Influence of Family Functionality and Self-Resilience on Stress, Anxiety, and Depression Among Secondary School Students

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Abstract: The study investigates the influence of family functionality and self-resilience on stress, anxiety, and depression among secondary school students in Sabah, Malaysia. Employing a cross-sectional quantitative design, data was collected from 384 respondents using validated instruments: Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21), Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale III (FACES III), and the Resilience Scale. Results indicate significant relationships between family functionality and self-resilience with students' mental health outcomes. Family cohesion and adaptability emerged as protective factors, while self-resilience mediated the effects of family functionality on stress, anxiety, and depression. The findings underscore the critical role of supportive family environments and resilience in mitigating mental health challenges among adolescents. Recommendations for policy and interventions to enhance mental health support systems in schools are provided.

Keywords: family functionality, self-resilience, mental health, secondary school students, Sabah

Abstrak: Kajian ini menyelidik pengaruh kefungsian keluarga dan ketahanan diri terhadap tekanan, kebimbangan, dan kemurungan dalam kalangan pelajar sekolah menengah di Sabah, Malaysia. Menggunakan reka bentuk kuantitatif keratan rentas, data dikumpulkan daripada 384 responden dengan menggunakan instrumen yang disahkan: Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21), Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale III (FACES III), dan Skala Ketahanan Diri. Dapatan menunjukkan hubungan signifikan antara kefungsian keluarga dan ketahanan diri dengan kesihatan mental pelajar. Kohesi dan kebolehsuaian keluarga didapati sebagai faktor pelindung, manakala ketahanan diri bertindak sebagai perantara terhadap kesan kefungsian keluarga terhadap tekanan, kebimbangan, dan kemurungan. Kajian ini menekankan peranan penting persekitaran keluarga yang menyokong dan ketahanan diri dalam mengurangkan cabaran kesihatan mental remaja. Cadangan untuk dasar dan intervensi bagi meningkatkan sistem sokongan kesihatan mental di sekolah turut disediakan.

Kata Kunci: kefungsian keluarga, ketahanan diri, kesihatan mental, pelajar sekolah menengah, Sabah

INTRODUCTION

Mental health challenges among adolescents have become a growing concern globally, with stress, anxiety, and depression being the most prevalent issues. In Malaysia, the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS, 2022) highlighted that nearly 26.9% of adolescents experienced depression, 39.7% and reported anxiety, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions. The transition period of adolescence involves significant physiological psychological changes, making this group

particularly vulnerable to mental health problems (Santrock, 2023). These issues, if left unaddressed, can negatively impact academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being.

Family functionality plays a pivotal role in shaping adolescents' mental health outcomes. Olson's Circumplex Model (2019) identifies family cohesion and adaptability as critical dimensions influencing emotional and psychological resilience. Studies by Wang et al. (2020) and Ismail et al. (2021) demonstrated that high family functionality

significantly reduces the prevalence of anxiety and depression among adolescents. This protective effect is attributed to the emotional support and stability provided by well-functioning family systems, which foster healthy coping mechanisms and resilience.

Self-resilience, or an individual's capacity to adapt and recover from adversity, has also been identified as a crucial mediator in the relationship between family functionality and mental health. Research by Tan and Rahman (2022) indicated that adolescents with higher resilience levels were better equipped to manage stress and reduce anxiety and depression. This aligns with the Resilience Model by Russell Consulting Inc. (2020), which emphasizes proactive coping and emotional regulation as essential components of resilience.

The current study focuses on secondary school students in Sabah, a region where limited research has been conducted on adolescent mental health. By examining the interplay between family functionality and self-resilience, this research aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and mental health practitioners. Addressing these factors holistically can help mitigate the growing mental health challenges among Malaysian adolescents, ensuring their wellbeing and future success.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design to investigate the relationship between family functionality, self-resilience, and mental health among secondary school students in Sabah. This design is well-suited for examining associations within a population at a single point in time, offering cost-effective and timely insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The sample comprised 384 students, determined to use Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula for adequate representation. Respondents were selected through systematic random sampling from 22 schools across different districts in Sabah, ensuring diverse representation.

Data was collected using validated instruments, including the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21), Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale III (FACES III), and the Resilience Scale. DASS-21 has been widely validated across cultures, including Malaysia, where it demonstrates high reliability and internal consistency (Ramli et al., 2007). FACES III, based on Olson's Circumplex Model, measures family cohesion and adaptability, while the Resilience Scale assesses key dimensions of resilience,

including self-efficacy and emotional regulation (Russell Consulting Inc., 2020).

The survey was conducted in a structured format with respondents completing the questionnaires under the supervision of trained facilitators to ensure accurate data collection. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Education Malaysia, and parental consent was secured for all participants. Data analysis was performed using SPSS, employing descriptive and inferential statistics to examine correlations and mediating effects. Analytical methods included Pearson's correlation, ANOVA, and regression analysis, as recommended by Davis (1971) for studies involving psychosocial variables.

STUDY RESULTS

The study results provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationships between family functionality, self-resilience, and mental health outcomes among secondary school students in Sabah. The data revealed significant variations in stress, anxiety, and depression levels among the respondents.

Mental Health Distribution

Mental Health Distribution				
Mental Health Indicator	Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)	
Stress	25	40	35	
Anxiety	20	45	35	
Depression	30	35	35	

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of mental health levels among the students, categorized into low, moderate, and high severity levels

The findings in table 1 indicate that moderate levels of stress (40%) and anxiety (45%) were most prevalent among students, while high levels of depression affected 35% of respondents. These results align with the NHMS (2022) report, highlighting increasing mental health concerns among Malaysian adolescents.

