

Relationship Between Resilience and Coping Strategies Towards Stress Among Postgraduate Counsellor Trainees In Pandemic Covid-19 Era

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Abstract

The pandemic Covid-19 has caused a lot of people to be under stress. People's lives have been changing 360 degrees since they must adjust to the new norm that changes their everyday life. This change has also affected university students greatly and counsellor trainees are not exceptional. Counsellor trainees are expected to be able to adapt quickly despite the fast-changing situation around them. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between resilience and coping strategies towards stress among counsellor trainees in Universiti Putra Malaysia. Resilience and coping strategies are the two important aspects that often been related to stress as they influence counsellor trainees' capability in handling stress. This research is quantitative using the descriptive correlation approach, involving 32 postgraduate counsellor trainees. Descriptive statistics were conducted to identify the level of resilience, types of coping strategies and level of stress. The findings showed that postgraduate counsellor trainees have high level of resilience. Besides that, majority of them uses more emotion-focused coping strategy. It was also reported that their level of stress is moderate. The outcome of this study may help counsellor trainees to better understand themselves and become more aware of their resilience and coping strategies in stressful situations. In conclusion, the findings of the study provide practical contributions to the field of guidance and counselling.

Keywords: coping strategies, counsellor trainee, Covid-19, resilience, stress

Introduction

Most of the human population would experience stress in their life at least once in a lifetime. Stress is not only experienced by a certain group of people. Stress is described as a mismatch between expectations and the perceived ability to cope with pressures, and it can affect people of all ages (Abhirami Kalaitasan et al., 2020). Stress can affect anyone, regardless of their age, gender, race, social-economic status and education (Kwaah & Essilfie, 2017). The only difference is that stress comes in different forms and it affects different people differently. Some people might handle stress well, but others might face difficulty in handling it. When a person fails to handle their stress well, it might affect their emotional stability and can also cause physical as well as mental health problems in the long run. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is a psychological term that refers to a reaction to demands that are higher than an individual's ability to cope, disrupting the individual's bodily or mental balance and posing a threat to the individual's overall well-being.

Ever since the Coronavirus (Covid-19) hits the world specifically in Malaysia, the government had decided to implement the Movement Control Order (MCO) nationwide. The government has taken urgent steps to prevent the virus from spreading into a full-blown pandemic, which has resulted in schools and universities across the country closing and compelling everyone to stay at home (WHO, 2020). During MCO, many organizations were urged to start working from home (WFH) and making full use of a variety of emerging online communication platform technologies. Educational institutions and schools were no exception in this matter. They have started doing online classes for students and the stress level among educators and students may be highly increased (Raj, 2021). In this situation, the

group of students who are currently doing their internship and industrial training are also greatly affected. In this study, the researcher highlights how the pandemic affects the postgraduate counsellor trainees in conducting their practicum and internship.

Coping mechanisms and defence mechanisms could sometimes be viewed alike in terms of their function in response to stressors. However, there is a difference between these two. Defence mechanisms involve feelings, ideas, and behaviours and are patterns of typically involuntary responses to external or internal factors (Vaillant, 2012). Cramer (2000) mentioned that coping and defence mechanisms can be differentiated according to whether they are conscious or unconscious processes, and whether they are intentional or unintentional operations. Problem-focused coping sometimes referred to as instrumental coping, and emotion-focused coping are two distinct coping approaches. Two forms of coping mechanisms are problem-solving and emotion-solving. Problem-focused coping strategies are frequently associated with stress-relieving measures, but emotion-focused coping can help people cope with any feelings of suffering that may occur as a result of the problem.

Previously, researchers have done numerous studies on coping styles with other variables. Farhana Sabri (2012) for instance did a study on the relationship between defence mechanisms and coping styles among relapsing addicts. On the other hand, Gnilka (2010) did a study on the Effects of Counsellor Trainee stress and Coping Resources on the Working Alliance and Supervisory Working Alliance and in 2009, Haley van Berkel conducted a study on the Relationship between Personality, Coping Styles and Stress, Anxiety and Depression. As far as can be ascertained, no research has been done to study the relationship between resilience and coping styles towards stress in the context of counsellor trainees, especially during pandemic Covid-19. Therefore, this study aspires in filling this gap.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To identify the level of resilience among postgraduate counsellor trainees.
2. To identify the types of coping strategies among postgraduate counsellor trainees.
3. To identify the level of stress among postgraduate counsellor trainees.
4. To identify the relationship between resilience towards stress among postgraduate counsellor trainees.
5. To identify the relationship between coping strategies towards stress among postgraduate counsellor trainees.

Methodology

The primary goal of this study is to determine the descriptive degree of resilience as well as to see if there is a link between resilience, coping methods, and stress. As a result, this research used a descriptive correlational strategy. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), correlational design is used to see if there is a relationship between the variables.

