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Exploring Mental Health Issues and Online Counseling Preferences Among University Students in East Kalimantan

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Abstract

Exploring Mental Health Issues and Online Counseling Preferences Among College Students in East Kalimantan. Adolescents' awareness and handling of mental health conditions such as stress, anxiety, and depression are still suboptimal because they face various academic, social, and personal challenges. This study aims to analyze the prevalence of depression, stress, and anxiety among college students and examine their preferences in accessing online counseling services. This study uses a mixed-method approach, Quantitative and Qualitative. Quantitative data uses the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS) to measure the prevalence of mental health disorders among college students. Qualitative data, using interviews, to explore students' preferences in accessing counseling services. The study findings indicate that anxiety is the most common mental health disorder among college students in East Kalimantan. In addition, the study findings show that the majority of students have not used offline counseling services on campus, partly because they are not aware of it or it is not available. Students' views on online counseling vary, and they have serious concerns about data security and privacy. Most respondents prefer conventional counseling because they are comfortable with face-to-face interactions, although some prefer online counseling due to its convenience. This research has implications for universities' efforts to provide counseling services that are easily accessible and familiar to students.

Keywords : Depression, Stress, Anxiety, University Students, Online Counselling

Introduction

In addition to physical health, mental health is a crucial element within an individual that needs attention (Iasiello et al., 2019; Novianti, 2023; Prince et al., 2007). Mental and physical health are inherently interconnected. Life demands on individuals

often result in stress, which subsequently affects mental health disorders (Calcia et al., 2016; Putri et al., 2015; Schönfeld et al., 2016). International surveys indicate that depression and anxiety are the most prevalent mental health disorders faced by university students (Wörfel et al., 2016). Although the concept of mental health varies between studies, the aspects of mental health frequently associated with university students are stress, anxiety (Kaligis et al., 2021).

The age range corresponding to adolescence is highly variable. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that the adolescent age range is 12-24 years. According to the Regulation of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia Number 25 of 2014, the age range for adolescents is 10-18 years. Meanwhile, the National Population and Family Planning Agency specifies that the adolescent age range is 10-24 years and unmarried.

Adolescents are an age group that garners attention from various fields such as psychology, sociology, education, and others. Physically, adolescents are at the peak of their development (Sluijs et al., 2021). However, from a psychosocial perspective, they are in a phase where they may experience problems both with themselves and with others. The developmental period between late adolescence and young adulthood, the age range typically encompassing undergraduate students, is particularly susceptible to mental health disorders (Martel & Fuchs, 2017; Wilens & Rosenbaum, 2013). Adolescents are in a transitional phase where, on the one hand, they still exhibit childlike behaviours, but on the other hand, they are expected to act maturely (Kaligis et al., 2021). As they develop, adolescents become closer to their peer groups and begin to detach from parental bonds or dependence, often displaying opposition to parental authority (Ragelienė, 2016).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 450 million people live with mental disorders (Aldiabat et al., 2014). Among adolescents, 1 in 7 individuals aged 10-19 years experiences a mental disorder, accounting for 13% of the global health burden due to these conditions. Depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are the three most prevalent mental health issues among adolescents. Furthermore, suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among adolescents aged 15-19 years worldwide.

The 2018 Basic Health Research (Riskesdas) in Indonesia indicates that over 19 million individuals aged 15 years and older experience emotional mental disorders, and more than 12 million individuals in the same age group suffer from depression. Additionally, the data reveals that 7 out of every 1,000 Indonesians suffer from severe

mental disorders. This figure represents a 312% increase compared to 2013 (Kemenkes RI, 2018).

In Indonesia, the prevalence rate of adolescent depression has not been thoroughly identified. However, the manifestations of depression can be observed in the form of substance abuse (including narcotics, illegal drugs, alcohol, etc.), declining academic performance, and destructive or aggressive behaviour (such as bullying, violence, and school fights), among others. Depression, which is particularly prevalent during adolescence, is a serious issue (Aditomo & Retnowati, 2004; Jayanthi et al., 2015; Lu, 2019). Failure to address adolescent mental health disorders can result in these issues persisting into adulthood, leading to both physical and mental problems and limiting the opportunities to become happy and productive adults.

