Factors Associated with Suicidal Risk among UCSI University Students

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ABSTRACT

Mental health is something that humans should be concerned about, and without exception, the UCSI students. Mental health issues can cause students to experience a higher risk of depression, anxiety, and stress which somehow will affect the students’ academic performance, their relationships with family and friends, and their future. Eventually, it could stimulate suicidal thoughts among students and influence them to commit suicide. Therefore, this research is conducted to determine the risk of depression, stress, and anxiety affecting UCSI students that could influence suicidal thoughts and commit suicide. This research is intended for all the faculties at UCSI University. There were questionnaires distributed online and offline for data collection purposes. The data were analysed using both DASS 21 (Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale) and a 5-point Likert scale for both the questionnaires using IBM SPSS Version 20. The findings from the research showed that depression, anxiety and stress have shown a relationship with suicide. The recommendations for this study are to improve the awareness related to suicide, particularly among university students. Society should be aware related to depression, anxiety and stress that can impact to commit suicide among university students.

Keywords: Mental Health, Risk of Depression, Anxiety, Stress, UCSI Students

INTRODUCTION

The most significant general health problem that takes more than 800,000 people to live annually is dominated by suicide. World Health Organization (WHO) has concluded that it is important to reduce the rate of death globally (Turecki and Brent, 2016; World Health Organization, 2014). Suicidal thoughts can cross over anyone’s mind, despite their age, gender, and social status. Based on the data
collected by WHO in 2014, suicide is the second greatest cause of death among 15-29 years old people around the world (Phillips et al., 2002a; McLoughlin et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2014). The statistics from Malaysia suicide rate from 2000-to 2016 has fluctuated whereby from 2000 to 2005 total cases has increased to 10,000 cases then later decreases to 30,000 in 2010, and increases significantly to about 40,000 in 2016. Referring to these statistics, it becomes a serious problem in Malaysia. This increases the concern of how suicidal thoughts can occur anytime and can happen to anyone. Hence, in this research, we want to find out the significant factors that influence someone to end his or her life with suicide, and where do the factors originate from internally or externally. Furthermore, this research can also be used for those who have interests and concerns on this topic, which can enhance their knowledge and experience.

Many researchers concluded that the most often causes that lead to suicide are due to stress, depression, and anxiety (Li et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2017; Phillips et al., 2002a; Turecki and Brent, 2006; Ren et al., 2018). In Malaysia, 29.9% have experienced stress, 12% have experienced anxiety, and 29% have experienced depression. This case had been reported that led to mental problems. Research had been conducted at the Universiti Sains Malaysia showing that from a total of 762 students that were enrolled in the study, there are 743 students responded showing the rate of stress is 46.9%, anxiety at 76.2%, and depression at 60.2% (Fuad et al., 2015). It is also supported by another research held by the National University of Malaysia (UKM) in Kuala Lumpur, which found that between 15-19 years old with a total of 190 students from 2 different schools consisting of 103 males and 87 females shows that 11.10% experiencing severe depression, 10% faces anxiety, and 9.50% faces stress respectively which significantly correlated with suicidal ideation.

Furthermore, this research is inspired by research conducted by both Universiti Sains Malaysia and the National University of Malaysia (UKM) that focused on the three main factors which are depression, anxiety, and stress in influencing someone to commit suicide which is dominated by young-adult people, especially students. Thus, the purpose of this research is to discover the significance of depression, anxiety, and stress in affecting a student to commit suicide. Besides, doing this research will also give another perspective on factors affecting committing suicide.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental health is defined as an individual’s condition where the person feels secure and prosperous, realizes their capabilities, can deal with life pressures, and being productive and can work effectively for themselves and their families (WHO, 2011). Good mental health describes a condition that is far from mental disorder and problems. Research conducted by the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) stated that the higher the possibility of someone having mental disorders will lead to higher the suicide rate, yet it is going to be worse as time goes by (Saha, Chant & McGrath J, 2007; Goldacre, 2011). Some people also do not realize that poor sleeping quality also affects humans’ health conditions where people who are lack of sleeping will tend to be moody and stressed caused of the decrease of serotonin hormone (Cheung & Wong, 2011), and tend to solve their mental health issues by committing suicide. Individuals who have mental issues are proven to practice bad health behaviours, such as smoking, consuming drugs, doing no physical exercise, and also poor diet (Druss & Walker, 2011; Nordentoft, Laursen & Mortensen, 2014).

