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## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT SYIAH KUALA UNIVERSITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between social support and academic stress among first year students at Syiah Kuala University (UNSYIAH). Data was collected through questionnaires. The respondents were first year students at UNSYIAH (n = 364) with ranging age from 16 to 21. Respondents completed the Multi Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI). Pearson Correlation Analysis was used to analyze the relationship between social support and academic stress among first year students. The results revealed that the sample reported moderate levels of social support and academic stress. Students with high level of social support, reported low level of academic stress.

*Keywords: social support, academic stress, first year students*

### **Introduction**

In our real life, everybody experiences many changes. Human life cycle begins from the prenatal period to old age. It is always colored with various life changes. Some of these changes happen during the school period. Many transitions are experienced by students during their school, home to school, middle school to high school and high school to college or work (Galaway & Hudson, 1996). First-year university students faced with numerous challenges that caused by increasing the number of students in developed countries (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). Students' life, especially during the first year, is a period of vulnerability during which young students establish, test and adjust new psychological identities (Bitz, 2010). Transition to university involves adapting to a new academic and social environment, this transition can be stressful for the students (Dalziel & Peat, 1998).

The transition to university life is often looked upon as a positive event but the changes in university life can sometimes be stressful to the student. Stress is a physical and mental response to everyday demands, particularly those associated with change (Agolla & Ongori, 2009). Among college students, stress can be viewed as a positive or negative experience that affects their life and

performances (Jogaratnam & Buchanan, 2004). This is because academic work is never happened without stressful activities (Agolla & Ongori, 2009).

Moreover, Fisher (1994) explains that change and transition are common features of life, but the process of change may have powerful negative effect on well being and health. Fisher and Cooper (1991) also explain that the change and transition are stressful because a person experiences, if only transiently, loss of control over the new environment. The new environment will have new experiences in most cases and the individual needs to adapt to new places, faces and routines. In some cases, as with culture shock, the individual may be required to adapt to a new cultural climate that includes new language, behavior and social customs. The impact of this can sometimes be startling. Fisher (1994) also presented the sources of problems associated with university were categorized as academic (65%), university routines (35%), financial restraints (18%), social (24%), future career at university (9%), missing people (6%), health (9%), and family (3%). Kwan and Faulkner (2011) explain that students acknowledged that there were many changes associated with the transition into university, and they noticed a shift in priority towards “academic”.

Similarly, Tinto (1995) found that the first year appears to be the most important year in overall degree progression, as 75% of the students who do not complete their degrees attribute the reasons for this to problems experienced in the first year of study. This stage may be more or less stressful and difficult, depending on the degree to which the new environment of the university relates to the old environment in which students have previously been operating. For some students, this process may be minor, and relatively seamless, but for others transition may take considerable time and effort (Hillman, 2005).

There are many causes of stress related to academic among first year students at university. In Aceh particularly at Syiah Kuala University (UNSYIAH), besides the changes in first year students during the transition period, the semester credit system in university is also one of the changes experienced by first-year students. Semester credit system (SKS) provides an opportunity for students to determine the subjects according to their interests, talents, and capabilities (BJM UNSYIAH). Therefore, this system demands a great responsibility on the student in determining the number of credit to be taken. Besides, the high demands of academic were also felt by the new students, the student must obtain a minimum GPA 2.0 in first and second semester. If the students obtain less than 2.0, they may be terminated from UNSYIAH. The conditions described above are very similar to the condition that causes stress (Greenberg, 1981). Greenberg (1981) explains that the stressors that exist in the first year students were a change in lifestyle, values, the number of courses taken, and the problem of academic.

According to Dwyer and Cummings (2001), first year students need social support to be able to succeed in their academic pursuit. Social support may be especially important in buffering stressors, because students experience an array of stressors in academic and personal domain (Parrack & Preyde, 2009). Besides, social support is very important for individuals in their life and also have been recognized to have significant impact on the achievement of the students (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2010).

In fact, perceived social support seems to be an effective moderator of the stress experienced by university students. Social support received by students assist the coping of students who are highly stressed (Lawson & Fuehrer, 2001). For students, social support may be derived from parents, friends, classmates and teachers (Bokhorst, Sumter, & Westenberg, 2009).

