

Optimism and psychological well being psychology essay



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There were different stressors that lead to a higher perceived stress level among undergraduate students. As stated by Amponsah and Owolabi (2011), environmental changes, academic problems and social challenges such as living apart from home for the first time were the common stressors for college students. However, academic stress was the top source of stress among undergraduate students (Elias, Ping, & Abdullah, 2011).

In turn, these stressors could lead to both physiological and behavioral problems such as immune system disorders and psychological disorders (Zainiyah, Afiq, Chow, & Sara, 2011). Research has shown that students who experienced stress may also lead to physical problems, psychological distress, behavioral problems and even poor academic performance (Sharma & Kaur, 2011).

Context of Study

There were several researches that have examined the relationship between optimism and perceived stress level. As highlighted by Rabiega and Cannon (n. d.), optimism is the belief of positive outcomes in future. Optimism is also known as a buffer against hopelessness (Jit-Ho, n. d). Both physical and psychological well-being could be influenced by optimistic thinking.

As proposed by Diener and Chan (2011), optimism could improve health and even lead to longevity. Rasmussen, Wrosch, Scheier, and Carver (2006) also found that optimists have better outcomes than pessimists when experienced threat to health as they reported less distress. Overall, optimism could bring benefits to different life situations especially in minimizing the stress levels (Shearman et al., 2011).

In a sample of undergraduate students in southeastern United States, Cann, Stilwell, and Taku (n. d.) revealed that individuals who possessed optimism, happiness and hope, supported by a good sense of humor would have a lower level of perceived stress. Furthermore, optimism was associated with positive mood and attitude that would lead to a stress free lifestyle (Daraei & Ghaderi, 2012). Saklofske, Austin, Mastoras, Beaton, and Osborne (2012) have supported that positive affect could serve as a buffer against stress while negative affect caused people more vulnerable to stress.

According to Shearman et al. (2011), high levels of optimism have a positive influence in coping with stressful situations. University students who have psychological strength such as optimism tend to adopt problem-focused coping strategies (Khan et al., 2011). Wang and Yeh (2005) explained that problem-focused coping involved optimistic action and social support that was helpful in alleviated psychological distress and minimized the negative impacts of stress. When the perceived stress level was moderate or lower, problem-focused coping became more adaptive. However, emotion-focused coping strategies such as avoidance and emotional were used at a higher perceived stress level.

Moreover, optimistic students reported better academic performance (Medlin & Faulk, n. d.). According to Gurol and Kerimgil (2010), there was a relationship between academic optimism and school success. There were three properties which known as academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and trust of students and parents that have shaped the culture of academic optimism. Among these three properties, academic emphasis could facilitate students' learning which in turn encourages achievement. Generally,
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academic optimism was positively associated with academic performance (Bressler, Bressler, & Bressler, 2010). Academic optimism was also positively influenced students' academic achievement despite socioeconomic status (Gurol & Kerimgil, 2010).

Furthermore, Lounsbury, Levy, Park, Gibson, and Smith (2009) have demonstrated the relationship between optimism, self-directed learning and academic performance among students in their study. The result showed that self-directed learning was linked to optimism. In fact, these students tend to perform better in their academic. Mustafa, Elias, Noah, and Roslan (2010) further proposed that the positive relationship between students' engagement in learning and academic success could be explained by integrating flow theory into the model of motivation. It was possible that academic success was caused by the subjective experience of having high concentration and capability to master the task as well as enjoyment of learning.

Generally, optimism was associated with better coping during stressful situation (Fernandez-Castro, Rovira, Doval, & Edo, 2009). Finding has shown that university students with optimism tend to adopt problem-focused coping strategies (Khan et al., 2011). In turn, these strategies could help them to manage stressful events during university life and even lead to better adjustment and academic success (Abdullah, Elias, Uli, & Mahyuddin, 2010). Apparently, optimism was the best strategy in any situation as individuals could gain resources for achieving goals and more open to new experiences (Forgeard & Seligman, 2012).

