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(IJEPC)**[www.ijepec.com](http://www.ijepec.com)**ACADEMIC STRESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING  
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**DOI:** 10.35631/IJEPC.954016This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

This study aims to investigate the relationship between academic stress and psychological wellbeing among undergraduate students of University Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) during COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the table Krejcie and Morgan (1970) this study required a total of 201 samples as study respondents. Perception of Academic Stress Scale (PAS) and Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS) inventory were used to obtain data. Data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0. The results of descriptive analysis showed that the type of academic stress among students is students' academic self-perception with mean 3.80. The results of descriptive analysis also showed that the level of psychological wellbeing among students were at a moderate level with 112 respondents (55.7 percent). Next, correlation analysis showed that there was a relationship between academic stress and psychological wellbeing with  $r=.582$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ . The implication of this study is students could increase the awareness of their states of mental and physical. Therefore, students can make good decision making and have ability to solve personal as well as interpersonal problems.

**Keywords:**

Academic Stress, Psychological Wellbeing, Mental Health, Undergraduate Students

## Introduction

Stress has become a part of students' academic lives as a result of the myriad internal and external demands set on them. Adolescents are more vulnerable to the issues associated with academic stress while they are undergoing personal and social transformations (Reddy et. al, 2018). Furthermore, poor psychological well-being and interpersonal relationships are becoming more visible issues among university students. Psychological well-being and interpersonal connections are critical topics to understand because they have far-reaching consequences in other aspects of students' life, such as cognitive functions and physical health (Canevello & Crocker, 2011).

Depression, anxiety, and stress are all detrimental to both individuals and society. They may have negative consequences such as reduced normal functioning, burnout, and health issues. In this case, Malaysian undergraduate students are not exempted (Ramli et. al, 2018). These students have weak self-regulation and are unable to control their stress effectively (Teh et. al, 2015). Malaysian students are unable to regulate themselves well when facing high levels of academic stress. This will be resulted to the poor-quality work and academic performance. Furthermore, high levels of academic stress can lead to an increase in psychological issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders, which can have an impact on their academic performance.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the schooling of more than one billion students in 129 countries worldwide (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization-UNESCO, 2021). COVID-19 was discovered in Malaysia for the first time in January 2020. Cases were few and mostly limited to tourists at the time. Local outbreaks first appeared in March 2020 (Sundarasan et. al, 2020). COVID-19 and lockdowns had a substantial negative impact on the psychological well-being and anxiety rate of college students (Cao et. al, 2020).

Due to growing concern over the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of universities around the world have either postponed or cancelled their campus and other events. This unexpected situation, as well as unprecedentedly stringent precautionary steps such as strict quarantines and school closures, have dramatically altered people's lives and jeopardized their mental health and psychosocial functioning (Capone et. al, 2020). During the Movement Control Order (MCO) implemented, the Communications Commission and Multimedia Malaysia (SKMM) has recorded a 23.5 percent increase in the streams of internet traffic throughout the country in the first week of the MCO, and subsequently increased by as much as 8.6 percent in the second week (SKMM, 2020). The increase in internet access was contributed by the changes in the Malaysia educational systems from face to face method to the online method. Not only educational system, other sectors including business sector, purchasing, services and transportation sectors were also affected. This scenario has created a new norm in the life of every individual, as well as the majority of students who are in adolescent stage.

Teaching and Learning (T&L) through digital platforms has exploded recently in the world of education as well as becoming an issue and discussion by many parties (Reggie, 2013)., after the beginning of the era of teaching and learning during the new norm, the debate pertaining to these issues has become a hot topic among the educators. This is because, the landscape of the educational system is seen to change after the COVID-19 pandemic which strike at the end of 2019. As a result, most university students are in shock because the ongoing MCO has stopped

all session involving the face-to-face teaching and learning activities which has been replaced with the online session. This sudden change certainly requires an adaptation process and leads to academic stress as well as anxiety among students. Therefore, the study was conducted to investigate the relationship between academic stress and psychological wellbeing among undergraduate students during COVID-19 pandemic.

## Literature Review

### *Academic Stress*

Academic stress was identified as the most significant health barrier to college students' academic achievement in a 2006 study conducted by the American College Health Association. The 97,357 college students surveyed, 32 percent said that academic stress has resulted in an incomplete, dropped course, or a worse grade. Most commonly reported stressors in the academic environment are related to oral presentations, academic overload, lack of time to meet commitments and taking examinations (Al Sulami et. al, 2018).

