



## Islamic spirituality stress coping mechanisms: some empirical evidences

Razali Mat Zin<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA), Brunei Darussalam

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### Abstract

*The study aims to assess the religious stress coping mechanisms used by selected Muslim students majoring in Bachelor of Business Management (BBM) undergraduate studies at Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA). Data were collected through interview and thematic analysis procedures were utilized for data analysis. The findings showed that majority of the respondents experienced severe level of stress. Some managerial and future research were recommended.*

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## 1. Introduction

The university years are an important developmental period when young people transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Baghurst and Kelley, 2014). University students, especially first-year students, face numerous challenges in making successful transitions. These challenges can be exacerbated by life stresses that vary across students depending on objective circumstances and psychological resilience (Heffer and Willoughby, 2017). Although some level of stress is a normal part of life and can even be motivating in certain contexts (Robotham and Julian, 2006) high levels of stress pose a threat to well-being and academic attainment (Eicher et al., 2014). Targeted stress management interventions can be developed (Feiss et al., 2019) but no large-scale epidemiological studies have investigated the relative magnitudes of these stresses among university students across a range of life areas in the context of Brunei Darussalam. Nor have studies estimated the potential importance of stress either overall or within individual life areas in accounting for common university student mental disorders.

Stress is an essential and inevitable part of daily living because, without some stress, we would be listless and apathetic creatures. Stress is unavoidable because it relates to any external event, which may be pleasurable or threatening. A person's reaction towards stress relays on whether an event is evaluated as a challenge or a threat (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Challenging situations can lead to positive outcomes such as motivation and improved task performance (Rheinberg & Engeser, 2018) while threatening ones or distress can result in anxiety, depression, social dysfunction and even suicidal intention (Tang, Byrne, & Qin, 2018). Along with the enhancements during the scientific era and the speedy development of information, competitiveness among people has become increasingly robust, as a consequence, people have become busy and demanding, and thus, stress is a natural consequence. Albeit appropriate stress is a juncture for self - growth, it is also a drive for people to headway keenly. It not merely affects our thoughts and feelings but our actions as well. However, overstress causes problems and discomfort, and can have severe effects on people. Precisely, students face stress when they enter an entirely new world of the education professionals.

### 1.1. Problem statement

Some alarming statistics about university students stress phenomena

#### a. USA case

1. Last winter of 2021, college students reported their highest levels of depression and anxiety of any prior semester, according to the *University of Michigan Healthy Minds Study 2021*, an annual web-based survey looking at mental health and service utilization among undergraduate and graduate college students.
2. Among the respondents, 47% screened positive for clinically significant symptoms of depression and/or anxiety—up from 44% last year and the highest since the survey was started in 2007. The study included data from 32,754 students from 36 colleges and universities.
3. A 2020 Stress in USA Report conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA), found that 8 in 10 *Gen Z* adults felt they could have used more emotional support in the past 12 months.
4. Additionally, in a study published by The Harvard Medical School (2020) of over 67,000 college students, three out of four students reported experiencing at least one stressful event that led to mental health issues, suicidal thoughts, or self-harm over the past year.
5. The pandemic has made college students experience a wide variety of circumstances that have affected their mental health and well-being. With both the CDC and American College Health Association (ACHA) recommending that colleges and universities offer

virtual services to support students on and off-campus now and in the future, thus health has a vital role to play for campuses.

*b. Singapore case*

Indeed, an increasing number of university students appear to be experiencing significant mental health issues. In addition, the proportion of students enrolling in university is increasing. These trends indicate that stress and mental health concerns are likely to become an even more remarkable phenomenon among Singapore university students. Some of the reasons for “why are students so stressed due to the educational system of Singapore?” are as follows:

- a. Heap of University Assignments which are almost impossible to do for any student on time.
- b. Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA) and Timed Online Assignments (TOA) which are to be completed within a time limit.
- c. Final year project submissions
- d. A lot of report writing, dissertation writing assignments to be written with managing tedious guidelines.
- e. Emphasis on grades and rank and no priority for other activities

The aftermath of excessive academic pressure had brought forward numerous real-life examples of tragic cases of stress and mental health crisis within the Singaporean society. Some tragic cases reported by *The Strait Times* (April 2021) involved young students at the primary school levels:

1. One young boy, 11 years old, received a caning from his mother each time he received below 70 marks. When he failed two mid-year exams, math and Higher Chinese, the boy could not face his parents and leaped from a 17-story flat to his death;
2. Another child, a girl of 13 years, scored 83 marks in mathematics. Instead of praising her, however, her mother rebuked her sharply. “If you had been more careful, you could have scored above 85,” she told the teen. The girl later had to attend counselling because of depression, anxiety, and a tendency to harm herself; and
3. One boy passed *Primary School Leaving Examinations* (PSLE) successfully. However, his marks were not high enough to please his mother. She made him go through the whole year of school and take the PSLE again, with the goal of improving his grade.
4. This voracious competition remains till the age of their graduation and that brings lots of stress among Singaporean students. These are the reason why during the past year (2020), a number of 27 students between the age of 10-19 have killed themselves. This is the biggest number of suicides that have been in 15 years.

