

## Academic Achievement Students' Experience in Facing Social Pressure at Pro Skill Indonesia Health Vocational School

Efda Ningsih<sup>1</sup>, Julitawati<sup>2</sup>, Marwa Marwa<sup>3</sup>, Dian N Marissa<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Lancang Kuning; [effon25@gmail.com](mailto:effon25@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Lancang Kuning; [julitawati@gmail.com](mailto:julitawati@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Universitas Lancang Kuning; [marwa@unilak.ac.id](mailto:marwa@unilak.ac.id)

<sup>4</sup> Universitas Lancang Kuning; [dian.marissa@unilak.ac.id](mailto:dian.marissa@unilak.ac.id)

**Abstract:** This phenomenological qualitative study explores high-achieving students' experiences in facing social pressure at Pro Skill Indonesia Health Vocational School. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation from three academically outstanding students (top 3 class rank/semester GPA  $\geq$  8.6) experiencing significant social pressure, analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Findings reveal multidimensional social pressures including peer exclusion, negative stereotyping ("bookworm" labels), marginalization, and excessive environmental demands. Psychological impacts manifested as reduced learning motivation, anxiety, and attempts to conceal achievements. Participants developed individual coping strategies through reflective activities (journaling, motivational quotes) and recreation (drama watching), supported by crucial family and teacher roles in mental recovery. Positive transformation occurred as participants reframed academic excellence beyond grades toward character building, empathy, and social resilience. They adopted collaborative approaches to bridge social gaps with peers. The study recommends systemic interventions through inclusive counseling services, open dialogue forums, and collaborative activities in health vocational schools. Practical implications emphasize balancing academic excellence with psychosocial well-being in competitive environments

**Keywords:** *social pressure; high-achieving students; coping strategies; health vocational school; phenomenology*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Academic achievement is one of the key indicators in the education system that reflects students' success in the learning process (Muhammad & S. Sulastri, 2021). In Indonesia, students who attain high academic performance are often considered benchmarks of institutional success and a source of pride for their families and communities (Nasional, 2008). Recognition of academic achievements is frequently accompanied by high expectations from teachers, parents, and schools. Therefore, efforts to enhance academic performance must consider various aspects, including learning processes and evaluation methods (Nurrahmaniah, 2019). However, behind these achievements, high-performing students often face significant social pressure. Such pressures may stem from external sources—such as the constant encouragement from parents and teachers to maintain their performance—or internal factors like fear of failure, perfectionism, and anxiety about always needing to perform flawlessly (Lusiane & Garvin, 2019; Santrock, 2009).

In the context of vocational high schools (SMK), especially those focused on health fields such as SMK Kesehatan Pro Skill Indonesia, social pressures can be more complex. The implementation of the 2013 Curriculum has further increased students' academic stress due to a heavier academic workload (Ernawati & Rusmawati, 2015). These pressures arise from a combination of high academic demands, intense practical training requirements, and competition among students in both academic and non-academic domains (Susanto, 2016). Consequently, such stressors may affect students' psychological well-being and social relationships at school. Students who are unable to manage these pressures effectively may experience academic stress, excessive anxiety, burnout, and even a decline in learning motivation (Mulya & E. Indrawati, 2017; Barseli & I. Ifdil, 2017). Individuals facing stress often develop various coping strategies, which are psychological and behavioral mechanisms used to respond to stressful situations (A. Azmy et al., 2017). These strategies are essential for maintaining mental health and sustaining academic achievement (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Coping strategies among students vary widely, ranging from religious approaches, seeking social support, to time and emotional management (Rodiyah, 2021; Zulaikha, 2021; Pambudhi et al., 2022; Rositoh et al., 2022). Problem-focused coping—such as time management and seeking assistance—is commonly found among senior high school and college students (Zulaikha, 2021; Rositoh et al., 2022). Emotion-focused coping strategies like self-regulation and positive reappraisal are also frequently employed (Pambudhi et al., 2022; Rositoh et al., 2022). Social support plays a significant role in fostering positive coping strategies (Rodiyah, 2021). With the diversity of coping

mechanisms, a deeper understanding of students' lived experiences in facing social pressure is essential to ensure that psychopedagogical interventions provided by teachers, counselors, and schools are well-targeted and effective.

