An Analysis of Self-Harm Behaviors among Undergraduate Students of Indonesia University of Education

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Abstract: Cases of self-harm among students are an increasing phenomenon, a survey conducted by Kompas.com in 2019 on first semester college students in Bandung showed that 30.5% of students were depressed, 20% seriously thought about committing suicide, and 6% had attempted suicide such as cutting, jumping from a height, and hanging himself (www.Kompas.com, 2019). The purpose of this study is to analyze the self-harm behavior that occurs in students, the participants in this study amounted to 299 active students in the Indonesian Education University, spread across 8 faculties and regional campuses, with an age range of 18-24 years. The measuring instrument used is the Indonesian version of the Self-Harm Inventory from Kusumadewi, et al (2017), which has been modified by researchers and has a reliability of 0.886. The results showed as many as 144 participants (48.1%) had hurt themselves intentionally, 88 participants (29.5%) never did, and 67 participants (22.4%) often did. It can be concluded that almost the majority of students at the University of Indonesia have committed self-harm. This research is expected to be an early screening as an early detection in preventing self-harm behavior.

1   INTRODUCTION

Early adulthood is exceptionally vulnerable to problems affected by either internal or external factors such as environment, society, peers, and so on. It is considered as a phase where individuals are more likely to face countless emotional conflicts, to adapt to new life patterns and new social expectations. The life problems encountered in early adulthood are either from individuals, social environment, physical situation, culture, or other factors (Putri, 2019). Some people can solve their problems, yet others may fail to do so. An individual's inability to face and solve problems leads to stress, causing negative emotions. This situation has resulted from each individual's personality formation and environmental patterns (Hurlock, 1980).

Daily life adversities are a test to create more mature individuals in taking actions encouraging them to handle their problems well. However, those who cannot deal with their problems properly may take a shortcut. For instance, mostly they commit wrongdoing that brings no good either for themselves or others outside their circle. An individual moving towards adulthood will experience social and psychological adjustment changes that can cause confusion and discomfort. It happens due to the shift of old roles and previously held values to be reevaluated, modified, or even abdicated (Matt, Seus, & Schumann, 1997, in Shulman, et al., 2005). They tend to handle their problems in bizarre ways, such as hiding their emotions or choosing to express their negative emotions into destructive behaviors.

Suppressed and uncontrolled negative emotions can trigger people to commit self-harm actions, for example hurting themselves, misusing drugs or alcohol, social and behavioral distortion. Commonly people will make several attempts to express their emotions. On the other hand, some who cannot channel their emotions in the right way are likely to do self-harm or self-injury even commit suicide. Self-harm is a worrisome phenomenon occurred among teenagers and university students at the moment. News in mass media is filled with a rise of depression among young people that leads to suicides. It happens as a way to get rid of stress or depression, the physical pain temporarily distracts the mental pain they suffer from (Prasanti &

Prihardini, 2019).

Self-harm becomes a channeling medium developed into manipulation, playing with youth's emotions as well. It is mentioned that children and teenagers frequently desire to follow current fads, to be acknowledged as 'capable' and brave. Accepting challenges from their social groups means an achievement claim (Putri, 2018). Referring to Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020, WHO members had committed to diminishing suicide rates up to 10% by 2020 in each country. In 2013 the global suicide rate reached 11.4 per 100.000 people (15.0 for males and 8.0 for females), meaning that one person dies every 40 seconds from suicide. Data reported the prevalence of mental disorders is 80-100% in each suicide case; hence, it can be estimated that people with a mental disorder have a 6-15% risk of suicide throughout their life, alcoholics 7-15%, and people with schizophrenia 4-10% (https://www.bethesda.or.id/read/42/bunuh-diri.html).

