UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**EFFECT OF PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME ON STRESS
LEVEL AND COPING RESPONSES AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS**

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By

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This study consisted of two parts. In the first part of the study, the descriptive-correlational research method was used to explore the different ways of coping and level of stress among college students at two different points of time in a semester. Apart from that, the relationship between these two variables as well as their differences in terms of sex, level, year, and course of study were also explored.

In the second part of the study, pretest-posttest design was used. A pre-test was administered to all subjects of the study to measure the level of stress before treatment condition was introduced. They were measured again after the treatment was given to determine the effect of such a psychoeducational programme on the level of stress. The treatment condition was in the form of six group sessions, 50 minutes each, every week conducted by the researcher.

The overall number of subjects who participated and completed all questionnaires during week 3 was 395. The size of the sample used in the data analysis for the experimental and control group was 32 each.

Results showed that the majority of TAR College students experience moderate to high levels of stress at the beginning of an academic semester. There was no significant increase in the level of stress experienced by students from week 3 to week 11. The level of stress among college students did not differ in terms of sex, level, year, and course of study.

The most frequently used coping response among students was positive reinterpretation and growth. Male and female students differed in the use of various coping responses. Certain ways of coping were related to the level of stress among students.

Experimental study showed that the psychoeducational programme had a positive effect on the level of stress among students. The decrease in the level of stress was greater among subjects who had undergone group sessions as compared to those who had not in the control group.

As a conclusion, the study has provided some insights to the effectiveness of using psychoeducational programme to help students cope with their stress, the level of stress among students, and their coping responses used by college

students. This information will be helpful to student counsellors in helping students to cope with their stress.

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Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

KESAN PROGRAM PSIKOPENDIDIKAN KE ATAS PARAS TEKANAN DAN CARA-CARA MENGATASI TEKANAN DI KALANGAN PELAJAR KOLEJ

Oleh

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Kajian ini terdiri daripada dua bahagian. Pada bahagian pertama kajian, kaedah diskriptif-korelasi digunakan untuk meneliti pelbagai cara mengatasi tekanan dan tahap tekanan di kalangan pelajar pada dua masa yang berlainan dalam satu semester. Selain daripada itu, hubungan antara kedua-dua pembolehubah serta perbezaan mereka dari segi jantina, peringkat, tahun, dan kursus pengajian juga dikaji.

Dalam bahagian kedua, kaedah sebelum dan selepas ujian digunakan. Sebelum rawatan diberikan, semua subjek kajian diuji untuk menentukan tahap tekanan. Selepas rawatan, mereka diuji lagi untuk menentukan kesan program psikopendidikan ke atas tahap tekanan. Rawatan diberi dalam bentuk enam sesi kumpulan. Setiap sesi kumpulan mengambil masa 50 minit dan dikendalikan oleh pengkaji.

Jumlah subjek yang mengambil bahagian dalam kajian pada minggu ketiga ialah 395. Saiz sampel yang digunakan dalam menganalisis data untuk kumpulan eksperimen dan kumpulan kawalan masing-masing adalah 32.

Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan pelajar di Kolej TAR mengalami tahap tekanan yang sederhana dan tinggi pada awal semester. Tiada peningkatan yang signifikan pada tahap tekanan dari minggu ketiga ke minggu kesebelas. Tahap tekanan di kalangan pelajar tiada berbeza dari segi jantina, peringkat, tahun, dan kursus pengajian.

Cara mengatasi tekanan yang paling kerap digunakan ialah *positive reinterpretation and growth*. Cara untuk mengatasi tekanan adalah berbeza di antara kalangan pelajar lelaki dengan perempuan. Sesetengah cara untuk mengatasi tekanan mempunyai hubungkait dengan tahap tekanan di kalangan pelajar.

Kajian eksperimen menunjukkan bahawa program psikopendidikan memberi kesan yang positif terhadap tahap tekanan di kalangan pelajar. Penurunan tahap tekanan di kalangan plelajar yang telah menyertai sesi kumpulan adalah lebih ketara kalau dibandingkan dengan mereka yang tidak menyertai sesi tersebut.

