

Academic Libraries and Mental Health Resilience: a Systematic Review Informed by Durkheimian Sociology

Okky Rizkyantha^{1*}, Labibah Zain², Tafrikhuudin³

¹Institut Agama Islam Negeri Curup, Indonesia

^{2,3}Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Email correspondence: orizkyantha@iaincurup.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Mental health has become a critical concern in higher education, particularly among university students who face academic stress, social isolation, and emotional instability. Grounded in Émile Durkheim's sociological theory of anomie, this study explores the potential role of academic libraries as psychosocial support systems that address not only informational needs but also emotional and social challenges. Using a systematic literature review method, this research analyzed 25 peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2025 from Scopus, including empirical studies and conceptual frameworks related to mental health and library supports. Seven implemented mental health programs in academic and public libraries were identified and analyzed using a Program Logic Model framework. The findings demonstrate that libraries can offer impactful interventions such as bibliotherapy, safe spaces, counseling partnerships, and expressive activities that foster emotional well-being, community connection, and student resilience. By synthesizing sociological theory with library practice, this study contributes a multidimensional framework for integrating mental health support into academic library services and highlights the need for interdisciplinary collaboration in program design, implementation, and evaluation.

Keywords: Academic Libraries; Mental Health; Émile Durkheim.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is no longer a silent issue especially for university students (Al-Najdi dkk., 2025). In the midst of academic pressure and social fragmentation, many students feel emotionally unanchored, a condition the sociologist Émile Durkheim described as *anomie*, a disconnection from norms and the weakening of social structures that normally provide meaning and stability (Durkheim in Kołodziej-Sarzyńska, 2019; Lowe, 2017). This vision aligns closely with Sustainable Development Goal 3, which affirms the right to a life of health and well-being for all (Hales & Birdthistle, 2023). As modern students struggle to navigate a fragmented world, libraries may hold an unexpected solutions community-

centered institutions capable of reweaving the social threads that give life coherence and care ([Brewster & Cox, 2023](#); [Henrich, 2020](#)).

University students are particularly susceptible to burnout, anxiety, and depression, often resulting from the transition to adulthood and the high demands of academic life ([Ganes, 2024](#); [Liu, 2025](#)). These mental health challenges can deteriorate their quality of life, academic performance, and social functioning ([Ribeiro, 2018](#); [Solomou, 2023](#)). According to Durkheim's theory of anomie, the erosion of social norms and structures can trigger psychological instability, especially in contexts of rapid modernization ([Kołodziej-Sarzyńska, 2019](#); [Lowe, 2017](#)). This sociological perspective underscores the need for institutions to offer environments that reinforce social integration and emotional support ([Sagan, 2017](#); [Sánchez, 1998](#)). For students, particularly those isolated by digital and urban lifestyles, universities must reimagine existing spaces to accommodate mental health needs more holistically ([Omodan, 2024](#)). Innovative practices in academic libraries notes the growing interest in promoting well-being as an example of libraries' evolving efforts to enhance student experience and outcomes ([Bladek, 2021](#); [Llewellyn, 2019](#)).

Several studies have explored library-based strategies to support mental health, emphasizing the value of bibliotherapy, mindfulness resources, and self-help access ([Levin, 2020](#); [Liu, 2025](#)). Reading therapy, for instance, has been shown to significantly reduce anxiety and depression when applied in structured university library programs ([Liu, 2025](#)). Similarly, self-help materials on acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) provided through university library platforms have proven effective in enhancing psychological resilience ([Levin, 2020](#)). Libraries can also promote students' mental health literacy through targeted campaigns and curated collections, enabling students to understand, manage, and seek help for mental health issues ([Komariah, 2022](#)). These findings suggest that library interventions are not only viable but can be impactful when integrated with institutional wellness strategies.

The broader role of libraries in supporting holistic student well-being has also been increasingly recognized in higher education discourse ([Brewster & Cox, 2023](#); [Henrich, 2020](#)). Libraries serve not only as information hubs but as communal spaces that foster belonging, reduce stigma, and enable dialogue around mental health issues ([Golden, 2022](#); [Merga, 2020](#)). Initiatives such as mental health corners, expressive writing programs, and artistic collaborations can create environments where students feel safe to express emotional concerns ([Lozano, 2022](#); [Lee et al., 2024](#)). Importantly, these programs can mitigate the effects of isolation and alienation that contribute to depression and anxiety ([Rancew-Sikora, 2012](#); [Sagan, 2017](#)). As such, libraries are strategically positioned to serve as dynamic agents of psychosocial support in academic environments.

