Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development

PERSONALITY TYPES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SARAWAK (UNIMAS)

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Personality Types and Psychological Distress Among Undergraduate Students in University Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas)

SALLY TCHEE ZHIN HUI

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ii.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the relationship between personality types and psychological distress among undergraduate student in Faculty Cognitive Science and Human Development (FCSHD), University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). This research adopted a correlational research design. The sample consisted of 100 respondents consist of 50 males and 50 females undergraduates students in FCSHD UNIMAS. Two instruments were used in this study. The Big Five Personality Test was used to measure the personality of the participants. Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) was used to measure the psychological stress of the participants. Spearman's correlation and Independent T-test were applied to analyse the collected data. The result shows that there is no significant correlation between four dimensions of personality, which are extraversion $(r= .184, p= .067> .05)$, openness, agreeableness $(r= .099, p= .328> .05)$ and conscientiousness $(r= .147, p= .143> .05)$, and psychological distress. However, there is a significant correlation between only one dimension of personality, which is neuroticism and psychological distress $(r= .651, p= .000 < .05)$. Also, results found that there are significant differences between gender differences and level of psychological distress $(p= .003 < .05)$.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research hypotheses, research questions, conceptual framework, the significance of the study, the definition of terms and limitation of the study. This chapter is essential because it provides a broad overview of the research.

Background of study

Students are the future assets of our society. They must take care of their mental health and have a good personality to improve their lives. Relieving students' psychological distress is an essential aspect for students to obtain better living conditions. Most studies have found that psychological distress is common among young people. Psychological distress will lead to poor academic performance and cognitive decline. Various studies from all over the world have found that there is psychological distress among university students (Harikrishnan & Ali, 2018).

Psychological distress is a diagnostic condition for the onset of mental illness that affects a person's thinking, feeling, behavior, or mood (Drapeau, Marchand, & Beaulieu, 2012, as cited in Osayomi & Adegboye, 2016). In fact, this is an indicator of the mental well-being of a specific population. Mental well-being is an indispensable part of human health. Health is a state of being free from disease or physical weakness and a state of mental, physical, and social well-being. Therefore, the total well-being of an individual will be affected if any of the three aspects are weak (Osayomi & Adegboye, 2016).

Psychological distress is a "state of emotional distress" characterized by symptoms of depression such as sadness, loss of interest, hopelessness, etc., and anxiety such as restlessness and feeling tense (Miroskwy & Ross, 2002, as cited in Osayomi & Adegboye, 2016). Depression and anxiety are the two main manifestations of psychological distress. Depression is described as a strong state of sadness, while anxiety is related to worry and stress (Madden et al., 2000, as cited in Osayomi & Adegboye, 2016). These two emotional states constitute psychological distress. According to World Health Organisation (n.d.), "it influences the power and control men, and women have over the determinants of their mental health including their socioeconomic status, roles, rank, and social status, access to resources and treatment in society". Wide gender differences have been noticed in the occurrence of

psychological distress. Besides that, "gender differences in distress may vary depending on background, historical period or socio-cultural setting" (Matud, Bethencourt, & Ibanez, 2015, as cited in Osayomi & Adegboye, 2016).

Personality traits play an important role in personal psychological distress. Different experts have different understandings of personality. Warren Norman was introduced as the "Big Five" in 1963, which included five aspects of personality traits: openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Harikrishnan & Ali, 2018). Most scholars emphasize that personality is a combination of personal thoughts, emotions, and motivation. In a comprehensive definition, personality is a dynamic interpersonal structure, including physical and psychological systems. The component provides individuals' thoughts and behaviors characteristics (Allport, 1961, as cited in Dehghanan et al., 2014). Personality usually deals with individual differences in human behavior, cognition, and emotion. Different personality theorists put forward their definitions and descriptions of words based on their theoretical positions. The "five personality traits" mentioned above are stable over time and seem to be attributed to genetics rather than environmental influences. However, some studies claiming that when any trouble occurs, personality will always change (Dehghanan & Rezaei (2014).

