

Religious coping as a protective factor against stress in medical education

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Abstract. College students often face the challenge of adjusting to various daily routines, which can create pressure and lead to negative emotional experiences. To navigate these difficulties, students must develop effective coping strategies that enhance their ability to manage stress. One approach that can support stress reduction is religious coping, as it provides a sense of comfort, guidance, and emotional stability. Additionally, resilience plays a crucial role in helping individuals overcome obstacles and persist through adversity. Coping mechanisms, including those rooted in spirituality, are essential for maintaining emotional well-being and fostering strong resilience in the face of academic and personal challenges. This cross-sectional observational analytic study gathered primary data using two questionnaire instruments: BRIEF RCOPE and Growth-Focused Resilience. Samples were collected through non-random sampling from 174 students of the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, class of 2023. Data analysis was conducted using the Chi-Square Test with SPSS version 21. The obtained p-value (sig) was 0.000 (0.05), indicating a significant relationship between religious coping and resilience. Religious coping was identified as a factor influencing resilience, where effective coping strategies contribute to positive personal growth, while ineffective coping may hinder resilience development. The study concludes that there is a significant correlation between religious coping and resilience among students of the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, class of 2023.

Keywords: Religious coping, Resilience, Stress control, Medical students, Coping strategies

Introduction

In both Indonesia and the global context, individuals face numerous challenges that impact various aspects of life, including economic instability, health crises, political uncertainties, and social upheavals. Among these challenges, one of the most significant issues that has emerged in recent years is the decline in mental health, particularly among students. The pressures of academic performance, social expectations, and personal responsibilities create an environment where students are increasingly susceptible to psychological distress.

A study conducted by Li et al. (2020) highlighted the severity of this issue by reporting that 53.8% of respondents experienced moderate to severe psychological distress, 16.5% exhibited symptoms of depression, 28.8% suffered from anxiety, and 8.1% faced stress-related conditions. These statistics indicate that mental health problems among students are prevalent and need immediate attention. The root causes of these psychological challenges are diverse and include exposure to distressing news,

restrictions on daily activities, lack of social interaction, and other external pressures that contribute to emotional strain.

Students, particularly those pursuing higher education, encounter various academic and non-academic stressors that can have profound effects on their well-being. The transition from high school to university life itself is a major shift that requires students to adapt to new environments, manage their time efficiently, and balance multiple responsibilities. In medical education, the situation is even more demanding, as students must cope with rigorous coursework, clinical rotations, and intense examinations.

The pressure to excel academically often leads to prolonged stress, which, if not managed properly, can manifest as psychological distress. Many students experience negative emotional states such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, psychological strain, and post-traumatic stress symptoms, all of which diminish their overall well-being. Sudden changes in daily routines, shifts in learning methods, and behavioral adaptations further contribute to this stress, making it difficult for students to maintain a sense of normalcy.

Psychologically, adapting to new conditions can be challenging, particularly when the changes are unexpected or difficult to navigate. Stress and emotional strain often arise when individuals perceive themselves as unable to meet the demands placed upon them. If left unaddressed, these stressors can escalate into severe mental health conditions, ultimately affecting students' academic performance and quality of life. Therefore, it is essential for students to develop effective coping strategies to navigate these challenges and protect their mental health.

Coping strategies play a crucial role in helping individuals manage stress and maintain their psychological well-being. Coping does not develop overnight; rather, it is a dynamic process that evolves as individuals learn to adapt to different stressors. Effective coping mechanisms allow individuals to regulate their emotions, build resilience, and foster a sense of stability despite external pressures.

There are two primary types of coping strategies: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping involves identifying the root cause of stress and taking actionable steps to resolve the issue. For example, students who struggle with academic pressure may adopt better time management techniques, seek academic assistance, or modify their study habits to enhance their learning experience. On the other hand, emotion-focused coping revolves around managing the emotional distress associated with stressors. This may involve engaging in relaxation techniques, practicing mindfulness, seeking social support, or engaging in recreational activities to alleviate stress.

While both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies are beneficial, their effectiveness varies depending on the individual and the specific situation. One particularly significant coping mechanism that has gained attention in recent years is religious coping. Religion provides individuals with a source of guidance, emotional support, and hope, helping them navigate difficult situations through faith-based practices.

Religious coping refers to the use of religious beliefs, practices, and spirituality as a means of managing stress and adversity. Religion has long been recognized as a fundamental aspect of human life, providing individuals with comfort, meaning, and a sense of purpose. In times of distress, many people turn to their faith as a source of strength, seeking solace in prayer, rituals, and spiritual guidance.

