Positively Correlated With College Adjustment in First-Year Students

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ABSTRACT

When first-year students enter university, they experience many changes and challenges that require adjustment and adaptation. Previous studies have suggested that social support is one factor related to college adjustment. However, scientific support for the relationship between these variables in Indonesia is limited. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between social support and college adjustment in the Indonesian university context. We used the adapted version of the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) to measure college adjustment and social support in 281 first-year students enrolled in Universitas Indonesia. The social supports measured in this study include peer support and family support. Our analysis confirmed that social support was positively correlated with college adjustment ($r = 0.468$, $p < 0.001$, one-tailed). The results suggest that social networks, including family and peers, are important to students during their transition period from high school to higher education.

Keywords: college adjustment, first-year students, family support, peer support, social support.

1. INTRODUCTION

Enrolling in college is a major step taken by high school graduates to pursue self-improvement and prepare for the workforce. However, many first-year students find the transition to college challenging due to increasing responsibilities and academic demands. In a research study conducted on 601 first-year college students by Fauziah (2013), 72% of first-year college students experienced academic difficulties, 44.8% felt lonely, bored, that they were studying in the wrong faculty or major, or anxious about their ability to survive college, 28.9% found it difficult to adapt to new environments, 28.5% found it difficult to establish relationships with others, and 18.7% experienced financial problems.

In addition, according to Arjanggi (2013), first-year college students often face demands that they have never encountered before. First, there may be a greater demand to prepare material and readings for classes, quizzes, and presentations. Second, many students feel pressure to ask questions and actively participate in classes. Third, students often feel challenged to become more independent or take the lead on projects outside class, such as group projects. The ability to fulfill these demands can be used to predict the likelihood for first-year college students to successfully adjust to

college life and excel in their program of study. The first-year of college is the most critical period for adaptation since a number of issues can arise during the transition to tertiary education life. The challenges are indeed different from those faced in high school (Clinciu, 2013). Numerous studies conducted in the field of higher education have proven that a student's ability to adjust is an important predictor for academic achievement; moreover, successful transition and adjustment in the first-year of college are good indicators of student success in the following years (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

1.1. College Adjustment

College adjustment refers to how well a student can adjust to the demands associated with the college experience (Baker & Siryk, 1989). College adjustment involves overcoming stresses, tensions, and conflicts while learning to meet their own needs (Robinson, 2009 in Julia & Veni 2012). When entering college, individuals must also try to maintain a harmonious relationship with the surrounding environment through this transitional period.

There are four components to college adjustment, namely, academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Academic adjustment describes a student's ability to cope with academic demands. Academic performance and achievement, seriousness in academic endeavors, and satisfaction with the academic environment are indicators of academic adjustment. Social adjustment refers to how students deal with interpersonal and community demands. Social adjustment can be

measured by students' level of participation in campus activities, ability to overcome homesickness, and attitude toward social interaction, loneliness, and perceptions of social support. The third component of college adjustment is personal-emotional adjustment, which encompasses the psychological pressure and physical problems students may face. Institutional adjustment describes students' level of commitment to the goals of the educational institution they attend, their level of attachment to these institutions, and the quality of relationships or bonds formed. The institutional adjustment component manifests in student status (continuing or stopping lecturing), and also by expressions of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the institution (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

According to previous research, there are several key factors related to the ability of students to adapt in college. One such factor is gender. A study conducted by Conley, Kirsch, Dickson, and Bryant (2014) found that in the first-year of college, men and women experienced the same increase in stress, but women's stress levels continued to increase, whereas men's stress levels gradually stabilized. Race/ethnicity is another factor related to college adaptation. Stoklosa (2015) reported that students who identified themselves as Arab/Middle Eastern experienced more difficulty adapting, while those from European descent could better adapt. Additionally, students from higher social classes displayed better personal-emotional adjustment. Han, Pistole, and Caldwell (2017) demonstrated that stress caused resulting from acculturation can negatively impact students' academic and social adjustment.

Furthermore, Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) reported that social support from senior students significantly positively impacted first-year students' academic and social adjustment. Senior students understand the difficulties experienced by first-year students and can provide advice. First-year students often meet senior students through organizational activities; therefore, organizational activities also factor into adjustment success. Social support, specifically from peers, is a crucial factor influencing college adjustment as a whole (Solberg & Valdez, 1994). Specifically, researchers have found that students who feel support from peers tend to report better social integration (Milem & Berger, 1997). The results of research conducted by Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali, and Pohlert (2003) also show that perceptions of peer support are positive predictors of academic adjustment in college students. Other factors that might predict or correlate with first-year college students' adjustment are personality, self-evaluation, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal relationships with family and friends (Schneider & Ward, 2003).

