UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ANXIETY AND OTHER PERSONALITY TRAITS AMONG STUDENTS IN A MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY

YASMIN ASGARI

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By

YASMIN ASGARI

Thesis Submitted to the School Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

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Chairman: **Lily Mastura Haj Harun, Ph.D.**

Faculty: **Educational Studies**

This study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between anxiety and personality traits among students of Universiti Putra Malaysia. In addition, demographic factors associated to students' anxiety and personality traits were determined. The study hopes to provide more insight on mental health that could enhance the alleviation of social and academic problems among students and increase their academic achievement.

The present study is a descriptive correlational research. The relationship of state and trait anxiety and personality traits was investigated. Besides, the differences in demographic variables with regards to anxiety and differences between personality traits of anxious and non-anxious students were also examined. Five faculties were randomly selected from the list of 13 faculties at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Accordingly, based on the knowledge disciplines, 263 subjects were

selected from the five faculties using the cluster random sampling. Two instruments, EPQ and STAI (form Y) were used in data collection to measure state and trait anxiety.

The results indicated that in general, and in comparison with some other countries, students had moderate level of state and trait anxiety. All statistical analysis in this study showed the validity of Eysenck's theory (Eysenck, 1947, 1952) and Spielberger 's model of anxiety (Spelberger, 1966), Introversion and Neuroticism were positively related to state and trait anxiety ($P<.05$) while Extraversion and Stability were negatively correlated to state and trait anxiety ($P<.05$). Moreover, significant differences were found in anxiety across some demographic variables including: age, gender, ethnicity, course of study, marital status and place of residence. Besides, significant relationship was reported between personality traits and some demographic variables. Finally, the stepwise multiple regression revealed that the personality traits and some demographic variables had significant linear relationship with anxiety.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master of Science

KAITAN ANTARA KEBIMBANGAN DAN SIFAT PERSONALITI DI KALANGAN PENUNTUT UNIVERSITI DI MALAYSIA

Oleh

YASMIN ASGARI

September 2002

Pengerusi: **Lily Mastura Hj Harun, Ph.D.**

Fakulti: **Pengajian Pendidikan**

Kajian ini adalah suatu usaha meninjau dan meneliti kaitan antara kebimbangan dan tret personaliti di kalangan penuntut di Universiti Putra Malaysia. Faktor-faktor demografi berkaitan dengan kebimbangan penuntut dan tret personaliti mereka telah dikenalpasti. Diharapkan kajian ini akan memberi pemahaman mengenai kesihatan mental yang boleh meringankan masalah sosial dan akademik di kalangan penuntut dan meningkatkan pencapaian akademik mereka.

Kajian ini merupakan penyelidikan korelasi keperihalan. Kaitan antara kebimbangan seketika dan kebimbangan tret dan juga sifat personaliti telah disiasat. Di samping itu, perbezaan kebimbangan dari segi pembolehubah demografi dan perbezaan di antara tret personaliti di kalangan penuntut yang resah dan tidak resah diselidiki. Lima fakulti daripada 13 fakulti di Universiti Putra Malaysia telah dipilih secara rambang. Dengan berdasarkan disiplin

pengetahuan, 263 responden telah dipilih dengan menggunakan kaedah pensampelan rawak berkelompok. Dua peralatan, EPQ dan STAI (borang Y) telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data bagi mengukur kebimbangan seketika dan kebimbangan tret.