Religious coping encompasses various practices, including prayer, meditation, scripture reading, attending religious services, and seeking counsel from religious leaders. These activities offer individuals a way to reframe their stressors in a spiritual context, allowing them to find meaning in their struggles. By believing that challenges are part of a divine plan, individuals can cultivate a sense of acceptance and resilience, reducing the psychological burden of stress.

Research has shown that religious coping can have positive effects on mental health by promoting psychological resilience, reducing anxiety and depression, and enhancing overall well-being. For many individuals, faith serves as a stabilizing force that helps them navigate uncertainty and adversity. When students incorporate religious coping into their daily lives, they may experience greater emotional stability, improved self-esteem, and a stronger sense of purpose.

Resilience is the ability to adapt and thrive despite experiencing stress, trauma, or adversity. It is a crucial factor in determining why some individuals are better equipped to handle difficult experiences than others. Resilience involves a combination of personal characteristics, environmental factors, and coping mechanisms that enable individuals to persevere in the face of challenges.

Religious coping and resilience are closely linked, as spirituality provides individuals with a framework for understanding and overcoming difficulties. Studies have shown that people who engage in religious coping tend to exhibit higher levels of resilience due to their ability to derive strength from their faith. According to Ozcan (2021), religious coping is rooted in spirituality and has historically been utilized as a method for managing stress and adversity. Spirituality itself is a fundamental component of resilience, as it fosters a positive outlook, encourages hope, and promotes inner strength.

For medical students, resilience is particularly important, given the demanding nature of their education and future profession. Medical training involves exposure to intense workloads, emotional challenges, and high-pressure situations that can take a toll on students' mental health. Developing resilience through religious coping can help students maintain their well-being and enhance their ability to cope with the challenges of medical education.

Given the growing concern about mental health issues among students, further research on the role of religious coping in stress management is essential. Understanding how faith-based coping mechanisms influence resilience can provide valuable insights for educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers in designing support systems for students. By integrating religious coping strategies into mental health programs, institutions can help students develop stronger coping skills, leading to improved well-being and academic performance.

Future studies should explore the different dimensions of religious coping, including its impact on long-term mental health, academic success, and overall life satisfaction. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural and religious backgrounds could provide a broader perspective on how religious coping influences resilience worldwide.

Religious coping serves as a vital protective factor against stress, particularly in the demanding field of medical education. By fostering resilience and providing emotional support, religious coping enables students to navigate their academic journey with

strength, hope, and a sense of purpose. As mental health continues to be a critical issue among students, promoting religious coping strategies can be an effective way to enhance resilience, improve well-being, and ensure a healthier academic environment.

Methods

This study utilized a cross-sectional research design with an observational analytic approach. The research was conducted from September 2023 to June 2024 at the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, and received approval from the Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, under ethical certificate number 729/EC/KEPK/FKULM/2023. Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire distributed to students of the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, class of 2023.

The study sample consisted of all students from the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, class of 2023, selected through total sampling, where all individuals meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria were included. The inclusion criteria required participants to be students from the specified class, while data were excluded if incomplete. Data collection was conducted through online questionnaires distributed to respondents.

The study employed two main instruments: the BRIEF RCOPE questionnaire (Religious Coping Questionnaire) and the Resilience Questionnaire (Growth-Focused Resilience). In the BRIEF RCOPE questionnaire, respondents were classified as using positive religious coping if their total score ranged from 1 to 7, whereas scores between 8 and 14 indicated negative religious coping. If a respondent's positive religious coping score exceeded their negative religious coping score, they were categorized as predominantly using positive religious coping, and vice versa.

The Resilience Questionnaire consisted of two components: Developmental Persistency (items 1-9) and Positive Emotions (items 10-16). If a respondent's score for Developmental Persistency was higher than their score for Positive Emotions, they were categorized as primarily using resilience through Developmental Persistency, and vice versa.

Once data collection was complete, the data underwent processing and analysis. Statistical correlation tests were conducted using the Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) software. A nonparametric correlation test was used to assess the relationship between the variables. The correlation test aimed to determine the significance and strength of the relationship between religious coping and resilience. The statistical test used to analyze this relationship was the Chi-Square Test.

Result and Discussion

Based on the sample size calculation, a minimum of 167 respondents was required for this study. However, a total of 174 respondents met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final research sample.

Due to challenges in the data collection process, data were gathered by distributing an online form link.