In the research related to mental health among adolescents, personality traits have often been a variable of interest (Shaheen, Jahan & Shaheen, 2014). Personality traits can refer to the tendency to react differently across many different types of situations (Caprana & Cervone, 2000, as cited in Shaheen, Jahan & Shaheen, 2014). In general terms, personality contains various unique traits and characteristics that affect an individual's responses to daily events. In other words, people's reaction to environmental stimuli depends on the inclinations and tendencies of their personality dispositions (Ptacek & Gross, 1997 as cited in Shaheen, Jahan & Shaheen, 2014). Psychologists discovered that there is a link between personality factors and psychological distress based on their research (Linn & Zeppa, 1984, as cited in Shaheen, Jahan & Shaheen, 2014). Other studies have shown that how a person perceives and interprets stress is very important; it depends on personality traits (Shaheen, Jahan & Shaheen, 2014). In other words, personality factors play an important role in the experience of psychological distress by influencing the perception of stress and interpreting stress. Researchers who studied the relationship between personality factors and psychological

distress have found a link between personality and depression. In contrast, others have not found any relationship between these variables (Shaheen, Jahan & Shaheen, 2014).

This research aims to investigate the differences between personality types and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS. The study hopes that this research can benefit the students to increase their understanding of personality and how it will be related to the psychological distress of individuals.

Statement of Problems

There are quite several research that has been conducted related to personality types and psychological distress. However, they used different instruments to collect data related to personality traits and psychological distress (Afshar et al., 2015; Nouri et al.,2018; Shaheen, Jahan & Shaheen, 2014; Matud, Bethencourt, & Ibáñez, 2015). Afshar et al., (2015) has conducted a research assessing the prevalence of personality traits and their relationship with psychological factors in the general population. There were 4763 participants from 20 countries in Isfahan Province of Iran selected for the study through convenience sampling. NEO Five‐Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) were used to assess personality traits and psychological factors, including depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. The results of study had showed that high levels of neuroticism and low levels of extraversion and agreeableness were correlated to high psychological distress related to depressed and anxious.

Nouri et.al., (2018) has conducted the research to explore the association of five factors personality traits, as predictor variables, with the depression and psychological distress as joint-dependent variables in a general Iranian population of 3177 participants. Researchers using the NEO-big five, Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) The findings indicated the significant relationship between personality and psychological distress. In particular, the higher the scores of neuroticisms would increase the risk of psychological distress and depression score. In contrast, the higher the scores of extraversions would decrease the levels of depression, and it was at risk of psychological distress. Besides, higher scores of conscientiousness significantly increase, lower the scores of psychological distresses.

Besides that, there are numbers of research which were related to gender differences and psychological distress has been conducted in other countries with the use of different

instruments to collecting the data related to gender differences and psychological distress. Shaheen, Jahan & Shaheen (2014) were conducted the research to investigate the role of personality factors in experiencing psychological distress among 200 students from secondary school of Aligarh Muslim University Aligarh. PGI Health Questionnaire N-1 was used to measure the psychological distress. The results indicated that female students scored significantly higher on psychological distress than male students.

Matud, Bethencourt, & Ibáñez (2015) also conducted the research among 1337 men and 1251 women from Spanish to examine gender differences in psychological distress by analyzing the relevance of stress, coping styles, social support and time use by using the convenience sampling. The research used the subscales of severe depression, anxiety and insomnia and somatic symptoms of the Scaled Version of the GHQ to assess the participants' psychological distress. The results of this study presented that woman had more psychological distress than men. Although psychological distress in the women and men groups has some common correlations such as more stress, more emotional and less rational coping, and less social support, but the result found some gender differences.

There is no known research that has been conducted in Malaysia, particularly among undergraduate students related to personality types and psychological stress using the Big Five Personality Test and Kessler Psychological Distress (K10). Therefore, this study is aimed to investigate the relationship between personality types and psychological distress among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development (FCSHD), University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).

Objectives

General Objective

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between personality types and psychological distress among undergraduate student in FCSHD UNIMAS.

Specific Objective

Specific objectives of this study were:
1. To identify the relationship between personality (openness) and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

2. To identify the relationship between personality (conscientiousness) and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

3. To identify the relationship between personality (agreeableness) and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

4. To identify the relationship between personality (extraversion) and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

5. To identify the relationship between personality (neuroticism) and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

6. To identify the differences on gender differences between level of psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

Research Hypothesis

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between personality (openness) and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between personality (conscientiousness) and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between personality (agreeableness) and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

H_{04}: There is no significant relationship between personality (extraversion) and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

H_{05}: There is no significant relationship between personality (neuroticism) and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

H_{06}: There is no significant differences on gender differences between level of psychological distress among undergraduate students.

Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables

Personality Types

- Openness
- Conscientiousness
- Agreeableness
- Extraversion
- Neuroticism

Relationship

Dependent Variables

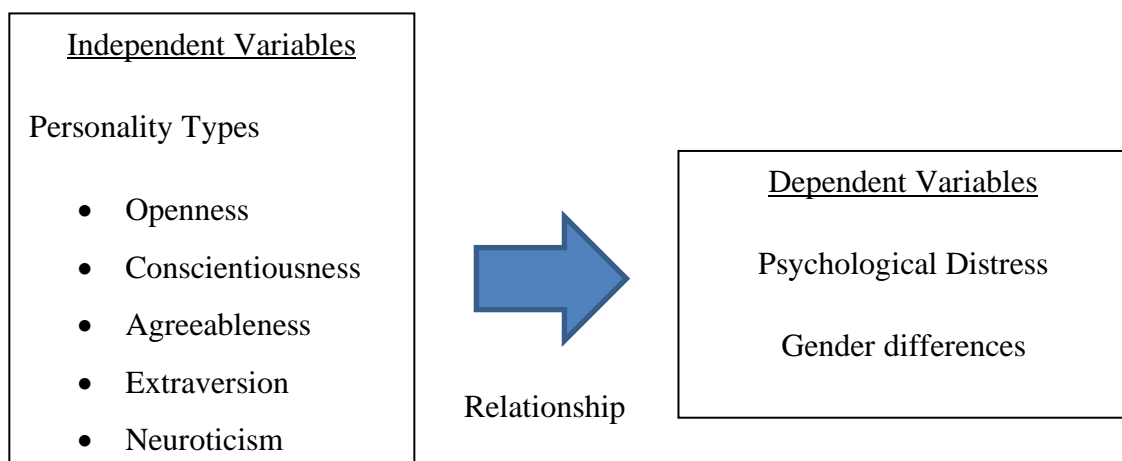Psychological Distress

Gender differences

Figure 1: The conceptual framework for the study

The five independent variables for this study are personality types which are openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, and neuroticism. The dependent variables for this study are psychological distress and gender differences. This study aimed to identify the relationship between personality types and psychological distress among undergraduate students at FCSHD UNIMAS. In addition, this study also aims to identify the differences in gender differences between psychological distress. Questionnaires were also prepared for this study and taken from relevant sections of the website.

Significant of Study

This study was significant attempt and beneficial to the students to increase their understanding of the personality and how it will be related to the psychological distress of individuals. Many researchers have been researching the field of psychological distress for many years. However, their findings cannot be generalized for each geographical area. It is because people differ in their way of responding, even residing in the same locality. Realizing the fact, the researcher created the research to identify the relationship between personality types and psychological distress among male and female students in FCSHD UNIMAS.

Definition of Terms
Personality Types

Conceptual Definition: According to Lexico Dictionary (2020), personality types is a collection of personality traits which are considered to occur together consistently, especially as determined by a certain pattern of responses to a personality inventory.

Operational Definition: Based on the research conducted by Thiel (2020), there are five personality types in The Big Five Personalities Test, which is openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. The openness people are always like to learn new things and enjoy new experiences. Openness includes traits of being insightful and imaginative and having a wide variety of interests. In term of the conscientiousness people, they are reliable and prompt. Traits include being organized, methodical, and thorough. Next, extraversion people are always getting their energy from interacting with others, while introverts get their energy from within themselves. The traits of extraversion which has

included are energetic, talkative, and assertive. Also, the agreeableness people are friendly, cooperative, and compassionate. People with low agreeableness may be more distant. Agreeableness includes traits of being kind, affectionate, and sympathetic. In term of neuroticism, it also sometimes called Emotional Stability. The dimension relates to one's degree of negative emotions and emotional stability. People who score high on neuroticism usually will experience emotional instability and negative emotions. Traits for neuroticism are including being moody and tense.

Psychological Distress

Conceptual Definition: According to American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology (2020), psychological distress refers to a series of painful mental and physical symptoms related to the normal fluctuations of mood in most people. However, in some cases, psychological distress may indicate the onset of major depressive disorder, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, somatization disorder, or a variety of other clinical illness. It is believed that it can be assessed by many self-report measures of depression and anxiety.

Operational Definition: Based on the research conducted by Watkins & Johnson (2018), psychological distress was measured using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6). An example item from this scale is, "During the past 30 days, about how often did you feel nervous?" Participants responded to items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (None of the time) to 4 (All of the time). The higher the calculated score, the higher the level of distress. Following the previous use of this measure, they divided psychological distress into three groups. When participants get the total scores ranging from 0 to 4, it indicated the participants have low distress level. When participants get the total scores ranging from 5 to 12, the participants have moderate distress level. In contrast, participants get the total scores ranging from 13 or higher indicated participants has high distress level.