The target population of this study were postgraduate counsellor trainees who were undergoing their practicum or internship programme in the current 2021/2022 academic session from Universiti Putra Malaysia. A purposive sampling method was applied in the sample selection process. According to the table for determining sample size from a given population by Krejcie and Morgan (1986), for this current study population of 35, the sample size of 32 is recommended.

Three instruments were used in this study namely the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 25 (CD-RISC-25), the Brief COPE and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). An online questionnaire was prepared, and it includes four sections whereby Section A consists of demographic questions, the CD-RISC-25 in Section B, Brief Coping Orientation of Problem Experienced (COPE) in Section C and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) in Section D. The questionnaire is in English language. The demographic information included gender, age, race, full-time/part-time student and practicum/internship.

In this study, the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 26 (IBM SPSS) was used to collect the data. It also included data documentation, allowing researchers to keep a metadata dictionary on hand. This metadata dictionary served as a centralised store for data-related information such as meaning, relationships with other data, origin, usage, and format.

Results

The Level of Resilience among Postgraduate Counsellor Trainees

Table 1. Level of Resilience

	Resilience		
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Resilience	32	79.2500	13.41881

Table 1 indicates the level of resilience among the respondents. It can be seen that the overall mean of resilience among the respondents is ($M = 79.25$, $SD = 13.41$) which indicates that they have a high level of resilience.

The Types of Coping Strategies among Postgraduate Counsellor Trainees

Table 2. Types of Coping Strategies

	Coping Strategies		
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Problem_focused	32	26.4062	3.43473
Emotion_focused	32	35.2813	4.28978
Avoidance	32	17.5000	4.00000

Table 2 above shows the mean distribution of the types of coping strategies that are being used by the respondents. There are three coping strategies which are problem-focused, emotion-focused and avoidance coping. Among these three, it can be seen that the respondents are more likely to use emotion-focused coping ($M = 35.28$), followed by problem-focused coping ($M = 26.40$) and the least used is the avoidance coping ($M = 17.50$).

Level of Stress among Postgraduate Counsellor Trainees

This part will be revealing the level of stress among the respondents. The table below shows that the level of stress of the participants is at ($M = 18.68$, $SD = 6.68$). According to the instrument, scores ranging from 14-26 would be considered as moderate stress, therefore the stress level of the postgraduate counsellor trainees is at a moderate level.

Table 3. Level of Stress

Stress			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Stress	32	18.6875	6.68382

Spearman Correlation Analysis

The Spearman correlation analysis was used in this study to examine the relationship between resilience towards stress, the relationship between coping strategies towards stress, the relationship between problem-focused coping towards stress, the relationship between emotion-focused coping towards stress and the relationship between avoidance coping towards stress.

H01: There is no significant relationship between resilience towards stress

Table 5. Relationship between Resilience and Stress among Postgraduate Counselling Trainees

			Resilience	Stress
Spearman's rho	Resilience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.495**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.004
		N	32	32
	Stress	Correlation Coefficient	-.495**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.
		N	32	32

According to the result presented in Table 5 above, there is a significant, moderate negative correlation between resilience and stress among postgraduate counsellor trainee with ($r = -.495, p < 0.01$). Therefore, H01 is rejected.

H02: There is no significant relationship between coping strategies towards stress

Table 6. Relationship between Coping Strategies Towards Stress

Correlations				
			Coping Strategies	Stress
Spearman's rho	Coping Strategies	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.128
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.486
		N	32	32
	Stress	Correlation Coefficient	.128	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.486	.
		N	32	32

Based on the result showed in the table above, there is no significant relationship between coping strategies towards stress ($r = .128, p > 0.01$). Therefore, H02 is accepted.

H03: There is no significant relationship between problem-focused coping towards stress

Table 7. Relationship between Problem-focused coping towards Stress

Correlations				
			Problem Focused	Stress
Spearman's rho	Problem Focused	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.269
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.136
		N	32	32
	Stress	Correlation Coefficient	-.269	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.136	.

	N	32	32
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Based on the table above, there is no significant relationship between problem-focused coping towards stress ($r = -.269$, $p > 0.01$). Henceforth, H03 is accepted.

H04: There is no significant relationship between emotion-focused coping towards stress

Table 8. Relationship between Emotion-focused Coping towards Stress

Correlations				
			Emotion Focused	Stress
Spearman's rho	Emotion Focused	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.161
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.379
		N	32	32
	Stress	Correlation Coefficient	.161	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.379	.
		N	32	32

According to the table above, $r = .161$, $p > 0.01$. Therefore, H04 is accepted. This result also indicates that there is no significant relationship between emotion-focused coping towards stress.

H05: There is no significant relationship between avoidance coping towards stress

Table 9. Relationship between Avoidance Coping towards Stress

Correlations				
			Avoidance	Stress
Spearman's rho	Avoidance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.300
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.096
		N	32	32
	Stress	Correlation Coefficient	.300	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.096	.

N

32

32

The result above shows that there is no significant relationship between avoidance towards stress with ($r = .300, p > 0.01$). Therefore, H_0 is accepted.

