



Social Support for Psychology Masters Students Who Live Away from Home: A Case Study

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Abstract

First-year master's students in psychology face a transitional period with various challenges, including academic demands, social adjustments, and adaptation to a new environment, particularly for those living away from home for the first time. This study aims to describe participants' experiences and interpretations of social support during this period. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed to explore the issue in depth. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews based on the theory of social support. The participants consisted of four first-year Master of Psychology students at Padjadjaran University, aged 18–25 years, who recently moved from their hometowns outside Java Island after completing their undergraduate studies, and were living independently in rented accommodations. The findings revealed that participants received and interpreted various forms of social support both on and off campus. Tangible support from friends, such as transportation assistance or companionship when sick, provided relief and convenience. Having support from parents and close friends, either in person or virtually, creates a sense of comfort and acceptance. Friendship groups also played a role in fostering social inclusion. Self-esteem support from parents, expressed through pride in the participants' achievements, enhanced their sense of worth. Appraisal support, including guidance and advice from parents, helps participants navigate challenges during their studies. Overall, these forms of social support played a crucial role in helping participants manage academic and personal challenges, contributing significantly to their adaptation and well-being as master's students living away from home.

Keywords: Social Support, Living Away From Home, Students, Adaptation, Case Study.

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1. Introduction

Students who are just starting a master's program will certainly experience a transition process from a bachelor's program to a master's program which has higher academic demands. Moreover, for students who are new to living far away from their parents when pursuing their master's degree. Not only experiencing a transition period, master's students are also faced with various new challenges such as responsibility, academic discipline, financial stability, relationships with supervisors, academic self-perception, solving complex and poorly defined research problems, and so on. [1]. Although this transition period can increase maturity and independence, many students still experience stress and feel burdened when adapting to their first year of college. In a study involving master's students, it was found that they often experience pressure due to publication demands, strict assessments for written assignments, lack of preparation for academic demands, cultural differences and difficulties in adapting [2]. Furthermore, other studies also say that the pressure to publish work, teach, and meet the expectations of supervisors can also be additional pressure that requires them to lose sleep [3].

A large number of master's students prefer to migrate,

leave home, and move to another city or region in order to continue their education. One of the main reasons is because of the uneven quality of education in Indonesia. Based on *THE World University Rankings* 2024, 16 of the 20 best universities in Indonesia are located on the island of Java, such as the University of Indonesia, Airlangga University, Bandung Institute of Technology, and Padjadjaran University [4]. These universities are favorites for undergraduate students who want to continue to a master's program because they have a good academic reputation compared to universities outside Java. Other motivations for students to migrate are because they want to experience a pleasant environment, try something new, have the hope of getting opportunities to develop themselves, and get a better quality education [5]. In addition, other studies involving students from other regions also state that the reasons for students to migrate include continuing their education, either because of their own desires or encouragement from their parents, increasing knowledge, seeking new experiences or skills, and because of limited educational facilities in their home areas [6]. These reasons show that studying abroad is seen as an opportunity for broader self-development for master's students.

As individuals who are in early adulthood, traveling is one of the efforts of master's students to actualize themselves. In this phase, early adulthood is also marked by the search for identity through identity exploration, instability in various aspects of life, focus on self-development, feelings of being between adolescence and adulthood, and optimism about future opportunities [7]. Through the experience as students who travel, individuals not only gain academic knowledge, but also have the opportunity to explore various ideas and different perspectives and develop a more critical and reflective mindset towards the knowledge and values they have, and understand that values and outlooks on life can differ depending on the individual or culture [8]. Thus, conceptually, traveling as a student not only broadens the educational experience, but also provides an opportunity for more comprehensive self-development, and prepares oneself to face future challenges.

The transition from living at home to a new environment such as a boarding house or dormitory is a significant experience. For most students, this is a challenge that provides an opportunity for self-formation and personal growth [9], but for others the experience of moving away from home can be very stressful. Various studies have found that new students often experience *homesickness*, which is emotional stress that arises from feelings of homesickness. More extreme, students who live away from home also tend to experience suicidal thoughts. Previous studies have shown that there is a high prevalence of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts among young students, with a more pronounced tendency in women [10]. One factor that can act as a *buffer* for mental problems such as those mentioned above is social support [11].

