

## **The Role of Leisure as a Mechanism for Coping with Stress in Masters-Level Degree Graduate Students at the University of Brunei Darussalam**

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**Abstract:** The quantitative study assessed the stress levels among masters graduate students at the University Brunei Darussalam. The random sample consisted of 122 students in four different faculties. The study found out that students were stressed but that feeling of burnout was at a moderate level. The findings are important as a reference to formulating strategic interventions to help students in coping with and reducing stress. Further, research is required to obtain additional insights and solutions to the problem.

**Key words:** Quantitative study, stressed, moderate level, formulating, strategic interventions, important

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In today's era of globalization, issues on stress and coping have become an area of growing interest to many researchers. In the demanding world today, many issues such as work, responsibilities, study and commitments are some of the matters that are related to the emergence of stress. The more interesting issue to explore is how an individual copes with stress in their life. Leisure is one of the stress coping mechanism. According to Charles (1960) leisure is a block of unoccupied time, spare time or free time when we are free to rest or do what we choose. In short, leisure is basically the time when an individual is doing something which relaxes the person's mind and body, getting away for a while from all sorts of work duties and assignments.

**Research on leisure and coping in Brunei University students:** No research has yet been done to investigate the role of leisure as a coping mechanism in Brunei tertiary students. A number of studies have been conducted on Brunei students that are related to a wide range of coping issues. Earlier previous studies paid more attention on students with special needs including behavioral problems (Bradshaw and Mundia, 2005, 2006; Mundia, 2006a, b; Tait and Mundia, 2012; Haq and Mundia, 2012; Yusuf and Mundia, 2014; Tait *et al.*, 2014). Other studies diverged and examined the problems of mental health among students in Brunei schools (Mundia, 2010a-c, 2013a-c). The performance of Brunei students in schools has also been an object of intense research (Mundia, 1998, 2010a-d, 2007, 2011a, b, 2012a, b; Keaney and Mundia, 2014). The research on student's

achievement has been extended to include a look at the way teachers are trained in Brunei (Mundia, 2012a, b; Tait and Mundia, 2012a, b; Tait and Mundia, 2014). The problems of doing research with Brunei students have been evaluated by Mundia and Abu Bakar (2010), Mundia (2011a, b). Based on these and other studies there is a paucity of research on leisure as a coping strategy among Brunei university students.

**Importance of leisure in coping with work related stress:** Dewe and Trenberth (2005) in their study, an exploration of the role of leisure in coping with work related stress using sequential tree analysis aim to contribute to the debate on the role of leisure in coping with stress by taking up the call by Iwasaki (2003) to consider new methodological approaches to help unravel the role that leisure may play in the stress coping transaction (Trenberth, 2005). In order to investigate this, the researchers use a score profiling technique called sequential tree analysis. This technique identifies patterns of data and arranges them in hierarchical order to provide a visual display. Hence, the focus of the study is on the patterns that emerge and their potential in helping to explain the role leisure plays in coping with stress (Dewe and Trenberth, 2005).

**Purpose of the study:** The main objectives of the study are to find out to what extent leisure helps participants cope with stress in their life and what motivates participants to engage in leisure activities. However, in the survey questionnaire, before proceeding to questionnaire related to those study objectives, the researcher wanted to find out first on the main issues or

reasons which make master degree students feel stress. The objective of the study was to investigate the extent to which leisure played a role as a stress coping mechanism in masters degree students. Basically, the study explored these student's attitudes and motivations for engagement with leisure during the pursuit of their degrees.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methods used in this study are described under separate sections.

**Design:** The survey method was used in investigating the problem. This procedure enabled the researcher to obtain the data quickly.

**Participants:** The sample consisted of 122 randomly selected masters degree students of the Universiti Brunei Darussalam who voluntarily participated in the study through printed questionnaires. Participants comprised of both males and females.

**Instrument:** Three rating scale instruments were used in this research, namely: Holmes and Rahe (1967) stress scale, Leisure coping scale (Iwasaki *et al.*, 2005) and the Leisure motivation scale (Beard and Ragheb, 1983).

**Procedures:** Prior to collecting the data, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Participants were informed verbally and in writing about the ethical conditions or requirements for being involved in the study such as privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, psychological harm and most importantly voluntary participation. All the participants signed a consent form. The study was done as part of the Master of Counseling degree program and the Universiti Brunei Darussalam Research Ethics Committee granted permission to conduct the study (Lim and Kayat, 2010).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main findings of the study are presented below under four subheadings.