The major source of these worrisome statistics has been recognized as academic stress. According to Lee and Larson (2000), this stress is caused by interplay between environmental stressors, student assessment, and reactions to the same. It is now a severe fact that is referred to as a "career stopper". Excessive academic stress can lead to an increase in the prevalence of psychological and physical issues such as depression, anxiety, nervousness, and stress-related disorders, which can have an impact on their academic performance. Next, according to Al-Ayadhi (2005) academic stress is a good model of psychological stress in humans and is thus useful for studying psycho-neurohormonal changes. From the standpoint of neurohormonal physiology, Al-Ayadhi has demonstrated that academic stress causes considerable neurohormonal alterations in the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenocortical axis.

In short, many scholars shared the same stances about academic stress which it is caused by a mixture of academic-related pressures that outweigh an individual's adaptive resources. Excessive academic stress can increase the incidence of psychological and physical difficulties such as depression, anxiety, nervousness, and stress-related illnesses, which can impair academic performance.

### *Psychological Wellbeing*

This study focused on enhancing knowledge about academic stress and psychological wellbeing. According to Bazlan Mustafa et al, (2020), there is a relationship between psychological wellbeing and academic achievement. A descriptive study was conducted on 542 second year student of Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) by using Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS) to identify the relationship between psychological wellbeing and academic achievement. Based on the study conducted, the findings shows that 321 respondents (59.2 percent) have a high level of psychological well-being, followed by 219 respondents (40.4 percent) who have a moderate level, and 2 respondents who have a low level (0.4 percent). Descriptive analysis of psychological well-being reveals that autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, life purpose, and self-acceptance are at the intermediate and high levels.

According to Aisyah, Raishan and Mohd Azhar (2021), previous studies from around the world had indicated that university students had a significant frequency of psychological issues and

mental health problems. A comprehensive evaluation of 13 articles on Malaysian university students found that the prevalence of stress and other psychological distresses ranged from 56 percent, which was higher than the general population's prevalence of 29 percent. A World Health Organization (WHO) study of college students found that mental problems were predictive of impairment in a variety of categories, including housework, college and work-related activities, interpersonal relationships, and the sociocultural context. It is supported by Harding, Lopez, and Klainin-Yobas (2019) stated that students in higher education throughout the world are subjected to a multitude of circumstances that may have an impact on their psychological wellbeing (PWB). In short, stress as judged by the student stress survey and the minority status stress scale had a negative impact on psychological wellbeing among students.

### **Relationship Between Academic Stress And Psychological Wellbeing**

Research on poor psychological well-being and interpersonal connections among university students demonstrates the impact of low levels of psychological well-being and interpersonal relationships on students' academic performance and future achievement. As a result, it is critical to evaluate the factors that reduce psychological well-being and contribute to bad interpersonal relationships among university students (Glozah, 2013). Academic stress is one of these issues. Stress is a subjective thing that is different for each individual and each unique circumstance. Regardless of a student's academic level, coping with stress on a consistent basis can have a significant impact on their psychological well-being and interpersonal relationships.

According to Ofori, Addai, Avor & Quaye (2018), there is evidence that academic stress has a significant influence on students' psychological well-being and interpersonal relationships. In the study, the researchers predicted that students who experienced higher levels of academic stress had lower levels of psychological wellbeing than students who received lower levels of academic stress. Based on the study's findings, low levels of academic stress promote the development of psychological well-being and enhance strong interpersonal interactions.

### **Methodology**

This study is a quantitative study focusing on academic stress and psychological wellbeing during pandemic COVID-19 among undergraduate students. In this study, the research design that conducted is correlational study. The researcher does not control or manipulate any of the variables in a correlational research design. The intensity or direction of a link between two (or more) variables is represented by a correlation. A positive or negative correlation can occur. Correlational design was used in order to find out the relationship between the academic stress and the level psychological wellbeing during pandemic among undergraduate students. There are three possible results for correlational study; a positive correlation, negative correlation and no correlation between the variables.

The researcher used simple random sampling to choose the sample of the study. The use of random sampling assures that the results obtained from the sample are close to what would have been obtained otherwise. The simple random sampling provides every unit in the population an equal probability of being chosen. Firstly, the researcher obtained the list of students from the class representative of fourth year students. From the list, the researcher selected randomly the participants based on the sample size that have been decided from each batch. In this study, questionnaires were used as research tools. The questionnaire was given to the samples in order to acquire response and collect data. Based on the research questions and research objective of this study, the data and important information were analyzed. The

questionnaire was divided into three sections which then measured demographic information, the type of academic stress using Perception of Academic Stress Scale (PAS) and students' psychological wellbeing using Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWB).