A qualitative approach with a phenomenological method is highly relevant to exploring the subjective experiences of high-achieving students in dealing with social pressure. Previous research reveals that students with high academic performance are driven by causal motives and future-oriented goals, in which past experiences and future concerns shape their academic trajectory (Widianto et al., 2016). Phenomenology aims to describe human experiences and consciousness without interpretation or abstraction (Helaluddin, 2019; Asih, 2014). By directly capturing students' narratives and perspectives, researchers can gain authentic insights into the dynamics they encounter within the school environment.

SMK Kesehatan Pro Skill Indonesia is a vocational education institution characterized by a competitive and demanding learning environment. Social adjustment has been shown to positively influence academic performance among vocational students (Tumiyem et al., 2020). In this context, social support—particularly from parents and peers—plays a crucial role in reducing academic stress and enhancing students' achievement motivation (Ernawati & Rusmawati, 2015; Hilmi, 2015). Several students at this school have demonstrated consistent academic excellence. However, limited research has specifically explored how these high-performing students perceive and respond to the social pressures they experience.

Based on the background described above, this study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) How do high-achieving students experience social pressure in their school environment? (By employing a phenomenological approach, this research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the psychosocial needs of high-achieving students and enrich the educational literature on student well-being in vocational secondary schools.

## 2. METHODS

A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to capture participants' subjective experiences. The study was conducted at SMK Kesehatan Pro Skill Indonesia in June 2025 with three purposively selected students meeting strict criteria: (1) consistent academic excellence (top 3 class rank/GPA  $\geq 8.6$  for two consecutive semesters), and (2) experience of achievement-linked social pressure (stigmatization, marginalization, or excessive demands) (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews explored pressure experiences and coping strategies, supplemented by limited participatory observation and academic documentation. Data analysis followed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) stages: transcription, thematic identification, meaning clustering, and narrative interpretation (Sparkes & Smith, 2009).

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### High-achieving students experience social pressure in their school environment

The interview results indicate that high-achieving students at SMK Kesehatan Pro Skill Indonesia face various forms of social pressure originating from peer interactions and classroom dynamics. This pressure manifests not only through verbal teasing but also through exclusion from learning activities. Participant 1 (P1) explained that she was once mocked for being too active in class and even excluded from the class communication group, stating, "It was painful because I never felt arrogant or boastful." Participant 2 (P2) admitted that she was excluded from group work for being perceived as overly dominant, while Participant 3 (P3) felt scapegoated when her peers refused to collaborate, assuming she was "too smart."

These experiences had significant emotional repercussions. The students reported deep psychological distress, including sadness and feelings of social rejection. P1 expressed, "I felt alone. I cried at home, but at school, I pretended to be strong." Similarly, P2 admitted to feeling confused and disappointed by her peers' behavior. P3 also acknowledged that the social pressure made her feel restricted in expressing herself for fear of being misunderstood or negatively judged.

The social pressure they experienced also impacted their academic enthusiasm and motivation. Some of them considered reducing their study efforts to avoid standing out. (P1) revealed that she had contemplated not studying seriously so as not to draw attention: "I once thought about putting in less effort so I wouldn't stand out too much." P2 even avoided opportunities to take additional tests, while P3 deliberately withdrew from classroom discussions to avoid sarcastic remarks.

Despite these challenges, the students developed their own coping strategies to alleviate the pressure. P1 engaged in pleasant and calming activities such as writing in a diary and watching dramas. P2 chose to join online learning communities and wrote journals as a form of emotional expression. Meanwhile, P3 adopted a reflective approach by collecting motivational quotes to reinforce her mental resilience. These efforts reflect self-initiated coping mechanisms developed to withstand social stress.

In addition to individual coping, support from significant others—especially family members and teachers—played a crucial role in their emotional recovery. P1 mentioned that her mother often advised her not to dwell on others' opinions. P2 felt more at ease after receiving encouragement from her older sibling and academic mentor, “My advisor once told me that pressures like this are common for outstanding students.” Likewise, P3 stated that her mother was the safest place to share her thoughts, and teachers often provided moral support.

From these experiences, the high-achieving students concluded that social pressure offered profound life lessons. P1 shared that the experience taught her the importance of maturity and resilience. P2 realized that academic success is not merely about grades, but also about shaping character and empathy. P3 perceived it as a process of mental and behavioral development, making her more discerning in choosing her social environment.

Furthermore, the three participants reported a shift in perspective regarding academic achievement and social relationships. P1 began to approach her peers with greater humility, avoiding any display of academic superiority. P2 emphasized collaboration and mutual respect rather than competition. P3 actively sought to create inclusive spaces where her achievements would not divide, but instead unite her with others.

