



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTION REGULATION, PERCEIVED STRESS
AND JOB PERFORMANCE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE INTERNS FROM UPSI

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A Final Year Project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
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DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK

SECTION A: Student's Declaration

I, Alya Nurfatehah Binti Anuar, Student ID D20201094404 of Faculty of Human Development, hereby declare that the work entitled “The Relationship Between Emotion Regulation, Perceived Stress and Job Performance Among Undergraduate Interns From UPSI” is my original work. I have not copied from any other students' work or from any other sources except where due reference or acknowledgement is made explicitly in the text, nor has any part been written for me by another person.



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I, _____ hereby certifies that the above-mentioned work was prepared by the above-named student, and is submitted to the Faculty of Human Development as a partial fulfilment for the conferment of Bachelor of Psychology with Honours, and the aforementioned work, to the best of my knowledge, is the said student's work.

.....

(Signature and Official Stamp)

.....

(Date)



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Alhamdulillah. All Praise to Allah, the Almighty, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful.

I would want to convey my heartfelt appreciation to my esteemed supervisor, Datin Roslinda Binti Mustapha. Her outstanding counsel, patience, and support throughout this project have been critical to its completion. Datin Roslinda has always been available to provide insightful advice and constructive feedback, helping me to refine my ideas and push the boundaries of my understanding. Without her continuous encouragement and expertise, this project would not have been possible.

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Thank you all for being a part of this journey.



ABSTRACT

The regulation of emotions and perceptions of stress play a crucial role in academic and workplace environments. As students balance academic demands and industrial training, understanding the impact of perceived stress on their work performance becomes increasingly important. This study aims to explore how work performance can be influenced by emotional regulation and perceived stress among undergraduate students. The research investigates the relationship between emotional regulation, perceived stress, and work performance among undergraduate students at Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI). A quantitative approach was employed, utilizing standardized questionnaires to measure three variables. The instruments used were the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), and the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ). Respondents were recruited online, and a total of 76 undergraduate students from UPSI participated in the study. Data analysis, conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), revealed a positive correlation between emotional regulation and work performance, while perceived stress and work performance showed a negative correlation. These findings highlight the need for strategies to enhance emotional regulation and reduce stress among students. However, the study has its limitations. Reliance on self-reported data introduces potential issues such as social desirability bias and inaccuracies in self-assessment. Additionally, the sample size was smaller than the ideal number determined by G*Power, which may have impacted the generalizability of the findings. Future research should address these limitations by employing a mixed-methods approach, increasing sample size, and diversifying recruitment strategies. Longitudinal studies could also provide insights into how these relationships evolve over time, further enriching the understanding of these factors.

Keyword: Emotion regulation, perceived stress, job performance, undergraduate students, academic stress, work performance, emotional management, student employment, stress management.



Hubungan Antara Pengawalan Emosi, Tekanan Yang Dirasai dan Prestasi Kerja Dalam Kalangan Pelatih Siswazah di UPSI

ABSTRAK

Pengawalan emosi dan persepsi tekanan mempunyai peranan penting dalam persekitaran akademik dan pekerjaan. Ketika para pelajar mengimbangi tuntutan akademik dan latihan industri, memahami kesan tekanan yang dirasai terhadap prestasi kerja mereka menjadi sangat penting. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka bagaimana prestasi kerja boleh dipengaruhi oleh peraturan emosi dan tekanan yang dirasakan oleh kalangan pelajar siswazah. Kajian ini menyiasat hubungan antara peraturan emosi, tekanan yang dirasakan, dan prestasi kerja dalam kalangan pelajar prasiswazah dari Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI). Pendekatan kuantitatif telah digunakan, menggunakan soal selidik piawai untuk mengukur tiga pembolehubah. Tiga instrument yang digunakan untuk mengukur pembolehubah ialah *Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)*, *Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)* dan *Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ)*. Responden direkrut secara atas talian dan seramai 76 pelajar prasiswazah dari UPSI telah mengambil bahagian. Data dianalisis menggunakan Pakey Statistik untuk Sains Sosial (SPSS) telah mendedahkan korelasi positif antara pengawalan emosi dan prestasi kerja, manakala tekanan yang dirasai dan prestasi kerja menunjukkan korelasi negative. Keputusan ini menekankan keperluan untuk strategi untuk meningkatkan peraturan emosi dan mengurangkan tekanan di kalangan pelajar. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian ini mempunyai batasan. Kebergantungan pada data yang dilaporkan sendiri berpotensi kepada masalah seperti keinginan sosial dan ketidaktepatan dalam penilaian sendiri. Selain itu, saiz sampel adalah lebih kecil daripada nombor ideal yang ditetapkan oleh GPower, yang mungkin telah menjejaskan kebolehgeneralisasi penemuan. Penyelidikan masa depan harus menangani isu ini dengan menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran, meningkatkan saiz sampel dan mempelbagaikan strategi pengambilan. Kajian membujur juga boleh memberikan pandangan tentang bagaimana hubungan ini berkembang dari semasa ke semasa, memperkayakan lagi pemahaman terhadap faktor-faktor ini.