Some researchers in Asia have shown that social support plays an important role in managing psychological problems. Lack of social support has been found to be one of the factors that lead to many psychological problems among students (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2010). Besides, support received by the students either from the family and friends can contribute to the academic performance at the university. It is indeed important to realize that students' performance in academic is determined not only by academic-related matters but also the social support that they get from people around them (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2011).

In Indonesia, there are also study related to social support and academic problems. According to Fauziah (2012) examined the influence of parents support on students studying in higher education. Result showed that there was an influence of parental support towards the ability of students to face academic demands at university.

There has been a considerable amount of research that conducted related to social support and academic stress in different countries. However, in Indonesia especially in Aceh, research related to social support and academic stress are still very rare. So, the researcher is interested in conducting a study to identify the relationship between social support and academic stress among first year students in Syiah Kuala University (UNSYIAH) in Banda Aceh.

## **Research Objectives**

The aims of this study are to examine the relationship between social support and academic stress among the first year students. The hypotheses in this study are "There is no significant correlation between social support and academic stress among first year students".

## **Literature Review**

According to Sarafino (1998) social support refers to the perceived comfort, caring, esteem, or help a person receives from other people or group. People with social support believe that they are loved, cared, esteemed. Social support as a part of a social network, that can provide goods, services, and mutual defense in times of need or danger. Sarafino (2006) explains that there are two theoretical models to determine how social support works within the individual, namely the buffering hypothesis: social support protects individuals against the negative effects of high stress levels in following two ways; the first, an individual facing a strong stressor, such as the financial crisis, then individuals with high levels of social support perceive the situation less stressful, than individuals with low levels of social support. The second, social support can change person's response to stressors that have been received previously. For example, someone with high social support may find somebody who provides solutions to his/her problems, or see the problem as something not too important, or make her/him see the positives of the problem. The direct effect hypothesis, suggests that someone with high levels of social support have a strong feeling that she/he is loved and appreciated. Someone with high social support feel that others care and provide their needs. So, it can bring them to a healthy lifestyle.

Moreover, Sarafino (1998), classifies social support into five types: (1) Emotional support which involves the expression of empathy, caring, encouragement, personal warmth, and love. (2) Esteem support which occurs through the positive expression of appreciation, encouragement of the spirit, or approval with ideas or positive feeling is expressed by individuals. (3) Instrumental support is provision of support involving direct assistance, such as financial help or doing daily homework. (4) Informational support is provided in the form of advice, rewards and feedback about how to face or solve problems. (5) Companionship support is provided in the form of togetherness that people feel part of the group.

In this research, social support is operationally defined as the score of Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS, Zimet et al. 1988). It consists of family support, friend support, and other significant support. The lower scores indicate greater degrees of satisfaction in the perceived social support and the higher scores indicate lesser degrees of satisfaction in the perceived social support.

This section describes the theory of general stress by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), there are three types of stress which are harm, threat, and challenge. Harm refers to the psychological damage or loss that has already happened. Threat is the anticipation of harm that may be imminent. Challenge results from demands that a person feels confident about mastering. These different kinds of psychological stress are embedded in specific

types of emotional reactions, thus illustrating the close conjunction of the fields of stress and emotions.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated that stress is a state of anxiety produced when events and responsibilities exceed one's coping abilities. Stress is viewed as a transaction between individuals and their environment (Lazarus, 1991). These transactions depend on the impact of the internal or external stressors. Lazarus (1993) defined stressors as demands made by the internal or external environment that upset the balance, thus affect physical and psychological well-being and require action to restore balance.

Furthermore, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explained that individual assessment of what is considered as a source of stress is influenced by two factors. The first is individual factors, including intellectual, motivational, and personality traits. The second is situation factors, including the size of the claim being viewed as a stressful situation. Excessive stress can interfere with life, activity and health of individuals.

Stress processes, according to Lazarus (1966), is a key factor for understanding stress-related transactions. This concept is based on the idea that emotional processes including stress are dependent on actual expectancies that persons manifest with regard to the significance and outcome of a specific encounter. This concept is necessary to explain individual differences in quality, intensity, and duration of an elicited emotion in environments that equal for different individuals. It is generally assumed that the resulting state is generated, maintained, and eventually altered by a specific pattern of appraisals. These appraisals, in turn are determined by a number of personal and situational factors. The most important factors on the personal side are motivational dispositions, goals, values, and generalized expectancies. Relevant situational parameters are predictability, controllability, and imminence of a potentially stressful event.