The respondents in this study were aged between 19 and 23 years, with the majority (63.8%) being 20 years old. In terms of gender distribution, more than half of the respondents were female. Regarding ethnicity, a total of 12 different ethnic backgrounds were represented among the respondents. The Banjarese ethnic group had the highest representation at 40.2%, followed by the Javanese ethnic group at 28.7%. Table 1 presents the detailed socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants.

Table 1 Socio-demographic Characteristics

Socio-demographic Characteristics	N	%
Age (yrs)		
19	20	11.5
20	111	63.8
21	38	21.8
22	4	2.3
23	1	0.6
Total	174	100
Sex		
Male	69	39.9
Female	105	60.1
Total	174	100
Race		
Arabic	1	0.6
Balinese	2	1.1
Banjarese	70	40.2
Batak	5	2.9
Bugis	20	11.5
Javanese	50	28.7
Karo	1	0.6
Madurese	4	2.3
Makassarese	10	5.8
Padang	2	1.1
Sundanese	5	2.9
Chinese	4	2.3
Total	174	100

Source: The result of research, 2024

Table 2 presents the results of respondents' answers to the Growth-Focused Resilience questionnaire, which contains 16 statements assessing how individuals react to various situations. Respondents used a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree," 2 being "Disagree," 3 being "Not Sure," 4 being "Agree," and 5 being "Strongly Agree." The most common response was "Strongly Agree" for statement 9, which reads, "I always learn from mistakes." On the other hand, the statement that received the most "Disagree" responses was statement 11, which says, "I tend to be more enthusiastic about facing problems than avoiding them."

Table 2 The Pattern of Respondents' Answers in the Growth-Oriented Resilience Questionnaire

Answer	Question number															
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Strongly disagree	2	4	4	2	0	3	8	6	1	10	13	9	4	8	4	10
Disagree	8	10	15	10	8	7	11	11	11	22	32	15	23	15	15	14
Not sure	24	49	55	25	36	27	34	22	26	26	48	48	42	45	46	30
Agree	102	88	73	100	97	103	83	99	89	87	47	67	68	80	89	99
Strongly agree	38	23	27	37	33	34	38	36	47	29	34	35	37	26	20	21

Source: The result of research, 2024

Table 3 displays the results of respondents' answers to the BRIEF RCOPE questionnaire, which measures religious coping. The questionnaire consists of 14 statements, and respondents answered using a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 being "Not at all," 2 being "Somewhat," 3 being "Quite a bit," and 4 being "A great deal." The statements reflect how individuals cope with difficult events in life, recognizing that people face challenges in unique ways. The statement with the highest number of "A great deal" responses was statement 6, which reads, "Ask forgiveness for my sins." In contrast, the statement with the most "Not at all" responses was statement 11, which says, "Questioning God's love for me."

Table 3 Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Answers to the BRIEF RCOPE Questionnaire

Answer	Question number													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Not at all	10	4	10	3	7	2	8	84	43	45	113	99	102	110
Somewhat	11	3	21	11	14	5	22	53	51	48	31	40	38	47
Quite a bit	66	50	46	47	50	32	71	27	51	52	22	27	28	12
A great deal	87	117	97	113	103	135	73	10	29	29	8	8	6	5

Source: The result of research, 2024

The relationship between religious coping and resilience was examined using the Chi-Square Correlation Test, yielding a p-value (sig) of 0.000 (<0.05), which indicates a significant correlation between these two variables.

Table 4 Correlation Between Religious Coping and Resilience

		Resilience		Total	Chi Square Test
		Developmental persistence	Positive emotion		
Religious coping	Positive religious coping	167	0	167	0.000
		96%	0%	96%	
	Negative religious coping	2	5	7	
		1.1%	2.9%	4%	
	Total	169	5	174	
		97.1%	2.9%	100%	

Source: The result of research, 2024

The analysis revealed that 96% of the respondents from the Faculty of Medicine, Lambung Mangkurat University, class of 2023, exhibited positive religious coping, while 4% demonstrated negative religious coping. Additionally, 97.1% of the total sample

showed resilience at the Developmental Persistence level. These results suggest that students who engage in positive religious coping strategies are more likely to exhibit resilience in the form of developmental persistence.

In the context of resilience, Amir and Standen (2019) emphasize the importance of an individual's will to grow, not just survive, in the face of adversity. Resilience is commonly seen as a variable that reflects individual differences related to adaptability and coping, rather than merely a response to trauma. It is often understood as a general approach to life characterized by openness, flexibility, and constructive adaptation to changes, viewed from a holistic perspective. Resilience is also associated with long-term positive individual development, as opposed to merely recovering from setbacks. While resilience is often defined as the ability to "bounce back" from challenges, some experts argue that it can also represent a quality that helps individuals grow, develop, and engage more fully in life.