As a form of reflection, the participants offered moral messages for other students facing similar situations. P1 emphasized the importance of staying true to oneself and remaining humble: “Don’t be afraid to be different, but always be willing to listen.” P2 reminded others that people’s judgments should not hinder personal growth, while P3 encouraged students to become the best version of themselves, without imitating or conforming excessively just to be accepted.

They also expressed hopes that schools would provide more open and inclusive spaces for dialogue. All three participants highlighted the importance of regular counseling forums, reflection sessions, or collaborative activities that integrate high-achieving students with their peers. Sania proposed discussions on social pressure and mental health, Nanda emphasized the need for a safe space where high achievers can share experiences, and Nazwa suggested that schools facilitate cross-group interactions to foster mutual understanding and healthy collaboration among all members of the school community.

Ultimately, these findings reveal that social pressure toward high-achieving students is not a trivial matter, but a reality that affects their psychological well-being and social dynamics within the school. Therefore, a humanistic approach and psychosocial support systems are essential to ensure that students not only excel academically but also thrive in a healthy, equitable, and supportive social environment. The participants' experiences underscore that academic success is often accompanied by complex inner struggles and require collective empathy and intervention from all educational stakeholders

## DISCUSSION

Although academic achievement serves as a key indicator of educational success (Muhammad & Sulastri, 2021) and a source of pride (Nasional, 2008), it carries its own set of complexities for high-achieving students. This study confirms earlier findings that high academic performance often triggers multidimensional social pressures. Consistent with Lusiane & Garvin (2019) and Santrock (2009), these pressures stem from both external factors (e.g., expectations from teachers and parents) and internal ones (e.g., perfectionism and fear of failure). However, within the context of health-focused vocational schools like SMK Kesehatan Pro Skill Indonesia, these dynamics become even more pronounced. Research by Susanto (2016) and Ernawati & Rusmawati (2015) underscores the distinct nature of stress in vocational health environments, where the dual burden of academic theory and clinical practice, along with competition across multiple domains, presents more complex challenges than those found in general schools. Moreover, curricular shifts such as the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, as noted by Ernawati & Rusmawati (2015), have further intensified academic stress through significantly increased learning demands.

The psychological impacts of social pressure on students' well-being in health vocational schools align with previous studies. Negative consequences such as heightened anxiety, burnout, and declining academic motivation—as identified by Barseli & Ifdil (2017) and Mulya & Indrawati (2017)—are not only relevant but

may even be amplified in this competitive educational setting. In this context, coping strategies become critical. The findings of Rodyah (2021), Zulaikha (2021), Pambudhi et al. (2022), and Rositoh et al. (2022) regarding the prevalence of both problem-focused (e.g., time management, seeking help) and emotion-focused coping strategies (e.g., self-control, religious practices) are reaffirmed within this study. However, the health vocational school context introduces a key nuance: while social support—especially from parents and peers—has been shown to effectively reduce stress (Hilmi, 2015; Tumiyem et al., 2020), the highly competitive atmosphere (Susanto, 2016) can paradoxically undermine peer support, a contradiction that remains underexplored in prior literature.

This research is deliberately designed to fill a significant gap in the literature. First, while Widiyanto et al. (2016) examined causal motives of high-achieving students in general, the phenomenological approach employed here (Helaluddin, 2019; Asih, 2014) allows for a deeper exploration of subjective experiences in the specific setting of health vocational education—a unique environment marked by high clinical competency demands and moral responsibility. Second, this study expands on Widiyanto et al.'s findings by investigating how social pressure influences the formation of professional identity and long-term academic goals among SMK Kesehatan students—an important but under-mapped dimension.

The significance of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it enriches Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) coping model by integrating the unique dynamics of competitive vocational education and the complex interplay between social pressure and identity formation. Practically, the findings serve as an evidence-based foundation for developing more targeted psycho-pedagogical interventions within health vocational schools, such as contextually adaptive coping training and enhanced social support systems that account for the specific characteristics of clinical practice environments.

A critical synthesis of the findings suggests that while many earlier conclusions regarding sources of stress and the effectiveness of adaptive coping remain valid, this study contributes three key innovations: (1) it provides a nuanced exploration of the trade-offs between achievement and identity formation in vocational health education; (2) it analyzes the specific impact of the 2013 Curriculum in exacerbating pressure dynamics; and (3) it maps coping strategies within a high-risk context governed by clinical protocols—elements that are largely absent from general education settings.