Other factors that contribute to mental health issues among university students, as identified by Flatt, include academic pressure, financial burdens, increased accessibility, gender ratios, technology, and lifestyle (Flatt, 2013). Additionally, students with characteristics that differ from the general student population—such as those from ethnic/racial minorities, international students, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds—are also susceptible to social isolation, which subsequently impacts their mental health (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009).

In East Kalimantan, data from the Basic Health Research (Riskesdas) indicates that the age group 15-24 years, which includes undergraduate students, is the second-highest experiencing depression, following those aged 65 years and above (Kemenkes RI, 2018). Undergraduate students worldwide are inherently at risk for mental health disorders due to various stressors they encounter. The transition from high school to university is a highly stressful and challenging process; thus, students globally are at risk of experiencing mental health disorders (Aldiabat et al., 2014).

Based on the background mentioned earlier, this article aims to (1) Analyze the prevalence of depression, stress, and anxiety among university students in East Kalimantan? and (2) How do students prefer accessing online counselling services?

Method

This study used a mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' mental health conditions and their preferences in accessing online counseling services in East Kalimantan.

Quantitative data were collected through a survey involving 206 active students from various universities in East Kalimantan, namely Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris State Islamic University (UINSI), Mulawarman University (UNMUL), Samarinda State Polytechnic, Sangatta Islamic College (STAIS), Kutai Kartanegara State Islamic University (UNKOTA), Kartanegara University, and Balikpapan University. Sampling was carried out randomly by considering the distribution of campuses to ensure representativeness. The instrument used was the validated Indonesian version of the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS), with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.85 for depression, 0.84 for anxiety, and 0.84 for stress, respectively. Quantitative data were analyzed using quantitative descriptive analysis to describe the prevalence levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among students.

To deepen the survey results, this study also collected qualitative data through in-depth interviews with seven informants selected purposively from different campuses. The selection of informants took into account the diversity of academic backgrounds and experiences in accessing counseling services. Interviews focused on students' preferences for online counseling services, including perceptions, barriers, and motivations in using these services.

Qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify common patterns and key issues related to access and acceptance of online counseling services. By combining these two approaches, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the mental health of students in East Kalimantan and their tendencies in choosing counseling services, both from a quantitative aspect and an in-depth understanding qualitatively.

Result

Level of Depression, Stress and Anxiety among Students

This study involved 206 students from various universities in East Kalimantan. The subjects consisted of 72 males and 134 females. The demographic details are as follows:

Table 1. Demography of respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	72	35
Female	134	65
Age (in years)		

17	1	0
18	44	21
19	73	35
20	46	22
21	22	11
22	11	5
23	2	1
24	7	3
Semester		
II	132	64
IV	41	20
VI	27	13
VIII	5	2
X	1	0
Indeks Prestasi		
2-2.5	1	0
2.51-3	4	2
3.1-3.5	60	29
3.51-4	141	68

The majority of respondents at the time of data collection were in the following semesters: II (132 individuals), IV (41 individuals), VI (27 individuals), VIII (5 individuals), and X (1 individual). The average age of the respondents was 19.5 years, with a median age of 19 years. Generally, the respondents in this study had academically satisfactory performance, indicated by an average latest GPA of 3.6 with a median of 3.6 (on a scale of 0-4).

Based on the DASS scoring scale for depression, among the total respondents, the distribution is as follows: 40% are classified as normal, 16% experience mild depression, 23% moderate depression, 13% severe depression, and 8% extremely severe depression.