Kata kunci: Pengawalan emosi, tekanan yang dirasai, prestasi kerja, pelajar siswazah, tekanan akademik, prestasi kerja, pengurusan emosi, pekerjaan pelajar, pengurusan tekanan.



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LIST OF SYMBOLS

Symbol	Definition
f	frequency
N	sample size
$\%$	percentage
r	correlation coefficient
p	p - value
SD	standard deviation
$Sig.$	significance
H_0	null hypothesis
H_1	alternative hypothesis



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations	Definition
CP	Contextual Performance
CWB	Counterproductive Work Behavior
ERQ	Emotion Regulation Questionnaire
	Individual Work Performance
IWPQ	Questionnaire
JD	Job-Demands
NGO	Non-government Organizations
PSS	Perceived Stress Scale
SRT	Self-Regulation Theory
TP	Task Performance
UPSI	Sultan Idris Education University
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview on the information about the study that the researcher will be conducting. This chapter consists of ten sections which includes the background of the study, problem statement, research questions, objective of the study, significance of the study, conceptual and operational definitions of each variable, theories connected to the study, conceptual framework, and hypotheses.





1.4 Research questions

There are five research questions to be answered in this study:

1. What are the levels of emotion regulation among undergraduate interns from UPSI?
2. What are the levels of perceived stress among undergraduate interns from UPSI?
3. What are the levels of job performance among undergraduate interns from UPSI?
4. Is there any relationship between emotion regulation and job performance among undergraduate interns from UPSI?
5. Is there any relationship between perceived stress and job performance among undergraduate interns from UPSI?



1.2 Background of study

A university serves as a structured educational institution providing a diverse array of academic programs ranging from certificate courses to postgraduate studies. In the Malaysian context, the culmination of an undergraduate student's academic journey often involves the completion of a short internship as a prerequisite for obtaining their bachelor's degree.

Within the university environment, students undergo a transformative process where theoretical knowledge acquired in lecture halls and through assignments is translated into practical skills through internship programs. These programs entail immersive, on-site work experiences directly related to students' fields of study. By engaging in real-world scenarios,



students gain invaluable hands-on experience that not only bolsters their academic learning but also cultivates essential job readiness, adaptability, and communication skills which are essential for success in the professional arena (Sukmawati, 2022).

Moreover, internships serve as a pivotal juncture for students to explore and refine their career aspirations, offering them first hand exposure to various industries and career paths (Wolinsky-Nahmias & Auerbach, 2022). Practical skills developed from the internship experiences are highly valued by employers, especially as many hiring managers prefer candidates with prior industry experience (Young et al., 2024). Consequently, according to Young et al. (2024), the cultivation of a skilled and adaptable workforce contributes significantly to the country's economic growth and development by fostering a pool of graduates capable of making meaningful contributions to various sectors.

Emotion regulation, perceived stress, and job performance are crucial components of the undergraduate internship experience, impacting interns' well-being and professional development. As interns navigate the transition from student to professional roles, their ability to regulate emotions, cope with stress, and perform effectively on the job becomes paramount. In addition to academic and work-related pressures, undergraduate interns also encounter the challenge of integrating into a new social environment. The workplace introduces them to a diverse array of colleagues, supervisors, and organisational cultures, which require them to develop effective interpersonal skills and navigate complex social dynamics. Building professional relationships and seeking mentorship are essential aspects of the internship experience, but they can also be sources of stress and anxiety for students adjusting to the professional world. Research by Cohen et al. (1983), has shown that interns may struggle in

creating rapport with colleagues and acclimatise to one's organisational culture, which may add to their stress levels.

