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I-CReST 2025: 048-024 – Burnout Associated with Psychological Distress Before Reading Law in Degree: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Burnout associated with psychological distress is an issue hindering law students' maximum achievement globally. With good mental health students will be able to live their lives to the fullest, hence have better academic performance. This research is meant to look at reasons why law students burnt out during their study. This is quantitative research. There are 10 sections in the instrument. It has 3 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile; section B has 24 items on learners' drive while Section C has 26 items on burnout. There are 113 respondents from the Centre of Foundation Studies at UiTM Selangor Branch, Dengkil Campus, Malaysia. General findings concluded that burnout amongst law students is prevalent. This research is important to ascertain and thus be able to strategize methods or steps to counter this issue.

Keywords: Burnout; foundation studies; law students; quantitative research and learners' drive

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Pre-Law students at UiTM Selangor study basic legal subjects that are different from what they studied in secondary school. They may also experience culture shock, especially when living away from their families for the first time. The pressure to excel in order to qualify for their chosen law school can lead to extreme fatigue or burnout. Burnout is associated with psychological distress, which is emotional distress due to daily stress that is difficult to cope with [1]. This problem affects students' mental health and academic performance [2].

1.2 Statement of Problem

Although many previous studies have examined psychological stress and burnout among IPT students, specific studies on law students are still lacking. Studies [4] show that stress can affect mental health and academic performance. Therefore, this study is important to identify the causes of burnout and its relationship with the values, expectations and affective aspects of law students.

1.3 Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore the relationship between learners' burnout and their motivation in reading law. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- What are the factors that motivate learners?
- What are the causes of burnout?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Psychological Distress - Burnout among Learners

Psychological stress among students in higher education institutions is increasingly worrying. This stress has certain characteristics, triggers and consequences. The inability to manage stress can lead to depression [4], while the long-term stress can affect on social functioning [6]. Studies show that psychological stress is closely related to risky behaviour and extreme fatigue (burnout) which affects learning interest [7]. 41.9% of students experience academic, financial and social stress [8]. Increasing self-efficacy can prevent burnout [9].

2.2 Causes of Burnout among Learners

Student burnout can lead to decreased class attendance, lack of motivation, increased dropout, and poor academic performance [11]. Burnout is often assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory, but alternative approaches have been proposed. Burnout results from prolonged can cause chronic stress [12]. Emotional exhaustion, internal conflict, and lack of parental support contribute to cynicism and lack of dedication [14]. Positive coping and an optimistic attitude can prevent burnout [15].

2.3 Motivation and Demotivation to Read Law

Law students' engagement in tutorial discussions depends on prior reading. Without reading, it is difficult to understand theory or participate in scholarly discussions. Prior reading is important, but millennial students as 'Digital Natives' require a different approach to reading motivation [17]. Spencer & Seymour [18] suggested motivational strategies such as realistic reading load and a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Problem-Based Learning can be linked to increased intrinsic motivation through the fulfilment of psychological needs such as autonomy and competence [19].

2.4 Past Studies on Burnout among Learners

The concept of burnout has been discussed as a psychological syndrome resulting from prolonged chronic stress that can affect anyone, including students [13]. Self-efficacy, internal conflict, and lack of parental support were the main predictors of burnout, cynicism, and lack of dedication of students [14]. Burnout also affected student productivity in quantitative courses [20].

Studies linked learning motivation and psychological stress to burnout [1]. Several other studies also examined burnout among medical, dental, and pharmacy students [22]. Negative coping strategies and pessimism increase burnout, while positive strategies and optimism help prevent it [15]. Abouras' [23] study also emphasized the role of "life calling" in reducing burnout of law students.

2.5 Past Studies on Motivation and Demotivation in Reading Law

Ruing [24] emphasized the importance of early reading, especially for law students to participate in meaningful discussions. Millennials or 'Digital Natives' have a different learning style and require a new motivational approach [17]. Realistic reading materials and the use of digital tools can be used to build reading habits [18]. Failure to read can create a 'vicious cycle' that undermines learning. The Problem-Based Learning approach by Hmelo-Silver [27] has

also been shown to be effective in increasing students' intrinsic motivation to read and learn deeply.

3. METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to explore burnout factors associated with psychological distress for learning among law undergraduates. A purposive sample of 113 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Campos et; al. [29] to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 3 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 24 items on Learners' drive. Section C has 16 items on burnout.

