

LEVEL OF STRESS AND ANXIETY AND SOURCES OF STRESS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: *Stress is a normal part of life. Every adolescent experience stress, including students. The study was conducted to determine the level of stress, anxiety and depression among students in Form 3 and Form 5 (age 15-17 years old), and identify the sources of the stress that occurs. The research methodology is a case study using DASS questionnaires (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale). Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistic. The study found the level of stress, anxiety and depression among students were found mostly at a moderate level and can be coped with at school. The study found environment, interpersonal problems (peer relationship) and parent's expectation were the main stressor for these students. Implication of the study was teacher should establish peer group counselor who can relate with these students in interpersonal relationship and can advice them on a personal basis to solve the problem before it get worse.*

Keywords: stress, anxiety, depression, secondary school students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Based on Malaysia National Health and Morbidity Research, they found out of 14.4 percent of adolescence age 16 to 19 years old facing mental health problems compared to adult whereby only 11.2 percent facing mental health problems. They also found 11 percent of youth between age 16 to 24 years have the tendency to commit suicide [1].

According to Abd. Rahim [2], the adolescent involvement in social problems caused by multiple factors including internal and external factors. Internal factor such as personality traits and external factor such as family breakdown and peer influence. Zainal and Sharani [3] found the school environment cause some of the behavioral problems. According to Asri [4], each youth face challenges and conflicts when changes occur within them either in terms of biological, physical, emotional and mental. Nickerson [5] found the atmosphere and environment in the lives of students is one of the main factors that affect the stress level of students other than experience and personality. This is a preliminary study to explore students' level of stress, anxiety and depression. Eventhough, level of suicide caused by stress among adolescence in Malaysia are not alarming, but the teacher, counselor and the doctor have to identify these student who experiencing stress and help the students to cope with the stress, anxiety and depression at an early phase to hinder them from endangering their own life and the life of others.

A large number of secondary school students belong to the adolescence stage. This is a transition stage between childhood and adulthood [6]. The stage is characterized by rapid physical changes and mental development. According to Havighurst, 1953 [6], adolescence stage is defined as the time when individuals begin to function independently in social, emotional and economic. It is generally viewed as a critical period of development, both in Africa and Western culture [12]. Hall, 1920 in Santrock [6] have often referred to adolescence as a period of "storm and stress". The adolescent try to cope biological changes in themselves and social and emotional problems that derived from their biological development and also problem from their environment. According to Erikson, (1902-1994), during adolescent years,

individuals try to find out who they are, what they are all about, and where they are going in life [6:23]. They are facing identity crisis, which he referred to as stage "Identity versus Identity confusion". At this stage adolescent explore few roles in a positive manner. If they arrive at positive path to follow in life, they manage to secure their identity. If not, maybe they will face identity confusion. There have been many studies which have reported a strong relationship between stress and secondary school students

So, in this study, researcher wanted to explore the level of stress, anxiety and depression among secondary school students or adolescents. Secondly the researcher also wanted to find the sources of stress among these students.

2.0 STRESS and ANXIETY Among SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.

England Education Service Advisory Committee,1998 in Alan *et al.* [7] defined stress as an unpleasant emotion, which arises when people worry that they could not cope with excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them. Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978 in Alan *et al.*[7] defined stress as a response to negative effect such as anger or depression, usually accompanied by potentially pathogenic, physiological and biochemical changes resulting from aspects of the student's condition.

There were two types of stress, namely good stress and bad stress [8]. Stress which motivates students to learn and achieved their goal is called good stress. An optimal level of stress can enhance learning ability [9]. On the other hand, stress which cause a student to withdraw from learning is called bad stress. The bad stress must be prevented and avoided [10]. The factors that cause stress were called 'stressors'[11]. Akande, Olowonirejuaro, Okwara Kalu [12] has done a study on sources of stress among secondary school students. Sample of study comprised of 540 secondary school students from 18 public senior secondary schools. Finding of the study showed that the secondary school students had a medium level of stress. Some of the significant sources of stress include academic, intra-personal and environment. There was a significant gender difference in the level of stress and sources of stress.

Sulaiman, Tajularipin and Hassan, Aminuddin et, al. [13] had done a study on the level of stress among 155 secondary school students in urban and rural school. They found no students are experiencing high level of stress, 29 percent students experienced medium stress and 71 percent students experienced low stress. The study indicated significant differences in level of stress for gender and between students in rural and urban secondary school. There are many factors influences students' stress such as parenting style, parents' education background, environment of the students which can give impact in students life.

Siti Hamad Mohamed and Rohani Ahmad Tarmizi [14] have done a study on level of anxiety among Malaysian and Tanzanian students during Mathematic examination. The finding indicated level of anxiety among Malaysian students were higher than the Tanzanian's students. All results revealed negative and significant correlation between anxiety and students grades in Malaysia and Tanzania. This study suggests that these students' performances are impacted with mathematics anxiety.