In this research, academic stress is operationally defined as the score of Student-Life Stress Inventory (SLSI; Gadzella, 1991), the SLSI measures academic stressors and reactions to stressors. The lower scores indicate greater degrees of stress in the academic field and the higher scores indicate lesser degree of stress in the academic field

## **Research Method**

The approach used in this study is the quantitative method. Quantitative is based on the idea that social phenomena can be quantified, measured, and expressed numerically (Azwar, 2010). In this research, independent variables are social support and the dependent variable is academic stress. Furthermore, in this study survey method and questionnaires were used. Survey is a widely

used method of measurement in social research involving the use of questionnaires to gather data (Bungin, 2008).

## **Population and Sample**

The population in this study are all of first year students at Syiah Kuala University (UNSYIAH) in Banda Aceh the following faculties: Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences and Politics, and Faculty of Marine and Fisheries. Techniques in research sampling and the way of taking a representative sample is called sampling method. In this research the convenience sampling was used. Convenience sampling is a non probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenience accessibility and proximity to the researcher. The participants in this study are chosen from the first year students belonging to different faculties from UNSYIAH.

According to Quality Assurance Board Syiah Kuala University (Badan Jaminan Mutu UNSYIAH), there were 5089 active first year students in academic year 2011-2012. To determine the ideal sample size for this population, Slovin's formula was used. Slovin's formula stated that  $n = \frac{N}{1 + N e^2}$ , where  $n$  = number of samples,  $N$  = total population,  $e$  = margin of error ( $\alpha = .05$ ). Based on the formula, the ideal sample size for the population was 380 students.

## **Instruments**

In order to collect data, two different instruments were used. They were Multi Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) to measure perceived social support and Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI; Gadzella, 1991) to measure academic stressors and reactions to stressors. A brief demographic information was used to obtain the background characteristics of the participants. In this section, the characteristics of each instrument, including previous validity and reliability is reported.

It is important to highlight that the original items of MSPSS and SLSI had been translated into Bahasa Indonesia to adapt the Indonesian cultural context. This document is named as Version A. To keep the accuracy of the original instruments that had been translated in Indonesian, the instruments were checked by the Indonesian experts in the field of psychology and experts in the field of English Language. After that, the instruments in Indonesian version were translated back into English Language. This document is named as Version B. Then, Version B was compared with the original version of MSPSS and SLSI. This was done in order to check the originality of the items after translation process.

### Multi Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

To measure perceived social support, the MSPSS by Zimet et al. (1988) was used (see Appendix C). The items were suitable for measuring college student's perceived social support. There are 12-items in this scale. The original scale consists of seven point Likert type scale with three aspects. Family support consist of 4 items, friend support consist of 4 items, and significant-other support consist of 4 items. However, in this research a four point Likert type scale was use to make it easier for the students to complete the questionnaire. Each item consists of choices ranging from highly suitable, suitable, not suitable, and highly not suitable. The 12-item scale contains three main parts which can be calculated separately. First part measures family support (item numbers 3, 4, 8, and 11). For examples, item number 3 "My family really tries to help me", and item number 8 "I can talk about my problems with my family". Second part measures friend support (item numbers 6, 7, 9, and 12). For examples, item number 6 "My friends really try to help me", and item number 12 "I can talk about my problems with my friends". Third part measures as significant-other support (item numbers 1, 2, 5, and 10). For examples, item number 1 "There is a special person who is around when I am in need", and item number 5 "I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me".

The MSPSS has good internal and test-retest reliability as well as adequate construct validity with different samples which included university undergraduates (Zimet et al., 1990). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the previous studies ranged from .86 to .90. Furthermore, researcher has done a pilot study on first year students in UNSYIAH and obtained Cronbach's alpha was .72. It means, the Indonesian version of MSPSS could be used to measure social support among first year students in this study.

The maximum score which can be obtained from MSPSS is 48, whereas the minimum score is 12. The scores can be divided into three groups, which are low, moderate, and high using Azwar's formula (Azwar, 1999), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.  
 Categorization Level Criteria of Social Support

Variable	Categorization Level	Range of Categorization Value	
Social Support	$x < (\mu - 1.0\sigma)$	12-20	High
	$(\mu - 1.0\sigma) \leq x \leq (\mu + 1.0\sigma)$	21-29	Moderate
	$(\mu + 1.0\sigma) < x$	30-48	Low

Table 1 showed that high categorization of social support ranged from 12 to 20, moderate categorization of social support ranged from 21 to 29, and the low categorization of social support ranged from 30 to 48. In other words, higher values obtained in the scale indicated the less perceived social support and lower values indicated the more perceived social support.

