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Final Year Project Report

Masters

PhD

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**STRESS, COPING AND LIFE SATISFACTION:
A STUDY AMONG RESERVE OFFICER TRAINING UNIT (PALAPES)
AND POLICE UNDERGRADUATE VOLUNTARY CORPS (SUKSIS) OF
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK**

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This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for a
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The project entitled ‘Stress, Coping and Life Satisfaction: A study among Reserve Officer Training Unit (PALAPES) and Police Undergraduate Voluntary Corps (SUKSIS) of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak’ was prepared by Nurhalida Binti Shoib and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Cognitive Science)

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ABSTRACT

Stress and coping are important variables that strongly related to each other and life satisfaction is the other element corresponds to both variables. This study examined the relationship between stress and coping strategies namely problem focused and emotion focused strategies and life satisfaction. 150 respondents were randomly selected from Kenanga college of University Malaysia Sarawak. Respondents completed a set of questionnaire of Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI-32) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). Result indicated that female experience more stress than male respondents. Stress has a significant relationship with problem focused strategies and this study recorded that there was no correlation between stress and life satisfaction. Multiple regression tests was carried out to test which coping strategies influenced life satisfaction and the result shows that students use emotion focused strategies as their ways of coping.

Keywords: stress, coping, problem focused, emotion focused, life satisfaction

ABSTRAK

Tekanan dan teknik menangani adalah pembolehubah penting yang berkait rapat antara satu sama lain dan kepuasan hidup adalah elemen yang lain sepadan dengan kedua-dua pembolehubah. Kajian ini meneliti hubungan antara tekanan, teknik menangani iaitu berorientasikan kepada masalah dan strategi berorientasikan kepada emosi dan kepuasan hidup. 150 responden telah dipilih secara rawak dari Kolej Kenanga Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Responden diberi borang soal selidik yang terdiri daripada Persepsi Tekanan Skala (PSS-10), Mengatasi Strategi Inventori (CSI-32) dan Skala Kepuasan Hidup (SWLS). Keputusan tekanan menunjukkan bahawa responden wanita mengalami tekanan yang lebih tinggi berbanding responden lelaki. Tekanan mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan dengan strategi berorientasi pada masalah dan kajian ini mencatatkan bahawa tidak ada korelasi antara tekanan dan kepuasan hidup. Juga, ujian regresi berganda telah dijalankan antara yang strategi yang mana mempengaruhi kepuasan hidup dan keputusan mengesahkan bahawa pelajar menggunakan strategi berorientasi pada emosi sebagai cara mereka menghadapi tekanan.

Kata kunci: tekanan, teknik menangani, fokus masalah, fokus emosi, kepuasan hidup

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Stress is part and parcel of human life and it could be detrimental to health, mind and body. According to Robotham (2008), the word “stress” is given by Hans Selye back in 1936 which he defined stress as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change”. Students in higher education especially in universities experienced different kind of stress every day. The sources of stress are classified by five factors which are social, family, school, relationship and physical mental factors (Wen, 2010). There are growing evidence had been done under topic of stress among students which indicated the term stress among students becoming common.

Numerous studies had been done under topic of stress. By reviewing previous studies investigating stress and coping strategies for the last 10 years, the target group that researcher focusing and frequently used as participants is in medical field which are nursing and medical students. Yusoff, Yee, Wei, Siong, Meng, Bin and Rahim (2011) conducted a study on stressors and coping strategies among Malaysian medical students. The results show that there are high occurrence of distressed among students and the factor contributing are related to university and parent income status.

According to Gibbons, Dempster and Moutray (2008), nurses and nursing students more likely to experience distress which is the negative stress and can also experience eustress which are positive stress. Although many researchers focused on medical and nursing students, there

also diverges research of stress among students in general. Study on stress still ongoing and tested by numerous variables. Stressors, eustress, distress, academic achievement and other variables are used to indicate the impact of stress and dependent variables towards students, organizational and in general. Thus, this study will focus on a dependent variable named life satisfaction because the research on student's life satisfaction is still low in interest and the relationship between stress and life satisfaction among Kenanga's students can be known.

