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Early Adult Children's Openness To Parents When Experiencing Academic Pressure In College

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Abstract

As social beings, early adulthood individuals facing academic stress in higher education, manifested as heavy course loads, piled-up assignments, and the threat of academic (burnout) require interaction within the family. This study was conducted to deeply understand how early adulthood individuals navigate self-disclosure toward their parents when experiencing academic stress. It aims to describe and analyze the decision-making process of self-disclosure among early adulthood individuals toward their parents when facing academic stress in higher education, and to understand how perceptions of family communication patterns influence their choice to be open or closed. This study is guided by the Social Penetration Theory by Altman and Taylor, which provides a framework to understand the development of interpersonal relationship intimacy through information exchange. The methodology used is qualitative with a descriptive approach to gain a profound understanding of individuals' subjective experiences, particularly in the context of family communication crises in the city of Surabaya. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with eleven (11) active college student informants who became the research subjects. The study finds that the self-disclosure decision-making process of early adulthood individuals regarding academic stress is heavily determined by the foundation of communication experiences established within the family. Informants with democratic communication patterns tend to feel secure in opening up because they are accustomed to a space without judgment. Conversely, informants with authoritarian parents exhibit a tendency toward emotional withdrawal (de-penetration) as a form of self-protection. Consequently, students' self-disclosure becomes restricted, they tend to be selective by only sharing neutral or administrative academic information while consciously concealing negative emotional dimensions such as stress, exhaustion, and crying. The depth of the shared information heavily depends on the child's level of

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trust in their parents' responses, highlighting that their primary goal in sharing is actually to seek emotional validation, rather than mere practical solutions.

Keywords: Self-Disclosure, Academic Stress, Early Adulthood, Family

INTRODUCTION

As social beings in daily life, we always need others to help us in carrying out activities or just communicating between fellow individuals. Humans need a mutual interaction, humans need to know others or just introduce themselves to others, humans need to express their emotions, thoughts and ideas to others because humans are social creatures. Social processes in terms of proximity will naturally be formed if humans interact frequently. The closest scope, the place where the interaction was first formed, was the family. Communication within the family is the main foundation that can determine how an individual interacts with his environment. The family occupies a position as the closest environment and most influential to the development of a person's social life. According to Listya Nasyroh Lubis and Abdurrahman Zuhdi, through an effective communication pattern, the family can become a safe *space* for its members to express grievances, share stories, and find solutions to various problems faced in daily life (Nasyroh & Zuhdi, 2025).

Entering the transition phase from adolescence to adulthood, individuals are in the age range of 18 to 25 years known as the emerging *adulthood phase*. According to Jeffrey Arrnet, this phase is a period in which individuals undergo many changes in roles and identities. They are required to be able to adapt to a new, more complex environment and assume various new responsibilities, especially in the aspects of higher education (*academic life*) and preparation to enter the world of work (Arnett, 2007). This is also supported by Dinda Dewi Santri et al, who state that early adulthood is a time of seeking identity, instability, and focusing on the future (Santri et al., 2025).

One of the main challenges often faced by individuals in the early adult phase, especially those who are studying in college, is *academic pressure*. Nur Mawakhira Yusuf, found the demands to maintain a high cumulative grade point average (GPA), the accumulated workload of lecturers, a tight lecture schedule, and competition between students creating a very competitive environment. This pressure can come from self-expectations, parental demands, and strict standards of educational institutions. For students, this is a fairly heavy mental burden in the midst of the process of self-maturation (Yusuf, 2020).

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If such academic pressure is not managed properly and does not receive adequate support, this can have a very negative impact on the psychological state of the individual. The impact that arises can be in the form of prolonged stress, excessive anxiety (*anxiety*), to academic boredom (*burnout*). Aulia et al. explained that this condition can interfere with the mental well-being and productivity of early adult children in carrying out daily activities on campus and in the social environment (Aulia et al., 2019).

The urgency of this problem is strengthened by field data that shows the high rate of mental health disorders among students. Based on the publication of data from GoodStats (2025) referring to the Chegg Global Student Survey 2025, as many as 56% of student respondents experienced academic burnout due to the pile of deadlines and off-campus activities, making it one of the most reported mental health challenges by Indonesian students after sleep deprivation. This reality goes hand in hand with the macro findings of the Free Health Check Program conducted by the Ministry of Health in the period 2025–2026 which found indications of mental health problems in almost 10% of children in Indonesia, one of which is due to burnout due to academic demands. This crisis phenomenon is also strengthened by a survey from the Student Counseling Board (BKM) FISIP University of Indonesia, where the results of the 2024 survey show that 36.5% of students experience severe anxiety, and most academic stressors come from lecture assignments (FISIP UI, 2026).