*c. UK case*

1. Stress has always been a part of the human experience. But life has never been more stressful than it is today. According to the *UK’s Daily Mail* (2020), a key study by the Office of National Statistics found that one in ten children in the UK suffer from mental health problems, including stress, anxiety and depression.

*d. Brunei case*

1. Brunei’s psychiatry services are seeing an increasing number of young patients who say they are over-worked and stressed. These conditions and other factors have now placed youth in their early 20s as the most vulnerable to mental health problems. Also, at high risk of suffering mental illnesses are those who are unemployed, foreign workers and individuals with a history of substance abuse. There is an increasing number of referrals and the trend more and more young people are coming forward although there is still a stigma attached to people with mental disorder

2. Mundia (2009) investigated the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress in trainee teachers at the University of Brunei Darussalam. Methods: A survey was used with 119 preservice students of both genders who were on the undergraduate (BEd) and graduate (PGCE) programmers. Data were measured by the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS). The results showed that 75% of the respondents experience mild to profound level of anxiety.

University education are often been portrayed as grueling and extremely taxing. Not only is the intensity and frequency of this stress emotionally draining, it has been linked with an increased risk in the development of physical and psychological health problems (Mallinckrodt et al., 1989; Nelson et al., 2001). As more research is conducted to investigate the perpetrators of undergraduate student stress, more effective means of coping with this stress may also be explored and discovered. This research project is expected to make a valuable contribution to this underexplored phenomenon by gathering a deeper understanding about the religiously based coping methods that under graduate students' access to help curb the impact of the stress associated with academic life in a university setting.

Satisfying the requirements to achieve a 4-year undergraduate degree can be stressful, challenging, and yet a rewarding experience (Schreiner, 2013). Some students may finish their undergraduate degree in 4 years, while some students may require additional time. There are several reasons why some students may require additional time, including academic, social, and economic disadvantages, lack of family support, working full or part time, financial debts and obligations, family obligations, personal attitudes and behaviors, and disabilities that limit ability (Capra, 2009; Kim et al., 2010). Disadvantages, disparities, depression, distractions, and disappointments can decrease a student's desire and ability to persevere in college (Schreiner, 2013). Some students may lose hope and cannot cope so they drop out of college. There are supportive services available to students in higher education to seek help as needed with personal and social challenges (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Jordan, 2007). However, some personal, social, and economic challenges and stressors cannot be addressed by traditional methods (Chaplot et al., 2015).

The transition from high schools to college level could cause psychological, academic, and social shock to students since this educational level has pronounced differences: the student will face new method of teaching, new academic requirements, new types of relations between students and faculties, new living environment (feeding and dwelling in mass).

Due to these changes, students can potentially experience different types of stress that can affect their mental and social health and academic achievement. Students of this level can be encountered with academic stressors like tests, assignments, projects, and other college requirements. The inability as well as the shortcomings to fulfill these requirements leaves students to get stressed. The physical environment including the location, buildings with its teaching and learning equipment, transportation access and other services provided on the campus for students can aggravate students stress levels. The social wellbeing is also a determinant factor for active learning. The social setting and its complexity: a large number of populations, the pressures from peers and the nature of the interpersonal social interactions, the intolerable misbehaving of others and sexual relationship affairs are influential for the social well-being of the learners (Coiro et al., 2017)

Similarly, stress affects the psychological and physical health of students. For instance, students with high levels of stress tend to perceive themselves as less healthy, with low self-esteem (Chen et al., 2017) and are more prone to practice some health risk habits (Pelletier, Lytle, & Laska, 2015). According to stress and coping theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) individuals are prone to psychopathological experience primarily in the absence of healthy coping strategies. Thus, it has been felt that conducting an empirical study to discover and

understand the nature of the coping strategies that college students use to deal with their campus stress is necessary and momentous.