Problem Statement

Stress among student has become common in learning environment whether in schools, universities or colleges. Stressor is the result of the existence of stress and depends on the severity of stress (Wen, 2010). Stressors might be varies according to the individuals itself and many students do not aware of the consequences and learn how to manage stress. Kenanga's College is one of the colleges that students of Unimas stayed in. The resident of Kenanga's college is the students joining the co-curriculum organization in Unimas which are PALAPES (Reserve Officer Training Unit) and SUKSIS (Police Undergraduate Voluntary Corps).

This study is interested to carry out the research at Kenanga College because the students are participated in PALAPES and SUKSIS in which they are more active and expected to experience greater stress life compared to other students. Researchers have done arrays of study related to the students and stress. Numerous of the previous studies maintaining their focusing on the stress and coping of students especially among nursing students. Gibbons, Dempster and Moutray, (2008) stated that stress among nurses and nursing student does affect the well being and there is growing evidence to support it.

Coping strategies has been develop by Lazarus and Folkman (1985) which the emergence of problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. Stress and coping strategies are the two variables that always come together with another variables to complete a researcher. Previous study had done the research on stress and coping towards academic performance, stress and stressors and gender factor (Espenshade, Lynch & Zajacova, 2005).

However, the research on stress and coping among students in different year of study, age, gender and courses are still in low interest and this study will fill the gap with the relationship of stress and coping towards life satisfaction. The target population will be the resident of Kenanga college in Unimas with different demographical factor and the questionnaire will be distributed to determine the stress and coping strategies towards the life satisfaction.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this quantitative study is to determine the relationship between stress, coping strategies and life satisfaction among Kenanga's resident of Unimas.

There are five specific objectives that highlighted from this study which are:

- a) To compare the difference between male and female's stress
- b) To examine the relationship of stress level and problem-focused coping strategies
- c) To examine the relationship of stress level and emotion-focused coping strategies
- d) To determine the relationship between stress and life satisfaction.
- e) To verify the dominant factor of coping strategies that influence student's life satisfaction.

Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses that can be gain throughout this study are:

- a) There is a significant difference between male and female's stress
- b) There is a significant relationship between stress level and emotion-focused coping strategies among Kenanga's resident.
- c) There is a significant relationship between stress level and problem-focused coping strategies among Kenanga's resident
- d) There is a significant the relationship between stress and life satisfaction among Kenanga's resident.

Conceptual Framework

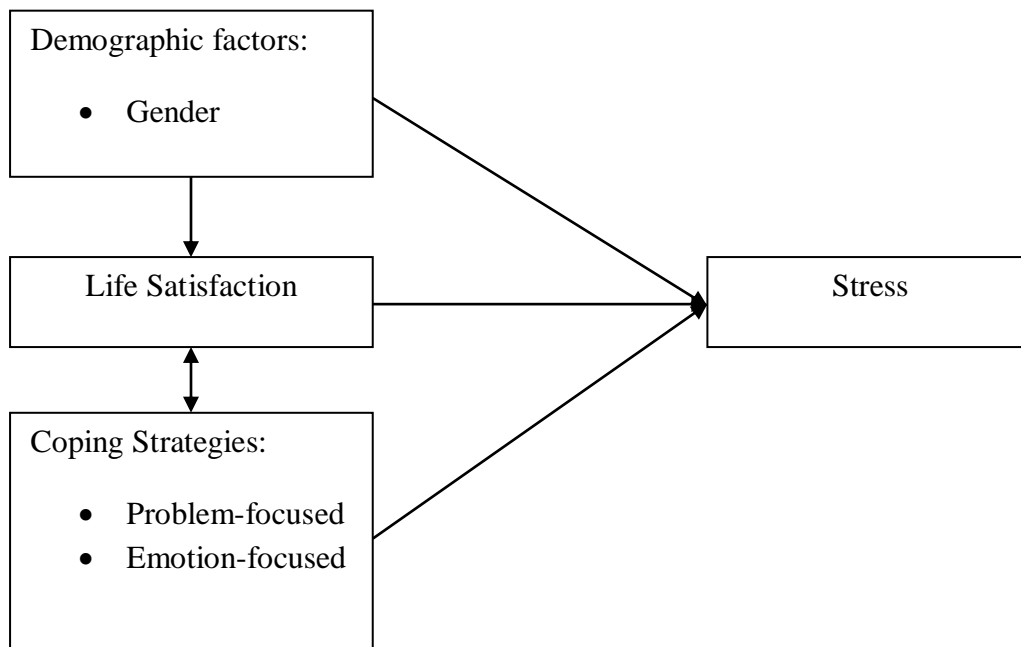


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of this research study

Figure 1 above shows the conceptual framework used in this study. There are four variables that been used for this research study namely gender, stress, coping strategies and life satisfaction. The 150 residents of Kenanga College are selected randomly and voluntarily as the respondents. The independent variables are the demographic factor of gender, coping strategies and stress while life satisfaction acts as the dependent variable for this study.

