

## LEVEL OF DEPRESSION, ANXIETY AND STRESS EXPERIENCED BY STUDENT MEMBERS OF ARMED UNIFORM BODY AT UITM PERLIS BRANCH

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### Abstract

This study evaluates the depression, anxiety, and stress level among student members of armed uniform body at Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis Branch. Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis Branch offered 15 co-curriculum activities included SUKISIS, Komander Kesatria, Bomba, and Angkatan Pertahanan Awam Malaysia. Unfortunately, in the selection system of co-curriculum activities, some students did not have the opportunity to select curriculum activities of their choice and interest. Questionnaire developed by Lovibond and Lovibond's (1995) entitled Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) was issued to 120 student members of SUKISIS, Komander Kesatria, Bomba, and Angkatan Pertahanan Awam Malaysia. In terms of the level of mental health, the student members of SUKISIS and Komander Kesatria suffered mild level of depression, while members of Bomba and Angkatan Pertahanan Awam Malaysia experienced normal level of depression. In relation to anxiety level, members of Suksis and Komander Kesatria suffered moderate level of anxiety, while members of Bomba and Angkatan Pertahanan Awam Malaysia experienced mild level of anxiety. Although the members of Komander Kesatria, Bomba and Angkatan Pertahanan Awam Malaysia experienced normal level of stress, the members of SUKISIS armed uniform body are mildly stressed. These findings provide an insight on mental health among students of tertiary education which is a very serious health issue that demands further exploration for development of effective co-curriculum activities. Hopefully, future researchers could relate this health issue with studies on other populations and demographic characteristics.

**Keywords:** depression, anxiety, stress, mental health, armed uniform body

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### Introduction

Mental or mood disorder has now commonly increased among university students such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Voelker, 2007). According to Gulshan and Zaffar (2017), mental or mood disorders are significant for the growth and development of every people and for healthy life. The definition also includes mental health along with physical, emotional, and spiritual components. It impacts how people manage their surroundings and make choices in their lives.

The American Psychiatric Association (2013) has classified depression as a low state mood and aversion to activity that can affects a person's behavioral and feeling. In other word, depression occurs when a person has low mood and unhappy to do activity and sense of wellbeing. Stress is a condition which upset a person mentally and physically that resulted from dealing with environment and perceived as threat to the well-being of the person (Salam et al., 2013). In Malaysia, most students suffered excessive stress due to cultural pressure to graduate with an excellent result which could give them opportunity to get better career in their life (The Coverage, 2015). As identified by Ramli et al., (2018), the major

sources of stress among students are difficulties in concentrating due to the presence of excessive information, pressure of heavy workload, and examinations that cause negative effects on their health and performance.

According to Chang et al., (2017), depressive symptoms among students may be determined by the level of internalized cultural identity that they carry from their home cultures. Symptoms such as weak, frustrated, desperate, helpless, and hopeless are commonly perceived by individuals with depression (Wicks-Nelson & Israel, 2009). They are usually in low-level of mood and are discontented with the things around them. Students who have to face these new challenges may suffer depressive side effects. Besides, chronic distress may increase anxiety level which is normally found to relate to depressive symptoms (Bjornsson et al., 2010). In addition, Collins and Mowbray (2005) relate that depression can be characterized by low mood and loss of interest or pleasure in nearly all activities with a plenty of co-happening issues, anxiety issue and suicidal ideation. Even when one can survive or satisfactorily adapt to depression and anxiety, improvement in life conditions and prosperity are not ensured. For instance, college students who managed to overcome depression and anxiety, and those who managed to finish their degree may still face challenges using their achievement to build up a career compared to those without psychiatric illness. Besides being normally referred to as a prevalent issue for students, the rates of depression among college students have additionally been rising steadily over the previous decade (Kenneth, 2010).

Hysenbegasi et al., (2005) conducted a study to determine the relationship between depression and academic performance. It was found that a diagnosis of depression was associated with lower GPA students. In addition, depressed students reported that missing more class, tests and assignments contrasted with the control group. Depression can be an interference to each part of an individual's life, particularly one's scholastic presentation. Students experienced various issues, for example, separation from their families, entrance into another condition, and adjustment to instructive measures causes abnormal state depression.

Twenge et al., (2018) stated that depression is a typical issue among young people. Students matured somewhere in the range of 20 and 24 and are mostly influenced by depression (Shamsuddin et al., 2013). The senior students perceive higher depression scores contrasted to the younger students. The reason why senior students experienced more elevated amount of depression was because of expanded outstanding task at hand or assignments during final year of studies. Anxiety regularly co-happens in college students who report experiencing depression (Krumrei et al., 2010). College age students with age 18 to 29 years old experience a more prevalence of anxiety compared with the general population (Kessler et al., 2005). The mental indications included apprehension before an exercise class, feeling helpless while doing assignments, feeling panic or lack of interest in doing exercise though the physiological manifestations of anxiety incorporate sweat-soaked palms, cold, nervousness, panic, quick pace of breathing, and dashing heartbeat (Vitasari et al., 2011).