Martin Jr., Swartz-Kulstad, and Madson (1999) stated that social support is essential for college adjustment. Apparently, this can be related to the fact that most first-year college students are in the adolescent developmental stage. Adolescent students may need support from their peers to assure them that they are accepted as part of the group and allow them to adjust to college life. Research conducted by Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005) found that the level of social support perceived by first-year college students is a key predictor of

adaptability in college. Additionally, social support is crucial for adolescents to develop social interaction skills, independence, and maturity before they reach adulthood (Kneipp, Kelly, & Cyphers, 2009). Students entering college experience the same challenges when adapting to the college environment. However, support from sources such as nuclear family, extended family, friends, and the people they interact with on campus enable first-year college students to adjust easier and faster in comparison to those who do not receive these supports (Credé & Niehorster, 2012).

Many studies have investigated the correlation between social support and college adjustment. For example, Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, and Cribbie (2007) demonstrated that social support is associated with successful college adjustment for first-year college students. Additionally, they found that self-confidence and stress also influenced college adjustment. However, self-confidence and stress variables were not included in this study, as social support is considered more crucial for adjustment in comparison.

In this study, we aim to build upon the research on social support and college adjustment presented by Friedlander et al. (2007), in which data were collected from 128 participants enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a Canadian university. Additionally, we conduct our research in Indonesia, where distinct characteristics that may affect college adjustment, such as culture, race, and religion, can be compared to the study conducted by Stoklosa (2015) at an American university.

1.2. Social Support

Shaumaker and Brownell (1984) explained that positive interactions in social support are an exchange of resources between two or more individuals, perceived as an intention to enhance the well-being of the recipient. Social support can include social resources that are perceived as the availability of someone to help their relationship (Cronkite & Moos, 1995). Perceived social support is one's perception of the availability of support from people such as friends and family (Hobfoll & Vaux, 1993). Social support can be explained in five dimensions. Tardy (1985) states that the best way to clarify differences in the definitions and approaches to social support is to determine the direction (support given or received), disposition (availability vs. utilization of support resources), description of support vs. evaluation of satisfaction with support, content (forms of support), and networks (systems that provide support).

According to Barrera, Sandler, and Ramsay (1981), social support is often provided by friends and family. Social support from the family can be in the form of providing assistance, guidance, and feedback (e.g., advice and instructions), non-directive support (e.g., trust, intimacy), positive social interactions, and tangible assistance (e.g., residence, money). Holahan, Valentiner, and Moos (1995) reported that first-year college students with higher levels of social support from family appeared to have better adaptability (i.e., higher well-being and happiness) and were less stressed (i.e., less depression and anxiety) than those with lower levels of familial support. First-year college students who perceived that

their parents were interested in the experience and direct decision-making regarding their education also felt emotional stability from family during the college transition. In addition, family support can help students to refrain from seeking help outside friends, neighbors, and professionals. Families can also provide moral support without assessing the amount of social support felt in certain situations (for example, "my family provides the moral support I need regarding academic demands") and may provide support in more domains than peer support (Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003).

Barrera, Sandler, and Ramsay (1981) also reported that social support can come from peers. Peer support refers to an individuals' perception that social resources, or their need for information, feedback, and support from peers, are provided (Procidano & Heller, 1983). When adolescents enter the period of emerging adulthood, they must navigate a period of instability, where they adjust to a foreign environment with different academic and social relationships, explore their identity, and experience changes in self-concept (Arnett, 2004). Hiester, Nordstorm, and Swenson (2008) stated that peers play an important role in the transition to college. Additionally, individuals experience more contact intensity with friends in college than with their families and friends who live in other locations (Kopperman, 2007).

Based on this literature review, we conclude that social support is a key factor in adaptation to college life. Indeed, we hypothesize that there is a positive and significant relationship between social support and the ability of first-year college

students to successfully adjust. We conducted this research to examine the relationship between social support and college adjustment and to overcome the limitations of previous studies by collecting data from students with diverse backgrounds.

2. METHODS

2.1. Participants

For this study, we collected data from first-year college students enrolled in 15 faculties at the Universitas Indonesia using a snowball sampling technique. We distributed questionnaire links using broadcast messages that would attract attention through the LINE and Instagram applications as well as physical questionnaires, recruiting first-year college students, or acquaintances or relatives of first-year college students.

From the online and offline questionnaires, we had a total of 281 participants. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 22 years (M = 17.99, SD = 0.650). Most participants were women (80.9%) and most (77.3%) attended state high schools as opposed to private high schools (22.7%). Among the 15 faculties in which students were enrolled, 21.53% were in the Faculty of Psychology, 13.52% in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, and 9.6% in the Faculty of Law. Most participants (47.8%) still lived with their parents and the majority came from Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi (86.3%). Additionally, most participants had never joined an organization while in college (66.9%).

2.2. Design

The research design was a non-experimental correlation study that was proposed to determine the relationship between social support variables and the college adjustment variable without manipulation. The EV that was controlled in this study was a cohort of first-year college students in 2018, using constant techniques.

2.3. Measurements

The researchers employed two measurement instruments to conduct this study. First, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley in (1988) and adapted by Rachgea (2016) was used to measure the social support variable. The MSPSS consists of 12 questions that are rated using a Likert scale where 1 = Very Unsuitable and 6 = Very Suitable. One example item is "my family is really trying to help me." A high score indicates considerable support from the participant's family. The MSPSS is scored by summing the score from each response because all items are positive. The MSPSS has good internal reliability, with a Cronbach's α of 0.89-0.92.

