International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

A CASE STUDY ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH AT KOLEJ UNIVERSITY POLY-TECH MARA KUALA LUMPUR

[1]Mas Anom Abdul Rashid, [2]Mohd Noor Azman Othman, [3]Abdul Razak Ibrahim

[1]School of Business and Accounting, Kolej Universiti Poly-Tech MARA

[2]School of Computing and Technological Sciences, Kolej Universiti Poly-Tech MARA

[3]School of Business and Accounting, Kolej Universiti Poly-Tech MARA

ABSTRACT

The Malaysian Ministry of Health has aired its concern towards the state of Malaysian students' mental health in the late 2016. Statistics revealed a worsening state of mental health problems among Malaysian students, which shows that there is an increase cases of mental health from 2011 to 2016. Experts cite anxiety and depression as the main causes of mental health problems among students although not ruling out the influence of drugs as a factor. Hence, this study is aimed to seek some answers to the state of the students overall mental health, what are the most influential factor that affects their mental health and how they manage these issues. A total of 340 students participated in this study and findings revealed that 50% of the students suffered from some kind of depressions triggered by various factors. The main factor contributing to mental health problem among the students are basically personal problems and second by academic problems.

Keywords: Malaysia, students' mental health, depression, counselling, support

INTRODUCTION

"Mental health is the condition that influences our mind in our daily activities. It determines how we handle stress, how we relate to others and how do we make our choices (mentalhealth.gov, 2017). Therefore, if the wellness of the mental is maintained, theoretically one should be living a stress-free life. Mental condition transcends throughout one's lifespan as the brain which is the control center for all the activities dictates how one acts and reacts to specific situation and condition.

The National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) (2016) conducted by the Malaysian Health Ministry revealed that the incidence of mental health problems was higher among younger

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

adults. Those in the 16-19 age group accounted for 34.7 % and those in the 20-24 age group accounted for 32.1%. However, studies have shown that the prevalence of mental health problems among people aged 16 and above is 29.2%. This is a marked increase from the same study done in 2006, which reported a figure of 11.2%. It also revealed a higher prevalence of mental health problems among adults come from low household income families. By occupation, the prevalence was lowest among government and semi-government employees (NST, 2016).

Mental health is influenced by factors such as biological (genes and brain chemistry), life experiences and family history. Going through life experiences, one will definitely be exposed to situations and conditions that force the mind to respond appropriately to the ideal outcome required. If the mental state is not in a healthy condition, this may lead to an unfavorable outcome as the production of the thinking process. Such situation will lead to unruly behaviors, miscalculation of steps to be taken or a mismatch between the action and reaction. This often results to dire consequences of one's life, the society or the nation eventually.

Mental health needs to be kept checked at all times to make sure that everyone in the community is able to contribute positively to the society. Perhaps the most critical stage of mental health that needs to be checked is the adolescent stage (Winters and Arria, 2011). This is a stage where the brain is still in the process of maturing. The maturing brain may help explain why adolescence sometimes make decision that are risky and may lead to safety or health concern including unique vulnerability to negative outcome (Winters and Arria, 2011).

When discussing adolescence the focus will definitely be on the teenagers. Teenagers' life at the adolescent stage is normally related to their college life. College life is regarded as the most important stage of teenagers' life because college is where they forge their future. As the brain maturing, rapid changes takes place both physically and cognitively where this leaves the teenagers facing countless problems and challenges that influence their emotions. At this period everything needs to be properly thought of in deciding the right direction to be taken by them. Hence the mental health needs to be at the healthiest level possible.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

College life is the most pressing stage in the teenagers' lives that can sometimes impose major challenges to study, play, socialize and live at the same time. Failure to manage these challenges effectively may lead to poor mental health in the teenagers and negative repercussions. Among them teenagers can be harried and overly anxious for their future and experienced stress. Some extreme cases may lead to depression, extreme anxiety and even suicide.

Pro-active assessments on the teenagers' mental health need to be carried out periodically in order to gauge the state oh these teenagers' mental health and overcome such possible

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

incidences. This is important to determine the product of the educational system may not only excel academically but also possess a healthy mental state when living the college to face their post-education lives.

For the purpose of this study poor mental health is referred to the stress level experienced by the respondents. It was engaged to answer the following research questions:

i. Do the undergraduate students at KUPTM suffer from mental stress?
ii. What is the undergraduates stress level?
iii. What is the main contributing factor to mental stress?