Social support is one of the psychological aspects that can help someone's success in adjusting when living away from home [12]. Social support for master's students who live away from home is obtained from parents, peers, people in the surrounding environment, and so on [13], [14], [12]. Social support is any form of support received by individuals from people around them that can improve their physical and psychological health. There are 4 dimensions of social support, namely *tangible support* in the form of real support that individuals receive from others. Second, *belonging support* in the form of feelings of involvement with others. Then, *self-esteem support*, namely emotional assistance in the form of self-esteem. Finally, *appraisal support*, namely having a place to tell their problems to others and feeling support in the form of feelings heard by others [15]. A study involving 202 Turkish students reported that having friends, family, and other important people who can be a place to share close and meaningful relationships has a positive impact on a person's life satisfaction [16]. In addition, various forms of social support received by students can help them build a positive self-concept which will

ultimately improve their academic self-concept. Previous research shows that the higher the social support felt by students, the higher their academic self-concept [17]. Therefore, social support plays a very important role for first-year master's students to overcome the challenges and problems they experience.

Research on social support in higher education generally focuses on undergraduate students (S-1) and is rarely conducted on master's students (S2) who have different characteristics and challenges. The transition from undergraduate to master's studies is often challenging and complex. Many master's students feel anxious and stressed in meeting high standards [18]. In addition, master's students who do not have work experience face various challenges such as lack of experience in drawing conclusions from learning, which affects the quality of their academic analysis and understanding, anxiety about the learning process, and uncertainty about future job opportunities, sexual problems and various administrative challenges, which add to the burden of adaptation during the study period, and so on [19]. Thus, it is important to extend this research to master's students.

The purpose of this study was to investigate and provide a deeper understanding of social support in first-year psychology master's students at Padjadjaran University. This study attempts to describe the social support of master's program students who are living away from home. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide new insights for the development of social support strategies or interventions for students.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research Design and Participants

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach, allowing researchers to understand the subjective experiences and emotional nuances felt by students living away from their families, which may not be fully revealed through a quantitative approach. This approach is relevant to this study because it helps to understand the dynamics of social support experienced by students in depth. The research design used is a case study. Case study research is a type of qualitative research that focuses on understanding events or situations and human behavior based on individual perspectives. The purpose of this study is to reveal or describe the specific characteristics of individuals, groups, or other entities [20]. This study is a single-instrument case study that focuses on a problem or case that occurs and describes the problem. The problem or case raised in this study is a case of first-year psychology master's students at Padjadjaran University with a psychological object, namely social support.

The research participants were selected using *purposive sampling techniques* based on certain considerations relevant to the research objectives. In this study, four psychology master's students who were studying abroad were selected as participants to represent various perspectives related to the experience of social support on campus and off campus. Participants were selected because they met specific criteria, namely, they were studying abroad for the first time after previously studying for a bachelor's degree in their hometown, outside Java, were currently studying at the first level of a master's program, and lived alone in a boarding house.

2.2. Procedures and Measurements

Data collection was conducted using a semi-structured interview method. The instrument used was an interview guide compiled based on Cohen and Hoberman's *Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL)*. This guide has the advantage of exploring various dimensions of social support, including *tangible support*, *belonging support*, *self-esteem support*, and *appraisal support*, which are relevant to the experiences of psychology master's students who are studying abroad.

Data analysis was conducted using *thematic analysis techniques*. There are 6 stages of *thematic analysis* according to namely 1) transcribing data, delving into the content to understand the material in depth, and selecting relevant quotes, 2) recognizing patterns, terms, or visual elements that often appear and assigning them as keywords, 3) coding to capture the core message, meaning, or theme of the data, 4) developing themes to identify patterns and relationships, and provide more abstract insights into research questions, 5) interpretation of keywords, codes, and themes, 6) and creating a specific picture of the data based on existing theories [21].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 . Results

This study involved four participants. The data shows that all participants were female, with an average age of 24.25 years. Participants came from three majors in the psychology master's program, namely developmental psychology, psychometrics, and health psychology. All participants were in their first semester when data collection was conducted. Based on their domicile, all participants lived in Jatinangor because Jatinangor was the closest study location to the campus. All participants were unmarried and unemployed.