### *1.2. Purpose of the study*

The purpose of this study was to gather first-hand experiences from undergraduate students majoring in Bachelor of Business Management program at the Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA), about the religious coping techniques they employed to buffer the effects of stress associated with their studies. The qualitative research method used in this study to analyze and present the information is thematic analysis using Nvivo software. Thematic analysis is a research method utilized to identify, analyze, and report themes within data, and describe them in rich detail. It can also be used by the researcher as a method both to reflect reality and permit exploration beyond the surface of reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### *1.3. Significance of the study*

This study is of significance because obtaining a university degree comes with many challenges and there has been proven from empirical studies regarding an increase in the stress levels of the students. Academic success is the main reason of most students deciding to attend University, but stress is one of the major factors, which tend to inhibit the goal of obtaining a degree; increased perceptions of stress increase the likelihood that a student will drop out of university. Assessing stress is a critical aspect of making sure students have a positive college experience. The outcome of the study will provide the basis for enhancing the general adoption of a new, positive approach to student life, thereby, ensuring academic success.

## **2. Literature review**

Zakaria et al. (2021) emphasized that religious coping strategies are one of the effective ways in overcoming academic stress. Their study explored and understand students' experiences of religious coping methods when facing academic stress by interviewing five university students from public universities in Malaysia. They discovered three specific religious coping behavior that were employed to cope with academic stress; 1) worship in the heart, 2) worship verbally and, 3) worship by action. These coping behaviors also helped the students to have a better understanding on how religious coping can affect students in term of cognitive, emotion and behavior.

Afaf and Iman (2021) conducted a study to assess the prevalence of religious orientation, academic stress, and the use religion as a means to cope with academic stress among 312 first-year undergraduates in a religiously oriented public university in Malaysia. The results showed high incidences of the religious orientation and religious coping among the sample of undergraduates, but no significant gender differences. The study substantiated that one of the means by which the first-year students reduced their academic stress is through religious coping and religious orientation.

Babicka-Wirkus et al. (2021) conducted a study in Poland during Covid-10 pandemic of universities worldwide. In Poland, the transfer to online teaching was announced without prior warning, which radically changed students' daily functioning. This situation clearly showed the students' helplessness and difficulties with coping with this new, stressful situation, highlighted in many previous studies. A sudden and far-reaching change in daily functioning caused anxiety, depression, and stress in this group. The statistical analysis showed that during the coronavirus pandemic, Polish students most often used the coping strategies including spiritual acceptance (such as religious pious personality), spiritual observances (prayers) and seeking spiritual and emotional support (meeting the elderly pious people). Such factors as age, gender, and place of residence influenced the choice of specific religious strategies of coping with stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, based on the results, an intervention

program for Polish students is proposed which would involve psychological, organizational, and instrumental support based on religious perspectives.

Radzi et al. (2014) reviewed how spiritual and religious coping strategies are used by Muslim 'Tahfiz' students in dealing with their academic and personal issues. The research used DASS and MRPI questionnaire to measure stress and anxiety level as well as religious and spiritual coping strategies. The results indicated that the student shows mild to low stress and anxiety level with high religious personality as coping mechanisms.

### **3. Methods**

Qualitative research is an established method of academic inquiry in the social sciences. The goal of qualitative research is to gather an in-depth understanding of some facet of human behavior and experience. Data are often gathered through interviews, participant observations, or content analysis of existing data. Compiled data tend to be analyzed based on the researcher's impression through coding systems used to investigate a phenomenon with the intent to generate meaning.

#### *3.1. Respondents*

The data collected in this research study were acquired from fifteen (15) Bachelor of Business Management (BBM) students who were enrolled in *BF 3324 Total Quality Management* course under my instruction. All the respondents are female third-year students.

Each participant was asked a series of closed and open-ended questions. When participants had difficulty formulating an answer to an open-ended question, the researcher offered clarification. He also used probes and follow-up questions when I perceived a response as either too brief or too broad. He made use of summary statements to make sure I understood what the participants were saying, and gave them the opportunity to clarify if my summaries were inaccurate.

#### *3.2. Data collection*

The data collected in this research study were acquired from each who each participated in an interview. After signing the consent form, the researcher asked each participant to fill out a demographic information form. These data were collected for descriptive and context purposes. Once this form had been completed, the researcher took a few moments to again explain the nature of my study, why the study was conducted, and asked the participant if he or she had any questions before we began. The researcher did this in part to offer them background information on my study and to make some small talk in order to establish rapport before beginning the formal interview.