Table 1. Distribution of items in the survey

SECT	HEADING	CONSTRUCT		VARIABLE	Items	Total Items
B	MOTIVATION Pintrich & De Groot (1990)	VALUE COMPONENTS	(i)	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	4	12
			(ii)	Extrinsic Goal Orientation	3	
			(iii)	Task Value Beliefs	5	
		EXPECTANCY COMPONENT	(i)	Students' Perception of Self- Efficacy	5	7
			(ii)	Control Beliefs for Learning	2	
		AFFECTIVE COMPONENTS				5
						24
C	BURNOUT Campos et.al, (2011)	BURNOUT-EXHAUSTION				8
		BURNOUT-DISENGAGEMENT				8
						16
				TOTAL NO OF ITEMS		40

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Findings for Demographic Profile

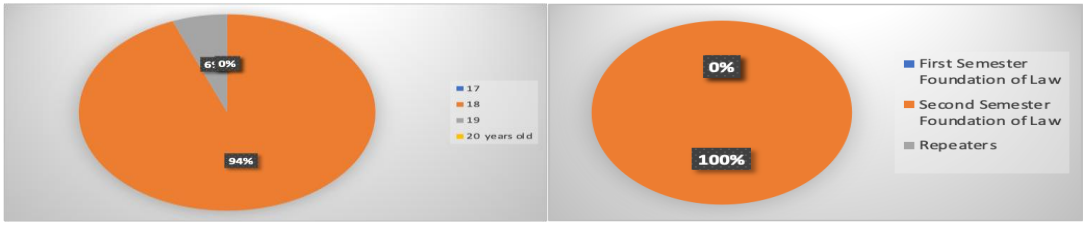

Fig. 2. Percentage for age group and discipline

Fig. 2 above presents the percentage for age group. An analysis of the data reveals the majority of respondents (94%) are 18 years old. This is followed by 6% who are 19 years old. 100% of the respondents are from the foundation of law.

4.2 Findings for Motivation

This section presents data to answer research question 1- What are the factors that motivate learners?

VALUE COMPONENT: INTRINSIC GOAL ORIENTATION

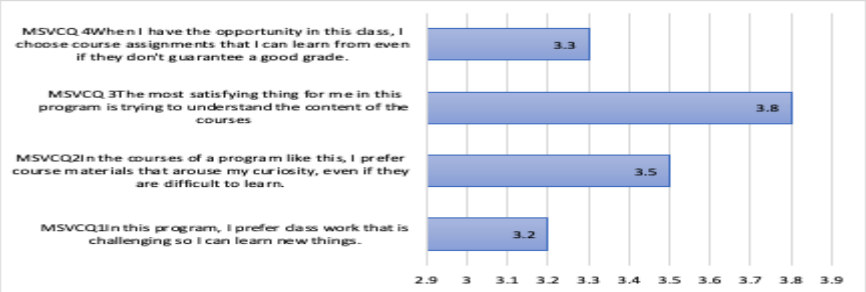

Fig. 3. Mean for intrinsic goal orientation

The descriptive analysis was carried out on four items in the Intrinsic Goal Orientation component. It can be seen that most of the students find it satisfying in trying to understand the content of the courses learnt (Mean = 3.8), followed by course materials that arouse their curiosity (Mean = 3.5). The intrinsic goal orientation is then followed by passion in learning even if they do not guarantee a good grade (Mean = 3.3), and preference of class work that is challenging as a way to learn new things (Mean = 3.2).

VALUE COMPONENT: EXTRINSIC GOAL ORIENTATION

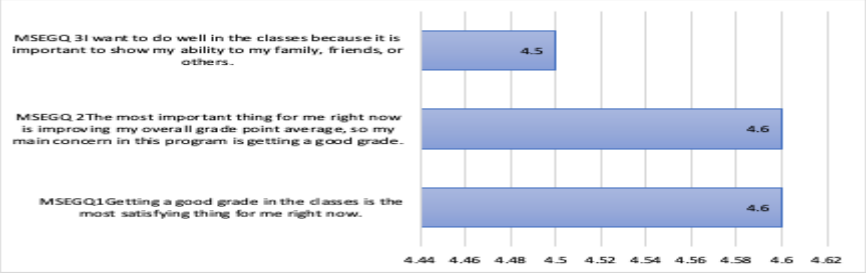

Fig. 4. Mean for extrinsic goal orientation

The descriptive analysis was carried out on three items in the Extrinsic Goal Orientation component. Based on items in Fig. 4, it can be seen that the main extrinsic goal orientation of the students is getting good grades in the class (Mean = 4.6) and to improve their overall grade point average (Mean = 4.6). Showing their ability to their family, friends, or others is somehow important for them as well (Mean = 4.5).

