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THE INFLUENCE OF CHARACTER STRENGTHS AND GENDER ON THE ACADEMIC STRESS OF STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY JAKARTA WORKING STUDENTS

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Abstract
This research is conducted to figure out the influence of character strengths on academic stress of State Islamic University Jakarta working students. Previous studies have shown that working students have higher academic stress than the opposite. Other studies showed that strengths may work as a buffer and help to maintain or even increase well-being despite challenges. Character strengths may work as protective factor that buffer, prevent, or reduce the negative effects of stress. This research employed quantitative approach with multiple regression analysis. The sample was 252 State Islamic University Jakarta working students. Sample was collected by non-probability sampling technique. In this study, researcher modified data collection instruments: Student-Life Stress Inventory (SSI) for the scale of academic stress and VIA Inventory of Strengths for the scale of character strengths. The results suggest the significant effect of gender and Character Strengths on academic stress of State Islamic University Jakarta working students. Minor hypothesis test on the significance of each regression coefficient of the dependent variable (DV) suggest that bravery, persistence, and gender have a significant impact on academic stress.

Keywords: Character Strengths, gender, Academic Stress, Working Students

INTRODUCTION
Students are future leaders. They are expected to have primary goal, namely achieving academic success. Quality higher education with excellent results is all students' dreams. However, academic demands can lead academic stress (Chung, 2008). According to Gadzella (1991 Gadzella & Masten, 2005), academic stress deals with a condition in which academic demands exceed the available resources. It is accompanied by certain symptoms such physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral reactions directed to stressful events.

Negatively-perceived or excessive stress can affect academic performance or students' health. American College Health Association survey in 2006 revealed one biggest health issue impacting on students' academic performance is academic stress. About 32 percent reported that academic stress had resulted in an incomplete i.e. a dropped course or a lower grad (Kadapatti & Vijayalaxmi, 2012).

Ahmed Riaz and Ramzan's research (2013) showed that the main symptoms of students' stress are anxiety, digestive problems, neck or shoulder pain, and migraine. Besides, students also find difficult concentrating and calming since they are worried a lot.

The stress levels of working student may be higher since they have to manage their time and energy to fulfill obligation in academic as well as workplace at their best (Gadzella & Masten, 2005; Wilks, 2008). Furr and Elling (in Daulay & Rola, 2012), reported higher
stress level of working students, compared to the non-working students who rarely involved in campus and social activity.

Data of National Center for Education Statistics (Papalia, 2008) also showed that students who work 15 hours a week or work in early morning or students with irregular working hours are less academically successful than non-working students. In addition, job stress to improve quality may result in stress reaction (Elsbach & Hargadon in Avey, Luthans, Hannah, Sweetman & Peterson, 2012).

Academic stress is influenced by internal and external factors. External factors of stress are formulated by Agolla and Ongori (2009) from University of Botswana. They suggest that the stressors of external factors encompass time management, academic demands, and academic environments, including academic workload, inadequate resources, low motivation, poor performance in academic, continuous poor performance in academic, overcrowded lecture halls, and uncertainty of getting job after graduating from the university. Meanwhile, the internal factors are character strengths (Park, 2004); positive temperament, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, social competence, problem-solving skills, internal locus of control, gender, etc (Chung, 2008).

This research employs character strengths as the Independent Variable (IV) in which the topic has strong theoretical development in positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman in Avey et al, 2012). Moreover, as a set of positive traits reflected in thoughts feelings and behaviors, character strengths can bring out personalities.

Park (2004) stated that character strengths are one protective factor that can diminish the negative effects of stress, trauma and psychological disorders. Character strength is classification system of various good characters formulated by Peterson and Seligman (2004). It is defined as “the underlying processes or mechanisms that define people virtues, allowing individuals to grow and have a good life”. In this system, each person can have six major virtues in which each virtue consists of several underlying strength of character.