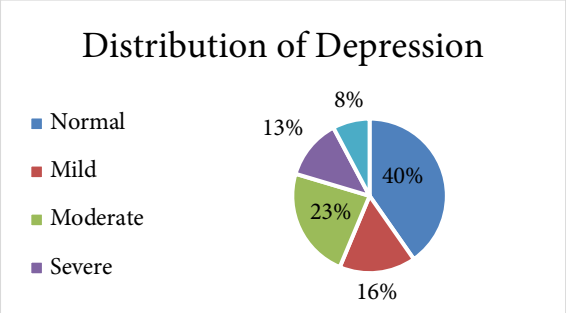
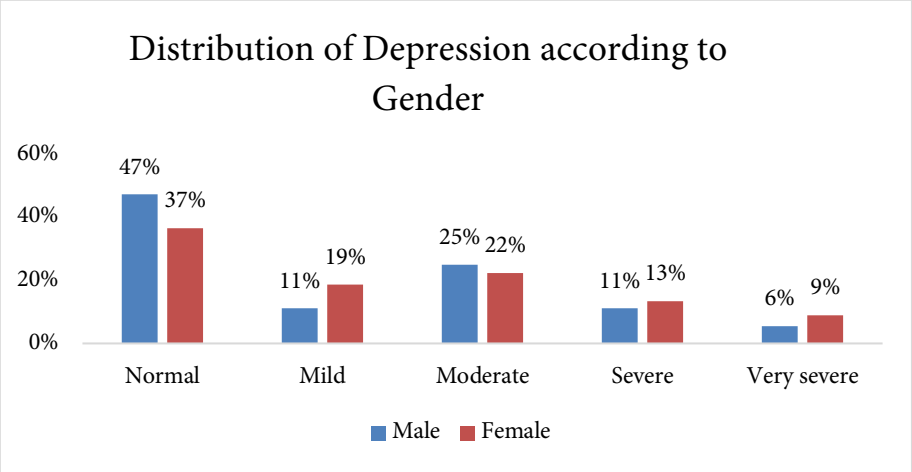


Figure 1. Distribution of Depression

When comparing male and female respondents, it is evident that the total percentage of respondents classified as normal is higher among male respondents. For the categories of mild, severe, and extremely severe depression, male respondents have a lower percentage compared to female respondents. Conversely, in the moderate category, the percentage of male respondents experiencing moderate depression is higher than that of female respondents.



Based on the DASS scoring scale for anxiety, among the total respondents, the distribution is as follows: 14% are classified as normal, 6% experience mild anxiety, 29% moderate anxiety, 24% severe anxiety, and 27% extremely severe anxiety.

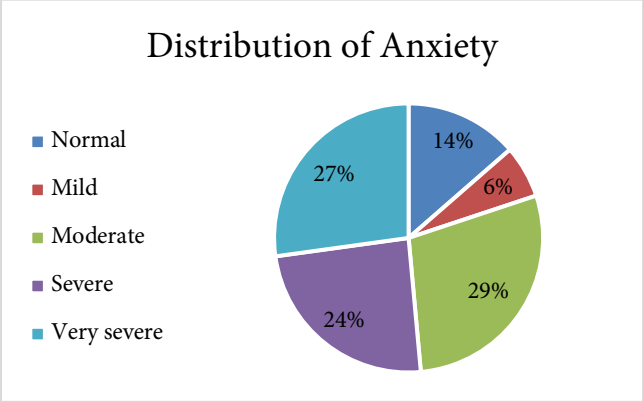


Figure 3. Distribution of anxiety

When comparing male and female respondents, it is evident that the total percentage of respondents classified as normal is higher among male respondents. For the categories of mild, moderate, and severe anxiety, male respondents have a higher percentage compared to female respondents. Conversely, in the highly severe anxiety

category, the percentage of female respondents experiencing extremely severe anxiety is higher than that of male respondents.

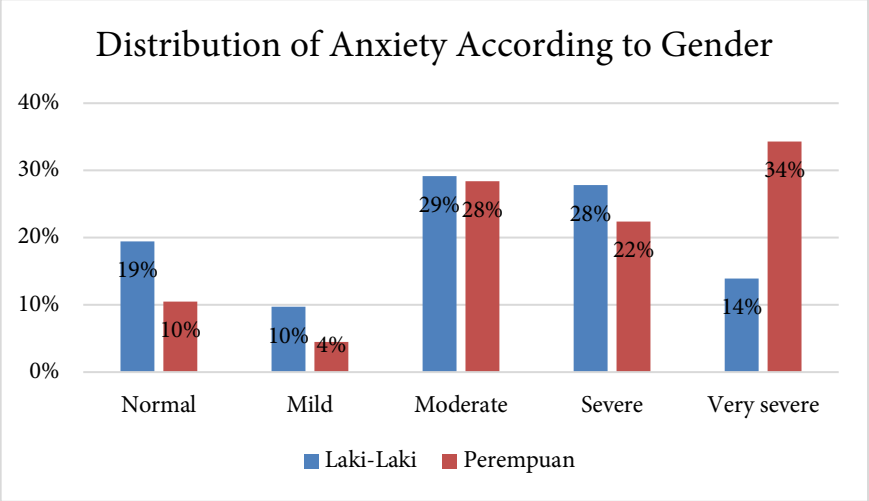


Figure 4. Distribution of anxiety according to gender

Based on the DASS scoring scale for stress, among the total respondents, the distribution is as follows: 36% are classified as normal, 24% experience mild stress, 24% moderate stress, 13% severe stress, and 3% extremely severe stress.

