



Part-Time Adults Students in Sarawak and Environmental Stress Factors

Siti-Huzaimah Sahari¹, Yusup Mohd Yaman², Awang-Rozaimie Awang-Shuib³

¹Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sarawak Malaysia

²School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang Malaysia

³Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sarawak Malaysia

huzaimahs@sarawak.uitm.edu.my

Abstract

Long-life education has become a phenomenon in world of education, and many adults pursue their study while working in order to compete with the demands of today's life in upgrading their education levels. In adopting a new lifestyle by becoming students, these students also need to face new stress in their lives. The study is to find out the environmental stress factors among part-time students. Five dependant variables are used for each of the factors and the respondents responded by ranking the variables. Questionnaire is used and distributed to the respondents which are 80 part time students from 5 universities, UNIMAS, UiTM, OUM, UPM and USM. This paper will also discuss how environment affects stress among part-time students in Sarawak. The environment factors which are discussed are the size, the conditions in term of noise and safety, pollutions, the quality of air and the potential of natural disasters in the house they are living and the surroundings. The significance of the study is to illustrate the highest stressors in part time adult students.

Keywords: Part-time students; environmental stress; stressors

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1.0 Introduction

Stress is a common word which can easily blurt out from anybody mouth whenever a tense situation occurs. Part time students in high institution also feel the same. Life situation which full of obstacles and difficulties can easily caused stress. Stress is subjective in nature. The same level of obstacles and difficulties can give different impacts to different individual. The difference is depends on one's resistance to stressors and stress management.

According to Malaysian famous motivator, Dr Mohd Fazdillah Kamsah, 8 out of 10 people when asked about anger and stress, admitted have stress daily. Study from Motivation and Care Center Singapore in 1980, stated that 75% of Singaporean between the age of 20 – 39 suffered stress. In US, according to Megan Othersen (1999) 90% of those who seek medical attention were stress related, and this is from American Stress Institution data.

Other than that, Dianne Hale (2008) claims a road to happiness is by being free from stress. Jim Plouffe (2007) stressed that one of 10 ways to succeed is by avoiding stress. Ramos and Sharma statement, in Jeff Davidson (2004) article stated that stress to some extent if not successfully controlled will lead to a lot of problem to individual. Maharaji Prem Rawat (2008) once said "human being is the same, what makes them different is the way their think and handle their stress. So, the mirror of yourself is within you."

Stress is a part of life. In a complicated life, it is impossible for us to avoid stress. According to Merrill F. Raber and George Dyck (2005), stress can be determined by observation, and through observation, causes and ways to handle it can be identified. Stress among part time IPTA students is different from others. There are those who can handle their stress without any permanent damage and there are those who cannot.

Adult learners are those between the ages of 25 to 50 years old who pursue their study due various reasons. The first reason is due to the demand of workplace. Some adult learners want to be promoted, in order to have that, gaining a higher level of education is the way. Other than that, thousands of graduates graduated every year, filling higher positions in the organization, and leaving existing employees behind in professional development. Observing inexperienced new colleagues gain salary higher or at the same par as them who have worked for years, can caused a lot of mixed feelings. The mixed feelings can jealousy, unsatisfactory, appreciation and motivation to further their studies.

Other than work or career, adult learners also choose to continue their study to higher level due to the demand of life. They need to gain more salary than they are making at the moment. If they have a bachelor degree for example, they can search for better jobs with better salary in other places. The increase number of family members also pushes them to study as they need to provide for the families. Not to mention the increment in goods prices.

Besides career and demand of life, self motivation is also one of the crucial factors for adults to continue or restart their studies. Some adults are unsatisfied with their professional and personal development. They feel that they can do much better in term of their educations, so they take the initiative to continue study to make them better and feel better. Other than that, most of the adults are parents, so they want to set examples to their children. They want and need to show their children that if they as adults (older people) can

get 'certificates' meaning their children should be able and motivated to study.

Last but not least is, the education itself nowadays. Flexibility in study plan and study periods allows students to choose their study time. Studying part time is a popular choice among adults as they don't want to give up their works and they don't have to be 100% committed to their studies. Technology allows online and blended learning make working adults easier to further their study without having to ask for study leave or quit their jobs.

Adults who are working and studying at the same time face a lot of challenges in their lives daily. They have commitment not only for their works and studies; they also have commitment to their families. Some of them are the care takers and providers to the families. Having a lot of commitments and responsibilities, can cause a lot of stress to a person.

Previous studies show that stress is a worrying phenomenon. Identifying the stress factors or stressors is an important step. So, this study in identifying stressors among part time adult learners in Sarawak is perceived as an intellectual and rational approach. This study will look at the environmental stress among part time adult learners in Public Higher Institutions (IPTA) in Sarawak. The higher institutions are UNIMAS, UiTM, OUM, UPM and USM in Kuching, Sarawak. In this study, the adult learners from these institutions are studying part time either through online and blended learning.