Definitions of Terms

Conceptual definitions

Stress: Papalia and Feldman (2012) claimed that stress is the damage that occurs when perceived environmental demands which called “stressors”, exceed or reached a person’s capacity to cope with them.

Coping: Coping defined as the person’s constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that appraised as taxing or exceeding the person’s resources. According To Lazarus and Folkman (1985) coping strategies can be divided into two general types; problem-focused and emotion-focused.

Life Satisfaction: Shin and Johnson (1987) define life satisfaction as a global assessment of a person’s quality of life according to his chosen criteria. The judgments of satisfaction are dependent upon a comparison of one’s state of affairs with what is thought to be an appropriate standard.

Operational definitions

Stress: Perceived stress score (PSS-10) is a 10-items of questions with 5-point scale from 0 to 4 develop by Cohen, Karmarack and Melmenstein (1983). The result for the PSS-10 is based on the sum of scores.

Coping: There are two ways of coping strategies; problem-focused and emotion-focused will be determined by using Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI-32) adapted from Lazarus Ways of Coping which containing 32-item that respondents need to answer with 5-point scale from 0 to 4.

Life satisfaction: The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) is used to determine the respondent's life satisfaction containing 5-items with 7-point Likert type of scale ranging from 1 to 7.

Significance of the Study

Student in higher education may experienced a lot of things and they could reached their limitations and the stress arise may affect their lives. This study will be conducted in Kenanga's resident of Unimas which the active students stayed in are focusing both their curriculum and co-curriculum activities. By carried out this study, it could offer information on the stress based on gender, stress and coping strategies as well as the effect on Kenanga's resident life satisfaction.

It can raise the awareness of students who struggle on both activities which the administration of universities can do some changes to prevent those stress harmed the students. Furthermore, this study would be beneficial to students that they can know their level of stress and how to manage their stress effectively. To the future researchers, this study can provide baseline information on the study of stress and coping strategies among students towards their life satisfaction in which the target group can be varied.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress

Life is an expedition with a reason. The hardship or happiness of life is driven by one's perspective whether the road to be taken are easy, tricky or challenging. In the process of living a life, the trouble along the journey would arouse the stress and provide discomfort to those experiences it. Stress is defined as a response brought by various external events which involves psychological responses and can be viewed as positive and negative experience (Seyle, 1976).

Papalia and Feldman (2012) claimed that stress is the damage that occurs when perceived environmental demands which called "stressors", exceed or reached a person's capacity to cope with them. According to Girdano, Dorothy and Everly (2009) stress is a gift we give ourselves to remind us that we have temporarily lost our way, and the uneasiness we feel motivate us to get back on the track.

Students in higher education especially university students who has to live in an environment where academic grade and co curriculum are important in which they have to compete each other would engaged with stress in their university life. Nevertheless, the source of stress which is stressors might be varied among individuals itself.

Robotham (2008) stated that the stressors among students in higher education can be classified by several aspects namely stressors related to studying, examinations, financial issues, transition to university and stressors related to being on a different country. Another study had been done on first year college students listed stressors into four components which are interaction at school, performances in and out of class, managing work, family and school's life (Zajacova, Lynch & Espenshade, 2005).

The impact of stress depends on the weight of the stressors and how the individuals handle the stress. By referring to the perspective of health, the impact of stress can be harmful to the body and affect one's functioning (Lyon, 2000). Too much stress can lead to fatigue (Maes, 2009), headaches (Davis, Holm, Myers & Suda, 1998; Fanciullacci, Alessandri & Fanciullacci, 1998; Armstrong, Wittrock, Robinson, 2006; Bjorling, 2009) colds (Cohen, Tyrell & Smith, 1991) and increasing the heart rate (Fontana & Mc Laughlin, 1998; Suarez & Williams, 1989).