Several studies on the relationship between character strengths and life satisfaction suggested that the character strengths may work as a buffer and help to maintain or even increase well-being despite challenges. (Park, 2009). Park (2004) in the journal of Character Strengths and Positive Youth Development stated that some character of certain strengths may be a protective factor that could restrain, prevent, or reduce the negative effects of stress. Lounsbury, Fisher, Levy and Welsh (2009) states that character strengths may help diminish the impact of stressful events for students, such as failing an exam, through cognitive appraisal which can lead to more positive and persistent coping mechanisms, especially in students who have high expectations.

French et al. stated that resources are beneficial to the extent that they fit with the demands of the environment. Resources have different effects in different situations. In another words, resources are very valuable in a certain situation and may not be useful in other situations (French, Caplan and Van Harrison; French, Rodgers and Cobb in Hobfoll, 2002).

On the basis of French et al’s, this research will not apply all dimensions of character strengths as the Independent Variable (IV). This study only used few that influence academic stress stated in several research journals and Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook
and Classification. The character strengths encompass creativity, curiosity, Bravery, persistence, vitality, love, self-regulation, hope, humor, and spirituality.

Besides character strengths, another personal aspect affecting academic stress is gender. There is no research concerning the effect of gender on the working students' academic stress found by the researcher. In addition, findings of studies regarding stress with references to gender provide different result. Further research is required to figure out the reason.

Hamaideh (2010) and Busari (2012) research on the difference in the perceptions of academics stress and reaction to stressors based on gender are somewhat conflicting. Hamaideh’s research (2010) on male and female Jordanian university students shows that female students reported a higher perception of stressors in frustrations, conflict, pressures and changes, as well as emotional reactions to stressors. Male students reported higher behavioural and cognitive reactions to stressors than female students.

Busari (2012) did not find any significant difference between male students and female students in his research concerning difference in perceptions of academic stress and reaction to stressors based on gender among first year of Nigerian university students. However, with references to mean scores, male students scored higher stress level in relationships with frustrations and pressures; while female students score higher for financial problems and self-expectations. With references to reaction to stress, male students scored higher for physical and cognitive reactions while female students scored higher for emotional reactions and behavior.

LIMITATION

Academic stress
This research defines academic stress as a condition in which academic demands exceed the available resources, accompanied by certain symptoms such physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral reactions directed to stressful events (Gadzella, 1991). Academic stress has two dimensions, namely academic stressors (including frustrations, conflict, pressures, changes, and self-imposed) and the reaction to the academic stressor (including physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive reactions).

Character Strengths
Character strengths refer to is psychological ingredients - processes and mechanisms - that define the virtues" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This research includes such variables of character strength, namely creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, Bravery, persistence, vitality, love, self-regulation, hope, humor and spirituality.

PURPOSES OF RESEARCH

This research is designed to determine the influence of character strengths (consisting of the creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, bravery, persistence, vitality, love, self-regulation, hope, humor and spirituality dimension) on the academic stress of State Islamic University Jakarta working students.
METHODS

Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques
The population of this research is working students of State Islamic University Jakarta. The sample is 252 people. Samples were taken by using non-probability sampling. It is a sampling technique where the samples are obtained in a process that does not give individuals in the population equal chances of being selected. Samples have met the criteria or goals determined researchers, the working students of State Islamic University Jakarta.

Research variable
The variables of this study are the dimensions character strengths (creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, bravery, persistence, vitality, love, self-regulation, hope, humor, and spirituality), gender, and academic stress (encompassing academic stressors and reaction to academic stressor). The dimensions of the character strength and gender serve as the independent variable (IV) while academic stress serve as the dependent variable (DV).

Instruments
Academic stress scale is adapted and modified from Gadzella (1991)’s Student-Life Stress Inventory. Meanwhile the scale of character strengths is adapted and modified from Christopher Peterson and Martin E. Seligman (2004)’s the Values in Action (VIA) Inventory.

Data Analysis
Researchers do validity test using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in lisrel 8.70. Meanwhile, the researchers conduct Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) using SPSS 16.0.

RESULTS
There are three things should be considered in regression, First is R-square value representing the percentage of variance accounted for the dependent variable (DV), described by the Independent Variable (IV), second, does the overall Independent Variable (IV) have significant impact on Dependent Variable (DV), third is the significance of the regression coefficient of each independent variable (IV).