Stress usually effects the college life to such an extent that in-depth research is important to facilitate stress avoidance for college future students. Liaqat et al., (2017) studies on evaluation of depression, anxiety, and stress among home and hostel medical students identified high level of depression, anxiety, and stress in both home and hostel medical students. In comparison depression was more prevalent in hostel students because of financial issues, far from home for the first time, and changes in living arrangements. Beiter et al., (2015) in their studies on the prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and stress among college students indicated that the top three concerns were academics performance, pressure to succeed, and post-graduation plans. Further demographic result shown that the most stressed, anxious, and depressed students were transferred, upperclassmen, and those living off-campus.

Stress is characterized as a condition commonly described by side effects of mental and physical tension or strain as hypertension, which can result from a response to a circumstance in which an individual feel threatened or pressured or both (Gulshan & Zaffar, 2017). College students have been reported to perceive excessive amount of stress (Anjum, 2018). Past research shows that college students,

especially first year recruits, report large amounts of stress (DeRosier et al., 2013). It is during the conventional or typical college age of 22 years old that most individuals began experiencing lifetime mental issue. As indicated by the Diathesis Stress Model of depression, life stressors may possibly trigger negative symptoms in people who are powerless against mental disorder (Eberhart et al., 2011). Stress frequently exists among students particularly in the parts of academics (Shamsuddin et al., 2013). Hence, stress is one of the contributing variables to emotional wellness. Learning and memory can be influenced by stress, and excessive amount of stress can cause physical and psychological wellness issues, reduce self-esteem, and may influence the academic of students.

According to Essel and Owusu (2017), an increase in class workload caused stress towards students as they must put in more efforts than they can handle. As so, they tend to get frustrated and are unable to focus and think straight. Students will overschedule their plans to meet up with the class workload in order to get good grades but eventually because these tasks are too much for them, they end up messing everything up. Also undergoing so many demanding courses in study made the student not having enough time to handle all these courses to his or her perfection within 24 hours and as a result this will have a great effect on the academic performance of the student. Stress is characterized as a condition commonly described by side effects of mental and physical tension or strain as hypertension, which can result from a response to a circumstance in which an individual feel threatened or pressured or both (Gulshan & Zaffar, 2017).

As identified by Jumelan (2014), there are several co-curricular uniform units in local universities which focus on training students to become more discipline, follow the rules, have self-identity, and uphold the quality of being patriotic. As the training programs of armed uniform units are mental challenging, student-members must be physically and mentally fit (Kosni et al., 2018). Problems will arise when students select the uniform units based on their interest and not psychological ability to accept the challenge in training. Inappropriate selection of co-curricular uniform units are risk factor for the mood or mental disorder such as depression and anxiety. Excessive depression, anxiety, and stress are serious issues that could lead students to suicidal attempt (Avenevoli et al., 2015). Therefore, students need to be aware of the signs of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Perlis Branch offered 15 co-curriculum activities and the list included the uniform armed units of Suksis (KOR Sukarelawan Polis Siswa/Siswi), Komander Kesatria, Bomba, and Angkatan Pertahanan Awam Malaysia (APM). Unfortunately, in the selection system of co-curriculum activities at UiTM Perlis Branch, some students did not have the opportunity to select the co-curriculum activities base of their choice and interest. This study evaluated the level of depression, anxiety, and stress among uniform armed students at UiTM Perlis Branch to ensure students adopt a healthy campus lifestyle which could enhance their academic and life achievement.

## Methods

### Research Design

The questionnaire was distributed equally to a total of 120 members of the Suksis, Komander Kesatria, Bomba, and APM armed uniform bodies of UiTM Perlis Branch. Permission was granted from the Deputy Rector (Students Affairs Department) of UiTM Perlis Branch to conduct the survey. The questionnaire was divided into two sections whereby, Section A recorded the demographic characteristic of the respondent, while Section B measure the level of depression, anxiety, and stress experienced by the respondents.

Section B consisted of 21 items developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) in the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21). The items were measured using a Likert scale, ranging from 0 to 3 (0- did not apply to me at all, 1- applied to me some degree, or some of the time, 2- applied to me to a considerable degree or a good part of time and 3- applied to me very much or most of the time).

### **Result and Discussion**

#### **The Signs of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Experienced by Members of Suksis Armed Uniform Body at UiTM Perlis Branch**

When feeling depressed, student members of the Suksis armed uniform bodies experienced the signs of not having any positive feeling of their experience. They felt downhearted and blue, as well. They found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things, and at times life seems meaningless. Besides that, they also rate themselves as not worth much a person as they had nothing to look forward to. They were unable to become enthusiastic about anything when they are depressed.

