

**A STUDY ON COMMON STRESSOR AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN UiTM
KEDAH**

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College students are synonymous with the stage of adolescent - occurs between childhood and adulthood. This is where young people experience rapid growth of their body and mentality to full maturity. Most memories have been undergone at this stage of transition – as the best time in life (good stress). However, these critical years of adjustment can also be undermined by depression and suicide (bad stress). These phenomenon may lead to good stress and bad stress – depending on how ones' reaction upon the stressor. Basically, the purpose of this article research was to identify what is the common stressor which constitute to the level of stress among undergraduates in UiTM Kedah. This article research was done to answer these research questions; what are the most stressor that constitute to the level of stress among undergraduates and what are the common stressor among undergraduates in UiTM Kedah. Therefore, the objectives of this research are to find out the stressor that constitute to the level of stress among undergraduates and the common stressor among undergraduates in UiTM Kedah. A questionnaire was designed to be distributed randomly to 50 undergraduates of UiTM Kedah. The significance of this article research was essential to identify the stressor which affects one's future performances especially in the workplace later. The research design for this study was a cross-sectional survey where the data will be gathered just once which over a period of a week in order to answer a research questions. Therefore, for this study, researchers used one time collection over a period of three (3) days time for the questionnaire to be distributed to undergraduates in UiTM Kedah. Data for this study will be collected through survey using questionnaire. The questionnaire for this study will consists of three (3) sections. In Section A, it will comprise a set of questions about the demographic of the respondents that consists of gender, age, CGPA, semester and course. The purpose of this Section is to know about the background of the respondents chosen. While for Independent Variables, Section B, it consists of possible stressor among undergraduates. The purpose of this Section is to know whether there is a relationship between backgrounds of the undergraduates with the students' factor of stress. Lastly, Section

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

From birth to death, human endures stress. Stress is a perceived concept; it can be caused by anything which makes one feels a sense of imbalances in his or her life. Generally, stress is defined in many ways. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), stress resulted from an imbalance between demands and resources. Meanwhile, demands refer to the stressor; such as academic demand or environment demand, while resources refer to the emotional and cognitive ability to cope with those demands. However, it is a norm when people associate stress with bad impacts – without knowing that stress actually can be perceived as a sense of motivation. According to Neuman, a stressor is any relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing. The relationship can result in either a beneficial or a harmful outcome (1989). Different types of stress produce anxiety in individuals, which results in feelings of apprehension that can ultimately lead to negative physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral symptoms (Boyd & Nihart, 1998).

1.2 Problem Statement

Stress is a perceived concept; it can be caused by anything which makes one feels a sense of imbalances in his or her life. Generally, stress is defined in many ways. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), stress resulted from an imbalance between demands and resources. Meanwhile, demands refer to the stressor; such as academic demand or environment demand, while resources refer to the emotional and cognitive ability to cope with those demands. Related to this study, undergraduates in UiTM Kedah are at critical phase of transition where they are adapting the changes towards entering adulthood. In fact, undergraduates are expected to be elites in the society. For undergraduates, they need not only to adapt themselves with the new life and new environment but also be familiar with many new people, events, and things – as this is the real society they have to face after graduates. Hence, the main problem is ‘what is the common stressor between good and bad stress that constitute to the level of stress among undergraduates in UiTM Kedah’.

1.3 Research Questions

1.3.1 What are the stressors that constitute to the level of stress among undergraduates

1.3.2 What are the most common stressors among undergraduates in UiTM Kedah.

1.4 Research Objective

1.4.1 To find out the stressor that constitute to the level of stress among undergraduates

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1.4.2 To find out the common stressor among undergraduates in UiTM Kedah

1.5 Scope of Study

The scopes of the study are as follows.

1.5.1 Level

This study will covers to the Degree students in four degree courses in UiTM Kedah which are Bachelor in Administrative Science and Policy Studies (AM228), Bachelor in Information Management (IM224), Bachelor in Islamic Banking (BM229) and also Bachelor in Marketing (BM220)

1.5.2 Territory

The study will be conducted in UiTM Kedah.

1.5.3 Time

The research is conducted from 20th May 2012 until 23rd May 2012. The period of data collection took about one week.

1.6 Significance of Study

This research will help us to categorize the stressors which lead to stress among the undergraduates in UiTM Kedah. Therefore, based on the results, the common stressor will be identified.

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1.7 Definition of Terms/Concepts

The terms used in this study are defined for ease of understanding.

1.7.1 Adolescent

In general context, undergraduates belong to the adolescence group which is youth. Adolescence is a stage of human development which occurs after childhood till before adulthood (Pascucci, n.d).

1.7.2 Undergraduates

Particularly, in Malaysian Education System, undergraduates are those who aged between 18-25 years old. Although there are varying definitions of adolescence, adolescence is generally viewed as a stage where young people experience rapid growth of their body and mentality to full maturity during 12~25 years of age (Liu, 2001).