Hasil menunjukkan secara amnya, dan dibandingkan dengan beberapa negara lain, penuntut-penuntut dalam kajian ini menghadapi tahap kebimbangan seketika dan kebimbangan tret yang sederhana. Semua analisa statistik dalam kajian ini menunjukkan kesahihan teori Eysenck (Eysenck, 1947, 1952) dan model kebimbangan Spielberger (Spielberger, 1966), Introversi dan Neurotisme mempunyai hubungan positif dengan kebimbangan seketika dan kebimbangan tret (P<.05) manakala Ekstraversi dan Kestabilan mempunyai korelasi negatif dengan kebimbangan seketika dan kebimbangan tret (P<.05). Tambahan pula, perbezaan yang nyata telah didapati pada kebimbangan dalam beberapa pembolehubah demografi termasuk: umur, jantina, kaum, kursus pengajian, status perkahwinan dan tempat tinggal. Di samping itu, hubungan yang ketara telah dilaporkan di antara tret personaliti dan beberapa pembolehubah demografi. Akhirnya, regresi berganda turutan menunjukan bahawa sifat personaliti dan beberapa pembolehubah demografi mempunyai hubungan linear yang ketara dengan kebimbangan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CLAI	Chemical Laboratory Anxiety Inventory
df	Degree of freedom
E	Extroversion
EPQ	Eysenck Personality Questionnaire
F	Computed value of F test
HSD	Honest Significant Difference
M	Mean
MS	Mean Square
N	Neuroticism
N	Total Number in sample
n	Number in sub scale
P	Psychoticism
P	Probability
PT	Personality Traits
R	Pearson Moment Product Correlation
S	State
SD	Standard Deviation
SS	Sum of Squares
STAI	State Trait Anxiety Inventory
T	Trait
UPM	University Putra Malaysia
US	United States of America

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter covers an introduction to level of students' anxiety and their personality traits. Moreover, it has a look at the two theories of anxiety and personality traits posed by Spielberger and Eysenck, respectively. The statement of the problem, research objectives, research hypotheses, definition of terms, significance of study and limitation of study will also come sequentially.

Background of the Study

Life in the modern world of today is extremely fast paced and fertile breeding ground for anxiety. Some authors have called the twentieth century "the age of anxiety" (Spielberger & Rickman, 1991). Over the last few decades, people seem to have become more anxious, worrying about safety, social acceptance, and job security more than in the past (Rosen, 1998; Sloan, 1996). Twenge (2000) asserted that these descriptions imply that modern life produces higher levels of anxiety. It is estimated that from 2% to 4% of the general population have at some time suffered from an anxiety disorder and that anxiety is either a

prominent symptom or contributes significantly to the aetiology of 20% to 25% of all psychiatric disorders (Lader & Marks, 1971). These findings imply that anxiety must be considered serious in every society.

Anxiety phenomenon is as old as the history of humankind (Spielberger, 1985). It is introduced as a common emotion. Anxiety is an unpleasant emotional state or reaction that can be distinguished from others, such as anger or grief, by a unique combination of experimental qualities and physiological changes (Spielberger & Rickman, 1991). The importance of anxiety was subsequently recognized in the establishment of anxiety disorders as one of the major categories of abnormal behaviour (Spielberger & Rickman, 1991). Anxiety's distressing effectual tone is often accomplished by disturbing thoughts, physical discomforts, and behaviours. Anxiety is considered a normal emotion when functioning appropriately, provides necessary information to the individual about the quality and adaptive efficiency of the individual's transactions with the environment. Anxiety can be helpful and dangerous. It is generally accepted that increased anxiety is “normal” in any situation in which an immediate danger might result in physical harm. Anxiety is also normal reaction to social-evaluative situations that pose threats to self-esteem or psychological well-being.

Mild or moderate anxiety may serve a useful or adaptive function. Anxiety rouses to action, it gears up to face a threatening situation. For instance, it can make students study harder for exam and keep them on their toes when they are

making speeches. On the other hand, excessive anxiety is regarded as a disorder and it can reduce individual normal functioning. High levels of trait anxiety impair cognitive performance (Seipp, 1991) including in everyday task, predispose people to marital problems, and sometimes lead to alcohol and drug abuse (Twenge, 2000).