Jolliff and Strubler (2021) describe resilience as a human asset that helps individuals navigate adversity, proposing that developing protective assets like cognitive skills and self-regulation can mitigate the effects of negative experiences. Recent research also suggests that resilience is not only about overcoming immediate challenges but is also about long-term personal growth.

Amir and Standen (2019) further explain that resilient individuals focus on personal development and growth, not just surviving difficult circumstances. This view is aligned with the understanding that psychological resilience is measured by four dimensions: persistence, positive emotions, finding meaning in adversity, and commitment to growth. In this study, the researchers focused on two of these dimensions: positive emotions and commitment to growth, or developmental persistence.

Positive emotions are critical in helping individuals thrive under stress, fostering resilience through strong willpower and the ability to rebuild disrupted resources. Positive emotions also support problem-solving without panic, facilitate decision-making, and help maintain a realistic understanding of challenging situations. They are considered a "building block" of resilience, combating stress and promoting a more pleasant state of mind. In both theoretical and empirical studies, positive emotions are recognized as essential to resilience, bringing calm, creativity, and effective decision-making during challenges.

Developmental persistence, which reflects a commitment to growth, is viewed as the motivation to learn from difficulties. Positive emotions are central to resilience, facilitating calmness, creativity, and rapid decision-making during challenging circumstances.

In this study, the researchers focused more on the aspect of developmental persistence, particularly in how students confront and learn from their difficulties. Resilience was viewed as a response to life's challenges, emphasizing growth through the commitment to change. The researchers believe that resilience is not just a set of abilities or resources for survival but a mindset that fosters growth in the face of both positive and negative events, enabling individuals to become more adaptable and competent. Resilient individuals recognize that they grow not only from adversity but also from the opportunities found in hardship.

The challenges faced by individuals in life often lead to negative emotional states such as stress, anxiety, and depression, while positive emotions like happiness and life

satisfaction tend to diminish. Despite these obstacles, individuals manage these pressures in various ways, and maintaining resilience is crucial for overcoming difficulties. Resilience is built through coping strategies, which are formed through effort and the application of different approaches to stress. One of the coping strategies individuals might use is religious coping, which involves seeking direction, emotional support, hope, and peace through their faith. Religion provides a sense of assistance and emotional relief in times of trouble.

This study aimed to examine whether there was a relationship between religious coping and resilience. The results indicated a significant relationship between these two factors in the Lambung Mangkurat University Medical Students of the 2023 class, confirmed by the Chi-square statistical analysis, which showed a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). According to Manning et al. (2019), an individual's spiritual level is a key psychological factor influencing the development of resilience.

In this study, religious coping was classified as either positive or negative. Positive religious coping is characterized by a secure relationship with God, the belief in the meaningfulness of life, and viewing God as generous, forgiving, and compassionate, while negative religious coping involves the opposite. Numerous studies have shown that positive religious coping contributes to finding meaning in life, thereby fostering resilience. Resilience, as defined in the study, refers to a person's ability to recover from difficult situations, adapt to challenges, and overcome adversity.

Amir and Standen (2019) categorized resilience into four dimensions: persistence, positive emotions, finding meaning in adversity, and commitment to growth (development persistence). This study focused on two of these dimensions: development persistence and positive emotions. Resilience is essential for navigating life's challenges, and individuals with better coping strategies tend to demonstrate higher levels of psychological resilience. Research has shown that resilience-building programs, which focus on psychological education and health promotion, can help students develop healthy coping mechanisms and improve their mental health.

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that religious coping can influence and enhance resilience. Effective coping strategies lead to personal growth, while poor coping strategies may hinder progress. As observed in research by Edara et al. (2021), engaging deeply in religious practice can increase resilience by encouraging individuals to seek solutions when facing difficulties. A positive outlook on challenges allows religion to offer security, comfort, and guidance through adversity.

However, the study had some limitations. The research was conducted at a single point in time, which resulted in inconclusive findings. The instrument used to measure knowledge was limited to an online questionnaire without direct observation or prior training, affecting the accuracy of the results. Additionally, there is limited research on the relationship between religious coping and resilience, and the small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. Despite these limitations, the study suggests the need for further research to explore the topic in greater depth.

Conclusion

From the research and discussions presented in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that a significant relationship exists between religious coping and resilience among the medical students of Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, class of 2023.

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