1.3 Problem statement

Internships or supervised fieldwork are crucial for undergraduate students' personal growth, yet they often come with stressors that can affect students' well-being and performance. Job performance of an employee has been recognized as an indicator of their work process and is a critical area of concern where interns are expected to transition smoothly into the workforce. Existing literature provides insights into the challenges faced by undergraduate interns, but debates persist regarding the interplay between emotion regulation, perceived stress and job performance.

Perceived stress among undergraduate students often arises as they navigate the demands of their internship placements, which may involve balancing academic requirements, workplace responsibilities, and social integration. The transition from a student to an intern can be daunting, as interns are tasked with demonstrating competence in real-world work settings while adapting to new roles, responsibilities, and organisational cultures. The main problem addressed in this study is the perceived stress levels and their impact on job performance among undergraduate interns. This issue is particularly salient in Malaysia, where interns currently lack the legal protection afforded by the Employment Act (Solihan, 2023). With the rise of the "*intern bukan buruh percuma*" (interns are not free labor) movement, there is growing

awareness of the challenges faced by interns in navigating their roles within organisations without the same legal rights and protections as regular employees.

The reason for conducting this research is because there are gaps in the knowledge on the study of emotion regulation, perceived stress, and job performance among undergraduate interns. First, there is a scarcity of research focusing on the specific population of Malaysian public university students undertaking internships. While studies from other countries provide valuable insights, cultural, educational, and institutional differences may influence the experiences and outcomes of interns in Malaysian public universities. Second, existing literature often lacks a comprehensive examination of the interplay between emotion regulation, perceived stress, and job performance in the context of internships. While individual studies may address emotion regulation or perceived stress separately, there is a need for research that investigates these factors as independent variables and their combined impact on job performance as the dependent variable. Therefore, this study aims to bridge these gaps by investigating emotion regulation, perceived stress, and job performance among undergraduate interns in Malaysian public universities particularly from UPSI, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of interns' experiences and informing targeted interventions to support their success.

1.5 Objective of study

The main objective of the current study was to investigate the relationship between emotion regulation, perceived stress and job performance among undergraduate interns in Sultan Idris



Education University (UPSI). To address the main objective, the current research was divided into five smaller and specific objectives:

- To assess the levels of emotion regulation among undergraduate interns in Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI).
- To assess the levels of perceived stress among undergraduate interns in Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI).
- To assess the levels of job performance among undergraduate interns in Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI).



- To examine the relationship between emotion regulation and job performance among undergraduate interns in Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI).
- To examine the relationship between perceived stress and job performance among undergraduate interns in Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI).

1.6 Significance of study

The significance of the study can be categorised into two main focuses: community and research. The main objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between emotion regulation, perceived stress, and job performance among undergraduate interns from UPSI.





Thus, this study will mostly benefit the undergraduate students, mainly those who are currently or going to undergo their internship, and also future researchers.

Considering that most universities in Malaysia have implemented internships or supervised fieldwork in the learning structure, this study will likely be beneficial to UPSI. Universities could tailor suitable support services and resources to better cope with the needs of their students after taking into account the students' struggles and experiences during the supervised fieldwork. This may include applying interventions that could help to enhance students' emotion regulation skills and optimising the internship experience to promote their well-being. Additionally, this study is significant because it can be an initiative to get an insight on the effectiveness and the significance of having an internship or supervised fieldwork as one of the mandatory programs, in order to complete a bachelor degree. Universities can implement strategies to mitigate stressors and promote a supportive learning environment during the supervised fieldwork experience when they could identify factors that contribute to the students' perceived stress level and that impact their job performance. This would, in turn, enhance the overall quality and effectiveness of internship programs and contribute to the professional development of future graduates.