Research Problem

Many students experienced stress during their university life (Khan et al., 2011). According to The Stars (Feb, 2011), National Suicide Registry Malaysia (NSRM) has revealed that the inability of teenagers and young adults to cope with stress from school, work, family issues and relationship problem could lead to suicide. In fact, long-term stress was associated with anxiety and depression (Smith, Segal, & Segal, 2012).

Asiaone (March, 2012) also reported that a Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) final year student was suspected to commit suicide because he was disappointed with his result. Apparently, there is an increase of suicide cases among undergraduate students in Malaysia because of stress. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the stress issue in order to prevent suicide behaviors among students. The rise of stress among undergraduate students is an issue that must not be overlooked as it could negatively affect students in different ways. By this identification of research problem, more information could be obtained on how optimism influenced both the stress level and academic achievement of undergraduate students.

Significance of Study

Different kinds of stress could be experienced by undergraduate students. They have to deal with challenging academic work, explore about their career options and build a good social relationship with others. Since stress has become a major concern among undergraduate students, it is significant to conduct research to explore more about stress and aspects that are linked to stress.

This study aims to explore the relationship between optimism and stress among undergraduate students in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). From present study, it can find out whether personality of optimism acts as a buffer against stress. It also gives a clearer picture on how optimism plays a vital role in order to reduce the stress among undergraduate students. Apart from that, people can have a more comprehensive understanding about the benefits of optimism and develop some helpful intervention programmes so that students can handle their stress in effective manner.

In addition, this study aims to investigate the relationship between optimism and academic achievement among undergraduate students in UTAR. Since students are the valuable assets of country, it is crucial to understand some factors that contribute to academic success. From present study, it can also offer insight into the relationship between optimism and academic achievement.

Purpose of Study

This study aims to explore the relationship between optimism and stress among undergraduate students in UTAR. Besides, it aims to investigate the relationship between optimism and academic achievement. Importantly, present study can demonstrate the importance of optimism in academic setting. This study is essential for future research to develop intervention programmes that can help undergraduate students to manage their stress and improve their academic performance.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are shown as follow:

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Is there any significant relationship between optimism and stress among undergraduate students in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR)?

Is there any significant relationship between optimism and academic achievement among undergraduate students in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR)?

Operational Definitions:

Optimism. The definition offered by Conversano et al. (2010) proposed that the term 'optimism' consists of two interrelated concepts which are the tendency to hope and to believe that we live in "the best of all possible worlds". According to Ashraf, Jaffri, Sharif, and Khan (2012), optimism can be expressed as behavior and attitude of human in which individual holds a belief of positive outcomes in every situation.

Stress. There were different views of stress. Smith et al. (2012) defined stress as a normal physical reaction which activates "fight-or-flight" reaction during threatening event. It is also the perceived stress that present or experienced by people (Jit-Ho, n. d.). In present study, the definition of stress was based on Cohen and Williamson (1988) which stated that perceived stress depends on how unpredictable, uncontrollable and overloaded is the life of individual. Stress was resulted from threatening and demanding events as well as inadequate coping resources to cope with threat or demand.

Undergraduate. A university or college student who has not obtained a first, particularly a bachelor's degree (Dictionary. com, 2012). The undergraduate students in this study were selected from UTAR.

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Resiliency. According to Garg and Rastogi (2009), the capacity to bounce back after setbacks, to be adjustable and to renovate the sense of vitality is known as resiliency. It involves the successful adaptation to challenging life experiences, particularly under stressful condition or traumatic events and manages to recover from these experiences in positive way.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Optimism and Psychological Well-being

As proposed by Cann et al. (n. d.), the way to interpret an event could affect psychological adjustment of individual. Particularly, individual with optimistic interpretive style would be more resilient to stress (Garg & Rastogi, 2009).

Research has also shown that optimism was a negative predictor of psychological ill health (Rothmann & Essenko, 2007).