VALUE COMPONENT: TASK VALUE BELIEFS

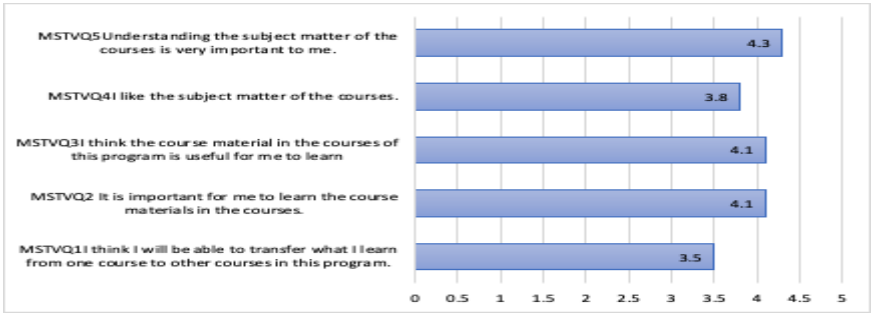

Fig. 5. Mean for task value beliefs

The descriptive analysis was carried out on five items in the Task Value Beliefs component. Based on these items in Fig. 5, the foundation of law students finds it more important to understand the subject matter of the courses leant (Mean = 4.3), than just to learn materials in the course (Mean = 4.1) or find the course material as useful for them to learn (Mean = 4.1). A slightly lower percentage of students who have the value belief of liking the subject matter of the course (Mean = 3.8), while the lowest percentage is believing that they will be able to transfer what they learn from one course to other courses (Mean = 3.5).

EXPECTANCY COMPONENT- STUDENTS 'PERCEPTION OF SELF-EFFICACY

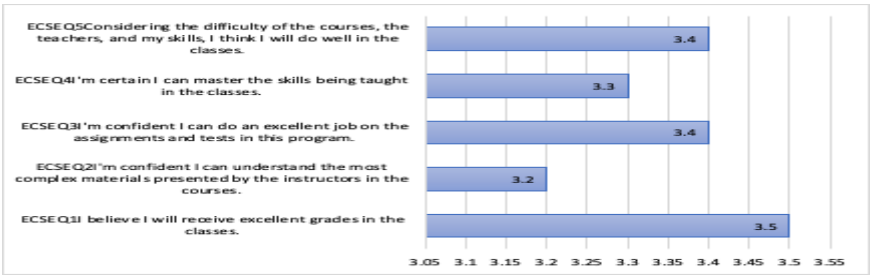

Fig. 6. Mean for students' perception of self-efficacy

The descriptive analysis was carried out on five items in the Students' Perception of Self-efficacy. Fig. 6 shows that students believe they will receive excellent grades in the classes (mean = 3.5). On average, they are confident that they can do an excellent job on the assignments and tests (mean = 3.4), they will do well taking into account the difficulty of the courses, the teachers, and their skills (mean = 3.4), and they are certain they can master the skills being taught in the classes (mean = 3.3). The item "I'm confident I can understand the most complex materials presented by the instructors in the courses" received the lowest rating from students, with a mean of 3.2. The result of the students' perception of self-efficacy indicates that they believe they will receive excellent grades in the classes.

EXPECTANCY COMPONENT - CONTROL BELIEFS FOR LEARNING

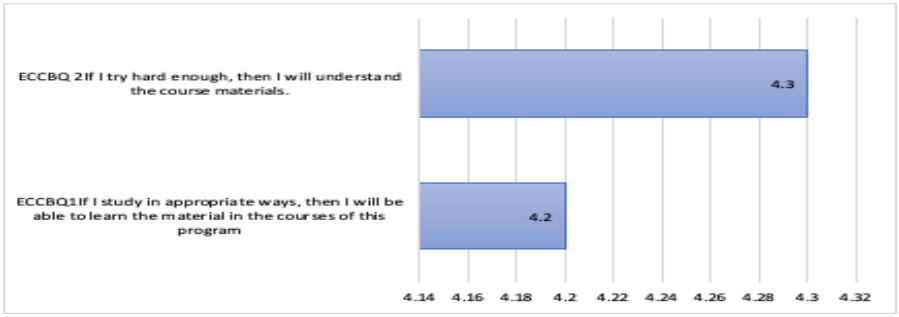

Fig. 7. Mean for control beliefs for learning

The descriptive analysis was carried out on two items in the Control Beliefs for Learning. Fig. 8 shows that the students will understand the course materials if they try hard enough (mean = 4.3), and they will be able to learn the material in the courses of this programme if they study in appropriate ways (mean = 4.2). This shows students' beliefs about learning: they will understand the course materials if they study.