Other than that, this research would also be beneficial as it would contribute to understanding the relationship between emotion regulation, perceived stress and job performance. This study will address a significant gap of knowledge in the existing studies by investigating the interconnections between emotion regulation, perceived stress and job performance among undergraduate interns from UPSI. Previously, past research has primarily focused on undergraduate students and not specifically focused on those who are currently doing their supervised fieldwork (Abdul Aziz et al., 2023; Thomas & Zolkoski, 202; Tasneem





& Panwar, 2020). Although there are a few studies that have done research on undergraduate interns, most of them focused on practical trainees such as the medical, nursing and culinary interns (Abdullah & Azam, 2021; Ismail et al., 2020; Mensah et al., 2020; Rabei et al., 2020; Amal & Fatma, 2016). Therefore, additional research on the Malaysian population will provide us with useful findings and results.

1.7 Conceptual Definition

Emotional Regulation

Gross (1998) mentioned that “Emotion regulation refers to the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions.” (pg. 275). It is said that the process of emotion regulation can happen either automatic or controlled, conscious or unconscious. Emotional regulation involves a change in response when it is exerted towards an emotion.

Perceived Stress

According to Cohen et al. (1983), perceived stress can be referred to as how an individual understands the amount of stress they are exposed to in a period of time. It also refers to an individuals’ subjective appraisal and perception of stressful and overwhelming events in life. Perceived stress can be influenced by many factors including the nature of the stressor, the individual's appraisal of their own resources and abilities to cope, and their previous experiences with stress. It often manifests as a feeling of tension, worry, or strain and may impact various aspects of an individual's well-being, including physical health, psychological functioning, and social relationships (Cohen et al. 1983).



Job Performance

According to Rotundo (2002), job performance is defined as the behaviours or actions of individuals that contribute to organisational goals and are under the individual's control. This definition underscores the importance of focusing on observable behaviours over mere outcomes or results. Job performance is also closely related to behaviours that support organisational goals, rather than concentrating on the results (Murphy, 1989, as cited in Rotundo, 2002). The construct of job performance is multidimensional, including adaptive performance, trait activation, and causal antecedents like personality traits, cognitive ability, motivation, knowledge, and skill (Estrella, 2014). Overall, job performance is a critical aspect impacting various outcomes such as promotion, job satisfaction, productivity, and interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

1.8 Operational Definition

Emotional Regulation

Emotion Regulation is operationally defined by the scores obtained from the 10-items Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) developed by Gross & John (2003). The emotion regulation will be measured by obtaining the scores from each subscale of the ERQ: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Perceived Stress

Perceived Stress is operationally defined by the scores obtained from the 10-items Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), which was originally developed by Cohen et al. (1983). The scores will be calculated by reversing responses of four positively worded items from items 4, 5, 7 and 8.

This will be done by subtracting the value with 4. The total score will be then obtained by summing up all the scores across all items. The higher the scores will represent higher stress that are being perceived by participants.

Job Performance

Job performance is operationally defined by the scores obtained from the 18-items scales Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ). IWPQ was developed by Koopmans in 2015 and it is used to measure three main dimensions of job performance: task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour (Koopmans, 2015). A mean score can be calculated by adding the item scores and dividing the sum by the number of items in the scale (Ramos-Villagrasa et al., 2019). A mean score for the individual dimension will be computed by summing the items' score within the dimension and calculating the average.

1.9 Theoretical approach

1.9.1 Job Demands - Resources Model (JDR Model)

This study is based on the theoretical approach that was originally developed by Demerouti et al. in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The theory is called Job Demands- Resources Model (JD-R Model), which is a widely recognized theoretical framework in organisational psychology in understanding factors that might influence employees' well-being and performance in the workplace. According to Demerouti et al. (2001), they proposed that job characteristics can be categorised into two main broad categories which are job demands and job resources.

Job demands can be referred to those physical, social, or organisational facets of a job that require sustained physical or mental exertion, which will consequently be linked with certain physiological and psychological costs. Job resources, on the other hand, can be referred to the physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that can serve various purposes including facilitating the achievement of work goals, and it is primarily related to disengagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). The JD-R model proposes that if job demands are high and job resources are low, it could lead to stress and burnout. Conversely, if the job resources are high, it could offset the effects of job demands, which would then lead to high motivation and therefore, lead to a better job performance.