The condition of the mental health crisis among students has reached a very worrying point and often ends in fatality. Data from the National Criminal Information Center (Pusiknas) of the National Police Criminal Investigation Branch shows that from January to August 2024 alone, suicide cases handled by the police have reached 849 incidents, with a trend that continues to increase from month to month, and the productive age group including students shows high vulnerability (Pusiknas Bareskrim Polri, 2024). This increase continues to go hand in hand with the rampant news in various mass media throughout 2025 to 2026 regarding the cases of students in big cities who ended their lives due to severe depression triggered by lecture problems. This statistical figure can be seen from the many cases of student suicide that have occurred consecutively in various cities in Indonesia lately.

Mass media and social media throughout 2025 to 2026 often report the tragic story of students from various campuses who are desperate to end their lives, either by jumping from the campus building or in their boarding houses. Sadly, in some cases, this reckless action is accompanied by a will whose contents show despair and guilt because they feel that they have failed to meet the college score target. These recurring cases show that students are experiencing

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severe mental stress, but they feel alone and have no place to tell their stories. This reality is a loud alarm that a high academic load, if not balanced with proper stress management, can trigger extreme and fatal decisions.

To minimize these destructive psychological impacts, individuals really need social support and space to release emotional *burdens*. This is where the role of *self-disclosure* becomes very important. The research was conducted by Witrin Gamayanti and Ida Syafei. emphasizing that self-disclosure is part of the way of managing emotions, where a person shares his information, feelings, and anxieties with others in order to feel more relieved and get a supportive response (Gamayanti & Syafei, 2018).

The main place most expected to be a source of social support for early adult children is the parents. The communication patterns applied by parents play a key role in determining whether children feel comfortable and safe to self-disclosure. Maulana Rezi Ramadhana's research in 2018 showed that if parents apply an empathetic, open, and supportive communication pattern, children will tend to be more likely to tell about the difficulties they experience. On the other hand, a closed, rigid, or authoritarian communication pattern will make children withdraw and keep their problems alone (Ramadhana, 2018).

This communication issue becomes increasingly relevant and urgent to be researched when facing the dynamics of the relationship between parents and children with the reality of the stressful world of lectures. When early adult students are faced with high academic expectations, the limits of their openness to parents are tested. The fear of disappointing parents often clashes with the child's psychological need to get a safe space. Therefore, it is important to see how interpersonal communication interactions in the family are able to facilitate this self-openness in the midst of academic crisis situations experienced by students.

Seeing the complexity of the above problems, this research is directed to fill the academic gap (research gap) that has not been touched much. While most previous studies have examined academic stress from a purely clinical or psychological perspective, this study highlights the phenomenon through the lens of family communication. Most previous research has examined the problem of stress and academic pressure from the point of view of pure psychology. For example, research by Aviva (2021) tends to view self-disclosure quantitatively only as a measure of student stress reduction in general. On the other hand, research in the realm of family communication that exists today is still often fixated on certain family structures, such as the study of single parent communication patterns in shaping adolescent self-concepts. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the *research gap* by focusing on the dynamics of early adult children's *self-disclosure*

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to their parents, especially when under crisis situations in the form of academic pressure during their education in higher education.

The novelty of this study highlights how the phenomenon of crisis in the form of academic pressure in higher education is responded to through the *self-disclosure* of early adult children to their parents. In contrast to previous studies that looked at family communication in normal or everyday situations, this study specifically picked up momentum when students were facing a high college load. Through this interpersonal approach, the study was able to provide a richer perspective from the perspective of family communication science, so that it was not only fixated on clinical studies, but also dissected how interactions in parent-child relationships can function as the main support system for students' mental health.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the process of *self-disclosure* of early adult children to parents when facing academic pressure in college. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore students' subjective experiences, family communication dynamics, and the process of penetration and de-penetration of relationships based on social penetration theory.

The main concepts studied include family communication patterns (authoritarian, democratic, and permissive), *self-disclosure* which is analyzed through the dimensions *of amount, value, honesty, intention,* and *intimacy* according to DeVito, as well as academic pressure in the form of stress, anxiety, and burnout due to lecture demands. The research was carried out in the city of Surabaya in March–June 2026 with subjects aged 18–25 years old who experienced academic pressure and lived with their parents.

Data was collected through *in-depth interviews* and documentation in the form of transcripts, recordings, and photographs during the research process. Data analysis used Miles and Huberman's interactive model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions/verification to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between family communication patterns and students' self-openness in the face of academic pressure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Presentation and Analysis of Research Findings

This study examines the decision process of students' *self-disclosure* to parents when facing academic pressure. The analysis was based on *DeVito' s* Self-Disclosure *theory, Altman and*

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Taylor's Social Penetration Theory, and James M. White's family communication pattern theory. The results of the study show that students' decisions to be open are influenced by communication experiences in the family, the form of self-openness carried out, parental responses, strategies to deal with academic pressure, and students' expectations for family communication.