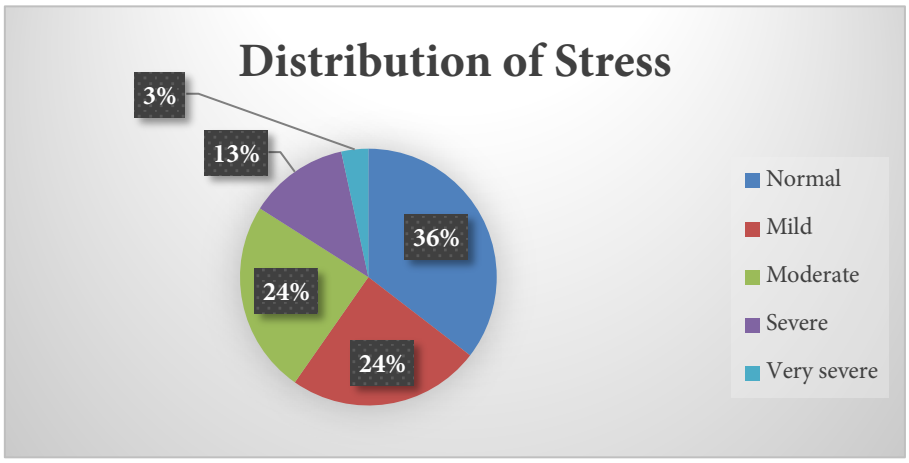


Figure 5. Distribution of stress

When comparing male and female respondents, it is evident that the total percentage of respondents classified as normal is higher among male respondents. For the categories of mild, severe, and highly severe stress, male respondents have a lower percentage than female respondents. Conversely, in the moderate stress category, the percentage of male respondents experiencing moderate stress is higher than that of female respondents.

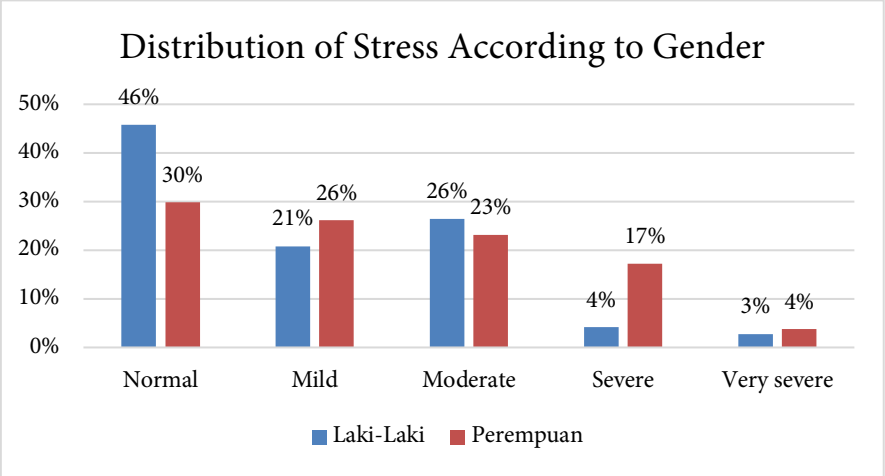


Figure 6. Distribution of Stress according to gender

Based on the research findings, anxiety is the most prevalent mental health disorder experienced by students in East Kalimantan compared to stress and depression. The total number of respondents experiencing moderate , severe, and highly severe anxiety is 165 respondents. On the other hand, the total number of respondents experiencing moderate, severe, and highly severe stress is 83 respondents, and the total number of respondents experiencing mild, severe, and highly severe depression is 90 respondents.