Maidah (2013) found out that self-injury results from family background and environments such as introverted personality, low self-esteem, rigid thinking, difficulty in expressing emotions, and inconducive family environment. The causes of stress in each individual are diverse; hence, it should be handled so well that no negative impacts can occur. Some people solve their problems by talking to friends and families, while other individuals find it hard to deal with their troubles. When we are unable to express our emotions and to talk about things that make us oppressed, mad, or annoyed, the tension will be getting higher and become irresistible. Some people can deal with their problems well and optimize their bodies by expressing their thoughts and feelings. On the other hand, others may experience difficulty in handling their issues that leads to self-harm.

According to Radham & Hawton (in Whitlock, 2009) around 13%, up to 15% of teenagers and early adults surveyed at school did self-injury or self-harm. Related studies conducted in universities demonstrate that 6% of students actively and chronically committed self-injury (Whitlock, 2009: 2), while Gratz and Klonsky (in Llyod Richardson et al, 2007:2) analyzed the prevalence rate of self-injury among early adults in universities were 4%. Some leading factors of self-harm are bullying and discrimination; loss of a close family member or friend; lack of love and affection or being abandoned by parents or carers; victims of physical, psychological, or sexual abuse; and serious mental disorder that affects one's way to feel himself/herself. (https://www.intothelightid.org). In Indonesia, there has not been a specific rate of self-harm, yet it has been indicated in some depression cases as the number of people with depression is increasing. Some challenges have made the leading factors and the cure of this clinical phenomenon hard to determine (DeAngelis, 2015, in Fitriyana, 2020).

A survey conducted by Kompas.com towards first-semester university students in Bandung in 2019 revealed a surprising result showing that 30.5% were depressed; 20% had serious suicidal thoughts; and 6% had already taken suicidal behaviors e.g. cutting, jumping off high structures, or hanging. Suicide was the peak of all problems faced by them (www.kompas.com, 2019). This survey result corroborates a study by Maslihah, et al. (2019) towards 362 students of the Educational Science Faculty in Indonesia University of Education. It was found that 69% of the research sample experienced high-level stress derived from five factors i.e. academic life, undergraduate thesis, social relations, family, or economic condition.

Self-harm/self-injury is not only reported in western countries but also in developing ones as it contributed to 600.000 deaths by 1990 (Ee & Mey, 2011). There is an urgency to conduct more research addressing the self-harm issue as early detection to avoid self-harm. Only a few research on self-harm is found in Indonesia due to difficulty in obtaining accurate data on the number of self-harm cases and the iceberg phenomenon of self-harm behaviors (Hidayati & Muthia, 2016). Self-harm is the iceberg phenomenon generally occurring in normal populations or patients who are clinically diagnosed with a mental health issue. It has an upward trend and a possibility to develop into suicidal behaviors, if not handled adequately. Self-harm early detection efforts and prevention are crucial in avoiding suicide mortality.

Referring to The Center of Applied Psychology (CAP) data in the Psychology Study Program of Indonesia University of Education, 20 (twenty) students of Indonesia University of Education became clients of CAP showing self-harm tendency during 2018-1019. Stress among students of Indonesia University of Education would most likely trigger self-harm due to an inability to solve their problems well. Pointing out to this fact, the researchers were interested in conducting a study on self-harm among students of Indonesia University of Education.
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2   METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design. It emphasized quantitative data analysis (numbers) that were gathered from objective measurements and analyzed by statistical method. Research variables needed to be identified, measurable, and empirically tested. Data analysis was deductive and inductive conclusion; data could capture clear facts. Collected data were descriptive, without aiming to test hypotheses (Azwar, 2017). The instrument used in this study was an Indonesian version of the Self-Harm Inventory (SHI) from Kusumadewi, et al. (2019) consisting of 22 (twenty-two) Yes-or-No ordinal questions where respondents got a score of 1 for Yes and 0 for No. The total score could range from 0 to 22. In this research, the researchers modified the instrument by adding and removing some items that were considered appropriate with the characteristics of respondents.