Based on identified gaps and emerging insights, future research directions should include: (1) longitudinal studies to track the evolution of coping strategies and the effects of pressure from entry to graduation; (2) exploration of the role of teachers and instructional styles in shaping social pressures on high-achieving students—an area currently overlooked; and (3) the development of context-sensitive intervention modules for SMK students, such as clinical stress simulation programs.

In conclusion, the phenomenological approach adopted in this study not only addresses empirical gaps but also offers a humanistic foundation for school policies committed to balancing academic excellence with psychosocial well-being. In the challenging environment of vocational education, such an approach is essential to nurturing students who are not only competent but also resilient and socially grounded.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that academically high-achieving students at SMK Kesehatan Pro Skill Indonesia are not exempt from experiencing social pressure originating from their peer environment at school. Such pressure manifests in forms of exclusion, negative comments, and detrimental stereotyping, all of which significantly impact the students' emotional well-being and academic motivation. Nevertheless, the three participants in this study demonstrated the ability to develop adaptive coping strategies and benefited from the emotional support of family members and teachers, which played a vital role in their emotional recovery and the reinforcement of self-identity.

Their experiences provide valuable insight that academic achievement is not solely about grades but is also deeply intertwined with social competence, emotional resilience, and the ability to maintain personal integrity under pressure. Therefore, it is imperative for schools to foster a supportive environment through inclusive counseling services and collaborative activities that bridge high-achieving students and their peers, in order to promote mutual understanding and empathy. A comprehensive school support system can empower high-achieving students to grow not only as intellectually accomplished individuals but also as socially and emotionally mature persons.

## REFERENCES

- Asih, A. D. (2014). *Pendekatan Fenomenologi dalam Penelitian Kualitatif*.
- Azmy, A., & al., et. (2017). *Strategi Coping dan Kesehatan Mental Remaja*.
- Barseli, M., & Ifdil, I. (2017). *Kecemasan Akademik dan Stres pada Siswa*.
- Brown, A., & al., et. (2023). *Social Stigma in High-Performing Students*.
- Ernawati, E., & Rusmawati, R. (2015). *Kurikulum 2013 dan Stres Akademik pada Siswa SMK*.
- Helaluddin. (2019). *Penelitian Fenomenologi: Sebuah Alternatif Pendekatan Kualitatif*.
- Hilmi, M. (2015). *Dukungan Sosial dan Prestasi Akademik*.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984a). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer publishing company.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984b). *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*. Springer Publishing Company.
- Lusiane, L., & Garvin, G. (2019). *Tekanan Sosial pada Siswa Berprestasi*.
- Muhammad, A. R., & Sulastri, S. (2021). *Prestasi Akademik sebagai Indikator Pendidikan*.
- Mulya, H. A., & Indrawati, E. (2017). *Burnout pada Siswa Berprestasi*.
- Nasional, D. P. (2008a). *Panduan Penilaian Hasil Belajar Siswa*. Direktorat Pembinaan SMA.
- Nasional, D. P. (2008b). *Panduan Penilaian Hasil Belajar Siswa*. Direktorat Pembinaan SMA.
- Nurrahmaniah. (2019). *Evaluasi Pembelajaran dan Pengaruhnya terhadap Prestasi*.
- Pambudhi, A., & al., et. (2022). *Strategi Coping Remaja dalam Menghadapi Tekanan Sosial*.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*.
- Rodiyah. (2021). *Dukungan Sosial dan Strategi Coping Siswa*.
- Rositoh, M., & al., et. (2022). *Strategi Coping dan Regulasi Emosi pada Siswa SMA*.
- Santrock, J. W. (2009). *Adolescence (13th ed.)*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Smith, J. A., & Johnson, B. (2022). *Academic Excellence and Social Adjustment in Vocational Schools*.
- Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2009). Judging the quality of qualitative inquiry: Criteriology and relativism in action. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10(5), 491–497.  
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2009.02.006>
- Susanto, H. (2016a). *Psikologi Pendidikan dan Perkembangan*. Kencana.
- Susanto, H. (2016b). *Psikologi Pendidikan dan Perkembangan*. Kencana.
- Tumiyem, & al., et. (2020). *Penyesuaian Sosial dan Kinerja Akademik di SMK*.
- Widianto, A., & al., et. (2016). *Motif Causal dan Orientasi Tujuan Siswa Berprestasi*.
- Zulaikha, M. (2021). *Strategi Coping Berbasis Emosi dan Masalah pada Remaja*.