Kesimpulannya, kajian ini telah memberi pengertian kepada keberkesanan penggunaan program psikopendidikan untuk membantu pelajar mengatasi tekanan, tahap tekanan di kalangan pelajar, dan pelbagai cara yang digunakan

oleh pelajar kolej untuk mengatasi tekanan. Maklumat ini amat berguna bagi

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of variance
BDI	Beck Depression Inventory
CSI	Coping Strategies Inventory
df	Degree of freedom
DSP®	Derogatis Stress Profile
F	Fisher's F ratio
η^2	Eta-squared
M	Mean
MS	Mean square
N	Total number in a sample
p	Probability
r	Pearson product-moment correlation
r_s	Spearman rank correlation
RTSS	Total Stress Score in week 11
SD	Standard deviation
SE	Standard error of measurement
SRRS	Social Readjustment Rating Scale
SSS	Subjective Stress Score
t	Computed value of t-test
TARC	Tunku Abdul Rahman College
TSS	Total Stress Score in week 3
U	Computed value of Mann-Whitney U-test

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Every human being that exists on this earth is subjected to a certain degree of stress so much so that it has become part and parcel of our lives. In our daily lives, opportunities to be stressed are everywhere and the causes of stress are multidimensional. Regardless of who we are, students, workers, housewives, professionals and so forth, we are all subjected to various types of stressors in our lives. For instance, students feel pressured because of expectations of their parents and teachers, professional people feel stressful because of the demand of their work and responsibilities and so forth.

Stress should not be seen as negative all the time. It can be motivating and energizing sometimes when it presses us to do more and to make greater endeavour in whatever that we are doing. Therefore, it is quite normal and healthy to have a certain amount of pressure in our daily lives because it will boost our performance and even motivate us to achieve goals in life (Rice, 1992). However, when the pressure becomes overwhelming and exceeds the ability of an individual to cope with, it becomes harmful to our physical and psychological well-being. Excessive stress can cause fatigue in our body system so much so that it causes behavioural, physical, and even mental problems. It is sad to see that in the fast growing world, people tend to push themselves beyond the limits

of their capability to manage their own lives and put their mental as well as physical health at risk.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimation of 400 million people around the world is suffering from mental disorders in the 21st century. This number will be expected to increase tremendously over the next 20 years. The increasing number of mental disorders cases could be a reflection of the hectic and stressful lifestyles that are prevalent in the new millennium ("Dare to care", 2003).

Frequently, we are not only being exposed to pressure and stress around us directly but also indirectly. In the era of electronic mass media, we are constantly being exposed to news about stressful events all over the world. Each day we hear news in the media about accidents, crimes, tragedies, conflicts between nations, terrorism, suicide, rape cases and so on. The message that we get indirectly from the media is that the world is full of trouble and is no longer a safe place to live in because of these unfortunate events. Although we are not experiencing these stressful events ourselves, they do have an effect on us indirectly if we are exposed to such news daily. These types of news may be sensational at times to the listeners or readers, they may also induce unnecessary fear and anxiety. For instance, if we are constantly being bombarded by news about rape and robbery, we may feel anxious and afraid when we go out or when we stay in the house alone.

In our daily conversation with friends or family members, a considerable amount of the content of our conversation is about stressful events that are related to either oneself or others for instance, problems at school or at work, interpersonal problems with colleagues, course-mates, friends, and so on. Each one of us, regardless of who we are, seems to experience some level of stress. Because of the universality of stress to people, and the effect that it has on people physically and psychologically, it has become a very popular subject of study for the past decade.

A simple click on the internet enables one to find a few thousands of articles on the subject of stress easily. For example, a browse in yahoo dot com by using the words "stress" yielded 35,900 web matches. There are tremendous amount of studies done on the various issues of stress based on the various theoretical approaches of stress that are discussed in detail in chapter two.

Most of the researches on stress were done in the West. In the past, people have a general opinion that stress affects people who are living in the Western industrialized countries more than those living in the Asian countries. Now, the situation has changed. In Malaysia, for instance, stress has become one of the most talked about issues recently although we are lagging behind in terms of stress research in comparison with our western counterparts. More and more people are suffering from depression and other mental disorders. In order to cope with this increasing awareness and number of mental illnesses, the new Mental Health Act was passed in the Parliament in August 2001. Consequently, private

hospitals in Malaysia have been compelled to set up mental health units while the existing mental health units in the government hospitals have been decentralized and improved (Ministry of Health, 2002). It was reported in the newspaper that 13 percent of adolescents in Malaysia might have mental health problems such as depression. This statistics was based on the 1996 Mental Health Morbidity Survey done by the Malaysian Health Ministry (as cited in Chelvi & Damis, 2002).

Malaysian Health Ministry statistics showed that 1,837 people above the age of 12 attempted suicide in the year 2000. The government hospitals recorded 151 cases of people above the age of 12 succeeded in killing themselves. The figures may be higher because not all suicides are being reported systematically. In situations whereby the deaths are not medically inspected and certified, suicides are likely to be categorized as accidental or undetermined deaths. Besides that, some suicide cases may be kept secret by the families because death by suicide is considered a crime under our Malaysian Penal Code and the suicidal act is generally despised by our conservative society (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2002).

Malaysians are generally still quite conservative in their perception regarding mental health problems and mental illnesses. Many people are very cautious in talking about them openly especially if one of their family members is having the illness. People who are subjected to excessive amount of stress and suffered from depression and anxiety may present themselves with physical symptoms