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries in various regions adapted their roles to accommodate students' changing mental health needs ([Brewster & Cox, 2023](#); [Keesler, 2025](#)). From addressing digital anxiety to implementing telehealth partnerships, libraries have demonstrated operational flexibility in supporting vulnerable populations ([Henrich, 2020](#); [Keesler, 2025](#)). For rural and underserved communities, library-based tele-mental health programs have proven effective in bridging the gap in mental health service provision ([Keesler, 2025](#)). Furthermore, wearable technology and data integration with library wellness programs have been proposed as future pathways for stress monitoring and personalized interventions ([Barac, 2024](#)). This evolution reflects a shift from traditional library functions toward more proactive, integrated health promotion models.

Nevertheless, gaps remain in the scholarly literature regarding the sociological and institutional dimensions of library mental health initiatives for youth ([Lozano, 2022](#); [Merga, 2020](#)). While bibliotherapy and resource provision have been studied, limited attention has been given to the library's

role in fostering community, social cohesion, and resilience from a Durkheimian lens (Lowe, 2017; Sánchez, 1998). Few studies have examined how libraries may counteract the effects of anomie, alienation, and disconnection among students in a digitally fragmented society (Lowe, 2017; Rancew-Sikora, 2012). Furthermore, existing research often lacks methodological depth, focusing on cross-sectional designs rather than longitudinal impacts (Barac, 2024; Ganes, 2024). These limitations highlight the need for an interdisciplinary framework that bridges sociology, psychology, and library science.

This study aims to examine the potential of the academic library as a social institution capable of fostering student mental health through safe spaces, counseling partnerships, expressive activities, and dialogue facilitation. It seeks to analyze how libraries can mitigate psychological distress and promote well-being among university students, particularly in the face of increasing individualization and societal fragmentation. By synthesizing sociological theory with library practice, this research offers a novel perspective on how institutional environments can promote social integration and psychological resilience (Lowe, 2017; Durkheim in Sánchez, 1998). The study contributes to the literature by proposing a multidimensional model of library-based mental health support grounded in both empirical findings and sociological frameworks. Ultimately, it argues that libraries hold untapped potential as proactive agents of mental health promotion in higher education contexts.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This paper used a methodical review technique to investigate the role of academic libraries in supporting university students' mental health. The literature search was conducted through Scopus database. This approach used the Systematic Literature Reviews to provide a methodical framework for locating, selecting, assessing, and synthesising pertinent studies. This study was especially suited for a methodical review since it enabled a thorough and repeatable synthesis of results across several empirical and conceptual studies, so identify patterns, conflicts, and research gaps in the field of the role of academic libraries in supporting university mental health.

The evaluation approach started with a methodical search in academic databases including Scopus. Included were only peer-reviewed journal papers. Conference proceedings, systematic or scoping review; editorial pieces, theses, and non-English publications were removed.

Table 1. Search Query for the Articles

Focus	Search Query	Year	Article Found	Final selection
Mental Health and Academic Library	"academic library" AND "mental health"	2015-2025	30 Articles	19 Articles
Mental Health in Emile Durkheim Framework	"Émile Durkheim" AND "mental health"	2015- 2025	14 Articles	6 Articles

The inclusion criteria for selecting studies focused on research conducted in library settings and studies examining mental health within the Durkheimian framework. Based on these criteria, the initial search from 2015 to 2025 yielded 19 articles out of 30 articles from Scopus discussing mental health in academic libraries, and 6 out of 14 articles discussing mental health within the Émile Durkheim framework. In total, 25 articles were included in the review. From these studies, seven major programs were identified and selected for further analysis. These programs were extracted from empirical studies and professional practice articles, each describing library-based initiatives aimed at addressing student psychological well-being.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identified seven implemented mental health support programs within academic and public library settings, as documented in prior research. These programs were extracted from empirical studies and professional practice articles, each describing library-based initiatives aimed at addressing student psychological wellbeing. The selected programs are diverse in format, ranging from bibliotherapy interventions to digital service innovations, and reflect both direct and indirect approaches to mental health support. Each program was examined and categorized according to the Program Logic Model framework, encompassing six indicators: input, output, outcome, actions, impact, and conditions.