3.1.1 Tangible Support

Tangible support refers to real support provided by others in the form of goods or money that individuals need. This support is felt when individuals realize that

there are people who are ready to provide assistance according to their needs. Based on the information presented in Table 1, all participants received real help from others while living away from home, such as transportation assistance. This is shown in participants 1 and 4 who received support from their friends, including taking them to campus with private vehicles and rides when they had to come home late at night from campus. In contrast, participants 2 and 3 preferred to rely on themselves by using *online transportation services*. This support also provided a sense of calm and convenience for participant 1, especially when sick and in need of help.

"...especially if I come home really late, but sometimes I go with R and S on the Go-Car to the gate" (P1)

"It's better to just use Gojek, so the price is certainly more expensive on GoJek, but the convenience is actually better on GoJek..." (P2)

"I'm a big user of online applications, so I can go anywhere easily..." (P3)

"...sometimes I get dropped off by my boarding house friends, sometimes because my boarding house friend is a bachelor's student but has a vehicle, sometimes I get a lift with him but not often" (P4)

3.1.2 Belonging Support

Belonging support refers to an individual's sense of involvement with others, where the individual feels accepted and part of a group. All participants expressed that they received *belonging support*, both from family and close friends. Despite moving away from home, all participants felt that they still had strong relationships with family and friends, often communicating through messages, video calls, and meeting in person. This relationship helped them overcome the loneliness that sometimes arose. Participants 1 and 2 also expressed the importance of having a friendship group that provided a sense of togetherness and emotional support. In addition, participant 1 also stated that the presence of people outside of their friendship group provided comfort during the time they were moving away from home.

"...even in the middle of the night I will definitely call if there is something I want to tell, so I really have to tell something, so I will definitely call my mom. If not to my parents, to my friends, video call, I have to tell something" (P1)

"I have a good relationship with them, meaning that they are on the same wavelength, initially there were many differences, but over time, it doesn't mean that the person has changed, but that we understand the person better." (P2)

"...even though there are some close friends of mine, but they are not that close because they are from different classes, we only met in the same subject. That

is really praying, the definition of applying if there is a problem praying two rakaat, they must take ablution, pray, cry or video call 3 times a day with their parents" (P3)

"...telephone calls and video calls are mandatory, yes, it has become a routine, in fact it is my obligation every day, basically I have to call my parents and that is a ritual that I have done all this time, starting from when I was in high school until now, my Masters, it is mandatory and it is often done at night" (P4)

3.1.3 Self-esteem Support

Self-esteem support refers to emotional support related to self-esteem, which allows individuals to have a positive assessment of themselves. All participants stated that they felt supported by parents who were proud of their achievements, which contributed to their self-esteem. In addition, all participants also expressed that they felt satisfied with their lives by providing views on the successes they had achieved. Participants 1, 3 and 4 added that they were also able to contribute by helping solve their friends' problems. On the other hand, participant 2 preferred to listen without getting too involved in other people's problems.

"...it's okay if you don't win, it's great that you dare to try, my mom said. Then I joined with the assumption that, well, the important thing is to join, but because of that, the people who joined, like each field only has 1 representative, like for example, development field 1, education field 1, and so on. Then I felt like I was under pressure, because if others won and I didn't, I would be discouraged, and I was like, wow, but thank God I ended up winning" (P 1)

"...then what, I entered UNPAD even though it was a bit stressful here hehe but I was proud, not only me, my parents too" (P 2)

"The first one perhaps, listen to what the problem is, then maybe I'm used to thinking about what I can do to help to solve the problem even though I am aware that my capacity is not that big but at least I can tell him what I can do" (P 3)

"Yes, I feel like my parents are the typical parents who responsive f yes so they listen well to whatever I tell. Their response is also good, if they think there is something lacking they add it, for example I finished this Then my mother said it was good but maybe there was something else that could be developed, gave input, or not, my mother often slipped in spirituality " (P 4)

3.1.4 Appraisal Support

When individuals feel they have a place to talk about problems, they feel support in the form of feeling heard, known as appraisal or advice. All participants expressed that they had people they could rely on to help assess and overcome the problems they faced.