In this study, there are five factors or stressors identified. The stressors are financial, work/career, relationship, environmental and personality. The focus of this study is the environmental stress. The hypothesis is there is a positive relationship between environment problems with stress among part time adult students.

2.0 Literature Review

There are a lot of factors that caused stress. Complex and complicated environment, hectic days, tremendous work pressure, demands from home and relationship contributed to the increment of stress level. According to World Health Organization (WHO) (2007), there were about 450 million people all over the world suffered stress-related problems. The number of people facing stress, in developing countries, has increased twice the number in 10 years time; and women suffer stress more than men.

Stress comes from a Greek word which is 'stringere'. There are a lot of definitions of stress, and the explanation of stress is very subjective, wide and global. According to Cox, T. (1979) in a book entitled 'Stres Alam Sekitar' by Rosnah Ismail (2008), stress means a 'tense and strained' situation. Peter G. Hanson, M.D (1986) in Tay Swee and Smith (1990) explained that stress is a reaction which affects both positive and negative impacts to oneself and others. Hanson (1986) further explained stress is an individual reaction. Stress is both fatal and fantastic, and human beings need to recognize the danger of stress and learn from it.

Anthony Yeo (1996) explained that stress is any sort of thrust which gives impact to one's daily life. The effects from the thrust can be positive or negative depends on individual's reaction to the stressors. Stressor is defined as a cause of stress. Erica Brealey

(2002) described stress is an emotional and physical reactions to pressure and it is 'contagious'. Mohamad Hatta Shahrom (2007) in his writing expressed that stress is a feeling of 'uncomfortable' in oneself which influenced one's mind. Other than that, Eohd. Fadzillah Kamsah (2007) defines stress as pressure, burden, conflict, fatigue, strain, panic, worrisome feeling, depression and helplessness.

Stress is unique because it can cause happiness, maturity and on the other hand can jeopardize life. Stress can be categorized into various types; psychology, mental, emotional, good and bad, and low and high. Negative stress can have symptoms like abrupt change in emotional and behavior, difficult in making decision and to react to situations, decrease in performance, body aches, sleeping problems and loss of appetite. Meanwhile, positive stress can build somebody to be strong emotionally and mentally, increase in performance, self esteem and self defend.

Past studies have listed various stressors. Swee and Smith (1990) identify stress caused by daily lifestyle, recreation methods, working styles, the nature of work/job and weather. Turkington in her study (1998) deliberated that stress exist because of factors like financial, illness, time management, spouse, social life, children, family problems, job/career, communication, and problems at home. In addition, Shahrom (2007) stipulates '4-Domain HA (Bio-physical, physicality, social and spiritual) is the four elements which trigger stress. Furthermore in Rosnah Ismail study (2008), emphasizes that, one of the main stressors is environmental conditions.

Environmental Stress

Good environment, clean and peaceful is very important for life. Environment plays an important role in influencing mood for sports, recreation and relaxation. Non-conducive environment will affect life. Changes in eco-system, noisy, polluted and crowded surrounding, and living or working location which is exposed or prone to natural disaster are the stressors of stress. Living space which is jammed and crammed like refugees' camps and squatters can cause stress especially in term of food distribution, sleeping arrangements and water supply.

One incident in Malaysia, as reported in Metro (28 December 2008), a landslide at Taman Bukit Mewah, Bukit Antarabangsa, Hulu Klang Selangor killed 5 people. Due to that, thousands of residents were asked to leave their homes. This has caused stress to others who live on highlands, thinking of the possibility of the reoccurrence of the same tragedy. Shahrom (2007) indicates that the spewing of smoke from Gunung Merapi, a volcano at the outskirts of Jogjakarta, Indonesia has caused discomfort and stress among nearby residents.

Other than that, rapid growths in population, increment in foreign workers number, inefficient in factory and farm management and ineffective sanitation have caused water pollution. For example, water pollution in Cameron Highlands. Based on Utusan Sarawak (20 February 2009) above factors have caused the water sources in Cameron Highlands contaminated by fertilizer from chicken dung and humans' feces.

In this study, five environmental factors have been identified to cause stress among part-time adult learners. The factors are small and crammed living condition, bad atmosphere condition (air & temperature) surrounding the living areas, noisy living space, living space

which is near topollution and living area which is exposed to natural disaster.