First, researchers analyzed overall Independent Variable (IV) contribution to Dependent Variable (DV). R square table can be seen as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.406</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>8.83622</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), GENDER, SPIRITUALITY, LOVE, CREATIVITY, REGULATION, HUMOR, PERSISTENCE, BRAVERY, HOPE, OPEN, CURIOSITY, VITALITY
b. Dependent variable: STRESS
Table 1 shows that R Square = 0.165 or 16.5%. It means 16.5% of academic stress variation is explained by overall Independent Variable (IV), the 83.5% is affected by external variable of this research.

The second step is to analyze the impact or influence of all independent variables on academic stress. The F test results can be seen in the following:

```
Table 2
ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Square</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>3690.818</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>307.568</td>
<td>3.939</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>18660.817</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>78.079</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22351.635</td>
<td>251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), GENDER, SPIRITUALITY, LOVE, CREATIVITY, REGULATION, HUMOR, PERSISTENCE, BRAVERY, HOPE, OPEN, CURIOSITY, VITALITY

b. Dependent variable: STRESS

Table 2 illustrates that the significance is 0.00 (sig < 0.05). It means that null hypothesis is rejected. The null hypothesis stated that there is no significant effect on the entire Independent Variable (IV) to the academic stress. In another word, gender has significant effect on Character Strengths and academic stress.

The next step is to examine the regression coefficient of each independent variable. The data is shown in the rightmost column. If sig < 0.05, the regression coefficient is significant. It means the Independent Variable (IV) has a significant impact on academic stress as provided in table 3.

```
Table 3
Regression Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13.793</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CREATIVITY</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>1.795</td>
<td>.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURIOUSITY</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>1.181</td>
<td>.239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPEN</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>-2.441</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAVERY</td>
<td>-.210</td>
<td>-.185</td>
<td>-2.154</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSISTENCE</td>
<td>-.249</td>
<td>-.203</td>
<td>-2.441</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITALITY</td>
<td>-.157</td>
<td>-.131</td>
<td>-1.390</td>
<td>.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOVE</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>-.374</td>
<td>.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGULATION</td>
<td>-.147</td>
<td>-.120</td>
<td>-1.502</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOPE</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.678</td>
<td>.498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUMOR</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>1.355</td>
<td>.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPIRITUALITY</td>
<td>-.092</td>
<td>-.082</td>
<td>-1.109</td>
<td>.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>3.017</td>
<td>.153</td>
<td>2.359</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: STRESS

"Promoting Children’s Health, Development and Well-being: Integrating Cultural Diversity"
The regression coefficients of Table 3 suggests the equation of academic stress as follows:

\[ \text{Academic stress} = 70.362 + 0.159 \text{creativity} + 0.121 \text{curiosity} - 0.004 \text{open mindedness} - 0.210 \text{bravery}^* - 0.249 \text{persistence}^* - 0.157 \text{vitality} - 0.030 \text{love} - 0.147 \text{self-regulation} + 0.069 \text{hope} + 0.114 \text{humor} - 0.092 \text{spirituality} + 3.017 \text{gender}^* \]

**Description:** Significant (*)

We can simply assess the significance of regression coefficient by reading the rightmost column of Table 3. If \( \text{sig} < 0.05 \), the regression coefficient is significant. It means the coefficient have significant impact on academic stress and vice versa. The table shows that the bravery, persistence, and gender coefficients have significant influence on academic stress, while the other variables are not.

Furthermore, table 4 illustrates variant proportion of each Independent Variable (IV) of the academic stress.