### **Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI)**

Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI), created by Gadzella (1991) was used in this study. The items in the inventory reflect on- and off-campus life of a student. This inventory consist of 51 items in a 4-point Likert type response. Each item consists of choices ranging from highly suitable, suitable, not suitable, and highly not suitable.

The SLSI measures academic stressors and reactions to stressors. In the academic stressors section, five categories of academic stressors which are frustrations, conflicts, pressures, changes, and self-imposed stressors were measured. In the reactions to stressors section, four categories describing reactions to these stressors which are physiological, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive were measured.

For the academic stressors section of the SLSI, items consists of statements such as, “I have experienced too many changes occurring at the same time,” and “I have experienced frustrations due to delays in reaching my goal.” The ‘frustration’ subscale comprises seven items and measures frustration that is due to delays, daily hassles to reach goals, lack of resources available namely, money for books and automobile, failures to accomplish goals, feelings of being a social outcast, dating problems, and denied opportunities in spite of one’s qualifications. The ‘conflict’ subscale has three items and measures academic stress produced by having two or more desirable and undesirable alternatives and goals with positive and negative impacts. The three-item ‘changes’ subscale assesses academic stress that is due to life changes and includes changes that are disruptive to the respondent’s life. The six-item ‘self-imposed stressors’ subscale measures stress in areas such as when a student likes to compete to win or to be noticed and loved by all. Finally, the four items of the ‘pressure’ subscale measures academic stress resulting from competition, deadlines, work overload, and work responsibilities and expectations. Cronbach’s alphas were .65, .63, .71, .75, and .63 for the frustrations, conflicts, pressures, changes, and self-imposed stressors subscales, respectively (Gadzella, 1991).

In the reactions to stressors section, four types of reactions to academic stressors ‘physiological’ consist of 14 items, ‘emotional’ consist of 4 items, ‘behavioral’ consist of 8 items, and ‘cognitive’ consist of 2 items reactions were assessed. The ‘physiological’ reactions subscale measures responses such as sweating, stuttering, trembling, exhaustion, weight loss/gain, and



headaches. ‘Emotional’ reactions include fear, anxiety, worry, anger, guilt, and grief. ‘Behavioral’ reaction subscale measures reactions to stressful situations such as crying, drug use, smoking, and irritability. ‘Cognitive’ reactions are measured by the respondent’s ability to analyze and think about stressful situations and the use of effective strategies to reduce stress.

Researcher has done a pilot study on first year students in UNSYIAH and obtained Cronbach's alpha .90. It means, the Indonesian version of SLSI could be used to measure academic stress among first year students in this study.

The maximum score which can be obtained from SLSI is 204, whereas the minimum score is 51. The scores can be divided into three groups which are low, moderate, and high using Azwar's formula (Azwar, 1999) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.  
 Categorization Level Criteria of Academic Stress

Variable	Categorization Level	Range of Value	Categorization
Academic Stress	$x < (\mu - 1.0\sigma)$	51-127	High
	$(\mu - 1.0\sigma) \leq x \leq (\mu + 1.0\sigma)$	128-162	Moderate
	$(\mu + 1.0\sigma) < x$	163-204	Low

Table 2 showed that high categorization of academic stress ranged from 51 to 127, moderate categorization of academic stress ranged from 128 to 162, and the low categorization of academic stress ranged from 163 to 204. In other words, higher values obtained in the scale indicated the normal feeling in academic stress and lower values indicated the severe feeling in academic stress.

### Demographic Information

A brief demographic questionnaire was used to obtain background characteristics of the participants. There are six items in this section, namely, age, gender, semester, GPA, and faculty.

### Research Procedure

Participants of this study were first year students in UNSYIAH. Questionnaires comprised three instruments as mentioned earlier and were distributed to the students. Before that, the instruments were translated in the Indonesian Language. This is carried out because the participants as a whole use the Indonesian Language. This study was conducted from August to September 2012.

During the survey process, participants were given the scales and the researcher waited until they completed all the instruments. This step was taken to minimize the loss of questionnaires.

After that, the researcher gave a souvenir such as a pen or pencil to students who participated in this study and successfully completed the questionnaires.

