Psychological Support in Uplifting University Students' Happiness in Fighting the Coronavirus Lockdown

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Abstract: The coronavirus pandemic has caused turbulence in the lives of several university students around the globe, including students of University Malaysia Sabah. The first 14 days of the coronavirus lockdown delivered significant psychological experiences to university students. Data from 106 on- and off-campus university students were examined to explore the effects of resiliency coping skills and religious faith in uplifting happiness in students after the first 14-day of the coronavirus lockdown. Also, the effects of religious faith on resiliency were examined. Out of 106 students, 74 (69.80%) were female and 32 (30.20%) were male. The study demonstrates that students' resiliency contributed 15% to the variance of happiness, while religious faith contributed 4% to the variance of resiliency. Furthermore, the on-campus students were more resilient compared to off-campus students. High resilient copers were also happier than low- and medium resilient copers. These findings give a glimpse of hope that the inner strength of students is essential in coping with unexpected circumstances due to the coronavirus outbreak. Although the coronavirus pandemic is unavoidable, by improving one's inner strength (i.e. through resiliency and religious faith), the adverse effects of coronavirus lockdown can be reduced. The lockdown may nurture students to be more mature in facing unexpected challenges in the future.

Keywords: *Resiliency; religious faith; resilient copers; happiness.*

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1. Introduction

It was a bright, sunny day, and, as usual students walked through the campus route paths to their target destinations. The hectic campus life momentarily distracted students of the coronavirus pandemic that had slowly affected the country and the globe. In the meantime, the one-week semester break was approaching two weeks. No one ever expected that the long wait for the one-week semester break would be replaced with the first 14-day restriction of movement (RMO) period. Such unexpected events may trigger unpleasant feelings (Paries & Somvang, 2017).

The drastic change from a hectic to a silent campus life causes uncertainty, fear, and worry among students. Their minds start to wonder about their loved ones, study, future, food and safety, which may heighten their prior negative emotions. This may easily trap them in patterns of negative thinking (Hougaard, Carter & Mohan, 2020). The coronavirus outbreak has dramatically altered everyday life for university students almost around the globe (e.g. Kamil, 2020; Zhaohui, 2020). Well-planned activities were disrupted and need to be justified. Things became worst when the freedom of students to move around on campus was restricted, which caused a feeling of isolation that only increased their worries (Hougaard, Carter & Mohan, 2020) and caused much confusion and despair.

The unforeseen challenges of the coronavirus pandemic faced by university students may open students' eyes to the fact that modern technology might not be adequate to help them overcome the difficult circumstances people around the globe are facing now. The personal strength from within i.e. personal constructs such as resiliency, need to be taken into consideration when facing challenges in this postmodern era. The strength of religious faith might also give students hope when facing the threats of the modern world. Winston (as cited by Polakovic, 2020) stated that millennials and generation Z have begun to understand concepts of religion, such as meaning, morality and mortality, which they never did before. This shows that today's generation turned to their inner strengths, such as resiliency and religious faith, for understanding the world phenomenon and way to deal with it. According to Cherry (2019), people experience the world through the "lens" of their constructs. These constructs are used to predict and anticipate events, which in turn determines people's behaviors, feelings, and thoughts. Based on the preceding argument, this current study will explore the contribution of psychological support, such as resiliency and the strength of religious, on

students' psychological well-being during the first 14 days of coronavirus lockdown.

2. Literature Review

In facing this difficult time, inner psychological support, including resiliency and religious faith, could be an essential source to uplift students' psychological well-being. Inner strength, however, might not be enough to make restore their psychological well-being bounce back having faced the unpredicted event (Thorpe, 2019). Previously accumulated academic stress might cause difficulty for some students in dealing with the unexpected event, which has disrupted the academic schedule. Some students are more resilient, but, as revealed in past studies, others may face more difficulties during adversities at certain stages of their lives (e.g., Molinero, Zayas, Gonzalez & Guil, 2018; Rahat & Ihan, 2016).

Resiliency refers to the human ability to cope with stressful challenges and regain normal functioning (Javanmard, 2013; Pennock, 2019) which contributes to psychological well-being (e.g., Aboalshamat et al., 2018; Kirmani et al., 2015). A resilient person may still be sad or find it difficult to deal with the situation but will adapt better to it (Anastasova, 2014). Besides, religious belief may strengthen one's resiliency by helping to shape one's view of the world after a significant experience (Bryant-Davis et al., 2012).

Religious faith also allows people to disengage themselves from the slow sludge of victimisation, worry and negative thoughts. It can also open people to a bigger sense of who they are and what they are capable of doing (Cornah, 2006; Hersh, 2014). Previous studies have revealed that spirituality is acknowledged as an important part of life by most individuals (e.g. Anastasova, 2014; Rahmati et al., 2017). Hence, it is predicted that resiliency and religious faith could uplift students' positive emotions after facing the first 14 days of the coronavirus lockdown.