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>R Square Change</th>
<th>F Change</th>
<th>df 1</th>
<th>df 2</th>
<th>Sig. F Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.035&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.303</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>.582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.069&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.881</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>.349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>.161&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>5.378</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>.240&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>8.308</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>.329&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>13.980</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>.348&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>3.638</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>.352&lt;sup&gt;g&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.821</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>.366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>.364&lt;sup&gt;h&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.132</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>2.253</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>.366&lt;sup&gt;i&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>.519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>.376&lt;sup&gt;j&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>3.959</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>.382&lt;sup&gt;k&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>1.289</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>.257</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>.406&lt;sup&gt;l&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>5.563</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity  
b. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity, Curiosity  
c. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity, Curiosity, OpenMindedness  
d. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity, Curiosity, OpenMindedness, Bravery  
e. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity, Curiosity, OpenMindedness, Bravery, Persistence  
f. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity, Curiosity, OpenMindedness, Bravery, Persistence, Vitality  
g. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity, Curiosity, OpenMindedness, Bravery, Persistence, Vitality, Love  
h. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity, Curiosity, OpenMindedness, Bravery, Persistence, Vitality, Love, SelfRegulation  
i. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity, Curiosity, OpenMindedness, Bravery, Persistence, Vitality, Love, SelfRegulation, Hope
j. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity, Curiosity, OpenMindedness, Bravery, Persistence, Vitality, Love, SelfRegulation, Hope, Humor
k. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity, Curiosity, OpenMindedness, Bravery, Persistence, Vitality, Love, SelfRegulation, Hope, Humor, Spirituality
l. Predictors: (Constant), Creativity, Curiosity, OpenMindedness, Bravery, Persistence, Vitality, Love, SelfRegulation, Hope, Humor, Spirituality, Gender

CONCLUSION

The test results of the research hypothesis suggests "the significant effect of gender on character strengths and academic stress of State Islamic University Jakarta working students". Minor hypothesis testing concerning the significance of each regression coefficient of Independent Variable (IV) to the Dependent Variable (DV) showed that bravery, persistence, and gender variables have significant impact on academic stress.

DISCUSSION

This research proposes the two-dimensional character strengths that have a significant effect on academic stress, namely bravery and persistence. The two includes courage virtues. Courage refers to an emotional force containing a strong desire to achieve goal despite the external or internal barriers.

Bravery is courage, not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain. Bravery has a significant negative influence on academic stress. The braver the individuals, the lesser their academic stress. It is consistent with previous studies that showed that the bravery have a low correlation with the degree of stress under pressure (Cox, Hallam, O'Connor, & Rachman; O'Connor, Hallam & Rachman in Peterson & Seligman, 2004). According to researchers, bravery will also encourage people to address challenges that in turn may alleviate stress.

As bravery, persistence also has a negative correlation with academic stress in which the higher the persistence, the lower the academic stress. Persistence is a tendency to act in a sustainable manner to achieve goals despite obstacles and difficulties. Persistent individuals are pleased to complete task despite difficulties without complaining a lot (Seligman, 2002). Besides, persistence is associated with hardiness. Hardy individuals are less likely to quit when they encounter failures and setbacks (Kobasa in Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Gender variables influence significantly to the working students academic stress. There are different academic stress between working male and female students. This result is consistent with studies that showed that there are significant differences in academic stress between men and women (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Hamaideh, 2010; Ahmed, Riaz, and Ramzan, 2013; Kai-Wen, 2009; Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2012).

Other variables that do not affect the academic stress of State Islamic University Jakarta working students, namely creativity, curiosity, vitality, love, self-regulation, hope, humor, and spirituality. However, discrepancies or differences in results between recent and the previous studies might be due to several important factors such as sampling error, differences in the use of psychological measurement tools, background samples, as well as
other things not included in this research. Besides, the different cultural background between those studies may also contribute to these discrepancies.

**SUGGESTION**

**Methodological suggestions**

Other researchers can examine other variables affecting academic stress such as goal setting, motivation, positive thinking, psychological well being, and good relationships with family, friends or lecturers. Other researchers may also investigate the influence of character strengths that may affect the academic stress but did not discuss in this paper, including love of learning, integrity, social intelligence, prudence, and gratitude. In addition, further research can examine the academic stress on students who work 10 hours a week and/or compare the academic stress between working and non-working students.

**Practical suggestions**

Students, especially the working ones, are expected to develop bravery and persistence since these two have a significant influence on the academic stress. The relatives of the working students are expected to provide social support in the development of the persistence, bravery, and other, and character strengths of the working students. It is might be useful to the extent that they can alleviate and defend themselves from academic stress. Faculty is expected to give seminars or training to students in general and to working students in particular to develop their bravery, persistence and other character strengths that may work as a protective factor of academic stress.

**REFERENCES**