Muhamad Saiful Bahri Yusoff [8] have done a study on stress, stressors and coping mechanism used among secondary school students. Sample of study comprised of 90 secondary school students from government school. He used 12 item validated Mental Health Questionnaire (MHQ). Finding of the study indicated that prevalence of stress among secondary school students in a Malaysian government school was high (26.1% out of 90 students). The main stressor were related to academic matters such as not able to enter university and study for long hours. Positive coping strategy was used by these students to overcome stress. The top five coping strategies were religion, positive reinterpretation, active coping, planning, and use of instrumental support. A study of stress, especially an approach towards measuring level of stress among adolescents is quite new in Malaysia [13]. Study by Sulaiman *et. al.* [13] indicated that the secondary school students experiencing medium and low level of stress only. While Muhamad Saiful Bahri Yusoff [8] in his study found the prevalence of stress among secondary school students was high. Based on these findings, there was a necessity to study and explore the level of stress among secondary students and done.

3. Objective of study

The objectives of the study were:

3.1 To identify the level of stress, anxiety and depression among secondary school students.

3.2 To study factors that contribute to stress among secondary school students.

4. Methodology of Study

Methodology of study used was case study from one sample site. Data was collected using questionnaire and interview. Weirisma [15], define case study as, " a description of the situation, and which is ongoing or have past that the people who experience it learn something out of the situation". Student will find the experience meaningful and worth it because it work as a tool to enhance students' decision making skill, interaction and work in a group. It also work to achieve the objective of the group.

Selection of location and sample of study was made through discussion between researcher and advisor. The school which

was situated in Perak was chosen because the school met the criteria which have been set such as consisting both gender, urban school, exam classes etc. Total population of students in form 3 and 5 from the school were 363 students. Sample chosen from Form 3 comprised of 72 students and from Form 5 were 60 students.

Methodology of study used was case study using questionnaire and interview. Questionnaire used were Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS). There were 18 questions on level of stress, 20 questions on anxiety and 21 questions on depression. The subjects were asked to choose answer from 4 level of likert scale namely: 1(never); 2(Sometimes);3 (Often); 4 (Always). Sample were chosen through purposive sampling. Subjects comprise of 132 students age 15 to 17 years old (62 boys and 70 girls). Subjects mostly from Malay ethnic (102 students), 28 are Indian and 2 chinese.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Level of Stress, Anxiety and Depression Among Secondary School Students

The study found (Table 1), level of stress among students were : normal=102(77.2%); medium =26(19.7%), high= 4 (3%) students. So, only 3% of the students facing high levels of stress. So the findings indicated that only 4 (3%) students out of 132 students were experiencing high stress. Teacher can refer these student to the school counselor or counselor in the hospital.

Table 1 Level of Stress, Anxiety and Depression Among Secondary School Students

Variable	Level		
	Normal	Medium	High
Stress	102 (77.2%)	26(19.7%)	4(3%)
Anxiety	85(64.4%)	34(25.7%)	13(9.8%)
Depression	99(75%)	28(21.2%)	5(3.8%)

Level of anxiety among students were: normal =85(64.4%), medium= 34(25.75%); high= 13(9.8%). Only 13 (9.8%) of the students facing high level of anxiety. The teacher can refer these students to the school counselor and the counselor can use behavior modification technique or intervention to help these students manage their anxiety. Level of depression among students were: normal = 99 (75%) students, medium= 28 (21.2%) students, high=5 (3.8%) students.

So, we can conclude that there were 4(3%) students with high level of stress, 13(9.8%) with high level of anxiety, and 5(3.8%) students with high level of depression among the secondary school students. This figure is not alarming but we have to ponder upon the consequences such as mass shooting that was caused by one student. So the principal, teacher and counselor of the school have to identify these students in order to curb misconduct among students before it occurs.

4.2 Factors That Causes Stress Among the Students

According to Akande, Olowonirejuaro et, al. [12] factors that cause stress among secondary school students were academic, intra-personal and environment. While Sulaiman, Tajularipin and Hassan, Aminuddin et, al. (2009)[13] found that parenting style, parents' education background, environment of the students, which is can give impact in students life.

Whereas in the study by Muhamad Saiful Bahri (2010)[8], the students' stressor were related to academic. In the study, regarding factors that causing stress were (Table 2): have to study for long hours were 33(25%), peer pressure were 36 (27.2%),environment were 47(35.6%), parent's expectation were 33(25%), teacher's expectation were 26(19.7%), low self-esteem were 28(21.2%). So, in this study, the students placed environment as the major factor causing the stress, anxiety and their depression. Environment means their physical surroundings, teachers, parents and peers. Then peer pressure and study for long hours and whereby these also contribute to environment.

Table 2, shows factors that causing stress were: environment =47(35.6%),have to study for long hours were 33(25%), peer pressure were 36(27.2%), =47(35.6%), parent's expectation = 33(25%), teacher's expectation =26(19.7%), low self-esteem =28(21.2%). So, as a conclusion the students placed environment as the major factor causing the stress, followed by peer pressure, study for long hours and parent's expectation.