Table 2. Distribution of stress, depression and anxiety

Level	Stress		Depression		Anxiety	
	Male	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male
Normal	33	40	34	49	14	14
Mild	15	35	8	25	7	6
Moderate	19	31	18	30	21	38
Severe	3	23	8	18	20	30
Highly severe	2	5	4	12	10	46

Preferences of Students in Accessing Online Counseling Services

Counselling services in universities are one of the services that should ideally be available in higher education institutions. However, interview results indicate that many students need to utilize the counselling services available on their campuses. Several primary reasons were expressed by the students, including the unavailability of services and the lack of awareness about the existence of these services.

> *"Personally, I have never attended a counselling session before. But I do know that counselling services are available for students on campus."*
>
> *"As far as I know, no counselling services are on campus. Therefore, I have never accessed or inquired about it with any lecturer."*

The lack of access to counselling services can be attributed to several factors, including the shortage of resources on campus and differing priorities from campus administration. In some cases, counselling services might need to be adequately promoted to students, leading to their unawareness of the availability of such services. The lack of knowledge about counselling services also indicates that campuses need to enhance their communication and educational efforts regarding these services.

Although some campuses provide counselling services, interview results indicate that awareness and utilisation of these services remain low. This situation could be attributed to the persistent stigma surrounding mental health, insufficient promotion, and students' apprehensions about accessing counselling services.

> *"If there are services available on campus, students sometimes feel more afraid of the service personnel when seeking counselling."*

The interview results indicate that most students prefer conventional counselling, specifically face-to-face sessions with counsellors. These students feel more comfortable speaking directly with counsellors because face-to-face interaction is perceived as more personal and profound. They believe this method is more effective in addressing anxiety and stress issues, as counsellors can provide empathetic responses that are tailored to individual needs.

> *"I prefer conventional counselling because when I feel anxious, I can be comforted. Machines can't understand feelings."*

> *"Online counselling is good for those who live far from the city, but if possible, face-to-face counselling allows us to express ourselves more satisfactorily."*

Online counselling allows students to access services from anywhere and at any time without needing to schedule appointments or travel to counselling locations.

> *"I prefer online counselling because I don't have to meet face-to-face, and I'm not restricted by office hours. So, if I need to, I can contact them directly at night. I'm also afraid of meeting new people."*

> *"I prefer online because I'm embarrassed to talk to someone I just met."*

Privacy is also a significant consideration, especially for those who feel awkward or embarrassed discussing personal issues face-to-face. Online counselling makes students feel more comfortable sharing their problems without worrying about judgment or stigma.

In this current research, students argue that online counselling services represent an alternative to service provision. However, online and artificial intelligence-based counselling cannot entirely replace the role of counsellors. Students are aware that

machines can only assist in tasks like initial data gathering but lack the specificity needed to provide personalised advice.

"Online counselling can help but cannot replace human intelligence."

"Online counselling cannot fully replace face-to-face counselling but can be helpful."

Considering the varying opinions among students regarding AI-based or online counselling, it is crucial for service providers to address concerns about privacy and security seriously. Campuses and service providers must ensure that the systems used are secure and safeguard students' privacy while continuing to promote the practical benefits of these services to enhance acceptance and utilisation among students.

Discussion

Based on the research results, anxiety is the most common mental health disorder experienced by students in East Kalimantan compared to stress and depression. The number of respondents who experienced moderate, severe, and very severe anxiety was 165 respondents. Meanwhile, the number of respondents who experienced moderate, severe, and very severe stress was 83 respondents, and the number of respondents who experienced mild, severe, and very severe depression was 90 respondents. Mental health can essentially have a significant impact on all aspects of a person's life. Daradjat explains that mental health affects a person's feelings, thoughts/intelligence, behavior, and physical health (Daradjat, 1969). In simple terms, mental health is the foundation for forming a quality individual. Without optimal mental health, a person cannot reach their potential adequately. In examining mental disorders (stress, depression, and anxiety) in adolescents, the stress diathesis model can be used to analyze the causes of these mental disorders. In the context of the stress diathesis model, individuals who face mental health disorders are not solely caused by one factor. Factors that contribute to stress include personality characteristics, childhood experiences, coping strategies, stressors in adulthood, and other factors. A person with a diathesis is at higher risk for mental health disorders. In addition, in general, stress can also cause stimuli that cause psychopathology (Davidson, 2006). The diathesis-stress theory of depression states that the impact of stress on the risk of depression depends on the individual's diathesis or vulnerability (Colodro-Conde et al., 2018). Diathesis-stress explains the relationship between the cause of depression and the level of vulnerability in reacting to stressors (stressors). A study conducted by Chang tested the diathesis-stress model involving expectations and trauma history as predictors of depressive and anxiety symptoms in a sample of 575 college students. The results of

