

Stress Levels and Coping Strategies in Thesis Writing among Islamic Guidance and Counseling Students: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Writing a thesis is a crucial step in completing undergraduate studies, but the process can be stressful for students. Students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling (BKI) study program face various challenges, such as limited references, limited understanding of scientific writing, the revision process, and difficulties with guidance, all of which can trigger stress during the thesis writing process.

Aims: This study aims to identify the level of stress experienced by BKI students in compiling their theses and to explore the efforts made to overcome this stress.

Methods: The study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. The primary participants consisted of 10 BKI students from the 2017 intake selected through purposive sampling, supported by eight additional informants consisting of close friends, roommates, and friends with the same supervisor. Data were collected through participant observation, unstructured interviews, and documentation. Analysis was conducted through data review, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data validity was checked through triangulation.

Result: The results of the study showed that of the 10 key informants, three students experienced mild stress, five experienced moderate stress, and two experienced severe stress. Stress triggers came from both internal and external factors. Students dealt with stress through two groups of strategies: general coping strategies such as relaxation, refreshing, a healthy lifestyle, time management, and discussions with friends, and Islamic coping strategies such as prayer, dhikr, supplication, reading the Quran, fasting, and vows.

Conclusion: Thesis writing stress among BKI students exhibits varying levels and impacts, with moderate stress being the most prevalent. Students manage this stress through a combination of psychological, behavioral, social, and religious strategies, demonstrating the importance of an integrative coping approach to supporting the completion of their final assignment.

Keywords: academic stress; thesis writing; Islamic coping

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INTRODUCTION

Writing a thesis is a crucial stage in undergraduate education because it demonstrates a student's ability to design research, carry out scientific processes, and independently prepare academic reports. Students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling (BKI) Study Program, like students in general, are required to complete their education within the specified study period and make a thesis one of the requirements for obtaining a bachelor's degree. However, academic demands in the final stages of study can develop into a source of stress when students perceive these demands to exceed their abilities or resources. Within this framework, stress is not only related to the number of demands, but also to how individuals assess and respond to pressure from the environment (Fiqih & Ratnawati, 2023; Gisela et al., 2025). In the context of writing a thesis, stress is a significant issue because it can be associated with decreased concentration, fatigue, anxiety, loss of self-confidence, and even delays in completing studies (Andini, 2023; Ardi et al., 2025).

Ideally, final-year students are expected to be able to apply the knowledge gained during lectures, work independently, master scientific writing, utilize relevant reference sources, and establish productive academic communication with their supervisors. Empirical conditions found among BKI students indicate a different situation. Initial observations indicate difficulties in determining research problems and thesis titles, understanding scientific writing, obtaining references, and meeting with supervisors. This process also requires considerable effort, time, money, and thought. Continuous pressure causes some students to delay completing their thesis, feel less confident, and even express a desire to discontinue their studies (Hidayat et al., 2021; Salsabila et al., 2022). At the time of the study, of the 73 BKI students from the 2017 intake, approximately 13 had completed their final exams, while approximately 60 were still in the process of writing their theses as they entered their ninth and tenth semesters. This situation demonstrates the gap between the demands of ideal academic completion and the reality faced by students.

This situation opens up an important opportunity to understand the stress of writing a thesis not only from the perspective of its existence or level, but also from the perspective of how students respond to and manage it. The context of BKI students is interesting because the characteristics of their academic field allow for strategies for coping with stress to be understood from a more integrative perspective. Efforts to cope with stress can involve general strategies related to managing emotions, behavior, health, time, and social support, but can also involve religious approaches that align with the characteristics of Islamic Guidance and Counseling. Thus, research on BKI students provides an opportunity to understand how students cope with academic pressure by utilizing personal, social, and religious resources. This perspective is important because responses to stress are not always uniform; similar stressors can produce different responses depending on how individuals assess, cope with, and adapt to those demands. This study itself differentiates stress coping efforts into general and Islamic approaches, thus providing space for a more comprehensive view of coping experiences.