1.7.3 Stressor

According to Neuman, a stressor is any relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing. The relationship can result in either a beneficial or a harmful outcome (1989).

1.7.4 Good Stressor

A good stressor makes you feel "stressed-out" but is actually a positive event; one that is good for you, or might be good for you. (Jacqueline, 2012)

1.7.5 Bad Stressor

Different types of stress produce anxiety in individuals, which results in feelings of apprehension that can ultimately lead to negative physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral symptoms (Boyd & Nihart, 1998).

1.8 Conclusion

Focusing on the subject of the study – undergraduates in UiTM Kedah is at critical phase of transition where they are adapting the changes towards entering adulthood. In fact, undergraduates are expected to be elites in the society. Thus, it is crucial to understand which stressor creates the biggest impacts so we can correspond to the changes in the society respectively. The life stress is considerable. Indeed, daily stressors in life cannot be avoided, nor can major life changes. For undergraduates, they need not only to adapt themselves with the new life and new environment but also be familiar with many new people, events, and things -as this is the real society they have to face after graduates. Therefore, understanding the sources of stress among them and how they can cope with the stress is very important.

CHAPTER 2

Undergraduate's Level of Stress

In an article on *How to Reduce Stress in College Life* by Elizabeth Scott, wrote that campus life has been a lot more competitive than school life – students have to compete for a placement in university and it is harder than the society ever thought (2009). It is, too, gotten a

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lot more expensive – fees on due, assignments, research and field work; without taking into account all the miscellaneous expenses. In fact, Feng (1992) claimed there are a lot of factors that have made the college society more stressful, and that really been translated in undergraduate's life as well. However, according to Boyd & Nihart (1998) it can be a positive or negative outputs to an individuals, depending on how strength and persistence of the stress, individuals personality, cognitive appraisal of the stress, and social support. Thus, in the process of adapting into these changes, it might affect undergraduates differently at the stage of transition years. Generally, Feng (1992) & Volpe (2000) categorized causes of stress of undergraduates into environmental factors, psychological factors, biological factors, and social factors.

Additionally, a theory of *fight or flight* responses which further explained by Counselling and Mental Health Centre of University of Texas, stated that our mind will act as a mechanism and automatically mobilize a lot of energy rapidly in order to cope with a threat or survival. In short, this response suggested a stress or tense over an individual either to fight or to flee away from the stressor. The fight response indicates that individuals perceived the stressor as a good stress; which urges him/her to solve stressor positively. While, flight response indicates that individuals will choose to flee from the stressor without solving the threat; in the end, the threat might continuously affect him/her because it is not yet to be solved (Medical News, 2004).

Stressor of Undergraduates

According to most researchers and experts, stress is a burst of energy that urges us to do what we might forgo at the beginning (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As defined by American Stress Institute (Stress), good stress is an increased stress which resulted to an increased in

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productivity -- up to a point, after which things go rapidly downhill (2010). Therefore, we need stress in our lives for creativity, to challenge and to motivate us to accomplish more.

Now, given in a university life context, a strong family support ranked the highest rate of good stress factor – meanwhile, family support belongs to the biological factor of stress (Clark, 2005). Liu & Chen (1994) proposed that modern parents are very concerned about their children's academic achievement and moral behaviours. Furthermore, Clark emphasised which, for adolescents, family support is the most important element in their lives – too, as part of growth experience adolescents usually expect a lot of things from their parents; such as rewards and attention (2005). Essentially, by creating rules for the child to abide by, at the same time, parents are helping the child to shape the social actions and to acquaint the child with the way the world operates (Gorman, 2005).

However, regarding the daily life stressor, time management factor might somehow, contribute a huge part as a good stressor; assignment on due, final examination around the corner, or social time on weekends (Pascucci, *n.d*). Coggins believes that in order to calm college student stress we need to have a grasp on our own passions and priorities so that we're in a stronger position to not be led around by the whims of others (2012). Therefore, by determining own passion and priorities, it will help undergraduates to stay focused on where they will head in the future. Undergraduate's life is all about mastering time management in order to master the degree and productivity (Coggins, 2012).

Daily stressors in life cannot be avoided, nor can major life changes. Stressful events and bad stress can change one's life for an extended period which might lead to bad future performance and bad future health related problems (Wong, Perry, & Hockenbury, 2002).

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Adolescents are mostly concerned about their physical appearances factor than about other aspects. Many of them are even dissatisfied with their physical appearances (Siegel and Lane,1982). Wang & Ko (1999) pointed out that girls feel upset more easily than boys, mainly because of their concerns about physical appearances. Lan (2003) mentioned that some physiological symptoms such as headache were signals of a mental overload. In addition, Wang & Ko also has listed few other signals including fatigue, depression, anxiety, dissatisfaction with certain interpersonal relations, change of the current sleeping habit, and a drastic gain/loss of body weight (1999). Feng (1992) pointed out that over-setting high goals, being a perfectionist, and comparing the self with others, and self-degradation may all cause stress and result in depression.