1.9.2 Self-Regulation Theory (SRT)

Another theory that is being implemented in the study is the Self-Regulation Theory (SRT) introduced by Baumeister and Vohs in 2007. SRT emphasizes that individuals actively manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to achieve desired goals, particularly in contexts requiring sustained effort and control. In the context of this study, SRT is highly relevant to understanding the relationship between emotion regulation and job performance among undergraduate interns. Effective emotion regulation, as an aspect of self-regulation, enables interns to manage workplace stress and maintain focus on tasks, leading to improved job performance.

The theory also underscores the importance of self-monitoring and adaptive strategies, which help individuals overcome emotional challenges and sustain productivity. This aligns with the study's objectives, which suggest that interns who apply emotion regulation strategies,

such as reappraisal, are better equipped to handle the demands of their work environments. Thus, SRT provides a theoretical foundation for exploring how self-regulation mechanisms influence the interplay between emotional control and performance outcomes in real-world settings (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007).

1.10 Conceptual framework

Based on the theoretical framework mentioned above, it shows that job performance of undergraduate interns can be influenced by both factors of emotion regulation and perceived stress.

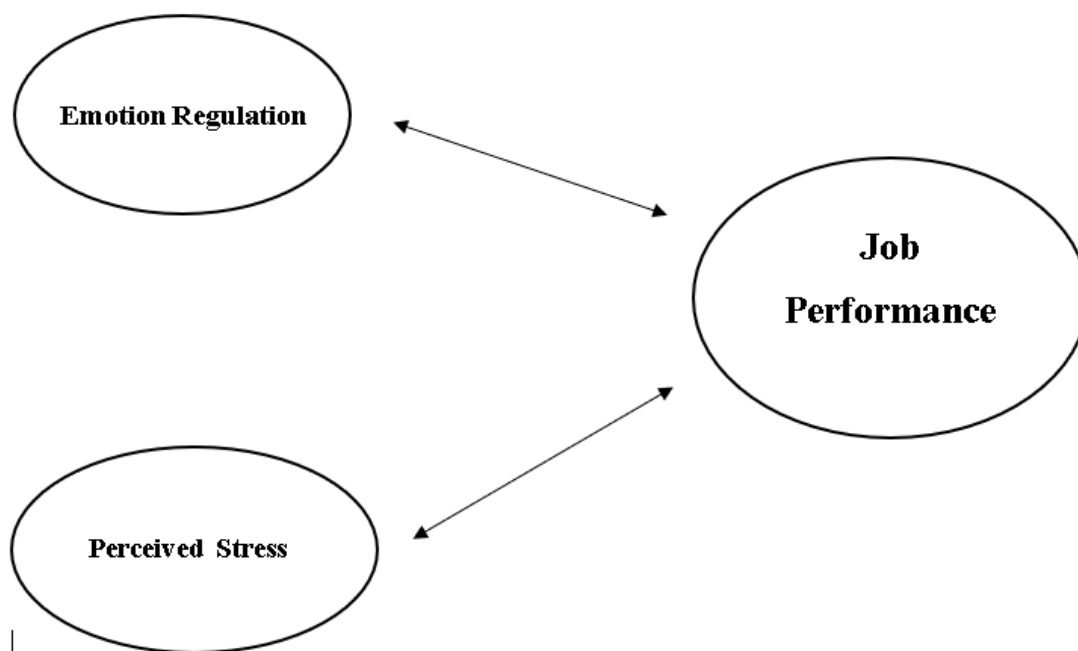


Figure 1 Proposed Conceptual Framework for the Study



1.11 Hypothesis

H₀₁ : There is a significant relationship between emotion regulation and job performance among undergraduate interns from UPSI.

H₁₁ : There is no significant relationship between emotion regulation and job performance among undergraduate interns from UPSI.

H₀₂: There is a significant relationship between perceived stress and job performance among undergraduate interns from UPSI.

H₁₂: There is no significant relationship between perceived stress and job performance among undergraduate interns from UPSI.

1.12 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter is mainly focusing on the foundation and the basic idea of what this study is about. The major goal of this study is to determine the relationship between numerous psychological factors, including emotion regulation, perceived stress and job performance among undergraduate interns during their supervised fieldwork experiences.





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