3   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of 298 research participants, 78% (231 people) were female and 22% (67) were male. They were active students in 8 (eight) faculties and Local Campus of Indonesia University of Education aged from 18-24 years old, as displayed in the figure below.
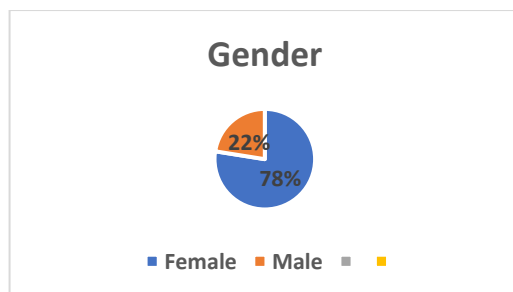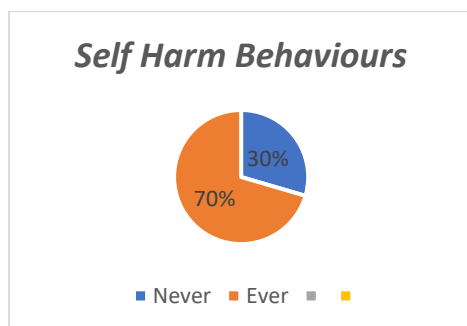

Figure 1. Gender Distribution

Figure 2. Self-harm behaviour

The tendency of self-harm behavior does not emerge without reasons. Wibisono (2016) stated two leading factors of self-harm behaviors i.e. internal and external ones. The internal factors cover neurosis or psychotic characteristics, hereditary traits from emotional intelligence, and negative emotions. The external factors can be trauma caused by an inappropriate school environment and parenting style. Problematic emotional or stressful situations faced by an individual are inseparable in triggering self-harm behaviors. Self-harm behaviors are not a mental disorder, but they are an individual's failure in coping with his/her stress (Carroll, et al., 2014). Although not all people with self-harm behaviors will continue committing suicide, they have 1.68 times the risk of doing so (Chan M., et al 2016, in Kusumadewi, et al 2019).

Research findings on reasons for doing self-harm are portrayed in Edmondson et al., (2016) in Fitriyana, R. (2020). Self-harm is a medium to handle stress or to regulate emotions in which people who have done self-harm feel relieved from the stress they are experiencing. Self-harm is the way to punish themselves for doing unexpected actions. As a form of disassociation escaping from many things and connecting more to self to feel the void, self-harm behaviors are one of the ways to define oneself or a validation form for his/her existence towards others. People who self-harm get used to suppressing their feelings including trying not to be too expressive. Suppression can hinder emotion-expressive behaviors that are taking place. It can harm health (Niedenthal, Krauth, & Ric, 2006).

Figure 3. Self Harm Cycle

Each individual has different causes of stress and worry. Some can talk to their friends and families;

others find it remarkably difficult. When people cannot express their emotions and talk freely about things that make them stressed, mad, or annoyed; the stress can get higher and become unbearable. This situation triggers self-harm. In the other word, they use their body to express their thoughts and feelings (www.mentalhealth.org.uk, 2016).

4 CONCLUSIONS

The participants of this study were 298 students with 77.5% of them (231 people) were female and 22.5% (67 people) were male. The result of this study revealed that 88 respondents (29,5%) had never done self-harm; while 140 respondents (47%) had ever committed self-harm and 67 respondents (22.4%) orang often did self-harm. It can be concluded that almost all students of Indonesia University of Education have ever committed self-harm. A suggestion for further research is conducting a qualitative study employing in-depth interviews to gain more understanding towards the psychological condition of students who have self-harm behaviors. This study is an early screening to avoid self-harm behaviors and there should be preventive efforts from the campus to solve them before getting bigger. They can be done for example through a program of community intervention that can synergize among the campus parties (Faculties, Study Programs, Academic Advisors, etc.) with the students who can employ their potency as a peer support activator.

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