Students' Communication Experiences with Parents That Form Self-Openness

Supportive Communication Experience

Students who have positive communication experiences tend to be more open to parents. Informant 11 stated that he told the story not to find a solution, but to gain emotional calm through *heart-to-heart talk*. Parents are considered to be able to provide a sense of security through emotional support and the right choice of communication time.

A similar thing was found in Informant 2 who felt free to tell stories because their parents did not give excessive academic demands. Informant 5 and Informant 6 also received support in the form of motivation, enthusiasm, and spiritual strengthening when facing thesis difficulties. These findings show that warm, empathetic, and supportive communication builds a sense of security so that students are more comfortable opening themselves. This condition is in line with the pattern of democratic and permissive communication that emphasizes emotional acceptance and openness in the family (White, 2005). These findings are also supported by the research of Apsarini and Rina (2022) and Karim et al. (2025).

Less Supportive Communication Experience

Conversely, less supportive communication experiences make students more cautious in expressing academic pressure. Informant 1 admitted that he began to limit his stories to his parents because the responses he received were often not in accordance with his emotional needs. In fact, he gave a "disclaimer" before telling the story so as not to get a response that made him even more depressed.

Informant 4 chose to hide the problem after repeatedly feeling that his complaint did not get validated. He stated that the more often he told stories, the more tired he felt. Informant 7 and Informant 8 also experienced similar experiences through pressure, lack of appreciation, and the tendency of parents to focus on academic results. These experiences form caution in self-openness and show characteristics of authoritarian communication patterns (White, 2005). These findings are in line with the research of Fadilla and Nuruddin (2024) and Abdillah and Pratiwi

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(2023).

Changing Communication Experience

Some students experience a change in communication relationships that make them more courageous to be open. Informant 8 explained that after facing family economic problems, his father became more open and often invited discussions. The change made him feel more appreciated even though the process of openness was still progressing gradually.

A similar change was experienced by Informant 7 who began to gain attention from his father after revealing academic pressure to his mother. These findings suggest that communication experiences in families are dynamic and can develop into more open relationships when supported by positive interaction experiences (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The results of this study reinforce the findings of Karim et al. (2025) regarding the importance of parental warmth and empathy in building emotional closeness.

Forms of Student Self-Openness to Parents Regarding Academic Pressure

Openness to Academic Development Is Higher than Emotional Stress

Most students still convey academic developments to their parents, such as thesis progress or guidance schedules. Informant 10, for example, honestly reported the progress of his thesis as it relates to academic responsibilities and tuition fees.

However, emotional distress such as anxiety, frustration, and burnout tend not to be expressed in depth. Informant 8 only provided brief information related to the delay in the thesis without explaining the difficulties experienced. Informant 3 even admitted that communication with parents was more related to practical needs than outpouring of feelings. These findings show that students' openness is more in the neutral academic aspect than in the more personal emotional experience (DeVito, 1997).

Self-Openness Is Done Selectively

Students make a selection of information to be conveyed to parents. Informant 9 will only tell the story when the problem is no longer able to be overcome on its own and after the emotional condition is stable. Informant 10 chose to talk about academic failure to friends, while Informant 2 kept the issue of friendship and romantic relationships because it was considered a realm of privacy.

These findings suggest that self-disclosure is a deliberate and carefully considered decision.

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Students choose information based on the level of urgency, type of problem, and consequences that may arise after telling a story (DeVito, 1997). These results support the research of Abdillah and Pratiwi (2023).

The Depth of Openness Influenced by Trust

Trust is the main factor that determines the depth of self-openness. Informant 11 admitted that he always conveyed his academic condition as it is, including difficulties in the thesis process. Even so, he still feels that worry is a burden on his parents.

Meanwhile, Informant 9 explained that his openness was driven by a sense of responsibility to parents who pay for education, not because of the need for solutions. These findings show that the higher the trust and sense of security that students have, the deeper the personal information that is disclosed to parents (DeVito, 1997). These results are in line with the research of Karim et al. (2025).

Parents' Response to Student Self-Openness

Emotional Support Increases Sense of Security

The majority of college students consider emotional support to be the most meaningful response. Informant 11 felt safe because he received a calming sentence from his parents. Informant 5 received motivation and encouragement to complete the thesis without pressure, while Informant 2 received simple support in the form of messages of encouragement.

Empathetic responses and accepting students' emotional experiences have been shown to strengthen the courage to open up again in the future (Altman & Taylor, 1973). These findings support the research of Apsarini and Rina (2022).