In a sample of undergraduate students in Poland, Posadzki, Musonda, Debska, and Polczyk (2009) found that depressive symptoms could be alleviated by optimism. Moreover, there was a positive relationship between optimism and students' quality of life. This finding was supported by Karademas (2006) which revealed that optimism was negatively associated with depressive symptomatology while positively associated with satisfaction with life. In addition, optimism could strengthen the belief in own value and foster active coping which resulted in less burnout during early career (Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen, & Nurmi, 2009). Overall, previous findings have indicated that optimism was associated with greater psychological well-being.

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Optimism, Belief and Stress

As pointed out by Urbig and Monsen (2012), dispositional optimism was associated with a specific belief structure. If the optimism of an individual was based on control and self-efficacy, he or she would be more likely to use active coping. Consequently, there would be an increased perceived chance for success. In contrast, passive coping would be used if the optimism of individual was based on belief in good luck. Generally, optimists believed that their problem was temporary and they could conquer the obstacles (Kumcagiz, Celik, Yilmaz, & Eren, 2011).

A research conducted by Lee and Bradley (n. d.) has shown that international students with greater optimistic beliefs about own capability could lead to a lower acculturative stress level. Besides, they showed more assertiveness compared to less optimistic students. They were more likely to engage in challenging tasks and exerted greater effort to conquer hardships. By producing positive experiences and constructive self-belief in students, they could also have a better adjustment to college life (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2011). From these findings, it could be concluded that optimism was associated with positive belief that would alleviate the stress level.

Optimism, Meaning of education, Coping and Stress

Using a sample of undergraduate students, Krypel and Henderson-King (2010) have examined the meaning of education and the relationship with optimism, coping and students' perceived stress. Optimism could keep students away from self-defeating view of education such as perceive education as stressor. Besides, optimism motivated them to view challenges

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in positive way and retain their responsibilities as students. As a result, optimistic students were more actively involved in education and even showed more persistence in pursuing education. Likewise, Bressler, Bressler, and Bressler (n. d.) stated that students with higher optimism may show more persistence to complete their degree program.

Apart from that, Krypel and Henderson-King (2010) pointed out that optimistic students were able to develop a more productive approach to deal with stress. There was also a positive correlation between positive meaning of education with problem-focused coping which involved positive reinterpretation of stressful events and active coping. Consequently, the perception of stress was lower. In short, optimism was linked to positive meaning of education and adaptive coping skills that could reduce the stress level.

Optimism, Coping and Stress

Conversano et al. (2010) revealed that optimism was positively correlated with coping strategies. As proposed by Carver, Scheier, and Segerstrom (2010), optimists adopted problem-focused coping during threatening events. They did not merely ignore threats but attempt to minimize the risks by attending to risks in a more selective manner. Therefore, optimists have less distress during adversity. Similarly, Rasmussen et al. (2006) found that optimists were more likely to adopt problem-focused coping strategies during adversity. However, when problem-focused coping was not feasible, they would apply emotion-focused strategies such as acceptance, humor and positive reframing.

As highlighted by Greenglass and Fiksenbaum (2009), positive affect could promote proactive coping which included goal setting and self-efficacy. Such proactive coping could provide resources for self-improvement and would be activated during stressful condition. In a sample of university students, positive affect could regulate the effect of proactive coping on depression. Study from DeAndrea et al. (2011) also stated that students who have optimistic outlook adopted better coping strategies which facilitated their adjustment to new environment. Taken together, these findings suggested that optimistic individual tend to apply effective coping skills such as problem-focused coping and proactive coping to resist against stress.

Optimism, Resilience and Stress

Jit-Ho (n. d.) has investigated the impacts of daily hassles and resilience in both physical and psychological well-being among undergraduate students in Hong Kong. Result showed that there was a positive association between optimism and resilience which in turn led to better health and lower stress level. During stressful period, there was a better adaptation of resilient people.

Besides, Steinhardt and Dolbier (2008) have found the positive relationship between resilience and effective coping strategies. People with high resiliency adopted more problem solving strategies. Ebrahimi, Keykhosrovani, Dehghani, and Javdan (2012) even revealed that resiliency was positively correlated with mental health among university students. Conversely, it was negatively correlated with stress and depression.