**Sample composition:** The subsequent sections under Table 1 feature the participant demographics such as gender, age, faculty affiliation at UBD, marital status and religion.

Table 1 shows that there were a total of 122 students participated in the study, of which 82.8% were females and 17.2% were males. The age of the participants

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of sample

Description	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	21	17.20
Female	101	82.80
Total	122	100.00
<b>Age</b>		
21-25	94	77.00
26-30	21	17.20
31-35	6	4.90
36-40	-	-
41+	1	0.80
<b>Faculty</b>		
SHBIE	38	31.10
FASS	11	9.00
SBE	57	46.70
Others	16	13.10
<b>Status</b>		
Single	105	86.10
Married	16	13.10
Divorced	1	0.80
Others	-	-
<b>Religion</b>		
Islam	115	94.30
Christian	3	2.50
Buddha	1	0.80
Others	3	2.50

Table 2: Scale means, standard deviation and level of mean

Variable	Mean	SD	Level of mean
Student stress scale	2.95	0.67	Medium

Table 3: Frequencies of respondents for level of mean

Level of mean	Range of mean value	Frequency	Percentage
Low	1.00-2.33	22	18.0
Medium	2.34-3.67	85	69.7
High	3.68-5.00	15	12.3
Total	-	122	100.0

ranging from 21-42 years old with age range from 21-25 years old scored the highest (77%). Nearly half (46.7%) of them came from School of Business and Economics, 31.1% from Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah Institute of Education, 9% from faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and 13.1% from other faculties such as faculty of Science, Pengiran Anak Puteri Rashidah Saadatun Bolkiah Institute of Health Science and Faculty of Integrated Technologies. Moreover, 86.1% of the participants were single, 13.1% were married and only 0.8% divorced. Majority of the participants were Muslims (94.3%) 3 were Christians, 1 was Buddhist and 3 stated as others (i.e., no religion or free thinker).

**Participant's stress levels:** Table 2 shows mean scores and standard deviations from the student stress scale with overall mean value of 2.95 and standard deviation of 0.67. This indicates that from the student stress scale, majority of master's degrees students experienced a medium level of stress (2.95 out of 5). As can be seen from Table 3, the results show that 18.0% experienced low level of stress (mean value from 1.00-2.33) 69.7% at medium

Table 4: Scale means, standard deviations and level of means for the maslach burnout inventory-student survey

Items	Items No.	Mean	SD	Level of mean
<b>Exhaustion</b>				
I feel emotionally drained by my studies	40	5.08	1.76	High
I feel used up at the end of a day at university	43	5.15	1.48	High
I feel tired when I get up in the morning and I have to face another day at the university	46	4.69	1.73	Medium
Studying or attending a class is really a strain for me	49	3.66	1.56	Medium
I feel burned out from my studies	52	4.39	1.75	Medium
<b>Cynicism</b>				
I have become less interested in my studies since my enrolment at the university	41	3.35	1.89	Medium
I have become less enthusiastic about my studies	44	3.67	1.76	Medium
I doubt the significance of my studies	50	3.26	1.67	Medium
I have learnt many interesting things during the course of my studies	53	6.11	1.21	High
<b>Academic efficacy (reverse result)</b>				
I can effectively solve the problems that arise in my studies	42	4.65	1.27	Medium
I believe that I make an effective contribution to the classes that I attend	45	4.51	1.34	Medium
I have become more cynical about the potential usefulness of my studies	47	4.22	1.62	Medium
In my opinion, I am a good student	48	4.88	1.41	Medium
I feel stimulated when I achieve my study goals	51	5.98	1.08	High
During class I feel confident that I am effective in getting things done	54	4.66	1.49	Medium
Overall	-	4.55	0.68	Medium

Table 5: Interpretation of the mean value of the 7-point Likert scale

Range of mean score	Level of mean
1.00-3.00	Low
3.01-5.00	Medium
5.01-7.00	High

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level of stress (mean value from 2.34-3.67) and 12.3% experienced high level of stress (mean value from 3.68-5.00). The details of the mean and standard deviation for each item can be referred on Table 5 and 6.