Besides that, most adolescents are in urgency to develop a relationship with the opposite sex (Clark, 2005). As there are no absolute ways for making friends with the opposite sex, many of them usually do not know what to do when in face of the opposite sex. Primarily, adolescents often suffer stress which had been induced by “a sense of insecurity” when they are dating someone (Gorman, 2005). They are worried that they may lose their dates and their parents or friends may have negative views of their dates. Therefore, developing a heterosexual relationship is a challenge and also a stressor for adolescents (Wang and Ko, 1999).

Chiang (1995) proposed that academic factor is one of the main sources of stress among adolescents. Such stress comes from too much assignments, unsatisfactory academic performance, lack of interest in a particular subject, and lecturer’s psychological punishment. Return to previous review by Liu & Chen (1994), parents get very concerned about their children’s academic achievement and moral behaviours. Indeed, parents expect their children not

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only to respect lecturers and follow moral norms but also become elite in the future (Liu and Chen, 1994). The educationist Dewey once said “education is a pursuit of a perfect life”. However, in most universities and parents usually use academic achievement as the sole criterion for evaluating a student’s performance at school. This criterion causes double stress on adolescents. Stress from high expectations of lecturers, universities parents, and self is usually an agony for undergraduates (Cheng, 1999).

Despite all the stressor that might affect one’s stress level, lies the occurrence of time behind them. Undergraduates get trapped in the management of time as a problem solving of all the stress they think they have. In fact, they are actually kept on adding more stressor over the previous stressor (Lan, 2003). Pascucci stated in her article, most of undergraduates are skipping classes as the best way to release the tense they have encountered. Still, it increases the tense in the long run; miss the class lectures and notes might bring you to a more unorganized semester. Another situation illustrated by Coggins, undergraduates are more likely to procrastinate which will affect their future examination performance, and future health disorder. Therefore, it is suggested for undergraduates to take advantage of those first few weeks of new semester to keep on track with assignments (2012)

Common Stressor among Undergraduates

Thus, based on the stressor that has been reviewed through various literature resources, it can be concluded that time management factor is the common factor that constitute to the level of stress among undergraduates in UiTM Kedah.

Time is the greatest asset in life; we have to be wise on how to spend the time (Pascucci, *n.d*). Undergraduates less likely to realize and understand what it is all about to be wise in spending their time according to priority. Particularly, as an undergraduate, academic demand is the core factor that should be prioritized before social demand (Cheng, 1999). Error in prioritizing this potential stressor will finally lead to a bad stress and bad mental health. This is, instead of learning strategies on managing time wisely and easing up on their perfectionism, they keep on giving excuses to delay assignments on due (Pascucci, *n.d*).

Still, contradict with the previous paragraph; time actually give a fight or flight response towards undergraduates especially when the final examination is just around the corner (Medical News, 2004). This portray on how a good stress can affect undergraduates in terms of time management. The shorter the time left before examination, the harder one will struggle to catch up with the entire syllabus (Pascucci, *n.d*). However, good stress does not always end up with good end, depending on how he/she correspond with the tense/stressor. Most likely, the fight or flight response works effectively as a good stressor for undergraduates who are concerned with their academic performances (Clark, 2005).

To sum up, Pascucci claimed time management factor is the core factor that might constitute to both levels of stress. Prioritizing the important elements/demands will help undergraduates to forecast and visualize what comes before what (Kilpatrick, 2005).

Conclusion

This research article should be continuously studied in order to identify the common stressor that lead the undergraduates experiencing stress. As we know, people were born at different era such as generation X, Y and Z. For instance, generation X which people were born on 1965 to 1981, Generation Y from 1982 to 2000 and Generation Z born on 2000 onwards. Thus, these factors are likely to give impacts on adolescents' maturity level. This is because they were born on different age cohorts where the education level as well as technology varies from each other. The stressor as for now is probably will be different for adolescents in 10 years upward. Due to that factor, stress will be varies and stressor also will change.

It was identified that the main good stressor in this research article was biological factor which is strong family support. Everyone loves their families and try to get the best to fulfil family's hope and dreams. Thus, most of undergraduates struggling to perform well in academic as well as adopting moral behaviours. Besides that, it was also identified that the main bad stressor in this article research was academic demand. The main purpose attending courses in university is to obtain at least a scroll of Diploma and Degree. Thus, undergraduates will take more efforts in order to get better results and this sometimes will lead to bad stress if they cannot handle their stress effectively. For instance, they study during last minute in order to face final examination. This situation surely will make them stress.

Since this study only focused on the UiTM Kedah undergraduates, it is recommended that further studies be carried out on undergraduates from other universities and colleges in order to see whether there are any similarities in the findings. Furthermore, further research could also identify the best alternatives and solutions in order to cope with stress among undergraduates.

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