A program logic model is a visual representation that articulates the theoretical framework of how a program is intended to function, illustrating the relationships between inputs (resources), activities, outputs, outcomes, impact, and conditions (Cooksy et al., 2001; Dwyer & Makin, 1997). As McLaughlin and Jordan (1999) explain, "The Logic Model describes the logical linkages among program resources, activities, outputs, customers reached, and short, intermediate and longer term outcomes," providing a "plausible and sensible model of how the program will work" under specified conditions (McLaughlin and Jordan, 1999). The following library-based mental health programs were synthesized from 9 selected studies and grouped into 7 major program categories, as several studies described similar intervention models.

Table 2. 7 Major Categories of Library-Based Mental Health Programs Synthesized from Selected Studies

No.	Program	Conditions	Inputs (Resources)	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
1.	Bibliotherapy / Reading Therapy (Liu, 2025)	anxiety and depression among students	Fiction and self-help books; reading spaces; librarians	Book lending, group discussions, thematic collection curation	Number of books borrowed; discussion group participation	Reduced anxiety symptoms; improved psychological well-being
2.	Mental Health Literacy (Komariah, 2022)	Low mental health awareness among students	Mental health literature collections; library staff; promotional media	Mental health corners; seminars; campaigns; digital flyers	Seminar attendance; distribution of informational materials	Improved understanding and positive attitudes toward mental health issues
3.	Library-Based Counseling and Collaboration with (Keesler, 2025)	Students unsure where to seek psychological help	Partnerships with psychologists; private rooms; scheduling systems	On-site counseling sessions in the library; referrals	Number of counseling sessions provided	Early-stage support for psychological crises
4.	Expressive Arts and Literary Dialogue Activities (Golden, 2022)	Stigma and difficulty in expressing emotions	Thematic literary books; facilitators; community spaces	Book discussions, narrative writing, poetry competitions	Number of student works produced; participant engagement	Enhanced emotional expression and peer connection
5.	Safe Spaces and Open Dialogue Zones (Brewster & Cox, 2023);	Need for reflective, non-judgmental environments	Inclusive spatial design; space usage guidelines	Quiet room setups; stress-free zones; peer discussion forums	Usage logs; student testimonials	Increased sense of safety and social engagement

	Merga, 2020)					
6.	Librarian Training for Early Psychological Intervention (Cox, 2020; Lozano, 2022)	Lack of trained personnel to detect student distress	Training modules; psychological trainers; training schedules	Workshops for librarians on recognizing psychological symptoms	Number of librarians trained	Improved early detection of psychological distress
7.	VR Co-Design for Teen Mental Health (Lee, 2024)	Lack of positive digital mental health spaces for youth	VR technology; creative librarians; technical partners	Co-designing virtual spaces; programming and narrative development	Number of VR modules created; youth participation	Increased emotional engagement and positive experiences among youth

Based on the analysis presented in the table, the reviewed library-based mental health programs demonstrate considerable diversity in both design and delivery, highlighting the adaptability of libraries as psychosocial support institutions. The identified programs can be broadly categorized into three complementary approaches. First, informational support programs, such as mental health literacy initiatives and bibliotherapy, focus on increasing awareness and knowledge related to mental health issues. Second, psychosocial intervention programs, including counseling services, expressive arts activities, and VR-based initiatives, provide direct opportunities for emotional support, self-expression, and psychological engagement. Third, supportive environment and prevention programs, such as safe spaces and librarian training, emphasize the creation of inclusive environments and the early identification of student distress. This categorization demonstrates that academic libraries contribute to student well-being through multiple pathways, ranging from education and prevention to direct psychosocial support.

These initiatives range from informational interventions, such as mental health literacy campaigns and curated bibliotherapy collections, to more interactive and therapeutic approaches like expressive arts programming and virtual reality co-design. What unites these efforts is their shared reliance on accessible resources, inclusive spaces, and cross-sector collaboration factors which enable libraries to serve as neutral, non-stigmatizing environments for students struggling with emotional well-being. Programs like safe spaces and librarian training also emphasize the preventative potential of libraries, positioning them as frontline actors in the early detection and mitigation of psychological distress.

