Depression Tendencies, Social Skills, and Loneliness among College Students in Yogyakarta

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Abstract. This research aimed to examine the role of social skills in depression among college students through the mediation of loneliness. As many as 645 college students in Yogyakarta (Male = 180, Female = 465) participated in this study. Social skills was measured using Social Skills Scale, depression was measured using Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II), and loneliness was measured using UCLA Loneliness Scale version 3, which were adapted into Bahasa Indonesia. Regression analysis with simple mediation model showed that, as expected, social skills negatively contributed to depression with the mediation of loneliness. This means that lower social skills were associated with higher loneliness and in turn contributed to increasing tendency towards depression among college students. Additional analysis found that levels of social skills, loneliness, and depression differed among college students in different years, with students in the fifth years and after being lower on social skills and higher on loneliness and depression. Furthermore, it was shown that 51% respondents were indicating depression symptoms which levels varied from mild to severe.

Keywords: college students; depression; loneliness; mental health; social skills; yogyakarta

Depression is a psychiatric disorder with a very high rate of prevalence. At least about 350 million people worldwide suffer from depression in their lives, of which only 17% seek for psychiatric helps (World Health Organization, 2012). In Indonesia, there are still many people with depression who have not receive helps due to lack of awareness (Hawari, 2011). Indonesian Basic Health Research results showed that in 2013, 11.6% of the adult population in Indonesia experienced emotional mental disorders such as anxiety and depression (Badan Penelitian dan Pengembangan Kesehatan Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2013).

Depression can occur in various age ranges, from children to elderly. According to Neiger (1988), teenagers are among the most vulnerable groups to depression. Unfortunately, the signs of depression in teenagers are often regarded as something normal in their stage of development (Aditomo & Retnowati, 2004). In fact, various studies have shown that depression is prevalent among college students (Furr, McConnel, Westefeld, & Jenkins, 2001; Harber & Runyon, 1984). In line with that, according to the American College Health Association (2015), depression is a psychological disorder that has the second highest prevalence in college students after anxiety disorder. In Indonesia, Natalia (2006) found that from 110 samples of college student, 61.8% of them showing depression symptoms with
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varying degrees of severity. Therefore, depression in college students is a crucial issue in mental health and early diagnosis and treatment is needed (Aditomo & Retnowati, 2004).

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Fifth Edition (DSM-V), depression is a negative change in mood or feelings from a person’s normal condition (baseline) characterized by grief, emptiness, and significant changes in the person’s cognition and affection and this changes affect his functions in various aspects of life (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to DSM-V, in general people who are depressed show symptoms of sadness and/or loss of interest in daily activities (APA, 2013). Specifically symptoms of depression may include significant change in weight or appetite, sleep deprivation, slowing physical movements, fatigue and loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt, decreased ability to concentrate, and suicidal ideation (APA, 2013). Based on the DSM diagnostic criteria, Beck, Steer, and Brown (1996) developed a depression inventory known as Beck Depression Inventory-Second Edition (BDI-II) which is the latest version of Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) by Beck (1967). The symptoms of depression in BDI-II are grouped into two aspects, namely the cognitive-affective and somatic aspects (Beck, et al., 1996).

Depression are caused by various internal and external factors. Internal factors include genetic factors, biological factors, personality factors, cognitive factors, and interpersonal factors (Hankin & Abela, 2005). External factors include stressful negative life events and social factors (Hankin & Abela, 2005). College students face many changes in their social environment and this makes them more prone to depression. One factor influencing the proneness of depression is social skills (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Seepersad, 2014). Social skills in the APA Dictionary of Psychology is defined as a set of learned skills that lets individuals to interact according to the social context (VandenBos, 2007). Michelson, Sugai, Wood, and Kazdin (1983) mentioned that social skills involve three aspects, i.e. verbal responses, nonverbal responses, and cognitive processes.

Social skills in students are necessary to adapt in the social environment, to build new social relationships, and to develop and maintain social relationships (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). According to Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004), adequate social skills can reduce the level of culture shock to students due to their socio-cultural transition. People with low social skills tends to develop low self-esteem, feelings of shame, unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and loneliness (Ozben, 2013).

Previous research has shown that low social skills are associated with loneliness (Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995; Dill & Anderson, 1999). Peplau and Perlman (1979) define loneliness as individual perception of social isolation, or subjective experience of solitude. According to Cacioppo, Hawkley, and Thisted (2010), the individual perceptions of loneliness and social isolation might longitudinally predict depression.

Boivin, et al. (1995) found that loneliness played a mediating effect in the relationship between someone’s social condition and their depressive symptoms. Similarly, Dill and Anderson (1999) mentioned that the negative relationship between social skills and depression may be mediated by feelings of loneliness.
According to Dill and Anderson (1999), shyness as a manifestation of low social skills possessed by individuals tends to inhibit their social relationships with others, increasing the feeling of loneliness. These feeling of loneliness then may lead to depression (Dill & Anderson, 1999).

