

The Impact of Lifestyle on Students' Mental Well-Being a Case Study in Terengganu, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

In essence, mental health is a prominently discussed issue in contemporary times, especially more so after the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has led to an escalation in mental health problems. This situation has raised questions about the extent to which students' mental health can be influenced by their lifestyles. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the impact of lifestyle on students' mental health. The study employed a quantitative approach, and the data collected utilized library research and survey methods. The survey questionnaire was distributed online, and the researcher successfully obtained responses from a total of 157 respondents. The results of this study indicate University students with lower levels of mental health recorded a moderate mean value. The study results also show that there is a significant influence between lifestyle and students' mental health. Lifestyle is one of the important factors that affect the mental health of university students. Everyone is responsible for maintaining a healthy lifestyle to achieve well-being in life. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a valuable indicator, particularly for university students, in maintaining good mental health. This is because university students represent the younger generation who will lead the nation in the future.

Keywords: Students; mental health; lifestyle; university; higher education institution

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is vital to everyone, influencing our thoughts, emotions, and actions. It shapes our ability to make decisions, form relationships, and contribute to society. Recognized as a basic human right, mental health is crucial for personal, communal, and economic well-being. Good mental health allows us to navigate life's challenges, recognize our strengths, excel in various endeavors, and engage actively in our communities. Conversely, without proper support, mental health issues can disrupt our cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning, affecting our overall welfare and impacting relationships, education, and work (World Health Organization, 2022). Good mental health can be described as a condition of wellness that enables individuals to effectively manage the typical pressures of life and perform tasks with productivity (Fusar-Poli et al., 2020).

The process of modernization in Malaysia has significantly changed the way its people live. Modernization encompasses shifts in societal attitudes, mentalities, and cultural customs to suit contemporary times. The growth of urbanization, alongside modernization, has brought about substantial changes in human lifestyles. The study by Wardhani & Paramita (2016) indicates that individuals experiencing mental health disorders are often attributed to their unhealthy lifestyles. The concept of lifestyle was first coined by Austrian medical doctor and psychotherapist Alfred Adler in his book, "The Case of Miss R.," suggesting that "the fundamental character of an individual develops during early childhood" (Rai, 2019), encompassing the core traits, values, and attributes that shape a person's personality or identity established in their early years. Contemporary lifestyles have impacted the overall well-being of individuals, including their psychological or mental health. Lifestyle includes the interests, beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral tendencies of individuals, groups, or cultures. It denotes the routines or manners of living that encompass diverse facets of an individual's or a group's existence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on findings from the World Health Organization (WHO), one in eight individuals experiences mental health disorders worldwide. This global statistic underscores the need for awareness and comprehensive strategies to address mental health on a global scale. Mental health disorders manifest in various forms, affecting individuals across different age groups, backgrounds, and cultures. According to Ueda et al. (2022), in Japan, suicide rates during the early phase of the Covid-19 pandemic were lower than in the years 2017 to 2019, but they began to rise again from July 2020. The main contributor to this increase was a decline in mental health status among young women. The number of suicide cases among women increased by around 70% in October 2020, with the most significant surge observed among young women, especially those under 40 years old. Additionally, young female workers lost income and were affected by challenging economic conditions, which impacted this group. Furthermore, according to Jang et al. (2022), South Korea has consistently reported the highest suicide rates among Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries since 2003. Additionally, a study by Chekroud et al. (2018) analyzed data from 1,237,194 individuals aged 18 and above in the United States from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey. The study found that individuals who regularly engage in physical exercise are less likely to experience mental health issues compared to those who do not exercise. The BRFSS is a self-reported telephone survey in the United States that provides frequency data on behavioral risk factors associated with the most common health conditions in the country (Hsia et al., 2020).

Mental health can influence a student's personal growth, everyday experiences, and future opportunities (Ab Ghani et al., 2022). The rising numbers of undergraduate, graduate, and professional students screening positive for major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder are concerning (Chrikov et al., 2020). Students' mental health refers to their emotional and psychological well-being while pursuing academic studies. It's influenced by factors like academic pressure, social interactions, and life transitions. Common concerns include depression, anxiety, and stress-related issues. Many previous studies have shown a relationship between lifestyle and an individual's mental health. Practicing a healthy lifestyle can provide positive benefits for one's mental health. Individuals who choose to adopt a healthier lifestyle tend to lead more comfortable lives and experience lower levels of psychological stress.

A study by Wang et al. (2020) revealed that most university students employ alternative coping mechanisms, which are strategies commonly used by individuals to manage unpleasant or challenging emotions when they face stress or trauma, to reduce their stress levels. Various strategies are used to alleviate stress, such as engaging in healthy activities like exercising, participating in beneficial activities such as reading, caring for pets, and listening to music. However, stress may also lead students to engage in unhealthy behaviours, such as excessive alcohol consumption, isolation, or frequent crying. According to Penley et al. (2002), if students choose to adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms, it not only affects their physical health but can also contribute to increased emotional stress. Therefore, students must make rational choices when selecting the best methods to manage stress, ultimately benefiting their mental health.