Confidentiality of the participants was assured and it was an anonymous survey. Besides, the participants were not pressurized to participate in the study and they were informed that they could exit from the research study at any point of time.

## **Data Analyses**

All the analyses in this study were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Science software (SPSS) 17.0. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample. The descriptive analysis involved the mean, percentage, frequency, and standard deviation. Moreover, Cronbach Alpha analysis was used to check the reliability of the instruments. As for the inferential statistical analysis, Pearson Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between social support and academic stress.

## **Reliability and Validity**

According to Anastasi (1988), the term reliability means consistency. One method to study the reliability of a test is by using a single test administration to measure the internal consistency of item. Coefficient alpha is among the most general formula for estimating internal consistency. Moreover, Azwar (2000) defined reliability as the extent to which a questionnaire, test, observation or any measurement procedure produces the same results on repeated trials. In other word, it is the stability or consistency of scores over time or across raters. Reliability scores for MSPSS and SLSI were assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The value of coefficient alpha for MSPSS which consist of 12 items showed good reliability ( $\alpha = .71$ ). The value of coefficient alpha for SLSI which consist of 51 items also showed excellent reliability ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

Furthermore, validity is defined as the degree to which they accomplish the purpose for which they are being used (Azwar, 2000). Validity for each item in the scales reported in Table 3 and Table 4 for MSPSS and SLSI respectively. According to Azwar (2000), item would be valid if the corrected item-total correlation value larger than .30. Based on Table 3 it is concluded that all items in MSPSS are valid because the corrected item-total correlation value ranged from .30 to .53.

Table 3.

Validity for MSPSS

Item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
A1	.31
A2	.53
A3	.40
A4	.38
A5	.47
A6	.42
A7	.30
A8	.31
A9	.35
A10	.51
A11	.37
A12	.36

Table 4.  
 Validity for SLSI

Item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
C1	.53	C18	.33	C35	.56
C2	.50	C19	.41	C36	.35
C3	.38	C20	.45	C37	.33
C4	.48	C21	.55	C38	.40
C5	.42	C22	.34	C39	.45
C6	.35	C23	.47	C40	.42
C7	.49	C24	.43	C41	.54
C8	.51	C25	.47	C42	.52
C9	.52	C26	.41	C43	.37
C10	.55	C27	.49	C44	.48
C11	.50	C28	.46	C45	.38
C12	.52	C29	.52	C46	.44
C13	.52	C30	.46	C47	.38
C14	.47	C31	.49	C48	.43
C15	.57	C32	.49	C49	.38
C16	.51	C33	.58	C50	.35
C17	.44	C34	.36	C51	.33

Based on Table 4 it is concluded that all items in SLSI are valid because the corrected item-total correlation value ranged from .33 to .58.

## Research Result

The term descriptive statistics refers to the methods that are used to summarize and describe data. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in a study and provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures (Aron, Aron, & Coups, 2009). In this section, the researcher used descriptive statistics to examine characteristics of participants based on the demographic information.

## Profile of Participants

The population in this study was all of the first year students at Syiah Kuala University (UNSYIAH). The total population was 5085 students (BJM UNSYIAH). Using Slovin formula (Argyrous, 2005), the appropriate sample was 380 students. Therefore, a total of 380 questionnaires were distributed and 364 questionnaires were returned.

Out of the 364 respondents analysed, 149 were male (40.9%) and 215 were female (59.1%). Respondents were between 16 to 21 years old and the mean of age was 18.87 ( $SD = 0.68$ ). All participants were in their first year of studies and were unmarried. Majority of the respondents were from the Faculty of Medicine, 62 students (17.0%). Their current CGPA mean was 3.11 ( $SD = .30$ ). The details of the respondents profile is shown in Table 5.

Table 5.  
Profile of Participants

Demographic Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	149	40.9
Female	215	59.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Faculty</b>		
Faculty of Economics	57	15.7
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine	24	6.6
Faculty of Law	44	12.1
Faculty of Engineering	33	9.1
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education	26	7.1
Faculty of Agriculture	29	8.0
Faculty of Medicine	62	17.0
Faculty of Mathematics and natural Sciences	28	7.7
Faculty of Social Sciences and Politics	32	8.8
Faculty of Marine and Fisheries	29	8.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Level of Social Support

In this research, social support is operationally defined as the score of MSPSS. The lower scores indicate high level of satisfaction in the perceived social support and the higher scores indicate low level of satisfaction in the perceived social support. The maximum scores which can be obtained were 48, whereas the minimum scores were 12. As mentioned in chapter 3, scores of 12 to 20 indicate high level of social support, 21 to 29 indicate moderate level of social support and scores of above 30 indicate low level of social support.