Hypotheses were construct to further investigate the research questions and they were:

Ho_1 There is no significant difference between male and female undergraduates level of stress at KUPTM.

H_1 There is a significant difference between male and female undergraduates level of stress at KUPTM.

Ho_2 Academic stress has no significant relationship to mental health problems among undergraduate students.

H_2 Academic stress has significant relationship to mental health problems among undergraduate students.

Ho_3 Personal problems have no significant relationship to mental health problems among undergraduate students.

H_3 Personal problems have significant relationship to mental health problems among undergraduate students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In September 2016, the national newspaper reported that the Malaysian Ministry of Health is concerned about the state of Malaysian students' mental health as statistics revealed a worsening state of mental health problems among Malaysian students. The report showed that there is an increase of one in 10 individuals in 2011 to one in five in 2016. Experts cite anxiety and depression as the main causes of mental health problems among students although not ruling out the influence of drugs as a factor (The NST, 2016).

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

According to Dr Mohd Suhaimi Mohamed, an expert of mental health at the University of Malaya, a prolonged state of mental health problems could make students become withdrawn, suffer from schizophrenia and develop the inclination to commit suicide. The tendency to take one's own life could become more sever if the mental health problems were not addressed within a period of two years which was often neglected. Factors which triggered anxiety, emotional disorders such as bulimia, developmental disorders like hyperactivity, behavioral disorders and severe stress due to family problems, anxiety could be attributed to pressure of examinations that might instill fear in students. Low self-confidence as a result could cause a student to be in a state of worry and stress, coupled with the pressure from parents and teachers who drive them to be competitive. Furthermore fear of embarrassment over matters related to studies could also push students towards extreme consternation or anxiety.

Studies concerning mental health among college students have been an area that received quite an interest among phycology researchers as the number of fatal cases involving college students especially in the US has created the urge to initiate a proactive measure to such problem. There are increasing concerns globally about the mental health of students (Kadison, & Digeronimo, 2004) as mental health problems are highly prevalent among college students, according to several data sources.

In the 2008 National College Health Assessment sponsored by the American College Health Association (ACHA-NCHA), more than one in three undergraduates reported "feeling so depressed it was difficult to function" at least once in the previous year, and nearly one in 10 reported "seriously considering attempting suicide" in the previous year. This puts the needs to investigate this phenomenon further has to be given serious concern (ACHA-NCHA, 2008).

If remains unattended, poor mental health will lead to even serious consequences. Stress among students if did not address at the early stage will leads to depression as in a survey data from random samples at 26 colleges and universities in 2007 and 2009 (the Healthy Minds Study) found that 17% of the students had positive screens for depression including 9% for major depression, and 10% of the students had a positive screen for an anxiety disorder (panic or generalized anxiety disorder) (Blanco et al, 2008). Preventive actions need to be taken by determining the mental health risk factors among students.

One of the negative repercussions is anxiety. In a survey conducted by American Psychological Association 95% of college counseling center directors surveyed said the number of students with significant psychological problems is a growing concern in their center or on campus. 70% of directors believe that the number of students with severe psychological problems on their campus has increased in the past year (APA, 2013). The survey also found that anxiety is the top presenting concern among college students (41.6%), followed by depression (36.4%) and

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

relationship problems (35.8%). Academic, environmental, social and health problems all play an important role in the development of stress. Academic factors are the most important stressors (Waghachavare, Dhumale, Kadam, and Gore, 2013). There is a need for specific and targeted measures to decrease substantially the burden of stress on the students before it gets out of control.

Depression does not have a single cause. Several factors can lead to depression. Some people carry genes that increase their risk of depression. But not all people with depression have these genes, and not all people with these genes have depression. Apart from possible genetically induced depression can also be caused by stress based on environmental issues such as surroundings and life experiences. Stresses in college life may result from living away from family for the first time, missing family or friends, feeling alone or isolated, experiencing conflict in relationships, facing new and sometimes difficult school work or worrying about finances. These issues should be addressed and managed effectively in fencing away depression among the students.