Therefore, optimism was correlated with resiliency which in turn leads to lower stress levels among university students.

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Optimism, Self-efficacy and Stress

There was an association formed between optimism and self-efficacy (Ashraf et al., 2012). According to Ahmed, Qazi, and Jabeen (2011), optimistic self-reliance of an individual was known as self-efficacy. Self-efficacy could motivate people to set goal and achieve it. Luszczynska, Gutierrez-Dona, and Schwarzer (2005) also supported that high self-efficacy individuals set higher goal and more persistent to attain it. They preferred challenging tasks and being highly committed to own goals even when there was setback.

Importantly, self-efficacy could help people to bounce back after adversity (Ahmed et al., 2011).

In a study among undergraduate students, Posadzki et al. (2009) revealed that self-efficacy could affect the coping strategies among undergraduate students. Luszczynska et al. (2005) also highlighted that self-efficacy allowed individuals to cope with stressful events in a more effective manner. In turn, students with high self-efficacy showed less stress and adjustment problems (Lee & Bradley, n. d.). Generally, optimistic individual have higher self-efficacy and thus able to cope with stress effectively.

Optimism, Social support and Stress

Mosher, Prelow, Chen, and Yackel (2006) have conducted a study to investigate the potential mediators of the relation of optimism to depressive symptoms among college students. Findings indicated that optimistic students perceived greater social support. In fact, students with higher optimism and greater social support were associated with less depressive symptomatology.

As explained by Vollmann, Renner, and Weber (2007), optimists have higher tendency to be provided with instrumental support for striving toward their goal. Besides, they possessed positive personality and interpersonal attraction. Thus, they elicited positive social responses from others and inclined to generalize these responses. As a result, they received more social support from others. Based on these findings, optimists tend to get more social support that could help them to buffer against stress.

Optimism and Academic Achievement

As pointed out by Luszczynska et al. (2005), individual with positive expectancy and optimistic belief could be more motivated. Such motivational belief could lead to a successful academic adjustment (Cazan, 2012). In fact, motivation was a significant factor that leads to academic success beyond prior performance and intelligence (Steinmayr & Spinath, 2009). According to Mustafa et al. (2010), both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation would motivate students to learn. However, students with intrinsic motivation performed better in the face of challenges.

Another study from Kumcagiz et al. (2011) has found a positive correlation between optimism of students and their levels of emotional intelligence. As highlighted by MacCann, Fogarty, Zeidner, and Roberts (2011), there was a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement. Specifically, more problem-focused coping strategies were used by individuals with higher emotional management which resulted in better academic achievement.

Ogundokun and Adeyemo (2010) further explained that students with emotional intelligence were able to regulate their feeling, solve problem and have excellent interpersonal skills which associated with academic achievement. Importantly, fewer negative emotions were found in them and thus could avoid distraction in learning (MacCann et al., 2011). With a good emotional management, students could even cope well with stress and anxiety due to examination (Ogundokun & Adeyemo, 2010).

Furthermore, association was formed between optimism and self-efficacy (Ashraf et al., 2012). As discussed by Ozan, Gundogdu, Bay, and Celkan (2012), students with higher sense of efficacy have higher aspirations and greater flexibility in finding new solution. Besides, they showed better intellectual performance compared to students of equal cognitive ability who lack of efficacy. Such efficacy beliefs could increase one's motivation and promote strategic thinking which in turn lead to achievement. Indeed, self-efficacy was one of the components of motivation that contributed most to performance (Katz & Shoshani, n. d.).

In addition, Robinson and Snipes (2009) proposed that hope, optimism and self-efficacy were expectancy beliefs that developed a system of competence and control which in turn lead to academic success. Specifically, students who have high self-efficacy possessed both the hope agency and hope pathways in which they were motivated to attain goals and identifying alternatives during adversity. Besides, they were optimistic about their plan. Hence, such interactive system of beliefs would result in better academic performance and coping skills.