Table 2 Factors That Causes Stress Among Secondary School Students

Variable	Stressor
Environment	47 (35.6%)
Study for long hours	33 (25%)
Peer pressure	36 (27.2%)
Parent's expectation	33 (25%)

5. DISCUSSION

In the process of growing, secondary school students experience stress either good or bad depending on how they cope the situation [8]. The resilience over stress will impair students' academic achievement, personal and professional development. So parents and the teachers in the school have to work hand in hand to help students cope with stress postively, so that this situation will enhance their physical, social and emotional development. According to Saiful Bahri [8] and Conor, Smith *et. al.*[16] environment play an important role in initiating stress among adolescents. Conor, Smith *et. al.* [16] found respondents with better overall childhood environments and a greater number of environmental strengths were at lower odds of developing a mood or anxiety disorder in adulthood than respondents with more adverse childhood environments. Higher stress reactivity was observed among respondents from families with lower socio-economic status and with childhood environments characterized by greater conflict and adversity.

6. RECOMMENDATION

Study regarding stress among secondary students is important because the students will become the nation's man power in the future. The school must produce healthy man power otherwise the nation will suffer. So school counselor must continue to identify students under stress and send them to a rehabilitation center. The counselor need to monitor students' counseling and decipline records. The students'need to fill

questionnaire given by the counselor at the beginning of semester. The counselor need to hold " Healthy Mental" and "Life without stress" campaign every semester to combat stressful situation in the students' life.

On the other hand, the government must set up arehabilitation center in the hospital for the students distress and provide trained doctors and psychiatric at this rehabilitation center. Finding of the research indicated that among factors that cause stress were factors related to academic matters, interpersonal, parents and environment. According to Kaplan and Saddock [9], stress arises when students failed to make adjustment to his or her environment. This situation maybe arises because of the changes in the education system and curriculum. At the present the goal of ministry of education (Malaysia) are to produce world class worker whereby they were equipped with science, technology and information technology skill. These generation was sometimes called "Gen Y". The government goal and aspiration had had great impact on the students and their parents especially students from rural area and from low income group. They were left behind and cannot cope with the fast changing environment [8].

The study done by Chai Ming Seng *et al.* [17] try to identify level of stress among college students during semester 2003/04. The sample of study comprises of 393 students (53 male, 34 female). Instrument used to access stress was 'Self Report Inventory' (DSP). The study indicated that level of stress among students were high especially those situation connected with self adjustment, financial and academic matters. It is noteworthy that over exposure stress causes physical, emotional and mental health problems by Niemi and Vainiomaki [18]. According to Aktekin *et al.* [19], therefore,early detection and intervention may prevent and minimize the exert effects of stress on the students in the future. Stress on secondary school students needs to be recognized, and strategies developed to improve it should be focused on both individual and situational factors [18]. So the principal, teachers and counselors have to administer stress and anxiety test upon students who showed symptom such as uncontrollable anger, involved in fighting and also alienation students.

Failure in the exam was one of the factor that cause stress among the students [12]. This was categorized under academic problems. At this situation, parents and sibling must showed their sympathy and support to the students. Help them to rebuild their hope. Take them to see counselor and guidance teacher. Bring them to education fair to explore their capability and oppurtunity that can be offered by college and university. There is always a way to achiev their life goal.

The stressed students usually ignore healthy food and healthy lifestyle [20]. They have to be taken to psychiatric and dietician. They have to develop healthy living in order to achieve their goal in life.They cannot improve their grade if they do not eat proper food and have had enough sleep and rest. Another factor indicated that peer pressure were the stressor among secondary students. Peer pressure, such as want to be accepted by the group or the 'feeling of belonging' to a group [6] may be one of the factor that causes stress

when doing something was not regarded as right have to be performed in order to be the group member. For example, the girl (Cady) was asked to leave her best friend in order to be a member of 'plastic girls'(from movie 'Mean Girls').

6. CONCLUSIONS

The study indicated that the majority of students were experiencing a medium level of stress and only few students were experiencing high level of stress. Environment, problem related to studying, peer pressure, and parents expectation were the major stressor among these students. As teachers, we have to identify the students with stress and help them to cope with the stress in a healthy way such as turn to spiritual activity such as praying, sport and recreation, talk to some one they trusted, etc. [8]. The stress problem among students cannot be swept under carpet. Because if these students used negative ways of coping such as taking drugs, suicide and killing people, we would lose our young generation, lost our hope in building future generation. So certain measures must be taken to educate these young generation to combat stress positively such as turn to religious activity, sport and recreation, talk to counselor, etc. The students must plan their future and always have friends and family to support them when they fall. Failure in the exam was one of the factor that cause stress among the students [8,12]. In this situation, parents and sibling must show their sympathy and support to the students. Help them to rebuild their hope. Take them to see counselor and guidance teacher. Bring them to education fair to explore their capability and opportunity that can be offered by college and university. There was always a way to achieved their life goal. Effective and appropriate coping strategies may minimize the impact of encountered stressful situations on one's wellbeing [22]. Muhamad Saiful Bahri *et al.*[8] found that the top five coping strategies that frequently used by the students were religion, active coping, positive reinterpretation, planning, and use of instrumental support.

7. REFERENCE

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