The signs of anxiety experienced by the members of the Suksis armed uniform bodies of UiTM Perlis Branch were awareness of mouth dryness, worried about situation in which they might panic and make a fool of themselves, and aware of the action of the heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increases, or heart missing a beat). Besides that, other anxiety signs perceived included tending to over-react to situations, felt scared without any good reason, felt closed to panic, and experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion).

As for stress signs, the members of the Suksis armed uniform bodies of UiTM Perlis Branch felt rather touchy and intolerant of anything that kept them from getting on with what they were doing. They also found it hard to wind down as they felt that they were using a lot of nervous energy and found it difficult to relax. Besides that, they tend to be easily agitated.

#### **The Signs of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Experienced by Members of Komander Kesatria Armed Uniform Body at UiTM Perlis Branch**

The members of Komander Kesatria armed uniform body found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things as they had nothing to look forward to when they were depressed. They felt downhearted and blue and felt that they were not worth much as person. Besides that, they were unable to become enthusiastic about anything and they failed to experience any positive feeling at all as they felt that life was meaningless.

Meanwhile, the anxiety signs displayed by the members of Komander Kesatria armed uniform body were awareness of mouth dryness, worried about situation in which might cause panic and making themselves fools, besides experiencing breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion). They also inclined to over-react to situations. The feeling of scared without any good reason would cause the action of the heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increases, or heart missing a beat).

When experiencing anxiety, the members of Komander Kesatria armed uniform body felt that they were rather touchy and easily getting agitated as they were intolerant of anything that kept them from getting on with what they were doing. Anxiety made the members of Komander Kesatria armed uniform body used a lot of nervous energy. This restrained their possibility of winding down and relax.

#### **The Signs of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Experienced by Members of Bomba Armed Uniform Body at UiTM Perlis Branch**

When feeling stress, the student members of Bomba armed uniform body found it impossible to work up the initiative to do things as they felt downhearted and blue, and felt that life was meaningless. They were unable to become enthusiastic about anything and they failed to experience any positive feeling. They felt that they had nothing to look forward to as they felt they were not worth much as a person.

Anxiety signs were clearly displayed when the members of Bomba armed uniform body over-react to situations. Physically, they felt dryness of the mouth. They started to worry about situation in which

might cause panic and the increase the action of the heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increases, or heart missing a beat). They were worried for no reason which could cause breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion).

When stressed, the members of Bomba armed uniform body felt that they were rather touchy as they were intolerant of anything that kept them from getting on with what they were doing. Consequently, they found it difficult to relax as they need to use a lot of nervous energy. They were also easily getting agitated.

### **The Signs of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Experienced by Members of APM Armed Uniform Body at UiTM Perlis Branch**

When feeling depressed, the members of APM armed uniform body found it tough to initiate working up something as they were unable to become enthusiastic about anything. The feelings of downhearted and blue and failure to experience any positive feeling at all especially towards things to look forward to makes them felt that they were not worth much as a person and life was meaningless.

Among the signs displayed by the members of APM armed uniform body when experiencing anxiety were mouth dryness and worried about situation in which might cause panic and fooling around. The members of APM armed uniform body also experienced the action of the heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increases, or heart missing a beat). They might feel scared without any good reason which could possibly cause breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion), as well.

Stress signs could be identified among members of APM armed uniform body who felt rather touchy than normal. The feeling of using a lot of nervous energy, intolerant of anything that kept them from getting on with what they were doing are also signs of being stressed. At times, they found it difficult to relax and to wind down, besides easily getting agitated over certain situation.

### **The Level of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Experienced by Student Members of Suksis Armed Uniform Bodies at UiTM Perlis Branch**

The DASS scores displayed in Table 1 showed the interpretation of the scores for each level of depression, anxiety, and stress. Table 2 presented the level of depression, anxiety and stress suffered by the student members of Suksis armed uniform body. Results shown that the members of Suksis armed uniform body experienced mild level of depression and level of stress but moderate level of anxiety.

Table 1. Interpretation of DASS scores

<b>Level</b>	<b>Depression</b>	<b>Anxiety</b>	<b>Stress</b>
Normal	0-9	0-7	0-14
Mild	10-13	8-9	15-18
Moderate	14-20	10-14	19-25
Severe	21-27	15-19	26-33
Extremely Severe	+28	+20	+34

Table 2. The level of depression, anxiety and stress experienced by student members of Suksis armed uniform body at UiTM Perlis Branch

	Mean score	Interpretation of DASS scores
Depression	11.87	Mild
Anxiety	14.07	Moderate
Stress	16.47	Mild

### **The Level of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Experienced by Student Members of Komander Kesatria Armed Uniform Bodies at UiTM Perlis Branch**

Table 3 displayed that the student members of Komander Kesatria armed uniform body suffered mild level of depression, moderate level of anxiety and normal level of stress.