Stress and Gender

Men and women act in response distinctively with certain aspects including stress. According to Girdano, Dusek and Everly (2009) when describing the body's functioning, women secrete the hormone oxytocin as a part of the response to stress which produces calmness and counters stress compared to men who secrete testosterone when under stress and do not get the calmness effect unlike the secretion of oxytocin in women.

The study on stress and gender is still under little interest where not much research has been done. Nevertheless, Matheny, Tovar, and Curlette (2008) carried out the study of stress among U.S and Mexican college students where they used the perceived stress scale (PSS) and the result found that there is no significant difference between male and female students of stress.

Costes, Andrews, Helmke and Steiner (2006) did the study among the third and fourth year medical students in an American university reported that female students faced greater stress and challenges in doctoral studies compared to the male students. For them who are doctoral students, they are more likely to experience a high level of stress because of the frequent evaluation of their studies, competitive atmosphere and high workload.

Time pressure, financial worries, family factor and lack personal time were listed as sources of stress. Besides, Wen (2010) stated in the research study that male students experience tough stress than female students in family factor issues. This result showed that lack of communication between parents and children especially between male students cause them to experience stress compared to female students who close and get along well with their parents.

Stress and Coping Strategies

Coping is defined as the person's constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources. In medical perspective, coping is defined as any attempt to counterbalance the stress arousal (Girdano, Dusek & Everly, 2009).

The conceptual analysis of stress and coping which known as cognitive transactional model of stress had emerged in 1966 founded by Lazarus which he stated that stress is built up in three stages; primary appraisal, secondary appraisal and coping (Carver, Weintraub & Scheier, 1989).

Primary appraisal is the process of identify a threat to oneself which the person assessed whether he or she has anything at risk in this encounter (Folkman, Lazarus, Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986). Then, the second stages is the secondary appraisal where the mind begin to process what is the best solution and the potential response to deal with those threat and the last stage; coping is the action that executes those potential responses (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

Based on the research by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), they had developed the model of coping strategies. The two types of coping strategies are problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies.

Problem-Focused coping:

Aimed at problem solving which find a way to alter the stressors. This strategy relies on using active ways to directly tackle the situation that caused the stress where the encounter must concentrate on the problem. Examples of problem focused coping include active coping, using instrumental support such as mentors and planning.

Problem focused coping strategies looking at the situation objectively, and without letting emotion get in the way and the encounter might begin to understand the source of the stress. Problem-focused coping was used more frequently in encounters that were appraised by the person more changeable than in those appraised as unchangeable (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

Emotion-Focused coping:

This type of coping involves attempts to reduce and manage the emotional distress that is related to the situations. Emotion-focused coping was used more frequently in encounters that were appraised more unchangeable than in those appraised as changeable. Types of emotion-focused coping including self-blame, seeking emotional support, wishful thinking and minimizing threat (Aldwin, Folkman, Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1980).

Previous study about stress and coping strategies focused more on nursing students. There are growing body evidence on stress among nurses and nursing students and its affect on student's well-being. Gibbons, Dempster and Moutray (2010) had done the study on 280 nursing students in their final year of studies. They use the Brief COPE (Coping Orientation of Problem Experienced) 28-item scale instrument where four factor of coping namely approach coping, avoidance coping, altering consciousness and seeking support and the result found that the nursing students tend to use altering consciousness as their method to cope with stress.

Another study conducted by Dilinger, Wiegman and Taneja (2003) examined 50 students who enrolled the Professional Pilot Training program in USA. The results of the studies on stress-coping strategies show that individuals cope with stress more effectively when they are facing a problem or when their coping strategy focuses on a problem and requires their action. The researcher points out that the lack number of sample as their limitation in this study.

Yusoff, Yee, Wei, Siong, Meng, Bin and Rahim (2011) done the study on stressors and coping strategies among 359 first year of Malaysian medical students which the result show that there are high occurrence of distressed among students and the factor contributing are related to university and academic. They use the Brief COPE 30-item scale instrument and the result show that the students prefer emotion-focused coping (positive reinterpretation and turning to religion) as their ways to cope with stress.