AFFECTIVE COMPONENT

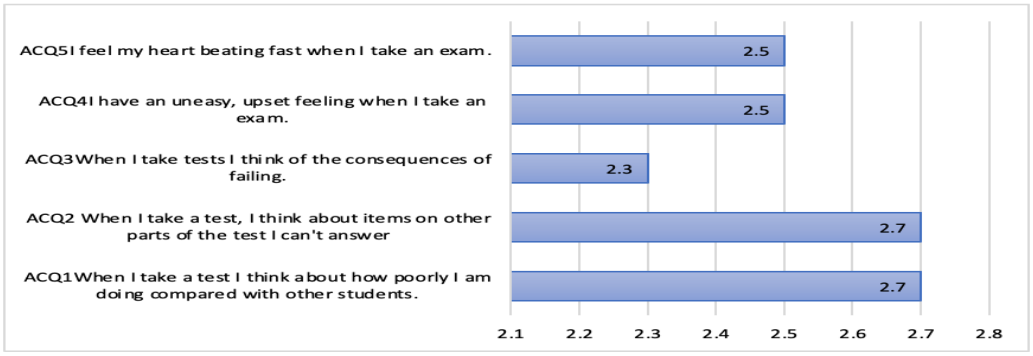

Fig. 8. Mean for affective components

Fig. 8 above shows the mean for affective components. Two items share the highest mean of 2.7 and they are "When I take a test I think about how poorly I am doing compared with other students." and "When I take a test, I think about items on other parts of the test I can't answer". This is followed by the mean of 2.5 for "have an uneasy, upset feeling when I take an exam." and "feel my heart beating fast when I take an exam".

4.3 Findings for Causes of Burnout

This section presents data to answer research question 2- What are the causes of burnout? In the context of this study, two causes of burnout are identified, and they are (i) exhaustion, and (ii) disengagement.

(i) BURNOUT (EXHAUSTION)



Fig. 9. Mean for exhaustion

Fig. 9 shows the mean for exhaustion. The highest mean is 4.1 for "There are days when I feel tired before the day begins. Next is the mean of 4 for the item "After classes, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better". This is followed by the mean of 3.5 for "after my classes, I usually feel worn out and weary" and the mean of 3.4 for "Usually, I can manage the amount of my work well". The lowest mean id 2.3 for "after classes, I usually feel energized".

(ii) Disengagement

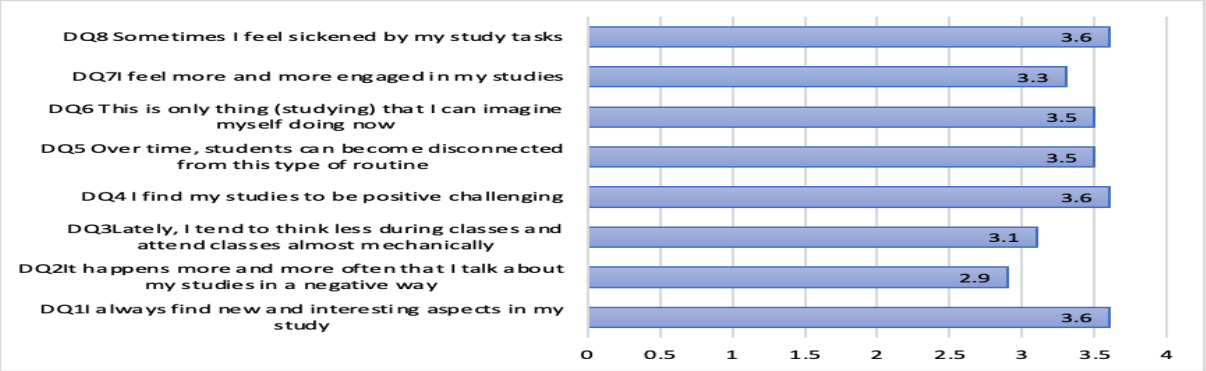

Fig. 10. Mean for disengagement

Fig. 10 above shows the mean scores for disengagement. Three items share the highest mean of 3.6 and they are "always find new and interesting aspects in my study". "I find my studies to be positively challenging" and "Sometimes I feel sickened by my study tasks". This is followed by two items with the mean of 3.5 and they are "Over time, students can become disconnected from this type of routine" and "this is only thing (studying) that I can imagine myself doing now'. The lowest mean is 2.9 for the item "happens more and more often that I talk about my studies in a negative way".

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Findings and Discussions

This study explores the relationship between the causes of burnout and the components of motivation in law students, namely values (values), expectations (expectancies), and affective aspects. Burnout is conceptualized through fatigue and disengagement. Findings indicate that intrinsic motivation plays an important role, such as satisfaction with understanding course content and interest in challenging assignments. Extrinsic motivation includes the desire to achieve excellent results and make family proud.

Students reported fatigue before the day began, after class, and needed longer breaks, with only a few feelings energized. Correlation analysis showed a moderate relationship between disengagement with values and expectations, and a weak relationship between fatigue with expectations and emotions. No relationship was found between disengagement and affective aspects. This study emphasizes the importance of motivation in reducing burnout.

5.2 Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

This study explores the relationship between the causes of burnout and the motivational components of law students, which have implications for their learning and performance. Burnout is defined as fatigue and disengagement. Further research involving various demographics is recommended to identify the causes and measures to reduce burnout.

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