Gender Differences

Conceptual Definition: According to American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology (2020), gender differences referred to distinct differences between men and women-specific to a particular culture and influenced by its attitudes and practices. Gender differences appear in various, such as careers, communication, and interpersonal relationships. **Operational Definition:** Based on the research which conducted by Shannon (2019), gender differences are defined as biological differences between males and females.

Chapter Summary

This research investigates the relationship between personality types and psychological distress among undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS. This research may help psychologists and counsellors getting betting understanding of the psychological distress of individuals. The next chapter will discuss the conceptual framework of this research and the literature review of the past studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter explains The Big Five Model which is related to personality types. Besides that, this chapter discusses some of the past studies related to the study.

The Big Five Model

The Big Five Model was developed by Warren Norman in 1963. It is the most widely accepted personality theory and The Big Five Model also known as the Five-Factor Model. The theory states that personality can be boiled down to five core factors, known by the acronym OCEAN. (Harikrishnan & Ali, 2018)

The five-factor model of personality (FFM) is a set of five broad trait dimensions or domains and usually referred to as the "Big Five" that is openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Christopher & Joshua, 2020). A highly extraverted person is assertive and sociable, rather than quiet and reserved. Agreeable person is cooperative and polite, rather than antagonistic and rude. Conscientious person is task-focused and orderly, rather than distractible and disorganized. Neurotic person is prone to experiencing negative emotions, such as anxiety, depression, and irritation, rather than being emotionally resilient. Finally, highly open individuals have a broad rather than narrow range of interests, are sensitive to art and beauty rather than indifferent, and prefer novelty to routine (Christopher & Joshua, 2020).

The Big Five was developed to represent as much of the variability in individuals' personalities as possible, using only a small trait dimension. Many personality psychologists agree that its five areas capture the most important personality traits, the basic individual differences and that many other trait models can be conceptualized in terms of the Big Five structure. (Christopher & Joshua, 2020).

Personality and Psychological Distress

Ahmad & Khan (2019) have conducted a research aiming to explore relationship between personality and anger among 80 students with age ranging from 18 to 25 years. The result found that there was a significant correlation between emotionality, extraversion, consciousness, and agreeableness. Not only that, but the result also showed that there was a

significant relationship between personality traits and anger which means the personality traits were associated with anger depending on what triggers it.

Mihailescu et al., (2016) have conducted a study to analyse whether anxiety and depression decrease academic performance among first-year medical students and second-year medical students. The result indicated that academic achievement decreases inversely proportional to depression scores on the grade average of first-year medical students and second-year medical students during the period before the examination session. More specifically, depression during the period before the examination period predicts low levels of academic performance with GPA in the inferior quarter, which is grades lower than 7.52, particularly in first-year students, irrespective of gender.

The research conducted by Rahmani & Lavasani (2012) to determine the gender differences in five-factor model of personality and sensation seeking among 177 undergraduate students with 108 females and 69 males of the University of Tehran using cluster sampling. The result found out that the average of openness and agreeableness for females were higher than the average for males. In particular, the scores of openness and agreeableness on female were significantly higher than males which means that females are more open and prone to agreeable than males.

Nurullah (2010) conducted the research to explore gender differences in distress with the mediating influence of life stressors such as chronic stress, work stress, negative life events, childhood and adulthood trauma, and psychological resources such as self-esteem, mastery, and sense of coherence. The finding of the research indicated that male and female showed some different level of psychological distress. Females reported more psychological distress compared to males, and female participants were also reported more likely experiencing chronic stress, work stress, negative life events, and childhood and adulthood trauma.

Shaheen, Jahan & Shaheen (2014) have been conducted the research to investigate the role of personality factors in experiencing psychological distress among 200 students which consist of 100 male and 100 females from senior secondary school of Aligarh Muslim University Aligarh. The result showed a significant negative correlation between extraversion dimension of personality and psychological distress. The significant negative correlation was found between other four dimensions of personality which is extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness and psychological distress. Besides that, there was also a significant positive correlation between neuroticism and psychological distress. A perusal of this study's

results showed a significant negative correlation between extraversion dimension of personality and psychological distress. There was also a significant negative correlation between the three dimensions of personality, which are openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and psychological distress.