3. Methodology

Data were obtained using a Goggle Forms survey, the most convenient survey method given the lockdown. Participants were contacted via WhatsApp and email. Participation was based on purposive sampling, which focused on university students from various academic levels. The survey was distributed to on- and off-campus university students by providing the link for the Goggle forms survey after their experience the first 14 days of the coronavirus lockdown. Students who received the Goggle forms link survey then distributed to other students who can access

the survey link in the same university. Snowball sampling was used because it is the convenient way to approach target participants during the lockdown. Naderefa, Goli and Ghaljaie's (2017) stated that snowball sampling is applied when samples with the target characteristics are not easily accessible. For data collection, participants' responses were collected and stored in the Microsoft excel spreadsheet and then transferred to the *SPSS* (Statistical Package for Social Sciences-version 25) template for further analysis.

3.1. Research Instruments

A set of questionnaires comprising a demographic profile and three scales (i.e. brief resilient coping scale, the strength of religious faith, and happiness) was used to gather data. For the three scales, participants briefly responded on their resiliency coping skills, the strength of their religious faith, and happiness by referring to their experiences after the first 14 days of coronavirus lockdown.

Section A: Demographic profiles – This section gathered participants' demographic information, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, academic year, and residency.

Section B: Brief Resilient Coping Scale - The resiliency coping skill was measured using the Brief Resilient Coping Scale with four items (Sinclair & Wallston, 2004). Participants rated each behavior or action from 1- 'does not describe me at all to 5- 'does describe me very well. The sample items for this scale; 'I look for creative ways to alter difficult situations,' 'regardless of what happens to me, I believe I can control my reaction to it,' and 'I actively look for ways to replace the losses I encounter in life. The higher the score, the higher is resilient. The categorization of the three groups of resilient copers is based on the accumulated scores; low resilient copers (4-13 points), medium resilient copers (14-16 points) and high resilient copers (17-20 points).

Section C: The Strength of Religious Faith – The strength of religious faith was adapted from the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire designed by Plante and [Boccaccini](#) (2007) with 10 items. The religious faith questionnaire measured not one specific religion but faith in general. Participants indicated their level of agreement (or disagreement) for each item from 1- strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree. Sample items were; 'My religious faith is extremely important to me,' 'I pray daily,' 'I look to my faith as a source of inspiration,' and 'I consider myself active in my faith.'

Section D: The Subjective Happiness scale– Happiness was measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale created by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999), Each participant had to rate their feeling on each item after the 14 days of coronavirus lockdown. The scale response was from 1-not a very happy person to 7- a very happy person. The higher scores indicated happy feelings. The internal consistency for each scale ranging from .72 - .93.

4. Results

In all, 106 university students participated in this study, with a mean age (M) of 23.05 (SD = 3.47). Majority of the participants were female (74 [69.80%]), and there were 32 (30.20%) male participants were. Table 1 shows the details of the students' demographic profile.

Table 1. *The Demographic Profile of Participants (N = 106)*

Source: Author's own conception

Variables	Number	Percentage
Students' residency level during the lockdown		
On-campus	36	34.00
Off-campus	70	66.00
Religion		
Muslim	51	48.10
Christian	46	43.40
Buddhist	5	4.70
Hindu	4	3.80
Academic level		
First Year	28	26.40
Second Year	21	19.80
Third Year	57	53.50
The first thing that came to mind during the RMO		
Family	48	45.28
Study	25	23.59
God	17	16.04
Food	6	5.66
Friends	3	2.83
Restriction of Movement	4	3.77
Others (i.e., money)	3	2.83
Things most worried about during the RMO		
Family	40	37.74

Safety	27	25.47
Future	20	18.87
Study	14	13.20
Friends	3	2.83
Others (i.e., money)	2	1.89

Independent t-test revealed a significant difference between on-campus students ($M=15.47, SD=2.44$) and off-campus students ($M=14.31, SD=2.29$); ($t=2.40, p=.02$) on resiliency after the first 14-day RMO. No difference was found between the two groups of students with regards to happiness and religious faith.

Table 2. *The Difference between On-Campus and Off-Campus Students with Regard to Resiliency, Religious Faith and Happiness during the Coronavirus Lockdown*
Source: Author's own conception

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t value	Sig
Resiliency					
On-campus	36	15.47	2.44	2.40	.02
Off-campus	70	14.31	2.29		
Religious Faith					
On-campus	36	39.42	8.64	-0.20	.84
Off-campus	70	39.71	6.39		
Happiness					
On-campus	36	19.42	4.59	0.70	.48
Off-campus	70	18.76	4.55		

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effects of resiliency on happiness between low, medium and high resilient copers. There were 27 (25.50%) students categorised as low resilient copers, 59 (55.70%) as medium resilient copers, and 20 (18.80%) as high resilient copers.