From the research, it is concluded that the feeling of less belonging tends to be felt by first-generation students rather than other students. That feeling refers to the student’s urge to have either formal or informal interactions with others (Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009). When a student is no longer interested to interact with others, it can be assumed that there is something wrong affecting the student’s mental health condition. As the feeling of belonging crucially determines the level of mental health condition of a student positively and integrates that she or he is needed and valuable to society (Patusky, Lynch-Sauer, Bouwsema, Collier & Hagerty, 1992).
H1: There is a significant relationship between how depression can influence a university student to commit suicide

Suicide ideations are divided into two types which are passive and active. A person with passive suicide ideation tends to think about suicide without actually making plans to conduct suicide (Crow et al., 2008). Meanwhile, a person with active suicide ideation will execute the actual plans to commit suicide. An action of suicide tends to be initiated by a person that has the thought and has planned to commit suicide. It is resulting in fatal and non-fatal suicide attempts among college students (Uchida & Uchida, 2017). The level of suicide risk can range from low severity which consists of thoughts of death to the highest severity which is suicidal ideation with a plan to execute it (Szanto et al., 2003).

The fact shows that the highest percentage of having suicide ideation, suicide plan and attempting suicide is dominated by young adults (Parks, Han, Crosby, Ortega, & Gfroerer, 2011). The research found that teenagers have a high-risk period for suicide thought and execution. It is shown that around 21–50% of teenagers who start to have thoughts and had attempted suicide will continuously haunt that particular student especially when they are transitioning into young adulthood (Nock et al., 2013). Therefore, a teenager that ever tried to do suicide tends to have another possibility to commit suicide for the second time (Sveticic & De Leo, 2012; Goldstein, Bridge & Brent, 2006). The transition from teenagers to young adulthood refers to the transition from high school to university which usually affects most freshmen in college around two-thirds of young people in developed countries (Steinhausen et al., 2006). Other research also proved that there is still high persistence of teenagers who have suicidal thoughts and behaviour into the years of their college life (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2012).

Eustress refers to the condition where individuals tend to feel excited in doing any activities, are fearless and are not afraid of any upcoming threats. Nevertheless, eustress can also disrupt the individual to concentration, distract the problem solving, inconsistency in decision making, and hinder the skills and abilities of a student to study (Jodaki et al., 2021). Subsequently, there is acute stress which comes as a reaction to being surprised, inconsistent happiness, and excitement. The third is chronic stress which individuals are always feeling pressured and this condition is unavoidable. Dealing with chronic stress in long term will attack our physical, emotional, and especially mental health conditions (Idoko, Agoha, Muyiwa & Kunle, 2015).

Depression is led by stress. It needs to be properly controlled and being taken care of, otherwise, it can affect someone’s personality and behaviour negatively and will be resulting in behavioural problems. Depression is influenced by many factors, those are environmental and individual factors (Hammen et al., 2012). A researcher found that among many factors that can influence someone to have depression stress placed the most influential factor in depression (Kessler, 2003). Depression itself is differently faced by individuals with different conditions and different reactions (Jaremka, et al., 2014; O’Connor et al., 2012, Neighmond, 2011; Wright et al., 2012; Koff, & Eickhoff, 2012). Besides that, some factors contribute to the level of vulnerability of a student to suffer depression that can be triggered by workload and academic stress (Dyrybe et al., 2012), abuses (Smith et al., 2007; Ahmed et al., 2009); and lack of sleep that resulting in high level of stress (Richman et al., 1992; Castaldelli-Maia et al., 2012). Studies in Turkey on student populations also show that causes of depression consist of six factors such as trauma, job problem, loss, character, and insulation (Cirakoglu, Kokdemir & Demirtuku, 2003).

H2: There is a significant relationship between how stress can influence a university student to commit suicide

Other research also found that stress is relatively relevant to anxiety whereby it can be worse because of the appearance of multiple stressors and simultaneously stress. Anxiety is a situation that disturb our physiological function to respond in a wrong way which is resulting in high blood pressure, headache, increased heart rate, and sweating. Specific psychiatric disorders that occur often for no
reason and involve extreme fear or worry is known as an anxiety disorder (Idoko, Agoha, Muyiwa & Kunle, 2015).

H3: There is a significant relationship between anxiety will influence a university student to commit suicide

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to verify the correlation between the independent variables (stress, depression, and anxiety) towards the suicide rate among students at UCSI University. Thus, this research will use a quantitative method which will be processed numerically. The questionnaires will be distributed online via Google Forms and offline around UCSI University South Wing, Taman Connaught, Cheras, Kuala Lumpur. After the data is collected, it will be measured with statistical calculation by using IBM SPSS Statistics 26 and will be resulting in a conclusion of this research. In this research, our target population is all the UCSI students with a total amount of 13,000 students including both Malaysian and non-Malaysian students which are more than 18 years old, that are currently pursuing Foundation, Diploma, and Degree levels.