The researcher then turned on my recording device and began to conduct the research interview by asking the predetermined series of closed and open-ended questions. The first set of questions explored how being an undergraduate student had affected their personal life. The intent of this series of questions was to prompt the participant to think about how their roles as an undergraduate student may have been impacting several areas of their lives, which eventually targeted to identify the level of stress they have experienced.

The next series of questions asked the participant to talk about which general aspects of the program requirements in their studies where they found most stressful, followed by a request for a description of the specific events or experiences causing the greatest amount of stress. This part of the interview was intended to uncover the variables which contributed to their academic life stress as students in UNISSA.

### 3.3. Data analysis

The current study employs a theoretical thematic analysis. This type of thematic analysis tends to be researcher driven with the intent of providing a detailed analysis of certain aspects of the data gathered to help answer the proposed research question. The themes were identified using a semantic approach whereby theme identification is based on explicit or surface meaning within the data. This was followed by my interpretation of pattern significance and any broader implications or meanings related to relevant existing literature.

The systematic analysis for this study was done by NVivo which is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by *QSR International*. NVivo organized, analyzed and produced insights in this study's unstructured data form interview the interviews of the respondents.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Religious spirituality coping mechanisms

A key impetus for this research involves understanding the role that spirituality plays in the Muslim's life when they are faced with stressful circumstances. The present research shows that Islamic-oriented spiritual students have three important ways of handling their stress which include: a) Belief in Qada & Qadar'; b) Five-time prayers; c) Recitation of Quran and Zikir. The following paragraphs highlight the significance of each of these coping strategies in more detail

**Table 1. Distribution of islamic religious spirituality as coping mechanisms among business management students**

STRESSORS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
a. Belief in Qada & Qadar	15	100
b. Five-time prayers	15	100
c. Recitation of Quran and Zikir	15	100
d. Supplication to Allah (Dua')	14	93.3
e. ..	14	93.3
f. ..	14	93.3
g. ..	13	86.6
h. ..	13	86.6
i. ..	13	86.6
j. ..	12	80.0

#### a. Faith in Qada & Qadar

Faith in *Qada*'and *Qadar* is to believe that Allah knew everything before it came into being, and what will happen to it afterward. He then brought them into existence, all in accordance to His perfect knowledge and measure. All says: *Verily we have created all things with Qadar (54:49)*. It makes a person to recognize the power and authority of Allah over His creatures. It brings about

acceptance of life situations whether good or bad as being part of the will of Allah. It encourages us as humans to exercise patience when afflicted by difficulties and challenges.

To the casual observer surrendering to *Qada'* and *Qadar* may sound like giving up. But to the faithful Muslims to have faith in *Qada'* and *Qadar* is a complex process that involves three steps: 1) The individual realizes that he/she does not have all the resources he/she needs to deal with his condition; 2) The individual understands that Allah is all powerful and all-Knowing about their circumstances; and 3) The individual makes a conscious choice when he/she has exhausted all human effort to give the matter to Allah. To give up would be to run from the problems or employ avoidance coping strategies. However, this surrendering process is not as easy as it sounds.

Respondent 11 summarizes this by saying, "My problem is...I used to think that, [I could] rely on myself, ...sometimes I struggle relying on Allah. ...but...when I do get stressed out...I guess just pray, like just cry out to Allah --- Ya Allah Ya Qawi... I can't handle this...I need you Allah to help me."

What makes the process difficult is that in order to benefit from Allah's help the individuals have to admit that they are limited. Because we all want to believe that we have control over our lives, this in itself can be a stressful process.

Respondent 2 sheds light on this faith in *Qada'* and *Qadar* by expounding, "*I would say, I am easily stressed out when it comes to exams [and] course assignments...when I am in those stressful situations, I can always just kind of throw up my hands [or] calm down and...pray to Allah.*"

She further reflects on this choice and decides to, "*just kind of tell myself....' you've done what you need to do, like you've done everything you can...kind of get rid of all the stress and leave it to Allah' to make the final decision.*" In her statements Respondent 2 reveals an interesting distinction between giving up and surrendering to Allah's fate.

Like the Respondent 11, Respondent 2 is not giving up, instead she is tapping into her Islamic religious spirituality and using it as a protective mechanism to help her handle stress. As Respondent 11 and 2 imply, the religious spiritual person believes that Allah has what it takes to solve their problems and the knowledge that no problem is beyond Allah's resolution creates a confidence that actually reduces the negative effects of the stressor.

