

## THE IMPACT OF FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE ON MENTAL HEALTH OF SEMARANG STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to determine the importance of social circles for mental health. The method used in this study is a qualitative approach through case study, employing interview techniques and observations with 8 informants from various faculties at Universitas Negeri Semarang. The results obtained from this research revealed two categories: the impact of social circles on mental health and the lack of impact of social circles on mental health. Among the eight informants, three were found to have social circles that significantly influenced their mental health, while five informants had social circles that did not significantly impact their mental health.

**Keywords:** *social impact, mental health, social circles, college student*

## DAMPAK LINGKAR PERTEMANAN TERHADAP KESEHATAN MENTAL MAHASISWA UNIVERSITAS NEGERI SEMARANG

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pentingnya lingkungan sosial bagi kesehatan mental. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi kasus, dengan teknik wawancara dan observasi terhadap 8 orang informan dari berbagai fakultas di Universitas Negeri Semarang. Hasil yang diperoleh dari penelitian ini adalah terdapat dua kategori yaitu pengaruh lingkungan sosial terhadap kesehatan mental dan tidak adanya pengaruh lingkungan sosial terhadap kesehatan mental. Dari kedelapan informan tersebut, ditemukan tiga orang memiliki lingkungan sosial yang berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kesehatan mentalnya, sedangkan lima orang informan memiliki lingkungan sosial yang tidak berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kesehatan mentalnya.

**Kata kunci:** *Dampak sosial, kesehatan mental, lingkungan sosial, mahasiswa*

## **Introduction**

Friendship is an important social phenomenon in human life. In friendship, a person usually looks for friends with similar interests, values, and goals. Good friends can usually provide emotional and psychological support, as well as entertain and motivate a person. Friendship can also help a person expand their social network and improve their psychological well-being. A quality circle of friends can provide benefits for students in achieving academic achievement (Gallardo & Barrasa, 2016; Tepordei et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2022; Li & Li, 2022).

Friendship circles are also one of the factors that can affect the mental health of students. Social relationships and support from friends and family can help reduce stress and strengthen mental health. Mental health is one of the important factors in a person's survival (Lin et al., 2016). This also applies to students, who are a group of people who are in transition to adulthood. Good mental health will help students to overcome various problems faced during their education, such as academic stress, interpersonal problems, and emotional problems.

College students are one of the groups that are quite vulnerable to mental health problems, especially during the transition from high school to college (Saleem & Mahmood, 2013; Grotan et al., 2019), limited facilities for mental health services are also one of the causes (Permata et al., 2022). This transition period is marked by environmental changes, social burdens, higher academic demands, and adjustments to independent living. Each of these components has the ability to cause significant psychological stress on students. This age is often referred to as a problematic age, a time of change, a time when individuals search for self-identity, a time of unrealism, and a time towards adulthood (Sari, 2017).

Mental health refers to an individual's health in all aspects of their development, including physical health and psychological health (Pertiwi et al., 2022). In addition, mental health will also help students achieve their maximum academic potential. Students who have good mental health will find it easier to overcome the problems they face, so they can focus on studying and achieving the desired achievements. Mental health will also help students develop good social and emotional skills (Blewitt et al., 2021).

Students who have good mental health will find it easier to interact with others with social support, so they can develop a good network of friends. Social support is a form of interaction between individuals where one individual provides assistance to another individual in various ways,

such as participating in joint activities, providing encouragement, providing useful information, providing awards, or providing assessments of individuals (Mulyana et al., 2015; Jokstad et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important to pay attention to mental health for students and provide the support needed to maintain good and healthy mental health. This can be done in various ways, such as providing mental health programs for students, providing emotional and social support, and raising awareness of the importance of mental health for students. Mental health issues are an important focus in the world of education because of their significant impact on students' academic and social lives.

This study uses the Social Exchange theory of George Caspar Homans, this theory focuses on the relationship between individuals and how their interactions are influenced by social exchange. Social exchange includes giving and receiving rewards and costs in social interactions. This theory also assumes that individuals tend to seek relationships that provide better results than the costs incurred. In a college environment, students are often involved in friendship circles consisting of classmates, college friends, extracurricular colleagues, and so on. This circle of friendship provides opportunities for social interaction, sharing experiences, and building emotional bonds (Mighfar, 2015).

This phenomenon is often found among students, namely dependence on a fairly strong circle of friends. This can be seen from the many students who are always looking for activities and social interactions with their friends, so that they leave other activities that are considered less important. Therefore, it is important to conduct research on the impact of the circle of friends in the student environment on students' mental health. The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of the circle of friends on students' mental health.

## **Methods**

The research method used in this study is qualitative. It was conducted to find out whether there is an impact of friendship circles on students' mental health. The study was conducted at Semarang State University, Gunungpati District, Semarang City, from February to March 2023.