Advice and Solutions Are Interpreted Differently

Responses in the form of advice and solutions are not always perceived equally by students. Informant 9 felt comfortable because his mother listened first before giving advice. On the other hand, Informant 10 does not need a solution because he has previously discussed with his friends and only wants his parents to know his condition.

These findings suggest that the effectiveness of parents' responses depends on the ability to understand the child's needs at the time of storytelling. Not all students expect a solution; some only require emotional understanding and acceptance (DeVito, 1997).

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Inappropriate Responses Shape Selectivity

Some students receive responses that are deemed less appropriate for their needs. Informant 7 felt not validated when every complaint was always associated with religious advice. He then gave a "warning" to his mother that he just wanted to be heard.

In addition, Informant 3 is often compared to his peers who have completed his studies first, while Informant 8 receives questions that focus on grade degradation without further clarification. This experience makes students more selective in determining the information that will be conveyed on the next occasion. These findings support the research of Fadilla and Nuruddin (2024) and Abdillah and Pratiwi (2023).

How Students Deal With Academic Stress Before Opening Up to Parents

Solving Problems Independently

Most students try to cope with academic pressure independently before telling their parents. Informant 6 admitted to crying alone, resting, or spending time with friends when experiencing stress. Informant 9 will also only tell the story if the problem is beyond his ability.

These findings suggest that early adult students seek to maintain independence before involving parents in their academic matters (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Seeking Support from Peers

Peers are the first to be chosen to share academic pressure. Informant 4 often told his childhood friends, while Informant 9 admitted that he always discussed with his friends before contacting his parents. Informant 10 chooses her grandmother as the place to tell the story, while Informant 3 relies on her close cousin.

Peers are considered to understand the situation at hand better so that it becomes a starting space to channel emotions before students are ready to open up to their parents.

Parents Become the Last Choice

Parents are generally only involved when academic pressure can no longer be overcome on their own. Informant 3 admitted that she kept the problem for months before finally crying and telling her mother. Informant 7 also just revealed his failure to meet the trial target after feeling very depressed.

These findings suggest that the decision to open up to parents is the final stage of a long and gradual process of managing academic stress (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

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Students' Expectations for Communication with Parents

Parents Become Good Listeners

Students hope that parents will play a more role as listeners than solution providers. Informant 10 emphasized that he only wanted his parents to know the condition he was undergoing, while Informant 9 wanted space to obtain emotional relief through the storytelling process.

This expectation suggests that students need communication that focuses on understanding and acceptance, not solely problem solving (White, 2005).

Emotional Support Without Judgment

Students also hope to gain emotional validation without negative judgment. Informant 7 wants a response that doesn't directly associate his problem with something else before his feelings are validated. Informant 5 hopes that parents ask more about their emotional state and personal life.

These findings confirm that acceptance and empathy are important needs in family communication, especially when students face academic pressure (Fadilla & Nuruddin, 2024).

Communication as a Safe Space

The most basic hope that emerged from all informants was the creation of a safe space in the family. Informant 1 hopes that the family will be a comfortable place to tell stories without judgment, while Informant 3 wants parents to be able to be friends for their children.

Overall, students expect warm, open, and empathetic family communication so that they can open up without fear. This sense of security is the main foundation that determines when, to whom, and to what extent students are willing to express the academic pressure they experience (DeVito, 1997; Karim et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the process of *self-disclosure* of early adult students to parents related to academic pressure takes place gradually and not spontaneously. Students generally try to solve problems independently, then seek support from peers or close relatives, and only involve parents when the emotional burden has reached a saturation point. The decision to come out is greatly influenced by the family communication patterns that have been formed for a long time. Students who grew up in democratic communication patterns tended to be more open because

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they felt safe and accepted, while those who came from families with authoritarian or less validated communication patterns tended to be more introverted because they feared judgmental or repressive responses.

The findings also show that students often selectively open themselves up by conveying only general academic information, while negative emotions such as stress, fatigue, and anxiety tend to be hidden. In fact, some students modify information or cover up the actual condition to avoid conflict and maintain the feelings of parents. The depth of information shared is highly dependent on the level of trust in the parent's response, where the student's primary need is to obtain emotional validation. Therefore, parents are expected to be able to play the role of a supportive listener and provide *a safe space* that allows children to feel safe to express the academic pressure they are experiencing.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Theoretically, further research is suggested to examine more deeply the influence of gender differences *on early adult children's self-disclosure* , given the differences in communication barriers influenced by social construction, especially in men who are required to appear resilient. Practically, parents are expected to provide more space for children to tell stories by listening without judgment, avoiding social comparisons, and providing emotional validation. Meanwhile, students are advised to communicate their needs and expected forms of support to parents clearly so that the communication process takes place more effectively and supportively.

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