3.0 Methodology

Sampling frame is formed based on format introduced by Anthony Yeo, the director of Counseling and Care Center, Singapore (1980). The questionnaire format is altered to suit the current situation. The sampling and the respondents are adult learners from 5 institutions. There were 20 students chose from each institution, 100 questionnaires were distributed and 80 were given back. The respondents were asked to answer questions based on their lives twelve months ago. They were asked to rank the situation based on Likert scale which is 1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3) neutral 4) agree and 5) strongly agree. Average score for each item represented by the construct was counted to determine the score of the particular construct.

There are 5 constructs or independent variables under environmental stress which were asked; 1. The size of house, 2. The surrounding condition, 3. Housing area exposure to pollution, 4. The quality of air, and 5. Living area exposure to natural disaster.

The data were analyzed and calculated using SPSS, Statistical Software for Social Science. The hypothesis is tested using Simple Linear Regression and Pearson Correlation models.

4.0 Findings

From the 100 questionnaires distributed, 80 were returned and analyzed. 45 respondents were females equivalent to 56.25% and 35 (43.75%) were males.

Based on the analysis of simple linear regression shows there is a relationship between environmental factors with stress among part-time adult learners in Kuching. The R (regression) depicts a high value 0.513.

Simple Linear Regression between Environmental problems (AveD) and Stress (AveS)

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the Estimate
1	.513	.263	.254	.731

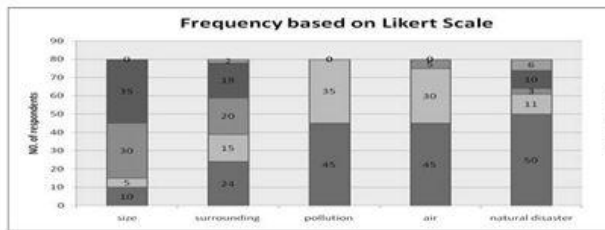
1. A Predictors: (Constant), AveD

Table below shows a positive relationship (0.01 level) between AveD and AveS, which is Pearson correlation = 0.513. This relationship also shows statistically significant. Thus, Pearson correlation confirms environmental problems are the factors that caused stress among part-time adult learners in Kuching.

Correlations between Environmental problems (AveD) and Stress (AveS)

AveS	Pearson Correlation	.513 (**)
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	80
AveD	Pearson Correlation	.1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.
	N	80

** correlation is significant at the >. >1 level (1-tailed)



Environmental problems or non-conducive environment does cause stress among part time adult learners in Kuching. The highest number of respondents agreed that the size of the house can cause stress, followed by surrounding and natural disaster.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the data, environmental stress does exist among part-time adult learners in Kuching. Even though not much of the variables were ranked 5 as strongly agreed, the respondents still rank most of them as 4, which is agree. The size of the house is analyzed in term of the actual size of the house and also the number of people who live in the house. Most of the respondents agree that the size of the house can cause stress to them. Some of them claimed that their houses are small regardless of the number of family members and some of them claimed that there are too many people living in their house which caused them discomfort.

The surrounding of the living area is analyzed in term of the noise and population. Those who agreed their surrounding has problem are those who live near town area. Most of them do not have problem with their surrounding area. It is the same as the next variable, the quality of air. Those who live in town were those who slightly agreed on the quality of the air is low. This might be due to their exposure to traffic and main roads near their houses.

In term of exposure to pollution, most of the respondents do not agree that their living area are too exposed too source of pollution. One of the reasons is the dumping areas or

centers are far away from housing area or villages in Kuching. Other than that, the rivers and drains are also being well kept and monitored by local councils.

The last variable, exposure to natural disasters are the exposure to flood, landslide and fire. 6 respondents strongly agreed that it caused them stress. This is because their houses are exposed and easily hit by floods. Other than that, Kuching is a strategic and safe geographically. There is no volcano, mountain and far from the seas.

In conclusion, environment can affect stress in human beings. Good and healthy environment can cause positive impacts to people, as well as unhealthy environment can cause problems and eventually stress. Stress management is important in handling stress. In term of environmental stress, people can choose to change their environment by moving to another place, clean their surrounding or improve their surroundings. Coping with stress involves a number of options. According to Alexander and Fairbridge "Humans can change their physical or social settings to create more supportive environments (e.g., smaller scaled settings, territories) where they can manage the flow of information or stress inducing stimuli" (2010). The improvements can be done in term of changing the colour of their homes decorations or arrangement of furniture. Other than that, appreciation to environment and adjustment and acceptance to the conditions of house and surrounding also can help in managing the stress. This supported by Alexander and Fairbridge, "People can also endure the stressful period, incurring mental costs that they deal with later, in restorative settings (e.g., natural areas, privacy, solitude). They can also seek to interpret or make sense of a situation as a way to defuse its stressful effects, often sharing these interpretations as a part of their culture (2010)".

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