Previous studies used in this research indicate that there is a research area that has not been fully explained. Hariaty et al., (2023) emphasized the depiction of stress levels through univariate analysis and found that overall student stress in writing a thesis was in the mild category. Meanwhile, the research Zalma et al., (2025) discusses the physical, psychological, and behavioral manifestations of stress, but does not deeply explore the variety of student coping strategies. Therefore, the research gap in this study lies in the limited understanding of how students writing theses cope with stress through a combination of general and religious strategies. The novelty of this study lies in the qualitative exploration of stress levels/experiences as well as general and Islamic coping efforts among BKI students in a single research context. This difference is also explicitly seen in previous

studies of theses, which show differences in subjects, locations, approaches, and forms of stress management.

The focus on students' efforts to cope with stress was chosen because understanding the stress of writing a thesis would be incomplete if it only stopped at identifying its level or symptoms. Stress is a response to demands perceived as burdensome or exceeding an individual's capabilities (Chu et al., 2026; Vancheri et al., 2022). Therefore, how students manage this pressure is an important part of understanding the experience of stress. In the context of writing a thesis, students face stressors that originate from within themselves, such as limited self-confidence and academic abilities, as well as external factors such as environmental demands, family, relationships with friends, and the academic guidance process (Kirana et al., 2022; Rus & Agustina, 2023). The research findings also indicate that internal and external factors contribute to stress in BKI students. Therefore, exploring coping efforts allows the research to explain not only "how much stress students experience," but also "how students maintain the ability to continue the thesis writing process amidst this pressure." This focus is relevant to Islamic Guidance and Counseling scholarship because it opens up an understanding of the intersection between general stress management strategies and coping practices based on religious values.

Based on these research problems and gaps, this study aims to identify the levels of stress experienced by students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program in writing their theses and explore their efforts to overcome this stress. This objective maintains the original formulation of the study, which focused on stress levels and efforts to overcome them. Theoretically, this study is expected to broaden the understanding of coping with academic stress in the context of completing a final assignment by considering both general and religious strategies simultaneously. Practically, the results of this study can be a source of information for students in developing adaptive stress management strategies, for supervisors in understanding the pressures experienced by students during the thesis writing process, and for the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program in developing academic support and counseling that is more responsive to the needs of final-year students. This contribution is in line with the initial objective of the study to develop knowledge about efforts to overcome stress and provide benefits for the development of Islamic Guidance and Counseling science.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore students' experiences of stress during the preparation of their thesis and the efforts they use to cope with this stress. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study seeks to understand and interpret phenomena based on experiences and information obtained directly from participants in a natural context. The descriptive design was used to describe the forms and levels of stress experienced by students and the strategies used to overcome it, using both general and Islamic approaches. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation.

Participants

The primary participants of the study consisted of 10 students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling (BKI) Study Program, class of 2017, at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication Sciences, IAIN Padangsidimpuan, who were writing their theses and experiencing stress during the process. In addition to the primary participants, the study involved eight supporting informants, consisting of three friends or close friends, two roommates, and three students with the same supervisor. Supporting informants were used to obtain additional information and help confirm the

experiences and behaviors reported by the primary participants. Thus, the research information sources included 10 primary informants and eight supporting informants.

Population and Sampling Methods

The population that became the context of the research was 73 students of the BKI Study Program, class of 2017. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, namely the selection of informants based on considerations and characteristics relevant to the research objectives. From this population, 10 students were selected as the main participants based on the criteria that they were BKI students class of 2017, were in the process of writing their thesis, experienced stress related to writing their thesis, met the criteria determined by the researcher, and were willing to provide information about their experiences.

Instrument

The data collection instruments consisted of observation guidelines, unstructured interview guidelines, and documentation. In participant observation, the researcher was directly involved in the research environment and observed students' behavior, psychological conditions, and stress-related complaints during the preparation of their theses. The observation guidelines were specifically aimed at observing BKI students experiencing stress and the strategies they used to cope with stress in general and Islamic perspectives.

The student interview guide consisted of nine main questions exploring stress experiences, symptoms, causes, and impact on daily life, responses to stress, strategies for maintaining the thesis writing process, Islamic coping strategies, and perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies. Separate interview guides were also used for friends/roommates and students with the same supervisor as the students as supporting sources of information. Photo documentation during the interviews and data obtained from the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication Sciences served as additional data sources.

Procedures and Time Frame

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication Sciences, IAIN Padangsidimpuan, North Sumatra, Indonesia, with a planned research period from February to December 2021. After selecting participants based on purposive sampling criteria, data collection was carried out in three main stages. First, the researcher conducted participant observation of students' behavior, psychological conditions, and complaints during the thesis writing process. Second, unstructured interviews were conducted with students as key informants to in-depth explore their experiences of stress, causes, impacts, and coping strategies. Interviews with supporting informants were used to strengthen and confirm information from students. Third, documentation in the form of photographs of research activities and institutional data were used as supporting data.

Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis in four stages. First, all data from observations, interviews, and documentation were systematically reviewed and recorded. Second, data reduction was performed by summarizing information, selecting relevant data, focusing on important information, and identifying themes related to stress and students' coping strategies. Third, the reduced data were presented in descriptive narrative form to illustrate participants' experiences. Fourth, conclusions were drawn and verified to identify patterns and key research findings.

Data validity was checked using triangulation. Observational data was compared with interview results, and information from key participants was compared with information from

supporting informants. This procedure was used to check the consistency and credibility of findings from multiple data sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Observation and interview results indicate that all 10 BKI students who served as key informants experienced stress during the thesis writing process, with varying levels and manifestations. This stress emerged during the process of determining the research problem, searching for references, writing the scientific paper, the revision process, and thesis guidance. Based on the interpretation of observation and interview data, five students were in the moderate stress category, three students in the mild stress category, and two students in the severe stress category. Thus, moderate stress was the most common category found among research informants.

Table 1. Distribution of Informants Based on Stress Level in Thesis Writing

Stress Level	n	%	Main characteristics
Light	3	30%	The stress and complaints last relatively short time.
Currently	5	50%	Stress affects daily activities and delays writing.
Heavy	2	20%	Affects physical and mental condition and causes longer delays
Total	10	100%	

Stress categories show increasingly pronounced consequences as stress levels increase. With mild stress, students primarily experience feelings of distress, worry, and complaints that last for a relatively short time. Moderate stress is characterized by longer-lasting tension, affecting daily activities and causing students to delay their thesis writing. Meanwhile, severe stress has a broader impact on physical and psychological well-being; in some cases, students experience illness, loss of self-confidence, feelings of hopelessness, and delaying their thesis writing for several months.

The findings also indicate that the sources of student stress are related to both internal and external factors. Internal factors are primarily related to the student's condition and ability to cope with the thesis writing process, while external factors stem from the environment and the demands of others. Difficulties experienced during the thesis writing process subsequently create different pressures for each student, resulting in varying responses and levels of stress.

To manage stress, students use several common coping strategies, including relaxation, relaxation, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, time management, and discussions with friends or others knowledgeable about their thesis topic. These strategies include regulating breathing, resting or sleeping, taking a leisurely walk, watching TV, eating, and developing positive thoughts. These strategies are used to calm the mind so students can resume working on their thesis.

In addition to general strategies, students also employ Islamic coping strategies, including prayer, dhikr (remembrance of God), recitation of the Quran, fasting, and vows. Prayer and dhikr are used to gain peace, prayer is performed to ask for ease in facing the thesis writing process, while reading the Quran is seen as helping calm the heart and mind. Fasting is used as an effort to control emotions and practice patience, while vows are made as a form of religious commitment when desired hopes are achieved. Thus, the findings show that BKI students cope with the stress of writing thesis through a combination of general strategies and religious/Islamic strategies.

Discussion

Research findings indicate that stress is a real experience during the thesis writing process for Islamic Guidance and Counseling students, with moderate stress being the most dominant category. Of the 10 key informants, five experienced moderate stress, three mild stress, and two severe stress. These differences in stress levels are reflected in their duration and impact: mild stress lasts relatively briefly, moderate stress begins to affect daily activities and causes delays in thesis writing, while severe stress impacts physical and psychological conditions and can cause delays of several months.

This finding is in accordance with the concept of stress levels used in the study. Ambarwati et al., (2019), that moderate stress lasts longer and can be accompanied by physical tension, sleep disturbances, fatigue, and decreased activity, while severe stress lasts longer and is associated with sadness, pressure, pessimism, and hopelessness (Febri, 2024; Martogi, 2021). Thus, stress in writing a thesis is not merely a momentary inconvenience, but can develop into a condition that hinders the continuation of the academic process.

