

THE RELATIONSHIP OF HARDINESS AND STRESS

Ho Khee Hoong & Rusnani Abd. Kadir

Faculty of Educational Studies, University Putra Malaysia

Abstract

The primary objective of this study was to assess the level of hardiness and stress of University Putra Malaysia in Malaysia using Cognitive Hardiness Scale (CHS) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). 181 undergraduate students selected via cluster random sampling to participate in this study. Questionnaires were used for self-reported measure and data collection. Results showed that majority of the respondents have low stress (58.0%), compared to high stress (42.0%), indicating a relative unhealthy proportion. Moreover, only a small proportion of respondents have high hardiness (23.8%), compared to moderate hardiness (76.2%). The mean score for stress is 41.69 ($SD = 5.626$), whereas the mean score for cognitive hardiness is 43.30 ($SD = 5.399$). The results of this study reaffirm the necessity of counseling intervention in tertiary education of Malaysia.

Keywords: Hardiness, Stress, University Putra Malaysia, Undergraduate students, Counseling

Introduction

Malaysia aims to be a sophisticated and developed country by the year 2020. The former prime minister of the country envisioned Malaysia to achieve milestones from economics, politic, social, spiritual, psychological, and cultural aspects (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2013). In order to become a developed country, it is vital to produce generations of youths with tertiary education qualification and equipped with knowledge, skills, and abilities to accelerate towards goal of nation.

However, it is noteworthy that Malaysian students share similar fate with the rest of the tertiary education students around the world, as they are plagued with psychological issues, such as stress. The trend of steady increase of stress experienced by tertiary students has been noted since the late 20th century (Sax, 1997). Transitional period of progressing into university life has put students in tertiary education particularly susceptible to stress (Hamaideh, 2011). Changes in life are always stressful, regardless of the desirability of the change (Lyon, 2000). Stress is formed when requirement of adaptation or adjustment is made on an individual. Eustress, or stress that is beneficial which keep us on the move is necessary, but when too much stress is exerted onto an individual, the effect can be detrimental (Rathus, 2004). Stress that derived from daily hassles and the minor negative experiences that need to address in daily or weekly basis are more problematic than a single major life event, such as marriage or death of family member (Compton, 2005). Thus, the field of counseling in the country has a fair share of contribution towards this noble vision by alleviating the predicament. This present study provides empirical evidence towards the field of counseling which enable the formulation of stress intervention strategies by promoting hardiness.

Within the body of research, a construct that is closely linked with stress is hardiness. Hardiness is a personality construct of control, commitment, and challenge that is known to be able to make an individual more resilient in the face of stress. More specifically, hardiness is capable of lowering physical and psychological strain after exposure to stress (Wiebe, 2013). A study among home health nurses found that higher level of hardiness is associated with lower level of stress (Judkins & Rind, 2005). In short, hardiness is known to be a good protective factor in a stress-illness relationship. Based on these literature reviews, there are queries that arise on probing into the mental health of the tertiary education students, particularly the level of hardiness and stress. The research on relationship of hardiness and stress has not been examined adequately particularly in non-Western societies. It provides a strong impetus for present study to examine in-depth of the relationship between selected key variables and to fill the gap of literature. Therefore, this study aims to explore the level of hardiness and stress, in addition, to examine the relationship between hardiness and stress among the undergraduates.

Methodology

Participants

A total of 181 undergraduate students from five different programs of University Putra Malaysia were recruited to participate in this study. Ethnically diverse, male and female students, ranging from 19 to 32 year old students were included.

Materials

Two instruments were used, including Perceived Stress Scale – 14 (PSS-14) by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) and Cognitive Hardiness Scale (CHS) by Nowack (1990). The questionnaires distributed to the respondents were divided into three parts. Part I requires the respondent's personal information, which includes gender, age, ethnicity, faculty, program of study, and year of study. Part II is PSS-14, followed by CHS in Part III. Construct validity and reliability of the instruments were verified before the commencement of data collection.

Procedure

Cluster random sampling was used to select 181 respondents from 65 programs of 15 different faculties. The respondents of this study were approached during their lecture class, to ensure maximum amount of data can be collected in the shortest time. The permissions of the respective lecturers were obtained and the respondents' verbal consent was then procured before proceeding to distribute the questionnaire to the respondents. The respondents were required to complete and submit the questionnaire on the spot. The response rate of this study is 100% with all the 181 sets of questionnaire successfully secured.

Results

Table 1 indicates the majority of the respondents have low stress ($n = 105$; 58%) compared to high stress ($n = 76$; 42%). The mean score for stress is 41.69 ($SD = 5.626$). Besides that, there are less hardy respondents ($n = 43$; 23.8%) than moderately hardy respondents ($n = 138$; 76.2%). The mean score for cognitive hardiness is 43.30 ($SD = 5.399$).

Table 1 : Descriptive Statistics of Hardiness and Stress

Variable	Score	Frequency	Percentage
Hardiness			
Valid	30 – 46 (Moderate)	138	76.2
	47 – 65 (High)	43	23.8
	Total	181	100.0
Stress			
Valid	14 – 42 (Low)	105	58.0
	43 – 70 (High)	76	42.0
	Total	181	100.0

Preliminary analyses of statistical technique assumptions, including normality and linearity of data were tested to ensure there was no violation. As shown in Table 2, a Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was performed to test the relationship between hardiness ($M = 43.30$, $SD = 5.399$) and stress ($M = 41.69$, $SD = 5.626$). The results of the correlation show that there is a significant weak negative relationship between stress and hardiness, $r(181) = -.318$, $p = .0001$. The result suggests that when the respondent has higher hardiness level, their level of stress tend to be lower.

Table 2 : Correlation between Hardiness and Stress

		Hardiness	Stress
Hardiness	Pearson Correlation	1	-.318**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	181	181

Stress	Pearson Correlation	-.318**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	181	181

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Discussion

This study found a negative relationship between stress and hardiness, which is consistent with previous studies (Ghorbani, Watson, & Morris, 2000; Maddi et al., 2002; Maddi, 2013; Maddi et al., 2012). The higher the level of hardiness of the individual, the lower the stress will be. Hardiness enables undergraduates to excel even in the face of hardship, especially stress. Therefore, undergraduates with high level of cognitive hardiness tend to have lower level of stress.

Undergraduates with high hardiness personality will respond to threat and stress with courage, motivation and strategies to face the stress. Hardiness activates the ability of undergraduates to learn from mistakes and to grow with the process. Likewise, individuals with low hardiness personality, will become anxious, angry, depress, and avoid stress. In another words, hardiness is important to assist undergraduates to cope with the stressful environment and to grow in wisdom and fulfillment throughout the process.

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