Theoretical Framework of Optimism

Optimism was under the branches of positive psychology that was more emphasized on the abilities to conquer hardship rather than the person's pathology (Rabiega & Cannon, n. d.). According to Sumer, Giannotta, Settanni, and Ciairano (2009), optimism could be defined as the expectation of the best possible outcomes.

Seligman (1998) has proposed an explanatory style model to explain optimism. In this model, optimists were those who attributed the causes of negative events to external, unstable, and specific causes while attributed the causes of positive events to personal and pervasive causes. Hence, optimistic individuals were more likely to focus on positive events and have more capabilities to handle future situations. In addition, individuals with positive explanatory style put more effort to achieve goals as they believe in their capabilities to reduce the discrepancy between goals and current situation (as cited in Kluemper, Little, & DeGroot, 2009).

On the other hand, Carver and Scheier (1981) have proposed a self-regulatory model which explained on how the self-regulatory nature of optimism could affect outcomes. In this theory, goal could direct human behavior. Assessment would be initiated when individual aware of the discrepancy between goal and current situation. More efforts would be exerted in order to achieve goals if individual perceived that the discrepancy between goal and current situation could be minimized (as cited in Kluemper et al., 2009).

Apart from that, Scheier and Carver (1985) have highlighted “dispositional optimism” in their study. This theory proposed that optimists have more positive attitudes about life. Besides, they showed more protective attitudes and higher resiliency during stressful events. They also implemented more useful coping skills. Therefore, there was a positive correlation between optimism with both physical and mental well-being (as cited in Conversano et al., 2010).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This chapter focused on several aspects which included research design, participants and location, instrument, research procedures and data analysis. Survey method with convenience sampling was being implemented in current study. The participants were Year 3 Psychology students from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) which located at Kampar, Perak. The instruments used were Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) to assess the level of optimism and Perceived Stress Scale, 10 item version (PSS-10) to measure the stress level. Besides, the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of students was obtained to assess their academic achievement.

Research Design

Survey. Research design could be defined as the overall plan of researchers towards the practical implementation of project (Draper, 2004). In current study, quantitative research design was used. Tewksbury (2009) has defined quantitative research as a scientific investigation in social science based on specific definition and careful operationalization of concepts and variables. It <https://assignbuster.com/optimism-and-psychological-well-being-psychology-essay/>

involved hypothesis testing by using statistical methods (Wood & Welch, 2010). Survey was the quantitative research method in present study and questionnaires were distributed for data collection. Self-report measure of survey method was implemented because of time-saving and it could assess the thoughts and feelings of participants. Besides, convenience sampling was used as sampling method. Convenience sampling is a nonprobability sampling in which participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to take part in the study (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2009).

Participants and Location

In present study, the participants were Year 3 Psychology students from the Faculty of Art and Social Science (FAS) in UTAR. There were 100 participants selected by using convenience sampling. Year 3 students were selected as sample because they were in the final year of study that have to deal with different stressors such as academic stress, stress from doing FYP and also stress from planning for their future after they graduate. In fact, the most stressful group among undergraduate students was the final year students (Elias et al., 2011).

Particularly, Psychology students were selected as sample because they were vulnerable to stress. A study done by Collins (2010) stated that students from the Medicine, Law, Mechanical Engineering and Psychology faculties have higher tendency to develop anxiety and depression.

Surprisingly, there was a higher tendency of suicidal thought and previous suicide attempts among psychology students compared to medical students (Kavalidou, 2013).

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This study was conducted at UTAR which located in Kampar, Perak. Specifically, the survey was carried out in UTAR lecture hall, IDK 6.

Instrument

The instrument used in current study was Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) in order to assess the level of optimism among undergraduate students. According to Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994), LOT-R was used to measure the dispositional optimism and pessimism.

