

The Effects of Hassles (Stressors) and Different Coping Styles on Tertiary Students' Mental Health.

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to look at the relationship between stressors (hassles), coping and mental health. This study also tried to analyze which factor (coping or hassle) is more important in predicting mental health. Tertiary students ($N = 152$) from different racial groups participated in this study. The participants filled out the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), the Hassle scale and the Functional Dimensions of Coping Scale (FDC). Results indicated that stressfulness of hassles, rather than the total number of hassles, was a better predictor of various mental health problems. In addition, people who use avoidance or isolation as their coping strategy has higher mental health problems. Most importantly, the coping strategy (isolation or avoidance) was more important in predicting mental health than the severity of hassles. These findings are congruent with several studies done overseas and theories postulated by other researches.

Keyword: stressors, coping, mental health

Abstrak. Tujuan kajian ini adalah melihat hubungan antara stresor, cara mengatasi tekanan dan kesehatan mental. Kajian ini juga menganalisis faktor yang lebih penting memprediksi kesehatan mental seseorang. Sejumlah mahasiswa ($N = 152$) dari berbagai kelompok etnis berpartisipasi dalam kajian ini. Para subjek mengisi borang *General Health Questionnaire*, *The Hassle Scale* dan *Functional Dimensions of Coping Scale*. Hasil-hasil menunjukkan bahwa intensitas stres akibat *hassles* ("kesulitan"), dan bukan jumlah total *hassles* yang merupakan prediktor yang lebih baik untuk berbagai masalah kesehatan mental. Di samping itu, mereka yang memakai penghindaran atau isolasi sebagai strategi mengatasi masalahnya memiliki masalah kesehatan mental yang lebih tinggi. Yang terpenting, strategi mengatasi masalah (isolasi atau penghindaran) lebih penting memprediksi kesehatan mental daripada parahnya perselisihan. Temuan ini selaras dengan berbagai kajian yang telah dilakukan di mancanegara dan teori yang dipostulatkan peneliti lain.

Kata kunci: tekanan, mengatasi tekanan, kesehatan mental

Everyone experiences stresses at different points of their life. These hassles or stressors may range from finance, health, grief, disputes to having too many things to do. Hassles are irritating, frustrating, distressing demands that to some degree characterize everyday transactions with the environment (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981). Some people have many hassles going on in their lives but yet they go about managing their lives well without being affected by those hassles. Some people cope by doing something about the hassles yet others resign to fate and choose not to deal with them. Why is it that some people are not affected by the hassles they experience but others are? What is the unhealthy way of coping?

Several theories about hassles or stressors have been postulated. These theories look at the different aspects of stressors and how one copes with stressors. Accord-

ing to Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend (1981), stressor or major life events (i.e. hassle) affects our mental health and may generate psychopathology. In fact, there are many evidences to support the notion that stressful life events such as loss of job, divorce, and health concerns are related to various physical and mental illness (Dohrenwend, Dohrenwend, Dodson, & Shrout, 1984). These illnesses include depression, acute episodes of schizophrenia, heart disease and fractures.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) postulated that when we perceive an event to be harmful, threatening, challenging or a loss, we would be affected. Thus, it is not the number of stressors (hassles) that affects us but our perception of the stressors. According to them, we use cognitive appraisal when we encounter potential stressors (i.e., hassles). The cognitive appraisals include