Parents were the main source of appraisal support for the four participants, providing views and advice that helped them make decisions during their time away from home.

"Hmm, mom and dad are really close friends, often with mom and dad" (P 1)

"Usually the closest people, friends, parents" (P 2)

" Yes, that's my parents, they asked me when I was confused, first maybe my father, then my mother because with my father, I looked for logic, maybe because he was a man, while my mother was emotional and coincidentally my mother was a thinker while I asked a lot of trivial things. "If I ask my mother directly, my mother will immediately think of my trivial things, so I go to my father first, then my mother afterwards. If I am calmer, then I will tell the results of the story." (P 3)

"...the people I rely on the most are my parents definitely. In my opinion, even though academic problems are also sometimes I mean I need to calm down first before looking for a solution. So, from my most serious problems, I tell my parents and I immediately calm down. So looking for a solution is clearer, so in my opinion, my parents, even though the rest is my effort, yes" (P 4)

Table 1 Clustering of Social Support Master of Psychology Student

Dimensions	Qualitative Data	Theme	Participant
Tangible Support	Feel calm and helped by getting transportation assistance from friends	Availability of real support from friends in the form of transportation while living away from home	1, 4
	Feel comfortable using online transportation		2, 3
	Feeling the need for intense communication with parents or friends		1
Belonging Support	Feeling involved in a friendship group	Availability of support to reduce loneliness and increase social engagement from parents and friends	1, 2
	Relying on parents for support and solving problems through a religious approach		3

Dimensions	Qualitative Data	Theme	Participant
Self-esteem Support	Make regular communication with parents a must to maintain relationships and support.		4
	Having parents who are proud of your achievements	Availability of support from parents can increase self-esteem and life satisfaction.	1, 2
	Able to help other people solve problems		3
	Having responsive parents		4
	Relying on parents to share and discuss problems		1
Appraisal Support	Relying on parents and close friends provides perspective on problems.	Availability of support from parents in the form of direction and advice in overcoming problems while away from home	2
	Relying on parents according to their strengths, father for logic, and mother for emotion		3
	Relying on parents for peace of mind to get clearer solutions		4

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that social support received by first-year psychology master's students who are away from home plays an important role in helping them face the various challenges that arise when they are away from home. The support received includes four main dimensions, namely *tangible support*, *belonging support*, *self-esteem support*, and *appraisal support*. Support from the environment, both in the form of real assistance and emotional support, contributes to helping them overcome obstacles that arise during the time away from home. This finding is in line with research on away from home students in Surabaya which states that individuals who receive support from their environment tend to feel more capable of facing the difficulties they face, so that the handling process becomes easier [22].

Tangible support or direct support is an important dimension of social support felt by master's students when they are away from home. This support plays a role in helping them meet urgent needs such as assistance with certain facilities or goods in a new environment far from family. This is in accordance with what was expressed by participants 1 and 4 that they received real support in the form of a ride when they had to come home late at night from campus, accompanied to treatment when they were sick, and taken to campus by boarding house friends. This form of support not only lightens the real burden, but also provides a sense of caring and strengthens positive relationships among students who are away from home. Positive relationships are created when individuals succeed in building close relationships with the people around them, creating a sense of mutual trust, and feeling affection from others [23]. With this support and positive relationships, master's students who are away from home will be better able to adapt to daily challenges who are still trying to build new social relationships.

Based on research involving undergraduate students who are away from home, it was found that the most significant support that plays a role is instrumental support or *tangible support* such as practical and financial assistance that helps them meet their living needs while away from home [24]. Based on developmental age, master's students tend to be more independent in managing their living needs compared to undergraduate students. However, from the interview results above, it can be concluded that master's students also need *tangible support* from their environment.