Referring to sample size with a 95% of confidence level, the total population of 13,000 will need as much as 373 as the sample size. The sampling method that is being used is non-probability sampling, where the samples are not chosen randomly. Specifically, the purposive sampling technique which is also known as judgment sampling is being applied in this research. In this type of sampling technique, the researcher has already set the targeted respondents that fulfil the requirements to answer the questionnaire (Bernard 2002, Lewis & Sheppard 2006). The questionnaire is adopted and measured by using a 5-point Likert scale that will determine the significance level of each UCSI student on depression, anxiety and stress, followed by the probability of doing suicide. The study will use multiple linear regression, Pearson’s correlation coefficient analysis and Cronbach’s alpha to test for the consistency and validity of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.Deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>4.280</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>-0.385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.02</td>
<td>4.382</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>-0.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.31</td>
<td>4.314</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>-0.166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 above illustrates the descriptive analysis of the IVs (stress, anxiety, depression) and the DV (suicide). It shows that 0 is the minimum statistic for depression, 1 for Anxiety, and 0 for Stress. Subsequently, depression shows 22 as its maximum statistic, anxiety is 21, and stress is 22. Furthermore, stress shows the highest amount of mean which is 10.31, followed by anxiety at 10.02, and lastly by depression at 9.42. For standard deviation, anxiety gives the highest amount, which is 4.382, followed by stress at 4.314, and depression at 4.280. In addition, the distribution of the skewness and kurtosis for each variable is depression at 0.147 and -0.385, anxiety shows 0.138 and -0.745, followed by stress at 0.038 and -0.166.
Results shown from table 2 Cronbach’s Alpha reliability for all variables are 0.783 with a total of 4 variables. Hence, it falls under the level of $0.70 \leq \alpha \leq 0.80$, which is acceptable.

In this part, the linear relationship between two variables will be explained. The amount below 0.5 can be considered that it has a significant relationship. Subsequently, the value of Pearson Correlation indicates a stronger relationship within the range of -1.0 and +1.0. In this part, the linear relationship between two variables will be explained. The amount below 0.5 can be considered that it has a significant relationship. Subsequently, the value of Pearson Correlation indicates a stronger relationship within the range of -1.0 and +1.0. Moreover, the correlation coefficient between depression and suicide is 0.330, which explains a low-positive correlation. Meanwhile, the value of the significance level of depression and anxiety is as much as 0.000 (p<0.05) and it tells that there’s a significant relationship. Thus, H1, H2 and H3 have been approved as one the factors that have an impact on a UCSI student to commit suicide. It is explained in Table 3 showing that the correlation coefficient between anxiety and suicide is 0.328 and it is significant at the 0.000 level which is less than 0.05. Therefore, anxiety and suicide show a low-positive relationship, as it falls between 0.30 and 0.50. Furthermore, $R^2$ is 0.129 which indicates that 12.9% of dependent variables are influenced by independent variables of depression, anxiety, and stress (see Table 4).

**Table 2: Result from Cronbach’s Alpha**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>N of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.783</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Coefficients of Multiple Linear Regression between IV towards DV**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Stress Total</th>
<th>Suicide Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.741**</td>
<td>.645**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.741**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.710**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Total Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.645**</td>
<td>.710**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Total Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.330**</td>
<td>.328**</td>
<td>.299**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Model Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.359</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>5.287</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONCLUSION**

Suicide can be executed by anyone despite their age or gender. The amount of suicide is increasing yearly (Turecki & Brent, 2016; World Health Organization, 2014). Committing suicide and depression are matters closely related to an individual’s mental health. Moreover, it can be deduced that depression, anxiety and stress have a significant relationship with suicidal ideation. Therefore, depression should be given appropriate attention in trying to carry out any form of intervention and should be prevented before it gets worse and eventually translated into suicidal actions. In dealing
with suicide problems, all parties including parents, teachers, the government, media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must put in an intensive effort to solve the problem. There is a limitation on time for both researchers and the participants whereby the students who take the questionnaire usually do not have much time to fully understand and fill the questionnaires well. However, if the students have enough time to fully understand and fill the questionnaire well, the results could be better and more accurate. Moreover, the researchers feel that the time given for doing the research is not sufficient enough. However, if the time is long enough for the researcher to do the research, the result could be better and more accurate and at the same time, the researcher would be able to get more precise independent variables with a higher significant impact on the dependent variable. In this research, there is a limitation in terms of the scope of the target participants which is limited to Degree level students of UCSI University. However, if the target participants include the Foundation, Master, and PhD students, the result will give a higher significance level of IVs (anxiety, stress, and depression) towards DV (suicide).

The recommendations for future readers are to instill awareness among students in the university, but it is also important for the students to have awareness within themselves. By conducting the research, it is hoped that the readers are also aware of their current surroundings’ conditions. Furthermore, besides increasing awareness, the readers need to know the after-effects of a suicide attempt, which affects someone’s reputation in the future as there will be a life record, their families, as well as themselves emotionally. Therefore, this study aims to find out the factors affecting people to commit suicide. Many factors could be the potential to influence someone to commit suicide. The researchers came out with the hypothesis saying three factors have a high influence on a student to do suicide, which are depression, anxiety, and stress factor.

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