The primary data sources used in this study were 8 students (4 female students and 4 male students) from various faculties at Semarang State University. These primary data were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. To obtain the appropriate informant criteria, the author has special criteria. Observations were conducted to directly observe the situation or object of

research related to students' friendship circles. Interviews were used to obtain in-depth information about students' experiences, views, and perceptions regarding the impact of friendship circles on their mental health. Documentation was used to collect data from previously existing written sources, such as journals, books, articles, or other documents relevant to the research topic.

In addition to primary data sources, this study also uses secondary data sources. These secondary data sources come from various literature that are relevant to the research topic, such as scientific journals, books, articles, or other documents. This secondary data is used to support and complement the primary data that has been collected.

The data collection techniques used in this study are observation, interviews, and documentation. In this study, the validation technique used is source triangulation. By using this source triangulation, researchers can compare and combine data obtained from various sources. This helps in identifying the consistency and appropriateness of findings from different perspectives, thereby increasing the validity and trustworthiness of the research results.

## **Research Result**

Having a strong circle of friends is very important for students during college. A circle of friends can provide support, help overcome problems and challenges and motivate and increase productivity. In addition, having a quality circle of friends can expand networks and understand cultural differences and different environments. However, not everyone can easily have a strong circle of friends, and it takes effort to build and maintain it. However, although having a strong circle of friends can have a positive impact, it is also necessary to be selective in choosing friends so as not to affect relationships with others. There is a need to have a strong circle of friends because it can help in studying, getting assignment information from lecturers, and increasing productivity. As informant NK explained, the circle of friends for students is very important because it not only increases theoretical insight but can also increase social relationship networks so that we get many benefits when we have a circle of friends.

The benefits of having a circle of friends can be felt by every individual who is part of the group. Friends can share assignment information, give each other input, and create a positive learning environment. As informant RNA explained, a circle of friends can provide positive benefits even when their condition is down. Having good friends can help us overcome difficult times and develop healthy

habits and lifestyles. However, this also depends on the individual's life principles.

The forms of friendship circles in the student environment are divided into several forms, namely: lifestyle, similar hobbies, one residential environment, campus organizations that are followed, one class in lectures and educational programs that are being undertaken. In the formation of friendship circles between each individual has their own criteria according to their desires and on the basis of the same interests.

### **LifeStyle**

Lifestyle is one of the important things that influences each individual to determine their actions. Lifestyle can be said to be a pattern of a person's life in the world that is expressed in their activities, interests, and opinions so that lifestyle describes "the whole person" who interacts with their environment [14]. As the informant ENR explained that the formation of the circle of friends that he entered at this time was based on the similarity of lifestyle. Lifestyle has the aim of later being able to form a proud image for users and participants. With the comfort felt due to the similarities owned by each member of the circle of friends, it ultimately creates a sense of interdependence and mutual effort to build long-term relationships.

### **Similar Hobbies**

Hobbies are often a strong foundation for forming a close circle of friends. When people share a hobby, they tend to have the same interests, understandings, and passions for the subject. This can be the basis for building deep and supportive relationships. After starting his college life, informant NR decided to join Futsal UKM. During the process of joining the UKM, informant NR found a strong circle of friends with fellow UKM members who had the same hobby. This is based on the fact that similar hobbies can help form a close circle of friends because they involve shared interests, shared activities, emotional involvement, a supportive community, and skill improvement. Hobbies provide a solid foundation for interacting, sharing experiences, and supporting each other, which are important aspects in building good friendships.

### **One Residential Environment**

Similarity of residence can be an important factor in forming a circle of friends. When someone

lives in the same place as others, they tend to have similar experiences and environments, which can be the basis for forming social bonds. According to CB informants, living in the same rented house or similar environment provides a greater opportunity for individuals to meet and interact with each other regularly. This situation facilitates the process of forming friendships because access between individuals becomes easier.

### **Campus Organizations That Are Followed**

Filling free time with positive activities that are beneficial for the present and future of the younger generation is the obligation of all stakeholders in the young generation environment itself.

One way is by participating in organizational activities on campus. Organizations are a place to develop skills for each student. With the various activities carried out, each student becomes closer in interacting with fellow members of the organization. From this organization, many circles of friendship are created.

### **One Class in Lectures and Educational Programs That Are Being Undertaken**

The formation of friendship circles in a class in lectures can vary depending on the context and purpose of the class. Overall, factors that support the formation of friendship circles in a class include common interests, collaboration, open communication, social activities outside the classroom, and facilities that facilitate interaction. Through positive interactions and getting to know each other, students can build strong and supportive relationships in the lecture environment. As stated by the VSR informant When students are given the opportunity to work in groups or teams on assignments or lecture projects, they have the opportunity to interact with each other, get to know each other, and build cooperation. Such collaboration can help strengthen bonds between class members. This provides an opportunity for each individual to establish more intense communication in forming friendship circles.