Findings regarding the existence of internal and external factors that trigger stress. Stress is the result of the interaction between an individual and his/her environment when a demand is perceived as burdensome or exceeding his/her capabilities and threatening the individual's well-being (Honkley, 2024; Mubarak et al., 2025). In this study, internal factors relate to students' ability to cope with the demands of writing a thesis, while external factors involve the environment and the demands of others. Difficulties in finding references, understanding scientific writing, undergoing the revision process, communicating with supervisors, and coping with the demands of completing studies can be perceived as burdensome when students' resources are deemed inadequate. This explains why relatively similar academic demands can produce different levels of stress in each student.

The following findings show that students not only experience stress, but actively use general coping strategies in the form of relaxation, refreshing, healthy lifestyles, time management, and discussions with friends (Arisandy & Nurisyah, 2025; Hikmah et al., 2022). These findings are in line with the stress management framework used in the study. Aqobah et al., (2023), which includes meditation, relaxation, a healthy lifestyle, and exercise as common ways to cope with stress. In practice, students engage in relaxation to calm their minds, manage their diet and sleep, manage their time to focus, and discuss thesis problems with friends or individuals deemed knowledgeable about the research topic. These findings indicate that students' coping strategies are not only oriented toward reducing emotional tension but also include practical efforts to control sources of stress and maintain the continuity of their thesis work.

Another important characteristic is the emergence of Islamic coping through prayer, dhikr, supplication, reading the Qur'an, fasting, and vows (Hsb et al., 2024). These practices are used by students to gain calm, strengthen patience, control emotions, and build confidence that academic difficulties can be overcome. These findings are consistent with a theoretical framework that positions prayer, dhikr, supplication, and reading the Quran as forms of Islamic stress management (Maftuhin & Yazid, 2025; Nurfajrin et al., 2024). These results also support Yuni Asnita's research, reviewed in her thesis, which found that performing tahajjud prayer helps create peace of mind, more positive thoughts, and the ability to cope with stress. Thus, among BKI students, stress management appears to be integrative: students combine psychological strategies and everyday behaviors with spiritual resources appropriate to their academic and religious backgrounds.

Implications

These findings imply that stress management for final-year students should focus not only on academic ability to complete their thesis, but also on psychological, social, and spiritual support. Study programs and supervisors can consider mentoring that integrates time management, peer

support, relaxation skills, supportive mentor-supervisor communication, and a religious approach appropriate to the characteristics of BKI students.

Research Contribution

The primary contribution of this study lies in understanding that the stress of writing a thesis among BKI students not only varies in level and impact but also in how they cope with it through two complementary groups of strategies: general coping and Islamic coping. These findings broaden the study of academic stress by demonstrating the importance of the religious dimension in understanding students' coping strategies in the context of Islamic Guidance and Counseling education.

Limitations

Based on the research design, the main limitations lie in the number of key informants, which was only 10 students, the purposive selection of informants, and the research being conducted in a single study program and institution, so the findings are not intended to be statistically generalized. Furthermore, stress levels were determined based on the interpretation of observation and interview data, not through a standardized psychometric stress scale. Therefore, the categories of mild, moderate, and severe should be understood as qualitative findings in the context of this study.

Suggestions

Further research is recommended to involve students from multiple study programs or universities, using a mixed methods approach, and supplementing in-depth interviews with validated stress and coping instruments. Future research could also specifically examine the relationship or effectiveness of various forms of general and religious coping on the stress of writing a thesis. Practically, students need to strengthen their physical and mental readiness, actively consult with their supervisors, and utilize peer support; while supervisors and the academic environment need to provide guidance that helps students maintain motivation and complete their thesis adaptively.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program experienced stress during the thesis writing process at varying levels. Of the 10 key informants, three students experienced mild stress, five students experienced moderate stress, and two students experienced severe stress, so that moderate stress was the most dominant category. This stress was influenced by internal and external factors and could impact physical and psychological conditions, daily activities, and delays in the completion of the thesis. In dealing with stress, students used two groups of strategies: general coping strategies such as relaxation, refreshing, a healthy lifestyle, time management, and discussions with friends, and Islamic coping strategies such as prayer, dhikr, supplication, reading the Qur'an, fasting, and vows. These findings indicate that stress management in thesis writing among BKI students is integrative, combining psychological, behavioral, social, and religious strategies to maintain the ability to continue the process of completing the final assignment.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

DH contributed to the conceptualization of the study, data collection, data analysis, and drafting of the initial manuscript; KA supervised the methodology development, critical review, and refinement of the manuscript; and MD supervised the validation of the research results, interpretation of the findings, and final revision of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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