A study conducted by Kernan, Bogart and Wheat (2011) shows that students most likely to report their concerns with respiratory infections and sleep difficulties rather than problems related to psychological concerns such as stress, depression, anxiety and relationship problems. While another study by Dunne and Somerset (2004) reveals that students' area concerned with proactive health campaign promotion among students to create awareness among students who are having problems and challenges as students are posed with various challenges while coping with independent lifestyle that is having to live away for the first time from their parents. This may affect their daily lives while studying and coping with their studies. These difficulties may seem intrinsic to the university life, include management of stress related to academic demands and the need to cope with the everyday challenges.

Furthermore, according to previous studies by Coxon (2002) and Keeling (2002), anxieties raised regarding mental health issues, particularly depression add to the growing concern over students' mental health. A large proportion of the students' population were felt to be affected by mental health issues at some point, associating this with the stress caused by the pressures of independence and academic expectations.

The importance of available support services was a key feature of the discussion. Participants valued the provision of welfare services that they could approach with a range of issues. The drop-in nature of these services and range of advice given was considered to be particularly helpful to them.

Perhaps the most common solution to psychological problems is to provide counseling sessions for the victims. Recognizing the seriousness of the problem, many colleges have taken the

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

proactive measures by improving the counseling department at their respective colleges. Counseling centers are seen to implement a variety of innovative strategies to meet the mental health needs of students and the demand for services (Kitzrow, 2003).

These strategies may include offering more immediate and accessible appointments, especially for students in crisis, by providing phone consultations and evening and drop-in appointments. Peer counselors and graduate interns can also be an important resource that allow counseling centers to serve more students. Group therapy and self-help programs (e.g., books, pamphlets, videos, Internet resources about mental health issues) are alternatives to individual counseling that can be effective for many students.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted on 350 respondents at the Kolej Universiti Poly-Tech MARA (KUPTM), a subsidiary of MARA (Council of the Indegineous People) Malaysia.

They came from various programs at the university college. The questionnaires were distributed to the students by the college counsellors.

The questionnaire consisted of an instrument adopted from a study conducted in Singapore in 2016. It consisted of five (5) sections which were the demographic, self-diagnose mental health, symptoms of mental distress, type of stressors, support system (who do students confide with when they are distressed) and professional help. There were a total of 50 items altogether in the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis of the Demographic

Based on the descriptive analysis, it was found that majority of the respondents were female and most of them were between the ages of 18 to 20 years old. This is very crucial to the study as this age period shows that they just left high school and would definitely face problem in adapting themselves to college life.

In terms of place of birth and type of school attended, the majority of the respondents were from Selangor (34.4%) and came from daily schools (75.9%). This may influence the study outcome as they may have issues in adapting to living with others at the hostels and away from home.

The majority of the respondents also came from middle class income socioeconomic background (34.5%) which may influence the financial element in the study. The area of study showed that respondents studied various academic programs which consist of business management, computer science and social sciences.

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

Reliability test was conducted on the constructs of the questionnaire. The cronbach alpha values for the variables were were highly reliable (.760 - .829). This suggests that the instrument used was reliable in measuring the items involved in the framework.

Next, descriptive analysis was conducted on the stress level where a scale of 10 points was used for the respondents to indicate the stress level they are experiencing. The result is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis on stress level

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
stress level	340	1	10	5.55	2.060
Valid N (listwise)	340				

Table 1 clearly shows that the level of stress was at 5.55 which indicates moderately stressed. What can be concluded here is that in general the respondents were stressed and they were on the brink of facing a higher degree of stress level.

From the mental health construct result, it was found that the respondents' have the responsibility to finance their own studies which was the main factor to poor mental health. This could be linked to the respondents' socio-economic background as the majority of them came from middle-income family. Meanwhile the respondents' refusal to specify their mental health knowledge and history registered as the second most influential.

Meanwhile from the symptoms of mental stress experienced perspective, it could be concluded the respondents had experienced all the symptoms listed. Sudden mood changes and lack of energy or motivation both had been determined as the main symptoms. Sudden mood change may be the result of lack of energy or motivation where they were easily snapped into different mood swings which will result into anxiety. Anxiety had also been determined as one of the symptoms.

The results for factors that lead to mental stress indicated that financial difficulties had been the number one stressor followed by pressure of examination, workload deadlines, requirement to maintain academic grades, looking for job to finance the study and personal problems

The second part of the analysis was the independent test to prove the second null hypothesis to see whether there is a significant difference in gender to the level of the students' stress level.