This research is focused on college students in Yogyakarta, because Yogyakarta is recognized as a city of education in Indonesia. On the other hand, Yogyakarta recorded a poor mental health with the biggest number of severe mental disorders in Indonesia (Badan Penelitian dan Pengembangan Kesehatan Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2013). Furthermore, the prevalence of emotional mental disorders such as depression and anxiety also very high, i.e. 8.1% of the population of Yogyakarta (Badan Penelitian dan Pengembangan Kesehatan Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2013). With this high rate of mental disorders in Yogyakarta, research in this area is very crucial in the attempt to find the solutions.

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that college students are vulnerable to depression. Social skills can be a factor affecting the tendency of depression in students and the effect is mediated by loneliness. This study aimed to examine whether this model is supported if applied to college students in Yogyakarta. The hypothesis proposed in this study was "social skills contribute negatively to the tendency of depression with the mediation of loneliness".

Methods

Participants. Participants were 645 college students aged 18-24 years old from the universities around Yogyakarta (male=180, female=465). Data were collected using questionnaires distributed online by snowball method. The average age of participants was 21 years old (30%). Based on the college year, the first year students consisted of 120 respondents (19%), second year students consisted of 105 respondents (16%), third year students consisted of 142 respondents (22%), fourth year students consisted of 259 respondents (40%), the fifth year and after consisted of 19 respondents (3%).

This study involved three variables, i.e. the tendency of depression, social skills, and loneliness. Instruments measuring these three variables are described below.

Depression tendency. To measure depression, we used Beck Depression Inventory-II (Beck, et al., 1996) adapted into Bahasa Indonesia by Ginting, Naring, Veld, Srisayekti, and Becker (2013). This scale consists of 21 items with 4 choices of answers based on the criteria of DSM. The Indonesian version of BDI-II Scale shows a reliability coefficient of α = 0.90 and has proven to be able to distinguish between depressive and non-depressive groups (Ginting, et al., 2013). In conducting regression analysis, we did not use clinical depression categorization, but used the raw score of BDI-II.

Social skills. To measure students' social skills, we used the Social Skills Scale that was developed by Ramdhani (1996) and has been modified by Nugraini (2015). This scale consists of 24 items based on the social skill aspects mentioned by Michelson et al. (1983) namely verbal, nonverbal, and cognitive processes. The scale quality was quite good with the reliability coefficient of α = 0.876 and item total correlation ranged from r = 0.287 to r = 0.664 (Nugraini, 2015).

Loneliness. To measure loneliness, we used UCLA Loneliness Scale version 3 (Russell, 1996) translated and tried out for the purpose of this study. The scale consists of 18 items with a reliability coefficient of α =...
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= 0.875 and the item total correlation ranged between 0.315 and 0.746.

Data collection was conducted by distributing the online questionnaires containing the above three scales to college students in Yogyakarta. Data analysis was performed using the 22.0 version of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program with additional macro from Hayes (2013) called PROCESS to test the mediation. As an additional analysis, ANOVA was also conducted to examine differences in the three variables based on some demographic characteristics of the participants.

Results

Descriptives. The data descriptions are shown in Table 1. Analysis of variance comparing the three variables by gender and the college year showed that: (1) depression tendencies, social skills, and loneliness did not differ between male and female, (2) based on the college year, there were differences in levels of depression tendency \( (F = 2.462, p < 0.05) \), social skills \( (F = 3.229, p < 0.05) \), as well as loneliness \( (F = 2.840, p < 0.05) \), where depression tendency and loneliness were highest in the fifth year. The lowest social skills was shown by participants in the second and fifth year.

From Figure 1 it can be seen that the students in the fifth year onwards showed the highest tendency of depression and loneliness, as well as low social skills.

The effect of social skills and loneliness on depression tendency. The results of the regression analysis showed that social skills and loneliness significantly contributed toward depression tendency \( (R^2 = 0.21; p < 0.01) \). Loneliness mediated the effects of social skills to depression \( (ab = -0.29; p < 0.01) \); controlling loneliness makes the role of social skill, which was initially significant \( (c = -0.34; p < 0.01) \) becomes insignificant \( (c’ = -0.05; p = 0.12) \). The relation between social skills, loneliness, depression tendency is presented in Figure 2.

<table>
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<th>Table 1</th>
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<td>Data description</td>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Depression Tendency</th>
<th>Social Skills</th>
<th>Loneliness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( N )</td>
<td>( M )</td>
<td>( SD )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>15.43</td>
<td>10.3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>14.19</td>
<td>10.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>15.91</td>
<td>10.3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>College Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>First year</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>15.88</td>
<td>10.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second year</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>16.98</td>
<td>10.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third year</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>14.51</td>
<td>9.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fourth year</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>14.71</td>
<td>10.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fifth year and so forth</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20.58</td>
<td>14.0</td>
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From these results, it can be concluded that low social skills led to increasing loneliness, in turn increasing the depression tendency in college students. Conversely, high social skills may lead to decreasing loneliness, thus decreasing the tendency of depression in college students. The ratio between indirect effect and total effect ($P_M = 0.85$) and the ratio between indirect effect and direct effect ($R_M = 5.85$) demonstrated that the role of social skills toward depression strongly influenced by loneliness, therefore loneliness fully mediated the role of social skills toward depression tendency.