### **Same Education Program (FastTrack)**

Educational programs can provide opportunities and venues for individuals to meet new people, but it still takes effort and initiative from the individual to expand and maintain these

friendships. Educational activities that focus on individual empowerment and personality development. Such programs can include leadership skills training, self-development, and career development. In this context, learners can connect with people who have similar interests and goals, and through collaboration and exchange of ideas, friendships can be formed.

Friendship circles have an impact that can affect a person's mental health. If a person's mental health is optimal, then various other aspects of life within him will function more effectively [16]. It is important to be careful in choosing friends and maintaining a balance between socializing and taking care of our own mental health. One way to do this is to wisely choose friends who have a positive impact on our lives and stay away from those who have a negative influence. Friendship has a great influence on a person's behavior and lifestyle, bringing positive and negative consequences simultaneously. Befriending good people will influence us to be good, while befriending bad people will influence us to be bad too.

### **Positive Impact of Friendship Circle**

In this journey of life full of twists and turns, we are not only looking for personal achievement, but also constructive relationships, and a strong circle of friends is one aspect that can have a tremendous positive impact. When we face challenges, uncertainties, or even failures in life, our friends are the ones who will listen, give advice, and support us.

In a circle of friends can give a lot of influence to its members. The circle of friends that we have will influence the way we live our lives and beliefs. Having a circle of friends also gives positive impact on the individuals involved in the group.

As explained by RNA informants, a circle of friends can have a positive impact on and provide direction for the future.

*“My friend had already thought about taking a master’s from the beginning of our studies. He always discussed the advantages and how important it was for us to continue our studies, but at first I just thought it was just a passing wind. Until finally in a certain condition I was confused about what my next goal was after I graduated. Because here I felt that I was not competitive enough with other students. Until finally my friend gave me a view and I was finally moved to continue my Masters education through the Fast Track route. Although at first this felt difficult, it turned out that with this circle of friends, it led me to a future with better self-competence.”*

With the support and good direction from his circle of friends, RNA is currently continuing his master’s studies in the Fast Track program. With the circle of friends, his members are increasingly

encouraged to do many positive things.

This is also supported by informant NK's question where in the end he was able to get out of his comfort zone and dared to learn many new things.

*"I am very insecure about what I have. So, I can't position which strengths can be developed so I bury all my talents. And having this circle of friends really helps, emotionally they really give full support to the positive things that I want to do. They can give the best views and advice that we need to try without thinking about the end result. At least there I will not regret in the shadow of curiosity, because I have dared to do what I want." With the direct support given by his circle of friends, NK became brave enough to try to register as an Ambassador at his faculty to try to develop the skills he had".*

### **Negative Impacts of Friendship Circles**

It is also important to set boundaries and distance us from friends who engage in activities that are not in line with our values, such as excessive use of alcohol or drugs. A person's circle of friends plays a significant role in their mental health. Strong social connections and emotional support from friends can help reduce stress levels, boost self-esteem, and provide a sense of belonging that is essential for mental well-being. Maintaining a balance between social circles and mental health is also important, and when experiencing mental health issues, it is vital to seek professional help even though there may be barriers such as access and cost.

Humans will always need other humans. Although socializing and having reciprocal relationships are a necessity for every human being, sometimes humans as social beings who need each other, of course in their lives will never be free from problems. Thus, to achieve happiness, meaning and well-being in life every individual need social support. However, in the circle of friendship the ongoing relationship does not only provide positive things.

Friendship circles can also have a negative influence if they do not set boundaries for what they do.

This is supported by the statement of the ENR informant

*"Maybe the bad influence is that we are still in the process of growing into adulthood. Where we also still understand each other's good and bad things around us. As young people, their curiosity is high, and they tend to want to try things even though we should know that it doesn't need to be tried because it has a bad influence. Like trying to vent problems with alcohol. Initially, one of us tried it, but due to the influence of bad drinks, he couldn't control himself. If the condition is like that, we tend to be sensitive and, in the end, we make a lot of problems about trivial things which eventually end up affecting our thoughts or mental health."*

Mental health is not only seen in the absence of diagnosed mental health problems, but is

related to a person's well-being. In reality, there are still many individuals who are trapped in toxic relationships in a circle of friends, whether they realize it or not.

Mental health shows the contribution of individuals to social activities. Where each activity will have an impact on positioning oneself and how to socialize in society. Although this circle of friends has a positive impact by supporting each other, there are still circumstances where negative influences can be given to each member. It is important for each individual to fortify themselves so as not to always be carried away by the flow of the circle of friends.

## Conclusion

In general, there are two categories of division, namely the positive impact of friendship circles and also the negative impact of friendship circles. In this study, there were eight informants who were divided into six informants with friendship circles that had a positive impact on mental health and two informants with friendship circles that had a negative impact on students' mental health. Mental health is generally influenced by the family environment. The family environment plays an

important role in the health of each individual. However, in this case, each individual has their own way of dealing with their mental health problems. Some individuals choose to keep it to themselves and try to solve their problems without sharing with others, because they do not have close family or friends. However, talking to friends is often an option to release feelings and find peace.

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