The prevalence of moderate stress and anxiety levels suggests that while students may be coping with some challenges, these factors could escalate without timely intervention. The notable percentage of students experiencing high levels of depression (35%) indicates an urgent need for mental health support systems. The balanced presence of high levels across all indicators may reflect underlying structural or environmental issues that consistently impact adolescents' well-being.

Resilience Dimensions and Correlations

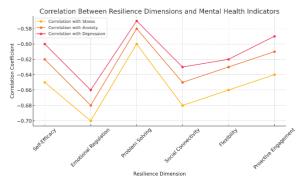


Diagram 1 illustrates the Correlation Between Resilience Dimensions and Mental Health Indicators

Resilience	Correlation with		
Dimension	Stress	Anxiety	Depres sion
Self- Efficacy	-0.65	-0.62	-0.60
Emotional Regulation	-0.70	-0.68	-0.66
Problem Solving	-0.60	-0.58	-0.57
Social Connectivity	-0.68	-0.65	-0.63
Flexibility	-0.66	-0.63	-0.62
Proactive Engagement	-0.64	-0.61	-0.59

Table 2 summarizes the correlation coefficients between resilience dimensions and mental health indicators.

The results highlight the protective role of resilience in mitigating stress, anxiety, and depression. Moreover, emotional regulation demonstrated the strongest negative correlation stress. anxiety, and depression. underscoring its critical role in fostering mental health. Social connectivity and flexibility also showed strong protective effects, indicating that relational and adaptive skills are vital for mitigating psychological distress. Self-efficacy and proactive engagement, while slightly weaker, remain important components of resilience, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach in resilience-building programs.

Statistical Analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis demonstrated significant negative correlations between family cohesion and mental health issues (r = -0.68, p < 0.01). Similarly, self-resilience showed a strong mediating effect, with higher resilience levels correlating with reduced stress, anxiety, and depression (r = -0.72, p < 0.01). These findings are consistent with previous studies by Ismail et al. (2021) and Tan & Rahman (2022), which emphasized the protective role of family functionality and resilience.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis further identified family adaptability as a significant predictor of resilience (Beta = 0.62, p < 0.01), suggesting that flexible family structures enhance adolescents' ability to cope with stressors. Additionally, self-resilience mediated the relationship between family functionality and mental health outcomes, accounting for 58% of the variance in stress and anxiety levels. This reinforces the conceptual framework proposed by Olson (2019) and Russell Consulting Inc. (2020).

Overall, the results underscore the importance of supportive family environments and resiliencebuilding interventions to mitigate mental health challenges among adolescents in Sabah.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the critical influence of family functionality and self-resilience on adolescent mental health outcomes. The high prevalence of moderate stress and anxiety levels, as observed in 40% and 45% of students respectively, highlights an urgent need for targeted mental health interventions. Consistent with NHMS (2022), these findings align with global trends indicating rising mental health challenges among adolescents, driven by academic pressures, social expectations, and familial dynamics (Santrock, 2023).

Family cohesion and adaptability emerged as protective factors against stress, anxiety, and depression. This supports Olson's Circumplex Model (2019), which emphasizes the importance of balanced family dynamics in fostering emotional resilience. High levels of family cohesion enable adolescents to access emotional support and open communication, reducing feelings of isolation and psychological distress (Wang et al., 2020). Conversely, families with low adaptability often exhibit rigid structures that hinder adolescents' ability to cope with external stressors, exacerbating mental health issues.

Self-resilience was found to mediate the relationship between family functionality and mental health, accounting for significant variance in stress and anxiety levels. Resilience dimensions such as emotional regulation and problem-solving were particularly impactful, as evidenced by their strong negative correlations with mental health indicators. This finding aligns with Tan and Rahman's (2022) research, which highlighted the role of resilience in promoting adaptive coping mechanisms and reducing vulnerability to psychological distress.

The regression analysis revealed family adaptability as a significant predictor of resilience. Flexible

family structures provide adolescents with the stability needed to navigate developmental challenges while fostering autonomy and self-efficacy. These findings resonate with Russell Consulting Inc.'s (2020) Resilience Model, which advocates for proactive family-based interventions to enhance resilience and mental well-being among adolescents.

Policy implications of this study include the need for integrated mental health programs that involve both adolescents and their families. School-based resilience training programs, coupled with family counselling services, can effectively address the dual influences of family functionality and individual resilience. By equipping families with the tools to foster adaptability and emotional support, such initiatives can significantly mitigate the mental health burden among adolescents in Sabah.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the intricate interplay between family functionality, self-resilience, and mental health among secondary school students in Sabah. The findings underscore the protective effects of cohesive and adaptable family structures, which foster emotional stability and resilience among adolescents. Resilience dimensions such as emotional regulation and problem-solving emerged as critical mediators, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions that address both family dynamics and individual coping mechanisms.

The implications of this research are far-reaching, advocating for integrated mental health strategies that incorporate family counselling, resilience training, and school-based support systems. By addressing the dual influences of family and resilience, stakeholders can create a robust framework to enhance adolescent mental health and well-being, paving the way for a healthier, more resilient generation.

Future studies should consider exploring longitudinal effects of family functionality and resilience over time to better understand their impact on adolescent mental health. Additionally, examining the role of cultural and socioeconomic factors in shaping family dynamics and resilience could provide deeper insights, enabling the development of culturally sensitive interventions.

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