Furthermore, both researcher Yusoff et al., (2011) and Gibbons, Dempster and Moutray, (2010) used the same instrument of coping strategies by Carver in 1997, the Brief COPE instrument with 28 and 30-item scale. The Cronbach's alpha for this instrument is 0.80 which is found to be valid and reliable. The limitations for both study is the study design may not reflect the actual and real pattern of stress in the population. The other limitation is the sample used are focusing on certain group; final year and first year of study which lead to sample bias that incitement to the accuracy of the result.

Life Satisfaction

“The assessment of satisfaction with life is a cognitive judgmental process” (Beuningen, 2012). The phrase can be understands as a process that occur during someone trade off good and bad aspect in their life. Shin and Johnson (1987) define life satisfaction as a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to the chosen criteria. According to Proctor, Linley, and

Maltby (2008) life satisfaction draw attention to its role as a buffer against the negative effects of stress, psychological problems, and disorders. Life satisfaction is linked with happiness and the achievement of the 'good life', whereas negative evaluations of life satisfaction are associated with depression and unhappiness.

A study conducted by Paschali and Tsitsas (2010) involved 200 university students to assess their anxiety level and life satisfaction in university life. The result found that students who have low anxiety scores have more life satisfaction compared to those have high anxiety scores. Similar studies done by Valois, Zullig, Huebner and Drane (2001) stated that students in high school who achieved low life satisfaction levels tend to act violence, risky and destructive behavior as well as other bad attitude such as robbery and stealing.

In the other hands, Hamarat, Thompson, Zabrocky, Steel and Matheny (2001) carried out the study on 189 peoples in three group of ages (18 to 40 years, 41 to 65 years, 66 years and above) to investigate the age differences in perceived stress, coping resource availability, and life satisfaction. They claimed that low scores of life satisfaction level are more likely to have high level of perceived stress. Meanwhile, Gilman & Huebner (2006) who found high levels of satisfaction with life to be positively related to higher academic performance, self esteem, parental relationships and interpersonal relationships. It was also found that high levels of satisfaction with life were negatively correlated with poor attitudes towards social stress, depression and anxiety.

At present there is very limited research on the effects of stress and coping strategies towards life satisfaction among students, particularly in Borneo. The aim of the current study is to investigate the relationship between stress, emotion focused and problem focused coping strategies on life satisfaction among Kenanga's resident in Unimas.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Research Design

The research that was conducted aimed to determine the relationship between stress, coping strategies and life satisfaction. This study used the quantitative approach which was more convenience and suitable for this kind of research. Quantitative research is based on the collection and analysis of numerical data where the researcher looks into the relationship between variables and visualizes it in terms of hypothesis and result (Creswell, 2013).

Questionnaire was prepared to obtain the data from the samples. Correctional study is used to study the association between one or more dependents and independents variables. There were several variables that tested in this study; independent variables are demographic factors, coping strategies and stress level while the dependent variable is life satisfaction.

Population and Sample

The population selected based on accessible population which is population that the researcher can realistically select from. Kenanga college of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), the population for this research topic with total population of 540 students. According to Landreneau (2004) sample defined as a subset of the population which is selected to be the respondent in a research study. The samples were randomly selected among the Kenanga's resident who was students and involve in Reserve Officer Training Unit (PALAPES) and *Police Undergraduate Voluntary Corps* (SUKSIS). PALAPES and SUKSIS are the main co-curriculum organization unit in which the students stayed in a college separately from other students.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study is questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into four sections which were demographic information, Perceived Stress Scale 10 (PSS-10), Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI-32) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). All the sections are essential for this research to gain the data from the selected samples.

Section	Item
A	Demographic information
B	Stress (PSS-10)
C	Coping strategies (CSI-32)
D	Life satisfaction (SWLS)

Section A: Demographic information. The first section of the questionnaire which is Section A will be asked about the demographic features of the respondent. The information of the respondents is crucial as the background of the sample is needed to determine the gender and other features. Age, gender, year of study, uniform and faculty are the items that will be asked in this section.

Section B: Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). This section is generating to know the stress level of the respondents. It has 10 items of instrument questions. PSS-10 inventory was developed by Cohen, Karmarck and Mermelstein in 1983 originally contain 14 items of questions. Later, the developer revised the inventory and come out with 10 items instrument which is the shorter version. The PSS-10 is created in order to indicate the degree in which one's dealing with life is considered as stressful (Ramírez & Hernández, 2007).