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EXPLORING HIKING AS A PROMOTIVE PRACTICE ON WELL-BEING AND THE MENTAL HEALTH OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract. Academic stress among college students remains a critical mental health challenge, yet micro-interventions using nature-based activities like hiking are understudied. Grounded in Biophilia Theory, Attention Restoration Theory (ART), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this qualitative descriptive study explores how hiking facilitates psychological restoration and stress regulation among Indonesian college students. Purposive sampling was used to eight active student hikers (aged 18–25) who met inclusion criteria. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews then analyzed using thematic analysis. Four themes emerged: (1) the healing capacity of natural landscapes, (2) stress regulation and the development of an internal locus of control, (3) the reclamation of autonomy and competence, and (4) relational relatedness, social safety, and vulnerability. Participants described hiking as more than a recreational activity, perceiving it as a meaningful practice that facilitated cognitive restoration, emotional regulation, psychological resilience, and fulfillment of basic psychological needs while helping them manage academic stress. These findings suggest that hiking may serve as an accessible, non-clinical, and culturally adaptable strategy for promoting student well-being. The study contributes to the growing literature on nature-based well-being by providing qualitative evidence of how hiking supports psychological health and offers practical implications for integrating outdoor activities into mental health promotion initiatives.

Keywords: *hiking, mental health, college students, well-being, nature based activity*

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Abstrak. Stres akademik pada mahasiswa masih menjadi tantangan kesehatan mental yang penting, namun intervensi berskala kecil berbasis aktivitas alam seperti hiking masih belum banyak diteliti. Berlandaskan Teori Biophilia, Attention Restoration Theory (ART), dan Self-Determination Theory (SDT), penelitian kualitatif deskriptif ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi bagaimana aktivitas hiking memfasilitasi pemulihan psikologis dan regulasi stres pada mahasiswa Indonesia. Teknik purposive sampling digunakan untuk merekrut delapan mahasiswa aktif yang melakukan hiking (berusia 18–25 tahun) dan memenuhi kriteria inklusi. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menghasilkan empat tema utama, yaitu: (1) kapasitas penyembuhan dari lanskap alam, (2) regulasi stres dan perkembangan internal locus of control, (3) pemulihan otonomi dan kompetensi, serta (4) keterhubungan relasional, rasa aman secara sosial, dan vulnerability. Partisipan memaknai hiking sebagai praktik memfasilitasi pemulihan kognitif, regulasi emosi, ketahanan psikologis, serta pemenuhan kebutuhan psikologis dasar, sekaligus membantu mereka mengelola stres akademik. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa hiking berpotensi menjadi strategi yang mudah diakses dan adaptif secara budaya untuk meningkatkan kesejahteraan mahasiswa. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur mengenai kesejahteraan berbasis alam dengan memberikan bukti kualitatif tentang bagaimana hiking mendukung kesehatan psikologis serta menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi integrasi aktivitas luar ruang dalam berbagai inisiatif promosi kesehatan mental.

Kata kunci: *hiking, kesehatan mental, mahasiswa, kesejahteraan, aktivitas berbasis alam.*