Generally, anxiety is produced for different reasons, for example, lack of preparation in an important work, negative experiences in a given situation, new situation, and sometimes fears, etc. Students are often exposed to degrees of stress and anxiety that are dominating their emotions. At universities and colleges, many students experience unpleasant anxieties and stress which interfere with their social life, studies, and their sense of personal happiness Almost any change in life is a stressor because there is a demand to deal with a new situation. Students are most anxious in new situations and find themselves in difficult circumstances at some time in their lives. When they begin a university program, they commonly encounter a variety of issues which can cause concern, living away from family and home, living with a roommate, adjusting to the competitive academic environment, developing a sense of community for oneself in a totally new and different social environment, taking more responsibility for oneself than ever before, academic or administrative problems and transition of study difficulties from school or work to university. In addition, students may have personal problems such as, relationship problems, anxiety, depression or low self-esteem.

There are different levels of anxiety that students can feel when taking written or oral examinations and face problems in concentrating. Some students attack the anxiety by over-studying, which loads the brain and confuses all the human information system. Some feel tense generally because they have extremely high social and academic standards. There are many other forms of stress that students experience. Students in various courses may have different reference of anxiety. For example, medical students may have health anxiety (Howes & Salkovski 1998). In computer courses some students have computer anxiety. Many students experience anxiety in chemistry laboratories. Some foreign students face various problems and they become anxious when they want to refer to practitioners or counsellors. The reason for their anxiety is that, they feel that the counsellors may not understand them or be interested in, or competent enough to address their concerns effectively (Jenkins, 1999).

Another point that must be noted is that stress periods change during the academic year for students. Bowman (1999) reported that source of stress is different in every month in the United States. Therefore, the students' anxiety changes in different months. In September, homesickness, especially for first year students can be a source of stress and anxiety. In October, new or returning students begin to realize that life at university is not perfect as they were led to believe by parents, teachers, and admission staff. In November, academic pressure is beginning to mount because of procrastination, difficulty of work and lack of ability. In December, the students become involved in extracurricular time

strain, seasonal parties, concerts, social service projects and religious activities, which make them exhausted and can be the source of stress and anxiety. In January, post-Christmas depression for being away again from home security. In February, many students experience optimism because second semester is perceived as going easier. In March, academic pressures and drug use increase. In April, academic pressures continue to increase because of mid-term exams. In May, anxiety develops due to the realization that the year is ending and pressure and anxiety of final exam come to an end soon.

In referring to Universiti Putra Malaysia counselling centre, there was specific statistic showing the number of students who refer to this centre (Appendix C). The statistic of year 2000 shows that 56% of total clients are male and the rest are female. Of these clients, (89%) were Malays, Chinese (7%), Indian (3%) students, and the rest includes others.

The problems which students were involved with included: 55% study problems, 17% personal, 7% career, 7% financial, 7% family, 5% social, 3% health, 3% religion, 2% sex and the rest had other problems. Furthermore, in November due to registration of new students, and also in February and March due to beginning of final exams the number of referring students to this centre increases. The breakdown of students that went to the counselling centre comprised of about 16% from the Faculty of Educational studies. The number of education students who refer to this centre is higher than the other students in various courses, 15%

from the Faculty of Science and Environmental studies, 10% from the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, 10% from the Faculty of Human Ecology, 9% from the Faculty of Economics and Management, 9% from the Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology, and the rest includes others.

In referring to the counselling centre of University Malaya there was no specific statistics. The head of the centre claimed that most of clients (students) have anxiety either alone or in component with other psychological problems. The counselling centre of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia reported an increase of clients referring to the centre from 1993 till 2001 which most of them experienced anxiety besides other problems. In Hospital Bukit Padang (Sabah, Malaysia) the number of outpatients and inpatients has increased from 1995 till 2000 (Appendix C). It is estimated that from 2 to 5% of the general population in Malaysia are suffering from anxiety disorder, or anxiety in them is either a prominent symptom or contributes significantly to the psychiatric disorders (Mhm, 2000).

The review of literature has shown that no single situation or condition causes anxiety. Psychoanalysts suggest that anxiety stems from unconscious conflicts that arise from discomfort during infancy or childhood and learning. Theorists believe that anxiety is a learned behaviour that can be unlearned (Smith, 1998). Briefly, researchers and scientists believed that genetic, biochemical imbalances, brain chemistry, motivational factors and combination of physical and