Ho_1: There is no significant difference between male and female undergraduates level of stress.

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

Table 2: Independent samples test on gender and stress level

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
stress level	Equal variances assumed	1.039	.309	-.968	338	.334	-.219	.226	-.663	.226
	Equal variances not assumed			-.957	301.941	.339	-.219	.228	-.668	.231

Table 2 shows there is a low significant difference between male and female undergraduates level of distress at KUPTM as the $p < 0.05$. (.309) therefore Ho_1 is accepted.

The correlation and regression analyses were conducted further to confirm the result of the descriptive analyses and test the hypotheses. The elements in the descriptive analyses had been categorized into two main constructs that were the academic stress construct and the personal problem construct which formed hypotheses 2 and 3.

Table 3: Correlation among the variables

Correlations

		acad_stress	personal_prob	self_diagnosed MHP
acad_stress	Pearson Correlation	1	.531**	.478**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	339	338	322
personal_prob	Pearson Correlation	.531**	1	.548**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	338	339	322
Symptom of MHP	Pearson Correlation	.478**	.548**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	322	322	323

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Ho_2: The academic stress has no significant relationship to mental health problems among undergraduate students.

.

Ho_3: The personal problems have no significant relationship to mental health problems among undergraduate students.

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

Table 3 result show that there is a moderately significant positive correlation between academic problems (.478) and symptoms of mental health problems (.531). Therefore, the second and third null hypotheses are rejected.

Table 4: Model summary

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.592[a]	.351	.347	.52340

a. Predictors: (Constant), personal_prob, acad_prob

Table 4 shows both independent variables explain R square =35.1% in symptoms of mental health. This indicates that there is a significant correlation as the F value is 85.901.

Table 5: Coefficient

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.016	.124		8.165	.000
	acad_prob	.185	.040	.252	4.664	.000
	personal_prob	.369	.048	.415	7.693	.000

a. Dependent Variable: symptoms of Mental Health Problems

Further analysis in Table 5 shows that the t–values indicates that academic and personal problems contribute to the prediction of the symptom of mental health among the undergraduate students of KUPTM.

Based on the above findings, the null hypotheses H_{02} and H_{O3} are rejected. Thus confirming that academic and personal problems have a significant relations to the state of the undergraduates' mental health problem.

Due to the low level of stress that the students are suffering (mean = 5.55) therefore, the majority did not seek support from the counsellor (78.5%), doctor (56.1%), peer support group 55%, helpline 48.2% and student representative (58.7%). However, an independent sample test was conducted to see whether there is a significant difference between those male and female who seek support for their mental problem.

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

DISCUSSIONS

This study was carried out to investigate the mental health condition and stress level of undergraduate students form a private university. As stressed earlier, mental health has become an issue that needs to be given extra attention by all the parties involved in the education industry. This is even more pressing as these youngsters are the ones who will decide the country's future direction. The study was carried out with the main aim to gauge the overall mental health of the students, what is the main contributing factor to such condition and how do they manage the it.

From the descriptive analysis it was found out that most of the students suffered from moderately poor mental health condition as the stress level for most of them was at the moderate level. Based on a 10 point scale from not stressed (1) to being extremely stressed (10), most of the respondents fell under the moderately stressed with points indicator ranging from 5 to 7. The respondents thought the main possible reason for feeling stress which could lead extremely poor mental health was the caring responsibility that they had to fulfill. Since they were still students and such responsibility had not been placed on their shoulder as yet that was why most of them fell under the moderately stressed category.

From the perspective of stress symptoms, all the respondents agreed that they were experiencing all the symptoms listed. Perhaps the most important symptoms that need to be carefully monitored would be the lack of energy or motivation, anxiety level and sudden mood changes. These three symptoms were registered as the main stress factors. The students should be closely monitored as sudden mood changes and lack of energy or motivation can easily snapped into different mood swings which will result into anxiety. Once the students start to experience anxiety the probability to falling into the extremely stressed category will be greater. These three symptoms need to be closely monitored. The rest of the symptoms experienced may lead to the conclusion that all respondents had experienced poor mental health symptoms.