Chapter Summary

Various past research has shown that personality types would affect the level of psychological distress. Besides, the gender difference was also seemed to influence the different level of psychological distress. The next chapter discusses the methodology of this research that includes research design, population and sampling, instrumentations, and data analysis of the research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology of this research, including research design, population, sample, location, instrumentation, pilot test, the procedure of data collection, data analysis and ethics of the study. This chapter outlines the specific methods which the researcher chose to study the problem.

Research Design

This research adopted a correlational research design that used a quantitative method of study. This study used the inferential statistical test that determined whether there is a statistically significant relationship between personality types with psychological distress and gender differences with psychological distress among FCSHD UNIMAS students.

Participants - Populations & Samplings

The population of the study targeted is FCSHD UNIMAS undergraduate students. The sample was around 50 male FCSHD students and 50 female FCSHD students which the total sample is 100 students. Stratified random sampling is a sampling method that involves dividing the population into subgroups known as a stratum. The strata in this study were formed based on the student, which came from different gender in FCSHD UNIMAS. The researcher chose stratified random sampling because the researcher wants to highlight the specific subgroup within the population.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables of the Participants (Age)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	100	2.00	3.00	2.28	.45
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Based on table 1, we can find that the sample was relatively young (M=2.28, SD= .45). The average age of undergraduate students is 21 to 23 years old (SD=.45).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables of the Participants

		Frequency	Percent
Age	Age 21-23	72	72.0
	Age 24-26	28	28.0
	Total	100	100.0
Gender	Male	50	50.0
	Female	50	50.0
	Total	100	100.0
Qualification	Degree/PISMP	100	100.0

Based on table 2, the data shows that age 21 to age 23 was the highest, which consist of 72 respondents (72%) out of total respondents, whereas the age of 24 to the age of 26 was the lowest, which consist of 28 respondents (28%) out of total respondents in this research. Besides, there are the same frequency and percentage for males and females, 50 male respondents (50%) and 50% (50%) due to researchers using strata random samplings to find the respondents to see the gender differences in psychological distress. For qualification, all the respondents (100%) were Degree or PISMP.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire used in the research consists of three sections. Section A is participant's information, section B is The Big Five Personality Test (1992), and section C is Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) (1992). Section A consists of 3 questions which included age, gender and qualification of participants, section B contains 50 questions that is to measure the personality of the participants, and section C includes 10 questions which is to measure the psychological stress of the participants.

The Big Five Personality Test (Goldberg, 1992)

The instrument was introduced by Goldberg in 1992. The Big Five Personality Test helps the participants understand how their personality is structured. The instrument consists of 50 item that have five subscales: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness. Each subscale consists of 10 items; Extraversion, items: 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, 36, 41 and 46; Agreeableness, items: 2, 7, 12, 17, 22, 27, 32, 37, 42 and 47; Conscientiousness, items: 3, 8, 13, 18, 23, 28, 33, 38, 43 and 48; Neuroticism, items: 4, 9, 14,

19, 24, 29, 34, 39, 44 and 49; Openness, items: 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45 and 50. The instruments was used Five-point Likert Scale which included disagree (1), slightly disagree (2), neutral (3), slightly agree (4) and agree (5). The higher the score on the subscale, it is represented that the individual tends to be that personality type.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) (Kessler & Mroczek, 1992)

The instrument was developed by Kessler & Mroczek in 1992. The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) is a simple measure of psychological distress. The instrument consists of 10 items about emotional states each with a five-level response which included all the time (5), most of the time (4), some of the time (3), a little of the time (2) and none of the time (1). Scores of the 10 items are then summed, yielding a minimum score of 10 and a maximum score of 50. 10 – 19 is scores likely to be well, 20 -24 scores are likely to have a mild disorder, 25 -29 scores is likely to have a moderate disorder and 30 -35 scores is likely to have a severe disorder.

Validity and Reliability

The pilot test of the study has been conducted to 30 respondents who studying at the university or collage in Kuching using the Google Form.

The questionnaires have gone through the content validity process by the expert panel in the field of study. The content validation index for The Big Five Personality Test is 9, while the content validation index for the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) is 8.9.

The reliability test has been carried out for both questionnaires. The Cronbach's Alpha for The Big Five Personality Test is 0.7, The Cronbach's Alpha for the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) 0.9 The validation index and the internal consistency of the Cronbach's Alpha for both questionnaires are acceptable to be used for the research.

Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed to the participants through online Google Form. The data collected for this study were 100 undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS by using stratified random sampling. The researcher gave the instructions to undergraduate students in FCSHD UNIMAS on how to fill the questionnaires.

Data Analysis Procedures