the regression analysis showed that expectations and trauma were significant and unique predictors of depressive and anxiety symptoms in college students. In addition, the researchers found support for a significant Expectancy × Trauma interaction in predicting depressive and anxiety symptoms. Diathesis-stress, which combines expectations and trauma experiences, can be used to predict symptoms of depression and stress in college students (Chang et al., 2016).

In his research, Amin explained that the cause of disorders in individuals is associated with psychological vulnerabilities such as personality traits. Subjects with introverted and passive tendencies who are highly dependent on the encouragement and attention of others are more susceptible to stress when faced with stressors. In addition, individuals with low social skills and permissive parenting tend to withdraw from their environment and fail to learn effective stress coping mechanisms (Amin, 2021).

Furthermore, Aditomo and Retnowati explained in their research that depression is the most common symptom of mental health disorders. Developmentally, depression often appears in adolescence. Epidemiological studies show that the prevalence of depression is 2.5% in children and increases to 8.3% in adolescents. Aditomo's research findings show that higher levels of perfectionism and lower self-esteem correlate with higher tendencies for depression and vice versa (Aditomo & Retnowati, 2004).

Stress can be conceptualized as an event that disrupts the balance of life (Oatley et al., 2006). A person who is susceptible to depression does not necessarily become depressed if they are not exposed to stressful conditions that trigger depression (Jeronimus et al., 2013). Stressors in a person's life can include certain events such as the death of a loved one, natural disasters, divorce, chronic illness, relationship problems with a partner/family, and others. Stress can also be caused by daily tasks such as schoolwork, university studies, or work. Counseling is one method of dealing with mental health problems. Various types of counseling can be applied to overcome mental health problems, such as religious-based counseling, trauma counseling, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), and other counseling approaches (Apriyanto et al., 2022; Awaliyah et al., 2021; Muzaki & Saputra, 2019; Novianti, 2023; Situmorang, 2020). The development of the Society 5.0 era requires students to be able to adapt. In this context, guidance and counseling for students is a crucial aspect to help them prepare themselves (Putra et al., 2022).

The purpose of guidance and counseling in higher education is to help students assess and analyze themselves, along with their understanding of the world of work and

the decisions they will make (Azhari et al., 2023). Higher education institutions need to be recommended to provide mental health support services. In particular, programs that focus on prevention and development should be implemented to assist counselors in helping students develop their emotional intelligence, solve academic and non-academic problems, explore their interests, talents, and personal values, provide support related to adjusting to the campus environment, overcome interpersonal problems, and improve psychological well-being (Desman et al., 2024; Kamaruzzaman & Sulistiawan, 2020; Wahyuni et al., 2018).

A 2022 study by Daciana on factors influencing students' decision to seek counseling services in a university setting showed that counselor personality and availability of information about counseling services were the two most important factors that encouraged students to utilize counseling programs (Lupu, 2023). Therefore, effective promotion and awareness campaigns are essential for students' utilization of counseling services. In this regard, the aforementioned study provides insight into the importance of integrating information about counseling services into new student orientation and other campus activities.

The stigma associated with mental health is often a significant barrier to students seeking help. According to research by Eisenberg et al. (2009), stigma and fear of discrimination often prevent students from utilizing available mental health services. Campuses need to take proactive steps to reduce this stigma through education and campaigns that promote positive understandings of mental health.