It is undeniable that an unhealthy lifestyle among university students can disrupt their mental health. Wardhani & Paramita (2016) also demonstrated that an individual's mental disorders are caused by current lifestyle choices. According to Mohamad (2022), mental health issues are the second most prevalent health problem affecting Malaysians, after heart disease. As we know, the rise in mental health problems occurs annually and has become increasingly serious after the COVID-19 pandemic. Daily routines and societal lifestyles exert pressure, consequently impacting mental health. Hashim & Saniff (2020) stated that an unhealthy lifestyle contributes to both physical deterioration (illness) and mental issues (depression or stress) in individuals.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative method or approach. The quantitative approach allows researchers to draw conclusions based on measurable quantitative data, where the results can be clearly assessed. The primary objective of this study is to examine the influence of lifestyle on university students' mental health. The

respondents of this study consisted of 157 students. According to Sekaran & Bougie (2016), an appropriate sample size for research ranges between 30 to 500 participants. This study utilizes descriptive data analysis (mean values) and inferential analysis (correlation). Regression analysis is a statistical technique used to investigate relationships between variables.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

University Students' Mental Health Levels

Table 1 presents the mental health levels of university students. The findings indicate that students generally exhibit poor mental health. This is evident as most students reported feeling consistently depressed, with a mean score of 3.14 and a standard deviation of 1.23. In addition, students frequently experienced stress, recording a mean score of 3.01 and a standard deviation of 1.16, as well as a lack of affection, with a mean score of 3.01 and a standard deviation of 1.30.

Furthermore, the item "I feel unnecessary" recorded a low mean score of 2.24 and a standard deviation of 1.14. This indicates that students generally feel important and needed in society. According to Smullen (2021), the feeling of being 'needed' contributes to a sense of positivity and meaning within interactions. Interaction methods play a significant role in shaping emotional well-being and lifelong personal development. The quality of social relationships contributes to a sense of belonging and fulfils overall life satisfaction.

TABLE 1: University Students' Mental Health Levels

Mental Health Indicators	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean Interpretation
I feel that my mental health is not good.	2.764	1.116	Moderate
I often experience stress.	3.013	1.160	Moderate
I often experience anxiety	2.350	1.085	Moderate
I feel depression	3.140	1.232	Moderate
I feel inferior	2.707	1.216	Moderate
I feel lonely	2.662	1.284	Moderate
I feel unnecessary	2.242	1.146	Low
I lack affection	3.013	1.306	Moderate
I often experience dramatic mood changes	2.736	1.193	Moderate

The results indicate that the overall mental health of students falls within the "moderate" range. Notably, the highest mean score is for the statement "I often experience depression" (mean = 3.140, SD = 1.232), suggesting that depression is a common issue among students. Similarly, stress and lack of affection are prominent concerns, with both items recording a mean score of 3.013. Conversely, the lowest mean score is for the statement "I feel unnecessary" (mean = 2.242, SD = 1.146), which falls into the "low" category. This indicates that students generally feel needed and valued in society. Overall, the findings highlight the prevalence of mental health challenges among students, particularly stress, depression, and feelings of loneliness, underscoring the need for effective support systems and interventions to promote better mental health outcomes.

Impact of Lifestyle on Students' Mental Health

To examine the influence of lifestyle on students' mental health, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to address the study's objectives and research questions. The output in Table 2 indicates that the correlation value between lifestyle and mental health is 0.470, while the R^2 value is 0.221. This value, referred to as the coefficient of determination, represents the percentage of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable. In this case, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.221$) indicates that 22.1% of the variance in mental health is influenced by lifestyle. According to Cohen (1992), this R^2 value falls within the moderate range (between 0.13 and 0.25) for this study. These findings suggest that lifestyle plays a significant role in predicting students' mental health. The positive correlation value of 0.470 indicates a positive

relationship between the two variables, meaning that a healthier lifestyle leads to better mental health, and conversely, an unhealthy lifestyle negatively affects mental health.

TABLE 2: Model Summary of the Influence of Lifestyle on Mental Health

Model	R	R ²	Perubahan R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.470 ^a	0.221	0.216	0.88643
a. Predictors: (Constant), Gaya Hidup				
b. Dependent Variable: Kesehatan Mental				

CONCLUSION

The conclusion derived from this study indicates a significant relationship between lifestyle and mental health, emphasizing that lifestyle can indeed influence students' mental well-being. However, it remains the individual's responsibility to adopt a lifestyle that safeguards mental health to ensure its stability and overall health. Maintaining a balanced and healthy lifestyle plays a crucial role in promoting mental well-being. Lifestyle-related issues may encompass various factors such as insufficient physical activity, irregular sleep patterns, unbalanced diets, and other contributing elements that lead to overall lifestyle imbalance. An imbalanced lifestyle can further exacerbate stress among students, where prolonged stress may result in mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Preventive efforts, including health education and other intervention strategies, can assist students in understanding the importance of maintaining a balanced lifestyle and its direct relationship with mental health. Such programs and strategies can equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively manage their lifestyles, ultimately fostering better mental health outcomes.

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