Table 3. *One-Way Analysis of Variance of University Students' Happiness by Level of Resiliency*
Source: Author's own conception

	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
Between groups	2	202.25	101.12	5.27	.00
	103	1975.71	19.18		

Within groups	105	2127.96
Total		

There is a significant effect of resiliency on happiness at the $p < .05$ level for the three groups of resilient copers [$F_{(2,103)} = 5.27, p = .00$]. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated that the mean score for low resilient copers ($M = 17.11, SD = 4.04$) was significantly different than for high resilient copers ($M = 21.30, SD = 4.86$). There was also a difference between medium resilient copers ($M = 19.05, SD = 4.36$) and high resilient copers ($M = 21.30, SD = 4.86$). No significant difference found between low and medium resilient copers (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. A comparison between low, medium and high resilient copers on happiness

Source: Author's own conception

Table 4. *Simple Regression Analyses of the Effects of Resiliency on Happiness and the Effects of Religious Faith on Resiliency*

Source: Author's own conception

Variables	B	R square	Sig.
Resiliency Happiness	.37	0.13	.00
Resiliency Religious faith	.19	0.04	.04

The simple regression analysis showed that resiliency contributed to 15% of the variance on happiness ($\beta=.37, t_{(1.104)}=4.00, p=.00$). While the religious faith contributed to 4% significantly on resiliency ($\beta=.19, t_{(1.104)}=2.04, p=.04$).

5. Limits and Discussions

Some limitations of the study—such as the small number of participants, which could not represent the whole population of the university Malaysia Sabah students—need to be addressed. Also, in controlling other external variables, tangible and intangible support that might contribute to students' resiliency needs to be taken into consideration for future study. Besides these limitations, this study provided reflections on the importance of resiliency and religious faith in uplifting university students' happiness in fighting the coronavirus pandemic. The findings also contribute to the literature on the coronavirus post-pandemic study.

The coronavirus lockdown may cause worry and confusion, particularly among the on-campus students. The spread of local and international news of the coronavirus pandemic can cause the parallel spread of worry and anxiety and instability (Hougaard et al., 2020), which can lead to ruminating thoughts (Villini, 2019). However, staying on campus connected the students to the study environment and enabled them to be more focused on their studies. By noticing their own thoughts, they can avoid the nonconstructive event and rebalance quickly (Hougaard et al., 2000). This may keep their mind from wandering and getting hooked, and it reduces the pits of stress and worry (Hougaard et al., 2020), thereby contributing to resiliency. People with high resiliency are able to control their reactions by looking for creative ways to alter difficult situations and grow in positive ways (Livni, 2018).

On the flip side, off-campus students may face difficulty in concentrating on online learning because of the unstable internet connection and distractions by other nonacademic activities. Living on-campus may provide a continual awareness of the academic activities and make students more focused, which may lead to mindfulness. In turn, mindfulness can extend to build several inner resources that help to strengthen resiliency (Fredrickson, 2009).

Concerning the level of resiliency, this study found that students with high resiliency are happier than low and medium resilient copers. This is in line with past studies (e.g., Aboalshamat et al., 2018; Kirmani et al., 2015) that high resiliency may lead to higher happiness and life satisfaction.

Happiness in this study refers to a subjective feeling that one's life is good and meaningful. People cannot control everything about their lives, but they can control many facets by learning to deal with difficulty, which in turn may improve their chances of feeling good again (Livni, 2018).

Resiliency can be strengthened by religious faith in dealing with adversity (Agaibi, 2018, Glicken, 2005; Rahmati et al., 2017) because it is a powerful source of hope, meaning, peace, comfort, and forgiveness for the self and others (Brewer-Smyth & Koenig, 2014). Praying daily and perceiving religion as important and as a source of happiness, comfort meaning, and purpose for life may strengthen students' faith in facing challenging times. Religion gives people a reason to achieve their goals and hope in the goodness of the world around them (Park, 2007). This may also help to increase students' capability to cope with the adversity caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

6. Conclusions

The coronavirus pandemic, a cause of uncertainty and mental breakdown for many university students around the globe, may give self-reflections to students on the importance of resiliency and religious faith in coping with the coronavirus hardships. All these may assist them to cope with life challenges and grow in faith. The Buddhist once stated "In life, we cannot always control the first arrow. However, the second arrow is our reaction to the first and with this second arrow comes the possibility of choice" (Hougaard et al., 2020, p.1).

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