

# Responses to Stress among East Malaysian Students: Psychometric Properties of the Responses to Stress Questionnaire

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## Abstract

**Background:** Academic stress is part of a student's life. Chronic stress may result in mental health problems, affecting the adolescent's well-being in adulthood. However, not all types of stress result in a negative effect. Therefore, understanding how adolescents adapt to academic stress can lay the groundwork for preventive interventions. The Response to Stress Questionnaire (RSQ) for academic problems centred on a multidimensional model of responses to stress. However, it has not been tested among Malaysians. Thus, this study aimed to validate the questionnaire among Malaysians.

**Methods:** The questionnaire was translated into the Malay language using forward and backward translation. Data were collected via self-administered questionnaires at a secondary school in Kuching. A validity test was conducted using face and content validation by subject matter experts, and construct validation was performed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). A reliability test was conducted by checking Cronbach's alpha.

**Results:** Results showed that the questionnaire has good validity and reliability. The EFA resulted in only three dimensions of responses to stress among Malaysian adolescents in contrast to the five dimensions in the original RSQ for academic problems. The Cronbach's alpha showed good reliability of the questionnaire.

**Conclusion:** The questionnaire measuring responses to stress was valid and reliable in assessing the responses of adolescents to academic stress.

**Keywords:** adolescent, mental health, psychological distress, adaptation

## Introduction

Academic-related stress remains a critical problem for all students. The education system has loaded students with various pressures, such as extensive curriculum, examination anxiety, neck-to-neck competitions and expectations and pressure from parents and teachers that add tons to their problems. Adolescents are the budding future of a nation. Studies about adolescents' experiences and how they respond to, ponder about and handle stressful events (academic stress) can lay the groundwork for preventive

interventions. These interventions are designed to help adolescents avoid stressful conditions, modify their way of appraising stress, find useful social resources or improve their adaptive coping capability (1, 2). The impact of ongoing stress, particularly academic-related stress, on adolescents' well-being remains underexplored. Understanding why students use a certain coping strategy is crucial to health education, especially at the stage of adolescence when they are developing habits that can influence their future lifestyle choices (3).