Academic Stress Scale (PAS) was developed by Dalia Bedewy & Adel Gabriel on 2015. Perception of Academic Stress Scale (PAS) was used to measure perceptions of academic stress and its sources. This scale consists of 18 questions with 3 main subscales which are the academic expectations subscale (four items), workload and examinations subscale (nine items) and students' academic self-perceptions subscale (five items). Meanwhile, to measure the psychological well-being of the students, Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWB) was used. The 42-items of Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS), developed by psychologist Carol D. Ryff, assesses six components of happiness and wellbeing which includes autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, life purpose, and self-acceptance. Higher total scores indicate higher psychological well-being.

The data was analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 26.0. The descriptive statistic was used to assess and describe demographic data, respondents' type of academic stress and level of psychological well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic among undergraduate students. A descriptive statistic includes frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

### Finding and Discussion

In this descriptive analysis section is described about the demographic element of the study sample. Among the elements analysed are gender, age, and batch or year. All data analysed are included in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: The Demographic Information**

Variables	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	28	13.9
	Female	173	86.1
<b>Age</b>	18 Years old	1	0.5
	19 Years old	12	6.0
	20 Years old	7	3.5
	21 Years old	11	5.5
	22 Years old	43	21.4
	23 Years old	85	42.3
	24 Years old	40	19.9
	25 Years old	2	1.0
<b>Batch/Year</b>	Year 1	24	11.9
	Year 2	7	3.5
	Year 3	18	9.0
	Year 4	149	74.1
	Year 5	3	1.5



The table shows the highest number that participated in this study. The total number of the respondents was 201 respondents with 28 male respondents with 13.9 percent and 173 female respondents with 86.1 percent. For group of age, the range of the respondents are between 18 until 25 years old. The highest number of age group participate in this study was the respondents with age group 23 years old with 85 respondents (42.3 percent), followed with age group 22 years old with 43 respondents (21.4 percent), followed with age group 24 years old with 40 respondents (19.9 percent) and followed with age group 19 years old with 12 respondents (6 percent). The next age group 21 years old with 11 respondents (5.5 percent), followed with age group 20 years old with 7 respondents (3.5 percent) and lastly followed age group 25 years old with 2 respondents (1 percent) and followed with age 18 years old with 1 respondent (0.5 percent). Meanwhile, the batch according to the year of studies showed respondents from year 4 recorded 74.1 percent, followed by year 1 is 11.9 percent, and followed with year 3 recorded 9 percent. Next, year 2 is 3.5 percent and lastly year 5 is 1.5 percent.

### ***Type Of Academic Stress Among Undergraduate Students***

The descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the type of academic stress among undergraduate students. There are three subscales of academic stress among undergraduate students.

**Table 4.2: Type of Academic Stress among Undergraduate Students**

<b>Subscale</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (SD)</b>
<b>Subscale 1</b>	3.69	0.602
<b>The academic expectations</b>		
<b>Subscale 2</b>	3.77	0.726
<b>Workload and examinations</b>		
<b>Subscale 3</b>	3.80	0.589
<b>Students' academic self-perceptions</b>		
<b>Average</b>	3.75	0.639

The finding shows in details in Table 4.2 above, the subscale 1 refer to the academic expectations with mean value 3.69 with a standard deviation of 0.602, followed by workload and examinations subscale with mean value 3.77 with a standard deviation of 0.726 and lastly students' academic self-perceptions subscale with mean value 3.80 with a standard deviation of 0.589.

Academics were cited as a main stressor by more than half of the students. Academic stress has become a widespread issue in many countries, cultures, and ethnic groups. It is supported from the current study revealed that academic stress is still a devastating problem affecting a student's mental health and wellbeing. Overall, the findings showed the highest type of academic stress among undergraduate students is academic self-perception subscale as it shows higher mean with 3.80 and followed by workloads and examination, and academic expectation. In contrast, according to Ramli, Alavi, Mehrinezhad, and Ahmadi (2018) stated that workloads and examination has the highest mean. It followed by student's academic self-perception and lastly academic expectation. Previous finding showed that the academic expectation has the least mean. According to Brough (2015), chronic illness and frequent disagreements with friends, family, or professors were also predictors of stress. Over half of the students indicated

that academics were a primary stressor such as homework, preparing for projects, or time required in class. In addition, the fast spread of the coronavirus pandemic has caused havoc for people, nations, and institutions all around the world. Prior research has identified many academic stressors related to the teaching-learning process that may cause stress in students (de la Fuente et. al, 2021).

### ***Level Of Psychological Wellbeing Among Undergraduate Students***

Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the level of psychological wellbeing among undergraduate students.