Belief in qada and qadar is the greatest remedy for man's stressful manifestation such as desperation, hopelessness and grief. With this belief, man sees the troubles and misfortunes he faces as the preordainment of Allah and consoles himself. Man-consents to His preordainment. He feels that he is under the control of the Almighty Allah. Since he knows that troubles and misfortunes come from Allah, he takes shelter only with Him and prays only to Him in order to be saved.

#### *b. Five-time daily prayers*

Prayer, or solat, the third pillar of Islam, is an obligation prescribed by Allah (SWT) upon every Muslim to seek Allah's pleasure. However, it may be from among Allah's blessings and signs that he has put other benefits in prayer besides spiritual salvation. Evidence from numerous studies suggests that prayer has multifaceted effects on mental wellbeing by increasing relaxation, improving coping strategies, helping with depression and anxiety, and as a preventive health care measure amongst the elderly population.

As Respondent 6 echoed her feelings that "*whenever I take time out for five times obligatory prayer, I am focusing on the relationship between me and my Creator, Allah. By doing this, I am able to temporarily change my perspective from this world to the hereafter.*"

Modern technology has made it possible to measure and more clearly observe what effects this engagement elicits in our brains. Doufesh et al. (2011) used electroencephalography (EEG) to measure brain waves of individuals using the four prayer postures: standing, bowing,

prostrating, and sitting. They measured alpha waves, which are waves which indicate cortical inactivation and relaxation, and they appeared to be present in a greater magnitude. The greatest magnitude of alpha waves was during prostration. This study shows that prayer — and particularly prostration, which is said to be the point at which one is closest to Allah spiritually — has a significantly relaxing effect on people.

A second study by Doufesh et al. (2014) also used EEG and ECG when Muslim men were praying and they came to the conclusion that the alpha waves detected indicate relaxation, decrease in tension, increased focus and stability between the mind and body. Additionally, the parasympathetic (part of the nervous system used when a person is relaxed) system's activity increased while the sympathetic (psychological fight or flight switch) system's activity decreased. In the fast-paced turmoil of the modern era, prayer gives us the opportunity to rise above the worldly chaos and turn our attention upon our Creator, regaining a sense of perspective and peace. Relaxing can improve mental health because it allows a person to step back from their worries and be present in the moment.

Respondent 15 explained that *“hardships and trials are a fact of life and are often difficult to deal with single-handedly... When I make sujud in prayers, I feel very close to Allah and I develop full conviction that Allah could ease the difficulty I am facing.”*

In Islam, patience and reliance on Allah are qualities that are encouraged and thus, those who practice these ideas are more likely to be God-conscious. Eliminating negative stimuli and increasing dependence on Allah during hardships can lead to a better ability to stave off issues such as depression and anxiety. Further studies support the conjecture that praying helps create overall better mental health.

#### c. *Quran recitation, and zikir*

For Muslims, the recitation of Qur'ān which is a form of remembrance (zikir) has always been a means to help reduce stress and anxiety. The Qur'ān describes itself as a remedy for ailments that are in the heart. *O mankind! There has come to you instruction from your Lord and healing for what is in the breasts and guidance and mercy for the believers (Qur'ān 10:57).* A recent study in the Journal of Religion and Health investigated the impact of Qur'an recitation on anxiety in hemodialysis patients.

The study involved having patients listen to the recitation of the Qur'ān in traditional cantillation voice. Patients that were placed in the control group were not exposed to the recitation of the Qur'ān and received no intervention. The study found a significant reduction in anxiety among the group of patients who listened to the Qur'ān versus those who did not. Additionally, it demonstrated that listening to the Qur'ān is an effective intervention for anxiety in patients undergoing hemodialysis. The effectiveness of the Qur'ān to relieve stress and anxiety is not limited to patients undergoing hemodialysis, but for others as well.

Respondent 5 clearly stated that *“I attain inner-peace and solace through reading Quran and remembering Allah. Every verse in the Qur'an serves as remembrance to Allah Almighty. With inner-peace, I won't have trouble in managing stress and anxiety ...and with solace, bigger problems become small, and smaller ones become non-existent, insha Allah.”* The words of Allah are soothing, reassuring and they uplift your spirit in ways that no worldly music can ever do.