The majority of the respondents reported moderate level of social support,  $M = 24.72$  ( $SD = 4.48$ ). The distribution of participants based on their social support level is presented in Table 6.

Table 6.  
Frequency and Percentage of Social Support Level

Level of Social Support	Score	Frequency	Percentage
High	12 – 20	121	33.2
Moderate	21 – 29	174	47.8
Low	30 – 48	69	18.9
Total		364	100

As shown in Table 6, the majority of participants had moderate level of social support with 174 participants (47.8%), followed by high level of social support with 121 participants (33.2%), and low level of social support with 69 participants (18.9%).

In this research, academic stress is operationally defined as the score of SLSI. The lower scores indicate high level of stress in the academic field and the higher scores indicate low level of stress in the academic field. The maximum scores which can be obtained were 204, whereas the minimum scores were 51. As mentioned in chapter 3, scores of 51 to 127 indicate high level of academic stress, 128 to 162 indicate moderate level of academic stress, and scores of above 163 indicate low level of academic stress.

The majority of the respondents reported moderate level of academic stress,  $M = 146.98$  ( $SD = 18.27$ ). The distribution of participants based on their academic stress level is presented in Table 7.

Table 7.  
Frequency and Percentage of Academic Stress Level

Level of Academic stress	Score	Frequency	Percentage
High	51 – 127	100	27.4
Moderate	128 – 162	147	40.3
Low	163 – 204	117	32.1
Total		364	100.0

As shown in Table 7, the majority of participants had moderate level of academic stress with 147 participants (40.3%), followed by low level of academic stress with 117 participants (32.1%), and high level of academic stress with 100 participants (27.4%).

Inferential statistics are the statistics that are used to analyze sample data, and the results will be generalized to the population from which the sample was chosen. In other word, inferential statistics try to make various inferences against a set of data derived from a sample (Azwar, 2010). The results of normality and linearity tests were presented first in this section. Then, the results of the hypothesis testing follows.

A normality test refers to the method that is used to check if a variable of interest has a normal distribution. The normal distribution means that the sample which is taken from the population is representing the population. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test is used to test the normality of the data of this research. The data with normal distribution is showed with  $p > .05$ . If the assumption is not fulfilled then it will affect the conclusion, so it will produce less reliable conclusions or deviate from the actual circumstances (Azwar, 2000). The result of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test is summarized in Table 8.

Table 8.  
 One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>
Social Support	19.09	4.25	.20
Academic Stress	145.08	18.13	.06

Based on Table 8, it can be concluded that the sample data of this study was normally distributed.

Next, linearity test aims to determine whether two or more variables have a linear relationship. This test is commonly used as a prerequisite in the analysis of linear regression. Two or more variables are said to have a linear relationship when the linearity test revealed a significant result. The data with significant result is showed with  $p < .05$  (Azwar, 2010). The results of linearity test is summarized in Table 9.

Table 9.  
 Test of Linearity

	Social Support		
Academic Stress	<i>Df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Linearity	1	102.49	.00
Deviation from Linearity	22	2.11	.00
Total	363		

From Table 9, it can be concluded that the relationship between academic stress and social support.

### **Relationship between Social Support and Academic Stress**

This section presents the result of the relationship between social support and academic stress. The relationship between these two variables was stated in Chapter I as there is no significant correlation between social support and academic stress among the first year students. To test  $H_0$ , the regression analysis was used. The summary of the regression analysis is shown in Table 10.

Table 10.

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Correlation between Social Support and Academic Stress

Variables	Academic Stress	Social Support
Academic Stress	-	-.46**
Social Support	-.46**	-

\*\* $p < .01$

Table 10 shows that there was a significant negative correlation ( $r = -.46, p < .01$ ) between social support and academic stress. It means, students with high level of social support, reported low level of academic stress. Therefore,  $H_0$  was rejected.

## Discussion

### First Year Students' Social Support

The result of this study shows that the first year students at Syiah Kuala University (UNSYIAH) have moderate level of social support. Moderate level of social support means that most of the students perceived the care that have been given by a person or group such as parents and friends as adequate. As listed in Multi Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), the students with moderate level of social support were able to perceive that their family really try to help them. They have received the emotional help and talked about their problems with their family. The family also helped them make decisions.