There were three types of items in LOT-R which included four filler items that were not scored, three positive items and three negative items. The items 2, 5, 6 and 8 were filler items while items 3, 7 and 9 were the reversed items. One of the sample items in LOT-R was " In uncertain times, I usually expect the best". The participants were required to choose the appropriate response by using a Likert scale with five possible choices. The scale ranges from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). In order to obtain the total score, sum the items 1, 3, 4, 7, 9 and 10. The scores for items 3, 7 and 9 have to be reversed. The possible range of total score is 0-24. There were three levels of optimism, namely high optimism (19-24), moderate optimism (14-18) and low optimism (0-13).

As pointed out by Scheier et al. (1994), the test-retest reliability for LOT-R were displayed as $r = .68$ for 4 month, $r = .60$ for 12 month, $r = .56$ for 24 month and $r = .79$ for 28 month. The Cronbach's alpha was $.78$. In short, LOT-R was fairly constant across time with high internal consistency and test-retest reliability.

Apart from that, Perceived Stress Scale, 10 item version (PSS-10) was used in current study to measure the level of stress among undergraduate students. According to Cohen and Williamson (1988), original PSS was developed by Cohen in 1983 and used to measure the extent to which respondents reported their lives as unpredictable, uncontrollable and overloading. Specifically, PSS-10 was used in this study because it was easier to score. Besides, the factor structure and internal reliability of PSS-10 were slightly better than original PSS in which the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal reliability was 0.78 (Cohen & Williamson, 1988).

In PSS-10, the questions were about the thoughts and feelings of participants during the last month. One of the sample items was "In the past month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?" The participants were required to choose the appropriate response by using a Likert scale with five possible choices. The scale ranges from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). In order to obtain the total score, the scores on four positively stated items included items 4, 5, 7 and 8 were reversed and the 10 items were summed. The possible range of total score is 0-40. Individuals with higher scores indicated higher perceived stress. There were three perceived stress levels, namely low stress (0-13), moderate stress (14-26) and high stress (27-40).

Furthermore, academic achievement of participants were measured based on CGPA. The CGPA of participant was classified based on grading system of undergraduate degree examination in UTAR. There were four classification of honour including first class with CGPA 3.5-4.0, second class (upper division) with CGPA 3.0-3.49, second class (lower division) with CGPA 2.2-2.99 and <https://assignbuster.com/optimism-and-psychological-well-being-psychology-essay/>

third class with CGPA 2.0-2.19. In this grading system, the lowest CGPA was 2.0 while the highest was 4.0.

Research Procedure

Research proposal has been revised and approved by research supervisor, Ms Annie Margaret a/p Sandela Raran before the distribution of questionnaire. Besides, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was learned from SPSS tutorial class organized by senior, William Hooi on 29th November, 2012 in D210 counselling room.

Survey was conducted on 30th November, 2012 at 9.00am during the last week of study in order to assess how stressful the students were in the last month whereby they were facing with academic stress such as preparation for examination, submission of assignments and presentation. In addition, they need to handle stress from doing their FYP as final year students. Specifically, this survey was carried out in UTAR lecture hall, IDK 6. The questionnaires were administered to the Year 3 Psychology students. Participation was voluntary and all responses were remained anonymous. The procedure ended at 12.00pm on the same day. All questionnaires were collected successfully from 100 participants. Lastly, the responses were assessed in Chapter IV Findings and Analysis. In Chapter V Discussion and Conclusion, the results were being analyzed.

Data Analysis

The academic achievement, item scores and total scores were being measured in descriptive analysis which included the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)

program was used with statistical method consisted of Pearson Correlation. Correlation analysis was done to examine the relationship between students' optimism and stress level in current study. Furthermore, correlation analysis was done to determine the relationship between level of optimism and academic achievement. $P < 0.05$ was known as statistically significant.

CHAPTER IV

Findings and Analysis

The findings and analysis of current study focused on two major parts which included descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. For descriptive statistics, the statistical result of participants' academic achievement, item scores and total scores were presented in frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. For inferential statistics, the statistical results of independent variable (optimism) and dependent variables (stress and academic achievement) had been computed with statistical method such as Pearson correlation.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. 0

Descriptive statistics for participants' academic achievement, optimism and stress

CGPA % Optimism % Stress %

2. 0-2. 19 24% Low 45