The outcomes observed across these programs such as increased mental health awareness, reduced anxiety, improved emotional expression, and enhanced peer support illustrate libraries' capacity to generate both cognitive and affective benefits for students. The logic model framework applied in this study clarifies the flow of resources to impact and reinforces the importance of context-specific inputs, including staff capacity, institutional policies, and technological infrastructure. For instance, initiatives like digital self-help services and VR-based programming depend heavily on digital literacy and sustained student engagement, while counseling partnerships require strong professional referral networks. These findings support the broader argument that libraries, when properly integrated into institutional well-being ecosystems, can move beyond informational roles to become psychosocial anchors within higher education settings

Library and Mental Health in Emile Durkheim Framework

Mental health is an important part of university students' growth and success. During college, students often deal with academic pressure, loneliness, money problems, and questions about identity all of which can lead to stress, anxiety, or even depression. As Rancew-Sikora (2012) explains, these emotional struggles are not just personal or medical issues, they also reflect larger social problems and pressures (Rancew-Sikora, 2012). The rising levels of depression among students show that they may be losing emotional energy and social support, something the sociologist Émile Durkheim described as "anomie," or a breakdown of social norms. This means that taking care of student mental health is not just the job of doctors or counselors it's also the responsibility of the university as a whole.

Durkheim's theory of suicide identifies two major social forces that regulate individual well-being: social integration and moral regulation. Students facing isolation in competitive academic environments may lack both social integration and moral regulation, leading to what Durkheim termed egoistic or anomic distress (Durkheim, 1973). In competitive and isolating university environments, students often lack both, which can lead to deep emotional distress. Aird (2015) adds that in today's society, many young people turn to individual coping strategies like trying to solve problems on their own which often don't give the sense of community and support they truly need (Aird, 2015). Rancew-Sikora (2012) also points out that today's culture puts pressure on people to constantly "find themselves," which can lead to even more stress when they feel disconnected (Rancew-Sikora, 2012). To really support students, universities need to offer more than just health services, they need to rebuild social and emotional support systems on campus.

Academic libraries can play a big role in this. While libraries are often seen as quiet places for studying, they can also become safe spaces for mental and emotional support. Programs like reading therapy (Liu, 2025), mental health information corners (Komariah, 2022), and group discussion areas help students feel connected and understood. These kinds of programs create shared experiences and a sense of belonging, something Durkheim called "collective consciousness." Aird (2015) notes that in the past, religion provided this role, but today libraries and other public spaces can help fill that gap by creating welcoming, inclusive environments (Aird, 2015). When libraries encourage group connection, provide calm and reflective spaces, and validate students' struggles, they help reduce the feeling of isolation. The findings of this review support Durkheim's perspective by demonstrating how library-based mental health programs foster social connection, collective participation, and a sense of belonging. Programs such as bibliotherapy, safe spaces, counseling services, and expressive arts activities create opportunities for interaction and emotional support, thereby strengthening students' social integration within the university environment.

Looking at libraries through Durkheim's lens shows even greater potential. Durkheim believed that institutions keep society strong not just through rules, but by giving people shared meaning and connection. Rancew-Sikora (2012) builds on this idea with the concept of "emotional energy," which means that social spaces can restore a person's motivation and sense of hope. In this way, libraries are more than just places to find books they are emotional spaces that can help students feel better, regain confidence, and reconnect with others (Rancew-Sikora, 2012). By embracing this deeper social role, libraries can help address not just the symptoms of mental health struggles, but also the root causes. That's why it's so important to create strong, thoughtful mental health programs in university libraries programs that support not only students' emotional health, but also their academic success and everyday well-being.

Identification to Implementation

The identification stage is a critical foundation in designing any mental health program, particularly within the higher education environment. It is essential to conduct a thorough mapping of students' psychological conditions, their primary stressors, and the coping mechanisms they currently employ (Brewster & Cox, 2023; Ecclestone, 2015). Without this diagnostic phase, interventions risk being misaligned with the actual needs and lived experiences of the student body. Open-ended questionnaires or in-depth interviews with students are necessary to obtain accurate baseline data regarding their academic and personal challenges (Atarodi Beimorghi dkk., 2018). However, many libraries are still not included in institutional mental health mapping efforts, leading to missed opportunities in leveraging their full potential (Alabi, 2025). Studies also highlight the importance of introspective audits assessing internal library capacities, staff readiness, and environmental features in identifying how libraries can serve as sustainable mental health allies (Komariah, 2022).