Furthermore, students showed that their friends really try to help them. Therefore, they could talk about their problems, share their joys and sorrows, and they have special persons who could be the real source of comfort to them and who cares about their feelings. The result of this study supported Salami (2011) who explained that it is easier for students under stress to solve their problems in the new environment when they have effective social networks or support than when they do not.

### First Year Students' Academic Stress

The result in this study shows first year students at UNSYIAH experienced moderate level of academic stress. Moderate level of academic stress means that the academic stressors and reaction of stressors experienced by the first year students at UNSYIAH were at moderate level. Based on Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI), most of the first year students did not face the following problems: frustrations due to delays in reaching their goal, daily hassles which affected them in reaching their goals and denied opportunities in spite of their qualifications. As students, they did not experience much problem in facing competition, meeting deadlines, attempting many things at one time, experiencing rapid unpleasant changes, facing many changes at the same time, and changes which disrupted their goals.

Furthermore, first year students who had moderate level of academic stress showed that they did not worry a lot about everything and anybody, and feel that they must find a solution to the problems they undertake.

The results of this study could be associated with the level of religiosity among Acehese teenagers after tsunami. Karjuniwati and Nashori (2007) explains that after tsunami, the Acehese teenagers' religiosity had increased. Furthermore, the implementation of worship have positive impact among Acehese teenagers. With worship, teenagers feel calm, get closer to Allah S.W.T and be thankful. In fact, the positive actions like feeling calm, getting closer to Allah S.W.T and being thankful have affected them to create a good problem solving skill in their life. Moreover, high level of trust in Allah S.W.T will reduce stress among Acehese teenagers in facing the demands and challenges of their life (Thaib & Hariyadi, 2005). It can be concluded that perhaps the tsunami experience has made the Acehese students spiritually stronger and therefore they showed moderate level of academic stress.

The result of this study revealed that there was a negative significant correlation between social support and academic stress among first year students in UNSYIAH. It means, students with high level of social support, reported low level of academic stress. It was consistent with the previous research findings by Wilks (2008) and Wilks and Spivey (2009) who also reported that academic stress was negatively related to social support. Negga, Applewhite, and Livingston (2007) showed the same result that the greater levels of social support were significantly related to lower levels of stress among African American university students.

According to Jung (1989), stress is defined as relatively minor daily hassles that may have disruptive effects on psychological well-being and functioning. The first year of college is known to be the most stressful year and a time in which the greatest number of college students withdraw or drop out from school (Misra et al., 2000). Academic stress may be a unique experience for first-year college students who face new and higher expectations for academic work (Sand, Robinson, Kurpius, & Rayle, 2005). Furthermore, first year students may lack strong social support networks at school and may not have developed the coping mechanisms to deal with stress, thus, they have fewer resources for managing stress and the anxiety of demanding school work and tasks (Misra et al., 2000). However, it is well known that social support systems at college may help first-year college students manage their academic stress (Dwyer & Cummings, 2001).

In fact, the sources of social support may reduce risk of psychological problem such as stress among first year university students and is considered as a protector for individuals who are unable to cope with difficult life events (Levine & Perkins, 1997; House, 1987). Therefore, if students perceived high level of social support, then they experience low level of academic stress.



The result in this study was also supported by theory of Sarafino (1998), who proposed the buffering hypothesis and the direct effects hypothesis. The buffering hypothesis supposes that social support protects people against ill health, with social support the person modify their response to a stressful situation. According to the direct effects hypothesis, social support may be beneficial to health and thereby making individuals resistant to stress. Therefore, high perceived social support may help college students decrease their experience of academic related stress (Smith & Rank, 2007).

In addition, social support has been suggested as a resource for effective stress management among students (Dziegielewski et al., 2004; Green et al., 2001; Holden et al., 1997; Verheijden et al., 2005). The beneficial impact of social support has been associated with both physical and mental health outcomes. Greater levels of social support are associated with lower levels of depression, stress and greater life satisfaction (Aldwin, 1994; Sarason, Shearin, Pierce, & Sarason, 1987).