From the results also, the main stressor under personal problem construct was the financial element. This is seen corresponds to the majority of the respondents who came from the middle-class background. Students whose parents fall under this category or better known as the M40 will not be given a full-study loan either by MARA or PTPTN. They are either granted partial study loan or not being granted a study loan altogether. On the other hand, students coming from low income category or the B40 will be given full study loan whist students whose parent fall under the high income group or the T20 will opt to finance their study on their own.

Being a private university, tuition fee is expected to be higher than the public university. In order to sustain their study and college life, the majority of the respondents had to secure a part time job. This was the second influential factor under personal problem construct. It was also

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

found out from the results that academic related problems were also the main stressors for the respondents followed by workload datelines and maintaining academic grades or performance.

CONCLUSION

From the study it can be concluded that the students were experiencing a moderate level of stress. Meanwhile there was no significant different between the level of stress experience between the male and female students. It was also found that stress inflicted by academic activities and personal problems do have significant influence on the students' overall stress level which contribute to lack of motivation, anxiety, insomnia, hopelessness, worthlessness, sudden mood change, paranoia and suicidal thought. The personal problem that the students' are facing includes family problems, relationship problems, social pressure and inability to fit in, homesickness while the academic problems include workloads, meeting deadlines, grades/performance and examination.

The findings concluded that the students' have a moderate stress level which is due to these two constructs namely; the academic problems and personal problems. Among these two constructs, it was found that the students' personal problems are more influential that the academic problems to the mental health problems among them. Therefore, this findings corresponded with the previous studies.

Based on the conclusion, it is recommended that KUPTM provide more support services to the students' to ensure that they are not only healthy but also mentally healthy and will not pose any more problems to their future prospective employers.

REFERENCES

American College Health Association (ACHA-NCHA) (2008). American College Health Association–National College Health Assessment: Reference Group Data Report, Spring 2008. American College Health Association, Baltimore, MD 2008.

APA (2013) College students' mental health is a growing concern, survey finds. Vol 44, No. 6. June 2013.

Blanco, C., Okuda, M., Wright, C. et al. Mental health of college students and their non-college-attending peers: results from the National Epidemiologic Study on Alcohol and Related Conditions. Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2008; 65: 1429–1437.

Coxon, K. (2002). "Students are increasingly suffereing mental health problems", The Guardian, 2 December, 2002.

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

Dunne, C & Somerset, M. (2016). Health promotin in university: What do students want? Health Education, Volume 104. Issue 1, 2016

Kadison, R., & Digeronimo, T. F. (2004). College of the overwhelmed: The campus mental health crisis and what to do about it. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Keeling, R.P. (2002). "Risks to students' lives; setting priorities", Journal of Amerian College Health, Volumn, 51, No. 2, pp 53-7.

Kernan, W, Bogart, J and Wheat, M.E. (2011). Health related barriers to leaving away graduate students. Health Education, Volume 111, Issue 5, 2011.

Kitzrow, M. (2003) The Mental Health Needs of Today's College Students: Challenges and Recommendations. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 41, 167-181.

Martha Anne Kitzrow, (2003) The Mental Health Needs of Today's College Students: Challenges and Recommendations. NASPA Journal, Vol. 41, no. 1, Fall 2003.

mentalhealth.gov. (2017). www.mentalhealth.gov/basic/what is mental health/index.html. Accessed 28 April 2017).

New Straits Times. http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/09/172683/mental-health-malaysian-students-cause-worry-health-ministry. 12 Septemberr 2016. Accessed on 2 May 2017.

National Institute of Mental Health. Depression And College Students. (https://infocenter.nimh.nih.gov/pubstatic/NIH 12-4266/NIH 12-4266.pdf. . Accessed on 2 May 2017.

National Health and Morbidity Survey 2015. Non-Communicable Diseases, Risk Factors and Other Health Problems. http://www.iku.gov.my/images/IKU/Document/REPORT/nhmsreport2015vol2.pdf. Accessed on 16 October 2017.

Vivek B. Waghachavare, Girish B. Dhumale, Yugantara R. Kadam, and Alka D. GoreA (2013). Study of Stress among Students of Professional Colleges from an Urban area in India. Sultan Qaboos University Medical Journal . 2013 Aug; 13(3): 429–436. Published online 2013 Jun 25.

ISSN: 2455-8834

Volume:03, Issue:05 "May 2018"

Winters C & Arria A (2011) Adolescent brain development and drugs. *The Prevention Researcher*. 18(2), pp 21-24.