As an addition analysis, we examined the depression rates of participants based on clinical categorization. For this purpose, BDI-II scores of the subjects were categorized into a clinical depression categorization introduced by Beck et al. (1996), i.e. the total score of 0-13 goes into the normal classification or no symptoms of depression, the score 14-19 as mild depression, the score of 20-28 as moderate depression, and score 29-63 as severe depression. The surprising finding was that the 51% of participants indicated depression clinically, with 18% being classified as mild depression, 21% of subjects classified as moderate depression, and 12% as severe depression.

Figure 1. Social Skills, Depression Tendencies, and Loneliness Based on the College Year

![Figure 1](image1.png)

Figure 2. The role of Social Skills on Depression Tendencies with Loneliness as Mediator

![Figure 2](image2.png)
Discussion

This study supports our prediction that social skills play a role in the tendency of depression in college students. It was demonstrated that the decrease in social skills contributes 21% to the increasing depression tendency. The influence of social skills on depression tendency was mediated by loneliness. These findings are in line with several studies which showed that high social skills can hinder individuals from depression tendency (Dill & Anderson, 1999; Garland & Fitzgerald, 1998; Reed, 1994; Segrin & Rynes, 2009).

The findings of this study also support previous research by Fiori and Consedine (2013) that loneliness as a subjective evaluation of the lack of individual social relations provides a 46-53% mediation effect on the relation of social interaction with one’s mental health. This may happen because individuals with low social skills tend to have difficulty in building positive and deep social relationships (Wittenberg & Reis, 1986).

Dill and Anderson (1999) also explain that poor social skills can increase the maladaptive arousal in social situations. Poor social skills lead individual to negative feelings toward his interpersonal relationships, both in quantity (e.g. feeling lack of friends) and quality (feeling lack of close relationship), thus making them feel lonely. This lack of social relationship in turn will make students vulnerable to feelings of loneliness that can lead to depression (Kraus, et al., 2009; Segrin & Rynes, 2009; Shiovitz-Ezra & Leitsch, 2010). On the contrary, the research of Jose and Lim (2014) showed that if social connectedness is well established it can be a protective factor that may prevent depression (Jose & Lim, 2014).

Students in the different college years showed different tendency of depression, social skills, and loneliness. Data from this study indicated that college students in the fifth year of college and beyond showed a higher level of depression and loneliness and lower level of social skills than other groups. This finding is in accordance with that of Smith and Renk (2007) which showed that the academic demands of the final task is a significant stressor in the final year of college.

In order to understand the results of this study in the context of students in Yogyakarta, we conducted a short interview to two students in the fifth year, they stated that they did feel a great pressure from the social environment because they have not successfully completed the final project. One of the interviewee mentioned that in this fifth year there was a feeling of distress as well as guilt because they had not yet succeeded in completing the final task (i.e. undergraduate thesis). Another interviewee mentioned that along the time, the inferior feeling he feels become greater and his confidence to complete the final task become lower because his peers have graduated before him. On the other hand, many of their friends have graduated so that access to the friendship is not as good as before. These could be the factors that trigger loneliness and depression in college students in the fifth year and beyond.

The high tendency of depression in the fifth year students onwards indicates the need for special attention to this group of students. According to Smith and Renk (2007), supports provided by people around students can reduce the perceived pressure that the final-year encounter. Support group for final year students may become an effective measure to reduce the tendency of depression (Smith & Renk, 2007). A support group can facilitate final-
grade students to stay intact with an appropriate social network, thus reduce loneliness and avoid depression.

The surprising finding from this research is the fact that there were high indications of depression among college students in Yogyakarta. Data showed that as many as 51% of the 645 college students showed symptoms of depression with various severity levels, i.e. 18% in the category of mild depression, 21% in the category of moderate depression, and 12% in the category of severe depression. This means that depression is a very common psychological problems among college students in Yogyakarta, just like in other parts of the world (Harber & Runyon, 1984; Furr, et al., 2001).

Given the high level of depression and other psychological problems among students, mental health services of students such as campus counseling become a very important service, as stated by Kitzrow (2003). Counseling services play an important role in higher education institutions, because through this service college students can seek help to solve their problems as well as to assist students in facing challenges and achieving their goals (Kitzrow, 2003). This research endorse that colleges in Yogyakarta are in deep need to provide psychological services for students.

This study showed that social skills and loneliness contributed 21% to college student’s depression tendency, thus there is 79% variance of tendency not explained in this study. According to Hankin and Abela (2005), both external and internal factors such as stressful negative life events, biological factors, genetic factors, personality factors, cognitive factors, and interpersonal or social factors are interacting to generate depression. Further research is suggested to explore the factors that affect depression in college students.

Conclusion

According to the results of this research, it can be concluded that social skills, with the mediation of loneliness, negatively contributed as much as 21% to the depression tendency among college students. It is also founded that loneliness fully mediated the connection between social skills and depression tendency.

Suggestion

Early recognition of the impacts of low social skills and loneliness might be helpful to reduce the depression tendency on college students. It is recommended to take social skills and loneliness into account in developing the intervention to overcome this issue.

Reference


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