### **Implication of Research**

There are two theoretical implications of this study. First, the results of this study could be associated with the concept of coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1986), specifically the problem-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is used when individuals have perception of stressors that can be changed and addressed. Lazarus and Folkman (1986) describes that one of the coping strategy to deal with stress under the problem-focused coping is by seeking social support such as finding sources of information support, social support and emotional support. Therefore, it can be concluded that the findings of this research support the concept of coping as described by Lazarus and Folkman (1986).

Second, the results of this study revealed that there was a negative significant correlation between social support and academic stress among first year students at UNSYIAH. It means students with high level of social support experience low level of academic stress. This result supports the theory of social support by Sarafino (2006) who explained the two theoretical models to determine how social support works within the individual, namely the buffering hypothesis and the direct effect hypothesis as mention in previous chapters.

This study isn't only have theoretical implications, this study have four practical implications. First, for first year university students there is a need for them to increase understanding of academic stressors and learn how to increase adjustment and social support. This is important because as shown in this study, students who have high level of social support and

good adjustment will be able to handle effectively any academic problems arising in their new university environment.

Second, parents, as well as other family members of first year university students have to provide continuous social support in helping the students in dealing with the stressors. For example, parents can communicate with university staff and keep track on the progress or problems experienced by students from time to time.

Third, the findings of this study implicate the need for university authorities to employ counselors who will design youth development programmes consisting of counseling intervention programmes that would consider the first year students' ages, needs and their challenges, especially during the orientation programmes for new students. In this regard, students should be taught how to schedule their time effectively, how to take tests successfully and reduce test anxiety, how to balance academic, personal and social demands. They also should be taught how to make use of their independent lifestyles at the college without stepping on other people's toes. Students could also be assisted in exploring the new college environment.

Fourth, counselors could design some interventions for first year students at the university. For examples, counselors could organize seminars during the orientation period (Schwitzer, McGovern, & Robbins, 1991) or special training courses in the first semester in order to prepare new students for specific educational demands such as, note-taking, test-taking, and time management. This could subsequently improve the academic performance and reduce academic stress of students. Findings of the current study indicate that counselors also might encourage students to actively deal with their problems rather than use avoidance as a form of coping. Students also might benefit from efforts to improving their social support networks. Interventions that aimed at improving coping skills and social support resources may be efficient and effective for the students. For example, small groups could be established in the residence halls to give new students a place to discuss issues related to their transition to college, thereby providing needed social support and encouraging active coping.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This section provides six suggestions for future research. First, the future research must be conducted during the first weeks of the first semester in order to get a more convincing results. Furthermore, in order to get more information from first year students at university related to social support, adjustment, and academic stress, future research could use the qualitative approach which include observation and in-depth interview.

Next, future researchers should also review the questionnaires, as lengthy questionnaires may influence the accuracy of responses provided by the participants. As a result of too many items to be answered, participants may feel bored and thus complete the questionnaires carelessly. Furthermore, research conducted in other higher learning institutions may also be beneficial as they may provide more generalized results.

It is also important for future research, to study the role of religiosity in predicting academic stress among first year students at univeristy. This is because, research has found that high level of trust in Allah S.W.T will reduce stress among teenagers in facing of the demands and challenges of their life (Thaib & Hariyadi, 2005).Lastly, a good follow-up study to this investigation might utilize basically the same model with a larger sample that could be divided between males and females because previous research (Ting & Robinson, 1998) seems to indicate that gender may moderate the relationship between adjustment and academic stress. Of course, this research could also be extended by including a more diverse sample of men and women from other racial/ethnic groups.

This study aimed to examine the relationships between social support, adjustment, and academic stress among first year university students. Moreover, this study also examined the contribution of social support aspects and adjustment aspects toward academic stress. There were 364 first year students at UNSYIAH participated in this research. They completed MSPSS which measure social support, SACQ which measure adjustment, and SLSI which measure academic stress. Multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the contribution of social support aspects and adjustment aspects, namely family support, friend support, significant other support, academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment to academic stress. Besides, multiple regression were used to reveal the joint contribution of social support aspects and adjustment aspects to academic stress.

The result revealed that there were negative correlations between social support, adjustment and academic stress among first year university students. These findings were parallel with previous studies that indicated that higher level of social support and adjustment were linked with a lower level of academic stress. Furthermore, only two aspects of social support and one aspect of adjustment, namely friend support, significant other support, and social adjustment significantly contributed to academic stress among first year university students. Besides, the combination of social support aspects and adjustment aspects provided the contribution to academic stress.

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