**Participants' degree of feeling burnout?:** In Table 4, it is indicated that the overall mean value is 4.55 and standard deviation of 0.68 which resulted to a medium level of burnout among master's degrees students. It shows that item 43 (feeling used up at the end of a day at university) was the main major source of master's degrees students feeling burnout with mean value of 5.15 and standard

Table 6: Scale means, standard deviations and level of mean for the student stress scale

Items	Items No.	Mean	SD	Level of mean
Studying for tests and exams	8	3.21	1.04	Medium
Managing the academic workload	9	3.77	1.03	High
Writing tests and exams	10	3.23	1.11	Medium
Meeting deadlines for assignments	11	3.85	1.15	High
Attending lectures or tutorials	12	2.20	1.07	Low
Writing essays and assignments	13	3.53	1.17	Medium
The amount of material to study	14	3.55	1.15	Medium
Understanding academic material	15	3.23	1.08	Medium
Learning or remembering the material	16	3.34	0.96	Medium
Dealing with family responsibilities	17	3.20	1.27	Medium
Fear of disappointing my family	18	3.59	1.35	Medium
Family conflict	19	2.16	1.29	Low
Managing my weekly budget	20	3.10	1.31	Medium
Being too tired to study properly	21	3.51	1.17	Medium
The financial burden of studying	22	2.77	1.29	Medium
Supporting myself financially	23	3.03	1.41	Medium
Paying university fees	24	1.88	1.29	Low
Not being able to effectively manage my time	25	3.37	1.19	Medium
Juggling work, study and personal life	26	3.42	1.17	Medium
The attitude of teaching staff towards students	27	2.80	1.19	Medium
Disorganization of teaching staff	28	2.89	1.32	Medium
Lack of support from teaching staff	29	2.46	1.31	Medium
Inconvenient timetabling	30	2.38	1.27	Medium
Understanding the expectations of teaching staff	31	2.86	1.21	Medium
Lack of communication from the university	32	2.85	1.15	Medium
Lack of campus facilities	33	2.89	1.33	Medium
Lack of helpfulness of administrative staff	34	2.57	1.25	Medium
Dealing with university administration	35	2.71	1.25	Medium
Lack of flexibility in study options	36	2.82	1.16	Medium
Quality of university buildings and equipment	37	2.74	1.25	Medium
Having to hang around	38	2.08	0.94	Low
Delays in marking and feedback	39	2.43	1.13	Medium
Overall		2.95	0.67	Medium

deviation of 1.48. Then, the second main source is item 40 (feeling emotionally drained by studies) with mean value of 5.08 and standard deviation of 1.76. The rest of the items were the medium sources of burnout with no lowest source can be seen from the table. Item number 51 (I feel stimulated when I achieve my study goals) also has a high value of mean (5.98) and standard deviation of 1.08. However, the result is reverse as academic efficacy (items 42, 45, 47, 48, 51 and 54) results need to be reverse. Hence feeling stimulated when able to achieve study goals has less impact in contributing to feeling of burnout.

**Dominant factors that lead to stress among master's degrees students:** Indicates that the overall mean value is 2.95 and standard deviation of 0.67 which resulted to a medium level of student stress among master's degrees

students. It shows that item 11 (meeting deadlines for assignments) was the main major source of master's degrees students feeling stress with mean value of 3.85 and standard deviation of 1.15. Then, the second main source is item 9 (managing the academic workload) with mean value of 3.77 and standard deviation of 1.03. The less contributing factors to feeling of stress are attending lectures or tutorials (mean = 2.20, SD = 1.07), family conflict (mean = 2.16, SD = 1.29), paying university fees (mean = 1.88, SD = 1.29) and having to hang around in between classes (mean = 2.08, SD = 0.94). The rest of the items were the medium sources of stress.

Based on the findings, most of the students (69.7%) experienced a moderate level of stress. This concurs with the results of previous research by Bataineh (2013) and Thawabieh and Qaisy (2012). Managing huge academic workloads and meeting deadlines for multiple assignments were some of the most stressful factors. This is in line with findings from previous research done by Kausar (2010) and Mazumdar *et al.* (2012). Paying university fees was not very stressful in the Brunei sample contrary to experiences of students in other countries in the study by Pfeiffer (2001). As claimed by Oswalt and Riddock (2007), Keaney and Mundia (2014) stress can either be positive (also known as eustress) or negative (also called distress).

## CONCLUSION

The main aim of the present study was to assess the stress levels in graduate students at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam. In addition, the study also aimed at finding out the dominant factors that lead to stress in students. The results indicated that most students experienced moderate levels of stress and burnout. Having excessive stress is risky as it could impair the health of a student. Further research is recommended. If similar findings are obtained then action should be taken to provide suitable interventions to help the needy students.

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