Master's students receive social support from various sources, including family (parents, siblings), friends, and other significant individuals. In this study, one of the influential sources of social support for first-year psychology master's students at Padjadjaran University was from peers. This social support is included in the dimension of *belonging support*, all participants felt accepted and part of a friendship group. This is important because students who live away from home tend to spend more time with their friends than with their families, so the role of friends is crucial in supporting them in facing academic and social challenges [25]. Peers play an important role in improving the psychological well-being of students who live away from home, especially in terms of autonomy, ability to manage the environment, and establishing positive social relationships [26]. High social support can also reduce *homesickness* which is commonly felt by students who live away from home. By feeling connected to friends who voluntarily accompany, provide attention, and even provide direct assistance, students are better able to face the pressures and challenges that arise during their studies away from home [14].

In the *self-esteem support dimension*, the majority of participants stated that the support received, especially from family, played a major role in increasing their *self-esteem*. Participants also stated that they felt satisfied with their lives through a positive view of the successes they had achieved. This finding is in line with research on college students in China which states that social support can increase life satisfaction in college students [2 7]. In addition, some participants not only received support but also contributed back such as helping other friends solve problems. This finding illustrates that *self-esteem support* is not only obtained from the support received, but also through an active role in providing support to others. In particular, providing support was found to have significant benefits for self-esteem, as it can strengthen a sense of competence and social value.

Previous studies have shown that master's students face greater challenges in their education, such as high academic demands and more intensive learning, which leads to higher levels of stress [2 8]. In line with these findings, this study found that emotional support, especially from family, plays a major role in increasing self-esteem and learning motivation of master's students. This emotional support is closely related to the concept of *self-esteem support*, where support received from family can increase life satisfaction and self-esteem, as expressed by participants in this study. On the other hand, undergraduate students tend to have more structured learning and are more intensively guided and directed by lecturers.

Social support that is also significant in this study comes from parents. All four participants revealed that they rely most on their parents when facing problems, which is related to the *appraisal support dimension*. All participants reported that their parents were the main source of advice and views in helping them make decisions while living away from home. This shows that even though they live independently as students who live away from home, the role of parents remains very dominant in providing emotional support and assessing the situation. As they get older, relationships and bonds with parents tend to be stronger and more stable than when they were teenagers [2 9]. They value more support and advice from their families as their independence increases. This finding underlines the importance of family relationships, especially parents, in providing *appraisal support*, even when individuals are already in the adult life stage and living independently. The role of parents in providing advice can help students become more emotionally stable, strengthening the feeling that they still have a place to seek support and guidance in making important decisions.

4. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that all participants received and interpreted the social support they

experienced, both on campus and off campus, through various forms of support. *Tangible support* was received from friends, such as assistance with transportation or offers to accompany them to medical treatment when they were sick, which provided a sense of calm and convenience for the participants. *Belonging support* was obtained from parents and close friends, in the form of consistent presence when participants felt bored, either through face-to-face meetings, video calls, or telephone calls. In addition, participants had a group of friends who made them feel comfortable and socially accepted while away from home. *Self-esteem support* came from parents, in the form of pride in the participants' achievements and their responsiveness, which provided a sense of satisfaction and made participants feel valuable. All participants also received *appraisal support* from their parents, such as direction and advice that helped them deal with various problems while away from home. The findings in this study strengthen the argument regarding the importance of each dimension of social support for master's students who are away from home.

This study provides practical contributions to higher education institutions, especially in developing strategies to improve social support for overseas master's students. Universities can improve access to psychosocial support by providing specialized counseling services for master's students that can help them manage academic and personal stress. In addition, universities can utilize digital technology to develop online *platforms* that can strengthen the quality and quantity of social interactions and social support received by students. Although this study provides important insights, there are limitations in terms of sample size, so the results cannot be generalized to a wider population. Further research can be conducted with more diverse methods and samples to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of social support for overseas master's students. In addition, the use of quantitative methods can be utilized to analyze the relationship between social support and several relevant variables such as psychological well-being or quality of life.

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