Table 3. The level of depression, anxiety and stress experienced by student members of Komander Kesatria armed uniform body at UiTM Perlis Branch

	Mean score	Interpretation of DASS scores
Depression	13.00	Mild
Anxiety	12.67	Moderate
Stress	14.47	Normal

### **The Level of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Experienced by Student Members of Bomba Armed Uniform Bodies at UiTM Perlis Branch**

As presented in Table 4, the level of depression, anxiety and stress experienced by the members of Bomba armed uniform body are normal level of depression and stress, but mild level of anxiety.

Table 4. The level of depression, anxiety and stress experienced by student members of Bomba armed uniform body at UiTM Perlis Branch

	Mean score	Interpretation of DASS scores
Depression	8.93	Normal
Anxiety	9.47	Mild
Stress	11.13	Normal

### **The Level of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Experienced by Student Members of APM Armed Uniform Bodies at UiTM Perlis Branch**

Table 5 below shown that the level of depression, anxiety and stress experienced by the members of APM armed uniform body are normal level of depression and stress, but mild level of anxiety.

Table 5. The level of depression, anxiety and stress experienced by student members of APM armed uniform body at UiTM Perlis Branch

	Mean score	Interpretation of DASS scores
Depression	8.27	Normal
Anxiety	9.40	Mild
Stress	9.00	Normal

### Conclusion

Findings identify suffering of mild depression among members of Suksis and Komander Kesatria armed uniform body, and normal level of depression among members of Bomba and APM. In relation to anxiety, members of Suksis and Komander Kesatria armed uniform body suffered moderate level of anxiety, while members of Bomba and APM experienced mild level of anxiety. Although members of Komander Kesatria, Bomba and APM armed uniform body experienced normal level of stress, the members of Suksis armed uniform body are mildly stressed.

The signs of depression perceived are failure to experience any positive feeling at all, felt down-hearted and blue, impossible to work up the innovative to do things, meaningless life, feeling of not worth much as a person, nothing to look forward to, and unable to become enthusiastic about anything. These findings supported the symptom revealed by Wick-Nelson and Israel (2009) that signs like weak, frustrated, desperate, helpless, and hopeless are commonly perceived by individuals with depression who are usually in low-level of mood and are discontented with the things around them. Meanwhile, the anxiety signs perceived were dryness of mouth, worried about situation in which that they might panic and make a fool of themselves, aware of the action of their heart in the absence of physical exertion, over-react to situations, scared without any good reason, closed to panic, and experienced breathing difficulty. These finding supported Caz et al., (2019) finding that anxiety is a condition that occurs when an organism reacts against dangers disturbing its internal balance which may lead to negative conditions such as sadness, tension and emotional sensitivity. Anxiety influences an individual's daily life in different ways, which may sometimes result in uneasiness or increase an individual's performance. The stress signs experienced included feeling touchy, intolerant of any barriers that constrain any actions, hard to wind down, using a lot of nervous energy, difficult to relax, over-react to situation, and getting agitated. These findings are in accordance to findings by Eberhart et al., (2011) who stated that a stressed person may possibly set off negative symptoms in people who are powerless against mental disorder. As stated by Essel and Owusu (2017), students will get disappointed if they must accomplish beyond what they can deal with which causes them to be stressed and always think negative.

Student members of Suksis armed uniform body at UiTM Perlis Branch experienced mild depression and stress level, and moderate anxiety level. This could be because of the module intensity of training with requires endurance of mental and physical readiness. For example, training requires two continuous days of training in marching and physical fitness activities. Besides that, students of SUKSIS armed uniform body are also required to know and pass the Malaysia Law (Police Act 1967). Meanwhile, the student members of Komander Kesatria armed uniform body suffered mild depression, moderate anxiety, and normal stress level. This could be because they need to assist staffs of the Co-Curriculum Unit in daily office chores in related to co-curriculum activities. Besides that, student members of Komander Kesatria armed uniform body are also required to guide the co-curriculum activities on Thursdays and Fridays of the study term. On the other hand, the student members of Bomba and APM armed uniform body experienced normal depression and stress, and mild anxiety level. This could be because the student members of Bomba enjoyed the learning the tasks of being a fire rescuer, while the student members of APM enjoyed learning the tasks of being a first aider. They experienced anxiety mildly as they were required to pass the exam for the co-curriculum subject.

This study provides an insight related to a serious health issue which demands further exploration for the development of effective health activities or programs to be merged with co-curriculum syllabus. Hopefully, this study could be of beneficial to the Counsellor and Co-Curriculum Unit and will assist other related researchers in the future. Future research could focus on expanding the study to a wider population and include the demographic characteristic of the respondents.

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