Second, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) developed by Baker and Siryk (1989) and adapted by Malay and Ali (2017) was used to measure the college adaptation variable. The SACQ consists of 64 questions that are rated using a Likert scale where 1 = Very Unsuitable and 7 = Very Suitable. One example item is "I enjoy academic assignments on campus." A higher score indicates more adaptations made by the participants. The SACQ is scored by adding up the scores from each response, but there are some negative statements/items that must first be reversed

(e.g., 1 to 7, 2 to 6, 3 to 5). The SACQ has good internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.918$).

2.4. **Procedures**

The research procedure began with the preparation of the questionnaire. We combined the two measurement tools described above into two types of questionnaire, physical, and online. The physical questionnaires were distributed to first-year college students of the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia during a Personal and Career Development Class. The online questionnaire was created using Google Forms and the link was distributed to first-year college students from all faculties of Universitas Indonesia using the social media application LINE. Researchers employed the snowballing technique by sharing a link in the LINE group chat for first-year college students in various faculties and departments. The link was also distributed using a feature on Instagram.

The link to the online questionnaire was active for 11 days from November 20-30, 2018. A go-pay credit of Rp20.000 was rewarded to online participants after completion of the questionnaire. After the data were collected, the offline and online responses were combined in Microsoft Excel and then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). We used Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation to measure the correlation between our two continuous variables with interval/ratio measurement scales. To test our hypothesis, we used a one-tailed test. Additionally, we analyzed the relationship between gender, origin of high school, and involvement in organizations with college adjustment using an independent sample t-test.

3. RESULTS

A summary of the statistical analysis that we processed using SPSS is presented in Table 1. The mean SACQ score was 272.14 and the mean MSPSS score was 53.06. The minimum score for the social support variable is 23 and the maximum is 72; the minimum score for the college adjustment variable is 144 and the maximum is 407.

Pearson's correlation was used to determine the relationship between social support and college adjustment. Social support ($M = 53.08$, $SD = 11.690$) and college adjustment ($M = 272.34$, $SD = 42,325$) were significantly positively correlated ($r(281) = 0.468$, $p < 0.001$, one-tailed). The statistical results indicate that we can reject the null hypothesis (H_0). Based on Gravetter & Wallnau (2007), social support is moderately affected by college adjustment ($r^2 = 0.2116$). According to the coefficient of determination, 21.2% of college adjustment can be explained by social support, while the remaining 78.8% is influenced by other variables not included in this study.

Table 1. Overview of Social Support and College Adjustment (N = 281)

Variable	M	SD
Social Support	53.08	11.690
College Adjustment	272.34	42.325

M, mean; SD, standard deviation.

Further, we examined the relationship between gender, origin of high school, and involvement in organizations with college adjustment. We found that gender had an effect size of $r^2 = 0.0163$ on college adjustment or 1.63%. High school origin had an effect size of $r^2 = 0.0004$ or 0.4%; involvement in campus organizations had an effect size of $r^2 = 0.0475$ or 4.75%. Thus, these variables were not significantly related to college adjustment.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that social support has a positive relationship with college adjustment. These results were in line with research conducted by Friedlander et al. (2007) who reported that social support was an important factor for the success of students adapting to tertiary institutions. Our statistical analysis shows that 21.2% of the college adjustment variable could be explained by social support. Several other factors can influence college adjustment, including gender (Conley et al., 2014) and involvement in organizations (Hurtado, 1996). Based on our analysis, these factors were not significantly correlated with college adjustment. We can conclude that social support had more effect on, and thus, was a better predictor of college adaptation.

Although social support had a significant relationship with college adaptation, we suspect that other cultural aspects, such as the collectivistic culture in Indonesia, may also be related to first-year college student adjustment. According to Hofstede (in Matsumoto & Juang, 2013), Indonesia is a country characterized by a collectivistic culture. Singh and Thuraisingam (2007) reported that international students in Malaysia who came from collectivistic countries such as Nigeria, India, South Korea, and Indonesia had stronger social support that helped them through their college adjustment.

One limitation of this study was that most of the participants were female and from the Faculty of Psychology. As such, we could not rule out the possibility that academic faculty and gender can influence college adjustment. In addition, the measurement of college adjustment covered all dimensions, so it was uncertain which college dimensions were most correlated with social support.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on research conducted by collecting data from 281 new students at the Universitas Indonesia in 2018, there was a positive correlation between social support and college adjustment. The influence of social support on college adjustment is at a moderate level. We suggest that in further research, the number of participants from each faculty can be balanced by setting a minimum number of participants per faculty so that each faculty can be well represented. We also suggest balancing the number of participants from both genders, as gender was reported to be a factor in college adjustment in other studies. In addition, the sample would be more representative if it can be drawn from a broader scope, for example, from one city or several cities in a metropolitan area. Future studies are also expected to describe each dimension of college adjustment and determine which dimensions are more correlated with social support.

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