**Table 4.3: The Level Of Psychological Wellbeing Among Undergraduate Students**

Level of psychological wellbeing	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Means
Low	0	0	
Moderate	112	55.7	2.4428
High	89	44.3	
Total	201	100	

Table 4.3 above shows the level of psychological wellbeing among undergraduate students during COVID-19 pandemic. The findings showed the highest level of psychological wellbeing scored is moderate with 112 respondents (55.7 percent), followed by high score with 89 respondents (44.3 percent). The lowest score for the level of psychological wellbeing is nul with 0 respondents. The means score for the level of psychological wellbeing is 2.44.

The result of this study shows most of respondent's level of psychological wellbeing are moderate with 55.7 percent which mean the respondents mostly are still in control. This study shows that there are no respondents with low level of psychological wellbeing. Majority of respondent's level of psychological wellbeing are moderate or high level. The findings of this study are also supported by Malik, Saidin, Abd Wab, and Nordin (2020) stated in their research that the majority of the respondents experienced a moderate level of psychological well-being, while only 8.1 percent reported a high level of psychological well-being. On the other side, almost 23 percent of respondents reported low levels of psychological well-being. According to the findings of this study, respondents felt a moderate level of psychological well-being, indicating that they are mostly mentally stable in terms of mental health, happiness, and social-ability. Meanwhile, according to Basson (2015), having the ability to perform daily obligations, having difficult experiences that stimulate growth, being confident in thoughts and perspectives, and feeling that life has significance and direction are all indicators of high psychological well-being among students.

### ***Relationship Between Academic Stress And Psychological Wellbeing***

This finding consists of the relationship between academic stress and psychological wellbeing among undergraduate students during COVID-19 pandemic. The data analysis yielded the result as present in the table 4.4 below.

**Table 4.4: The Relationship Between Academic Stress And Psychological Wellbeing  
Among Undergraduate Students**

		Psychological wellbeing
Academic stress	Pearson Correlation	-.582**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	201

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table 4.4 above showed the correlation between academic stress and psychological wellbeing. There is a relationship between academic stress and psychological wellbeing. The moderate negative correlation of variables ( $r = -.582$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ). There is a significant negative correlation between academic stress and psychological wellbeing among undergraduate students during pandemic COVID-19. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a moderate negative correlation between academic stress and psychological wellbeing among undergraduate students.

According to Malik, Saidin, Abd Wab, and Nordin (2020) in their finding suggests a moderate and inverse association between psychological well-being and stress among students ( $r=-0.423$ ,  $p=.00$ ). In the other words, if the students were able to lessen their stress level, they may be able to improve their psychological well-being. The result in this study shows that there is a significant positive correlation between academic stress and psychological wellbeing among undergraduate students during COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a moderate positive correlation between academic stress and psychological wellbeing among undergraduate students.

In contrast, according to Malik and Javed (2021) in their findings shows a different result. The result 96.9 percent (moderate stress = 82.5 percent, high stress = 14.4 percent) reported experiencing stress as a result of e-learning during COVID-19. The findings also revealed a strong negative correlation between perceived stress and student's academic performance. The effects of family and institutional support on student's stress perception were shown to be considerable.

Thus, it can be concluded that the findings of the study with previous studies are parallel and also there are some contrast. The type of academic stress shows that students' academic self-perception and workloads and examination are the highest caused the academic stress among undergraduate students. The level of psychological wellbeing among undergraduate students is at moderate or medium level which means that they are mentally stable. This indicates that the undergraduate students may be able to improve their psychological well-being.

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a period of upheaval for undergraduate students. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which began in China in December 2019, is a catastrophic disaster that has spread across the entire globe at the speed of light. About every nation has put in place public health programs to stop the spread of the disease. The pandemic has the potential to have a physical, academic, environmental, and psychological impact on college students. College students' lives have drastically changed in a brief amount of time



since they have been forced to leave campus, transition to new living conditions, and move to online learning platforms.

In addition, the closure of educational institutions in the country following the COVID-19 pandemic that hit has has a certain effect on the structure of teaching and learning, which it has been drastically switched from a direct method (face to face) to online method. Accordingly, students in this country have been faced with different modes of study which are online teaching and learning in parallel with Revolution 5.0 through the use of internet networks and digital applications. In this situation, self-adaptation and adjustment are vital and proper coping strategies can help students to go through this rough situation. Therefore, all parties need to make a strong and comprehensive preparation to face the new norm through online learning methods to ensure the continuity of the learning process runs smoothly. Teaching and online learning needs to be fully utilized to ensure focus on learning. Online teaching and learning needs to be fully utilized to ensure that the focus on learning is not affected despite various challenges that will be faced in the future.

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