

Level of Perceived Stress and Emotional Symptoms among VET Students

KWOK Sin Tung¹, WONG Wai Ning, Kris², LEE Tse Yan, Alexander²

¹Industrial Liaison Office, Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong

²Faculty of Science and Technology, Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong

Psychological stress in adolescence, especially among those who are pursuing a professional degree, is one of the major contributors to academic performance (Robotham and Julian, 2006). Daily stressors coupled with adolescents' developmental gaps in coping ability make this population particularly vulnerable to resultant psychological and physical health problems and poor academic development as a result of excessive stress. It is important for the Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong (THEi), as a new post-secondary institute to provide quality professional education, to assess the psychological profile of its Vocational Education and Training (VET) students so that interventions can be provided to cater for their physical and psychological needs.

The objectives of the study were to:

- examine the level of perceived stress, emotional syndromes and quality of life among students; and
- evaluate if personal resources is a major contributor to student' stress level.

All students in THEi were invited to participate. Socio-demographic characteristics and outcome measures including physical and psychological well-being and personal resource/resilience (optimism, perceived control and self-esteem) were assessed via validated self-reporting questionnaires.

The response rate of the survey was 83.3%. Although only half of the participants experienced some form of emotional symptoms, 86.8% of participants reported to have endured higher than average level of perceived stress and 21.8% of them reported that they were suffering from emotional symptoms.

The current study investigated students' personal resources in withstanding stress (resilience) by examining their levels of optimism, self-esteem and perceived control during difficult situations. Consistent with previous studies (Chan, Lai and Wong, 2006; Wong and Kwok, 2012), it was found that a higher level of stress suffered by students is correlated with poor personal resources in response to distressing situations. This finding is further solidified by the significantly higher level of stress among students of poor resilience. As a result of a higher level of stress and its associated emotional symptoms, it is not surprising that many students have reported low perceived general health and quality of life. Results indicated that personal resilience is a predicting factor of the level of stress and consequently students' general well-being and quality of life.

In conclusion, a high level of stress and psychological symptoms, as well as a low level of quality of life among THEi's VET students were reported. Further study in developing a theoretical framework and exploration of essential generic stressors such as academic stress is necessary before an effective intervention could be derived to help students manage stress and perform better academically.

This project was funded by THEi seed grant under project no. 1213102. The support of THEi is acknowledged.

References:

- Chan, I.W.S., Lai, J.C.L. & Wong, K.W.N. (2006). Resilience is associated with better recovery in Chinese people diagnosed with Coronary Heart Disease. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 21(3), 335 – 349.
- Robotham, D. & Julian, C. (2006). Stress and higher education student: a critical review of the literature. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 30(2), 107 – 117.
- Wong, K.W.N. & Kwok, S.T. (2012). The role of personal resources in patients with coronary heart disease in response to cardiac rehabilitation programme. *Journal of the Hong Kong College of Cardiology*, 20(2), B2.