In the same vein of thoughts, Respondent 10 expressed that *“the words of Allah in Al-Quran Kareem are soothing, reassuring and they uplift my spirit in ways that no worldly human words can ever do.”*

#### d. *Supplication to Allah (Dua')*

Supplications to Allah (Duas) are a part of life, and it is the tool which a person uses to make themselves relax by putting their faith in the Power of Allah and Allah himself. Another Islamic religious way to cope with stress as expressed by the respondents in this study is to seek the countenance of the Lord of the worlds by making sincere supplications to Him. Allah has stated in the Quran that all ease and all difficulty are from Him, and only He can remove

difficulties and give ease. Indeed! Only He has power over all affairs and each and every thing in the universe.

Respondent 7 explained that “*during times of hardship and suffering, it is important that I we humbly beg Allah for His comfort and protection.*” “This is in-line with one hadikth of the Prophet s.a.w. as below:

حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَهُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ (سَبْعَ مَرَّاتٍ)

Translation: Allah is enough for me. There is no true god but Him, in Him I put my trust, and He is the Lord of the Great Throne. [Abū Dāwūd]

This supplication appears in the Qur’an. Allah, the Almighty, says, if they turn away, say, “*Allah is enough for me. There is no true god but Him, in Him I put my trust, and He is the Lord of the Great Throne.*”

Responden 9 reminded that “*making du ‘ā’ strengthened our faith that that everything in creation is under Allah’s control...every time I raised my hands in supplication to Allah my belief in Him and His divine decree soothe my heart.*”

Once we have put forth the effort for our desired results, we no longer have to worry. The outcome is in the Hands of the Lord of “the Great Throne” and the Throne is the greatest of all creations. Thus, the importance of supplication to Allah cannot be overstated. The great Imam Ibn al-Qayyim said, “*Du ‘ā’ is one of the most beneficial remedies. It is the enemy of calamity; it repels it, cures it, prevents its occurrence, and alleviates it or reduces it if it befalls one. It is the weapon of the believer.*”

As Muslims, we have been blessed with powerful and effective Dua that not only can eradicate our stress and anxiety, but also help us draw closer to Allah (swt).

## 5. Discussions

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are forwarded for the by responsible stakeholders of the UNISSA. Counseling and preventive mental health services should be enhanced in UNISSA.

UNISSA with the action taken by Student Affairs Unit should mobilize more efforts to encourage students to seek help before they reach the acute stress levels. UNISSA administrators, academicians, and professionals must be involved in developing collaborative, multidimensional, and culturally sensitive preventive stress coping programs to create a helpful academic environment, which promotes students’ psychosocial wellbeing.

To avoid the source of stress, the UNISSA upper management should be flexible in order to give attention for the interest of their students and not to create too much taxing and rigid academic schedules. Also, health professionals like psychologists, counsellors and psychiatrists should be invited to give consecutive training on life skills, stress management, and adaptive coping mechanisms.

This study demonstrated that various religious spiritual could buffered the impact of stressful life events among UNISSA students. The management of the UNISSA should incorporate more the religious oriented elements especially in the extra-curricular activities as a meaningful stress-coping mechanism framework for students. More generally, a better understanding of Islamic religious spirituality as coping mechanisms with help UNISSA counseling practitioners and educators better integrate Islamic religious and spiritual dimensions into the treatment and relapse prevention of common stress problems such as such as anxiety or depression.

## 6. Limitations of the study

One important limitation of this study was that the respondents were drawn only from one batch of BBM students in one academic major in UNISSA. This finding cannot be generalized

for students in other majors throughout UNISSA and Brunei Darussalam as a whole country. Replicate this study with a larger, stratified random sample would expand knowledge of stress coping management among university students in Brunei Darussalam. Another limitation is the sample consisted of female third year undergraduate students only. Comparative analysis between gender-types; degree-levels and age-groups cannot be done to enrich further the data.

## 7. Future research implications

Interventions for these students are needed and replicating this study with a bigger sample size is recommended. Therefore, the researcher recommends that further research would develop the understanding of stress among undergraduates with different gender, degree level, race and academic majors. Future research should not only use a larger sample size but also covers other tertiary institutions in Brunei Darussalam. This effort would allow for comparative analysis, which help university officials to control the stress factors for students. Lastly, the scope of research objective should be widened to understand the coping adopted by university students who experience level of stress due academic life stressors.

## 8. Conclusion

Elevated stress levels among students can result in a decreased performance in the academic accomplishments and can affect both their physical and mental health. Therefore, studies on coping with stress will have a significant impact in higher education. Islamic religious oriented students have a stronger ability that enable them to cope in tough and stressful circumstances. In addition, to providing social support and inspiration, religious spirituality enhances academic outlooks by decreasing stress, changing perspective and providing a sense of holistic meaning and purpose to life.

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