Discussion

In determining the level of resiliency, it was found that postgraduate counsellor trainees have high level of resilience where ($M = 79.25, SD = 13.41$). According to the result, the minimum score is 52.00 while the maximum score is 100.00 which according to the cut-off score, score of 50 and above means having high resilience. The findings of the current study are in line with the study of Machuca (2010) who stated that master's-level-counselling students level of resilience are higher among other adult populations. It was also stated in the study that master's-level counselling students are reported to have moderately-high to high levels of resilience. One explanation for the finding of that study might be because adult students may get strength and support from their accumulated roles as an adult, and from their educators followed by the expectations and demands of class work and academic performance. In addition, another study that is similar to the current study which is by Stanley and Buvanewari (2020) revealed that the level of resilience among social work students are moderate.

In this study, it was revealed that emotion-focused coping was mostly used by the respondents when dealing with stress. It was then followed by problem-focused coping and avoidance coping the least. In a study by Innes (2021) that studies on the relationship between levels of resilience and coping strategies among chiropractic students, it was revealed that emotional-focused coping was being used the most in dealing with stress. Besides that, a study on stress and coping strategies among undergraduate nursing and medical students by P Ravi Shankar et al. (2018) also reported that the highest mean score is active emotional coping ($M = 24.08$), followed by problem-focused ($M = 21.42$) and avoidant coping ($M = 18.90$). This shows that emotion-focused coping is mostly chosen when dealing with stress.

Based on the findings of this study, it was reported that the level of stress of the participants is at a moderate level where ($M = 18.68, SD = 6.68$). This finding is similar to the findings of a study by Nasrudin Subhi et al. (2021). In his study, the mean value and standard deviation of counsellor trainee stress level was reported with ($M = 19.99, SD = 6.06$). In his study, the maximum score value for stress is 40 marks. This indicates that the respondent's stress level is at a moderate level.

Therefore, the researchers think that counsellor trainee might have moderate level of stress due to the knowledge and training that they have learnt throughout their study. In the counselling syllabus, there are a lot of techniques learnt that can be applied to everyday life. Counsellor trainees are able to practice what they have learnt in class and during their training in practicum and internship. They are still a trainee and still have a lot to learn and figure out the best way and technique to cope with their stress, hence the moderate level of

stress.

The findings show there is a significant, moderate negative correlation between resilience and stress among postgraduate counsellor trainee with ($r = -.495, p < 0.01$). This finding is in line with the findings of a study by Innes (2021) which it was reported that chiropractic students have a higher level of perceived stress and lower level of resilience. Besides that, another study that supports the findings of this study is the study of Pooley and Cohen (2010) whereby it was found that university students in Australia has significantly higher levels of psychological distress and low level of resilience.

The findings also show there is no significant relationship between coping strategies towards stress ($r = .128, p > 0.01$). This finding is not in line with past research by MacIntyre et al. (2020) whereby it was stated that there is a relationship between planning and stress. Planning is one of the subscales that is under the problem-focused coping. The reason might be that the choice of stress instrument (PSS-10) to be unfitting in testing the relationship with coping strategies.

As been stated in the findings, emotion-focused coping does not have a significant relationship towards stress with result of ($r = .161, p > 0.01$). On the contrary, according to past research, emotion-focused coping is commonly associated with negative outcomes. Therefore, the finding in this current study is not aligned to the past research might be due to the unsuitable choice of instruments.

The findings have revealed that avoidant coping strategies has no significant relationship towards stress ($r = .300, p > 0.01$). However, Nasarudin Subhi et al. (2020) revealed in his study that there was a significant positive relationship between stress and avoidance coping strategies for the subscales of denial, behavioral withdrawal, and self-blame. Therefore, the researchers think that this is due to the unsuitable choice of instrument.

Suggestion for Future Research

Given the findings of this research contribute to related fields in resilience, there are still a few suggestions and recommendations to be highlighted for future research. The findings in this research are not generalizable to all counsellor trainees in Malaysia. If the research is to be applied to a bigger population, it could provide more valuable findings and information. Henceforth, it is recommended to include more universities and different level of education in future research.

Furthermore, it is suggested that future researchers to use qualitative approach instead of quantitative since the population of this current research subject is small, therefore qualitative approach would be the best fit for the current population size. Qualitative approach would also be beneficial to further investigate on resiliency and coping strategies, for example, how to build more resilience in counsellor trainee and what factors contributes to resiliency and choice of coping strategies among counsellor trainees.

Conclusion

Working in the helping profession is not as easy as it seems. Counsellor trainees will be under

training in the real counselling working setting for a certain duration before they graduate. Through practicum and internship, counsellor trainees will gain more knowledge and sharpen their counselling skills. They also face stressful situations and sometimes have issues coping in stressful situations. Therefore, it is important to know their resiliency and choice of coping strategies as well as their level of perceived stress. The information gained are really important and could help and guide the counsellor trainees and supervisors to help polish and improve on certain areas to make sure these counsellor trainees are mentally and emotionally ready for the job.

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