After identifying both internal capacities and environmental conditions, the next crucial step is to plan a comprehensive mental health program and prepare the necessary library facilities to support its implementation. This stage requires strategic collaboration with various institutional units to ensure that the program is not superficial, but rather holistic and impactful. Partnerships with external professionals such as invited psychologists or expert speakers are essential, along with cooperation from student centre unit and psychology faculties (Forrest, 2017). These collaborations help align the library's efforts with clinical expertise and student life services. At the same time, librarians themselves must be equipped with interpersonal communication skills and undergo training related to mental health awareness to effectively contribute to program delivery and student support (Burns & Green, 2019). Furthermore, co-designing initiatives with students enhances program ownership and ensures that cultural and religious dimensions of mental health are respected, fostering inclusive support ecosystems (Lee, 2024).

Infrastructure and service improvements are an important result of the collaborative planning stage. Instead of turning libraries into clinical spaces, the goal is to make them more supportive of students' mental well-being through thoughtful design and services. Changes like creating wellness corners, quiet areas, and flexible spaces have been shown to help reduce stress and support emotional balance (Brewster & Cox, 2023). Service improvements also include offering self-help books, adding mental health materials to class reading lists, and giving students personal recommendations for helpful reading (Alabi, 2025; Levin, 2020). These efforts make mental health a normal part of academic life. Digital tools are also very important, especially for students who learn online virtual wellness spaces, e-books on resilience, and peer chat support help make mental health support more accessible (Liu, 2025).

Successful program implementation depends on strong and clear partnerships. Librarians, counselors, peer mentors, and university staff need to work together closely, especially when it comes to handling referrals and responding to mental health emergencies. For example, if a student talks about having suicidal thoughts during a group activity, there must be a clear and safe process to connect them with professional help (Alabi, 2025; Golden, 2022). Having written procedures, proper staff training, and regular evaluations helps keep the program both caring and safe. In the end, libraries don't need to act like clinics but by becoming trusted, supportive spaces, they can help shift campus mental health efforts from being reactive to more proactive and preventative.

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirmed that academic libraries hold untapped potential to act as transformative agents in the mental health landscape of higher education. By reimagining their functions beyond

traditional informational roles, libraries can offer psychosocial interventions that are inclusive, accessible, and culturally sensitive. The integration of Durkheim's theory of social integration and anomie provides a valuable lens to understand the emotional disconnection experienced by students and the institutional responsibility to address it. Through seven programs that were discussed, such as bibliotherapy, mental health literacy, safe spaces, and cross-sector collaborations, libraries can foster environments of belonging, reduce psychological distress, and promote resilience. These psychology-library programs offer perspectives on the role libraries play in supporting mental health within academic settings. However, effective implementation requires institutional support, interdisciplinary collaboration, librarian training, and continuous evaluation. Future research should focus on longitudinal impacts and further explore the sociological dimensions of library-based mental health interventions. Ultimately, libraries must be recognized not only as academic infrastructure but also as emotional infrastructure spaces where students can restore their psychological energy, rebuild social connections, and thrive both academically and personally.

Additionally, based on this systematic literature review, academic libraries are encouraged to institutionalize mental health-oriented services as part of their core mission and strategic planning. Strong policy support, sustainable funding, and leadership commitment are essential to ensure that library-based psychosocial initiatives move beyond temporary or symbolic efforts. Capacity building for librarians should be prioritized through training in mental health literacy, ethical engagement, referral practices, and culturally sensitive approaches. Furthermore, interdisciplinary collaboration between libraries, counseling services, academic departments, and external mental health organizations is crucial to address students' experiences of social disintegration and anomie, as conceptualized by Durkheim, and to create inclusive environments that foster belonging and emotional well-being.

From a research perspective, future studies should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to examine the long-term impacts of library-based mental health interventions on student well-being, academic engagement, and social integration. Greater attention to sociological and institutional dimensions such as emotional infrastructure, organizational responsibility, and social cohesion would deepen theoretical understanding of the evolving role of academic libraries. Systematic evaluation frameworks are also needed to strengthen the evidence base and support policy recognition of libraries as integral components of higher education mental health ecosystems.

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