In addition, ineffective promotion of counseling services is also a significant factor. A study by (Lally et al., 2013) on mental illness stigma and help-seeking among college students showed that unclear information and inadequate communication can hinder students' utilization of counseling services. Without a clear explanation of the importance of good mental health, students tend to think that engaging with counseling services is an indication of individual weakness, thus misleading students into believing that they will face discrimination because of it (Martin, 2010). Therefore, universities need to develop better communication strategies and ensure that information about counseling services is easily accessible and understood by all students. The results of the interviews showed that most students were not aware of the availability of online counseling services. Only a small number of respondents had heard of this service but had not used it. This shows that students' knowledge of new technologies in counseling is still very limited. In addition, students who have heard about online counseling are not interested in participating in the service for several reasons such as fear of discrimination, stigma, and labeling (Gulliver et al., 2019).

This lack of awareness can be attributed to several factors, including the lack of promotion of counseling services on campus and limited information available to students. According to a study among Korean college students by Bathje et al., (2014) , mental health technologies, including AI-based apps and services, have significant potential to improve access to and effectiveness of mental health interventions. However, the success of implementing these technologies largely depends on how well the information is communicated to potential users.

Interview results indicated a significant information gap regarding online counseling services among college students. This information gap suggests that many students need to be informed about the potential benefits of such services or how to access them. To address this gap, campuses need to develop more effective outreach strategies . One approach is to integrate information about online counseling services into new student orientation programs, mental health seminars, and campus health campaigns. Research by Okpechi et al., (2018) showed that comprehensive education and appropriate communication strategies can improve.

Utilizing various communication platforms such as social media, campus email, and posters can also help disseminate information more widely and effectively. Additionally, providing training for campus staff and counselors on the use of these technologies can ensure that they can provide accurate information and support students in accessing these services.

Research by (Wang et al., 2020) supports this view, showing that a strong therapeutic relationship and the physical presence of the counselor can enhance the effectiveness of therapy. Face-to-face interactions allow counselors to read clients' body language and facial expressions, which are important components in understanding and treating psychological issues. However, some students prefer online counseling for a variety of practical reasons. Factors such as convenience and privacy are the main reasons for those who prefer online services.

According to research by Wells, (2023) , online counseling can be as effective as traditional counseling, especially in addressing anxiety issues. Interview results showed that some students viewed AI-based or online counseling as a quick and practical solution. These services offer easy access, especially for those who live far from the city or in remote areas where access to traditional counseling services may be limited. Students can access these services anytime and anywhere without having to travel long distances or schedule appointments that may be difficult to meet due to time constraints. However, serious concerns about privacy and security of personal data when using AI-based or online counseling services are ongoing issues. Students are

concerned that their personal data, including sensitive mental health information, could be misused or leaked. These concerns can be significant barriers to adopting online counseling services. A study conducted by Murray et al. found that students who accessed counseling services showed significant improvements in their Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation-Outcome Measure (CORE-OM) scores. Forty-nine percent of those whose initial scores were in the clinical range experienced clinically meaningful changes (Murray et al., 2016). Biasi et al. also found that students who accessed counseling services were able to reduce their scores on interpersonal difficulties and distress symptoms on the OQ-45 (Biasi et al., 2017). Counseling also improves students' quality of life by helping them achieve academic success and has a substantial impact on their educational and personal development (Thuryrajah et al., 2017).

A systematic review by (Hadler et al., 2021) appears to support this view, suggesting that online counseling services can increase accessibility and flexibility, particularly for individuals living in areas with limited access to mental health services. While online counseling provides flexibility and anonymity that can encourage client openness, online counseling also poses challenges, particularly in maintaining the warmth and closeness that is typically conveyed through non-verbal cues (Rosyid et al., 2024). It can also reduce waiting times and costs associated with traveling to a counseling center. Findings from Hadler et al also highlight the importance of security and privacy in technology-based mental health services. They emphasize that user trust in the security of data is a key factor in accepting and utilizing these services. Online counseling services need to ensure that they use strong data encryption and adhere to strict privacy standards to protect user information.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the phenomenon of anxiety disorders is one of the most common mental health problems experienced by students in East Kalimantan. Although not as widespread as anxiety, stress, and depression are also significant mental health disorders with alarming prevalence rates among students. Based on gender, male students are generally more likely to experience anxiety than female students. Conversely, female students are more susceptible to stress and depression than male students. This study recommends that campuses need to provide counseling services that are accessible to all students to understand students' mental health conditions. And campuses should also recruit and train peer counselors from among students as first aid for students' mental health problems.

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