
PROCRASTINATION AND ANXIETY AMONG PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN EAST MALAYSIA

Pang Chee Hong, *Guan Teik Ee, & Muhamad Azlan Daud

Faculty of Psychology and Education, Universiti Malaysia Sabah

*Correspondent author's e-mail: guanteikee@ums.edu.my

Received date: 30 October 2019; Accepted date: 6 November 2019

Abstract: Procrastination is prevalent and pernicious but not entirely understood. It has been seen as a universal phenomenon that hinders people's ability to accomplish their goals. Procrastination can be defined as lack or absence of self-regulated performance and the behavioural tendency to delay what is necessary to reach a goal. It appears to be a troubling phenomenon and yet human beings have been procrastinating for centuries. University students are the backbone of society. They need to be aware of their procrastination attitude so that they could tackle the problem. Anxiety on the other hand is a negative feeling. Studies show that a relationship exists between procrastination and anxiety. However very few studies investigate procrastination and anxiety, especially among Psychology and Social Work students in the public university in Malaysia. In view of this, the objectives of this study are to examine: (1) the difference in procrastination by gender; (2) the difference in anxiety by gender; (3) the relationship between procrastination and anxiety. This study managed to get 304 samples for the objectives above. The difference of gender was tested by *t*-test; while the relationship between procrastination and anxiety was tested by correlation. The results of this study indicated that female students engaged more in major procrastination, whereas male students engaged more in moderate procrastination. However, there were no significant differences on procrastination and anxiety between gender. The finding also showed a significant relationship between procrastination and anxiety.

Keywords: Procrastination, Anxiety, Psychology, Social Work

INTRODUCTION

Procrastination is the act of delaying or postponing a task even though it is important. Procrastination could affect academic performance, lead to anxiety, negative feelings and even self-defeating behaviour. Steel (2007) estimated that about 75% of college students engaged in procrastination.

Over the past 20–30 years, procrastination has attracted great interest among researchers as it is a crucial issue that affects student learning outcomes.

Khan et al. (2014) conducted a study to investigate gender differences in procrastination. The data were collected from 200 students (100 college students and 100 university students) from different colleges and universities in Islamabad. The result indicated that there was a significant gender difference on procrastination.

Mandap (2016) also conducted a study exploring the differences in procrastination among students with different gender, academic courses, performance level and academic self-efficacy. The data were collected from 200 college students of Bulacan State University in the Philippines. The result indicated a gender difference in procrastination where male students procrastinate more than female students.

Some studies demonstrated that male and female students procrastinate at the same rate. For example, a study done by Ebadi and Shakoorzadeh (2015) on procrastination among high-school students in Tehran found no significant difference in procrastination by gender. Data were collected from 624 high school students (312 boys & 312 girls) from different areas and regions selected using random cluster-multistage sampling method. The results showed that boys and girls procrastinate at the same rate, in general.

As for anxiety, most of the studies suggest that females have more anxiety than males. For example, a study done by McLean et al. (2011) to examine gender differences in anxiety disorders collected data from a large sample of adults ($N = 20,013$) from the Collaborative Psychiatric Epidemiology Studies in the United States. The findings indicated that women had higher a rate of anxiety than men.

As for procrastination and anxiety, Yerdelen (2016) indicated that student procrastination and anxiety were positively correlated. Procrastination was significantly related to anxiety and that led to low level of self-efficacy for self-regulation.

University students need to combat procrastination as they are always the ones being expected to contribute more to the betterment of society. The resolution of procrastination is a crucial step for successful adulthood and leadership. This study points to the need for greater awareness of the impact of procrastination. However, very few studies have examined the specific relationship between procrastination and anxiety. Therefore, the current study focuses on the following objectives: (1) To examine the difference in procrastination by gender; (2) To examine the difference in anxiety by gender; (3) To examine the relationship between procrastination and anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in the form of quantitative study using survey method to collect data. Participants were selected randomly from students who took Psychology and Social Work courses at University of Malaysia Sabah.

Psychology students referred to the students from HA13, Industrial and Organizational Psychology Program; HA16, Youth and Community Development Program; HA19, Counselling Psychology Program; and HA20 Child and Family Psychology Program. The Social Work students referred to students from HA52, Social Work Program.

Psychology and Social Work students were chosen as they are seen as the first to play an important role to help to reduce psychological problems in society. They have to act fast should the problems arise in their surroundings. Thus, it is important to investigate whether they procrastinate before they start working, as procrastination affects their future work quality and competency.

Participants were selected through random sampling from each of the 5 programs. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) based on total population of 1100 in the total 5 programs, only 285 sample subjects were needed; this study managed to collect 304 subjects.

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study. The first was the Procrastination Quotient (Ellis, Dave, 2009). The Procrastination Quotient has a total of 10 items aimed at measuring the level of

procrastination. Responses for the Procrastination Quotient assess the frequency of engaging in procrastination behaviour from strongly agree to strongly disagree. If a respondent scores below 22 points, indicated occasional problem, i.e., mild procrastination; a score between 21 to 30 indicates not too severe, i.e., moderate procrastination and scores above 30 points indicate severe problem, i.e., major procrastination.

The second instrument was The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI-T, Form Y-2; Spielberger, C.D. 1983) is a two-part instrument designed to measure state anxiety (i.e., current severity of anxiety the individual is experiencing) and trait anxiety (i.e., individual differences in the frequency of anxious feelings that are relatively stable over time). Range of scores for each subtest is 20–80, with higher scores indicating greater anxiety. Responses for the T-Anxiety scale assess frequency of feelings “in general”: 1) almost never, 2) sometimes, 3) often, and 4) almost always. The purpose of this instrument is to measure via self-report the presence and severity of current symptoms of anxiety and a generalized propensity to be anxious.

RESULTS

The 3 objectives of this study were answered according to the following sub-topics:

Difference in procrastination by gender

Table 1 shows the percentage level of procrastination among Psychology and Social Work students according to gender. Overall, out of 304 students, .7% (2 students) have minor procrastination, 54.6% (166) students have moderate procrastination and 44.7% (136) students have major procrastination.

As for gender, out of 56 male students, most of them i.e., 62.5% (35) students were at the moderate procrastination level. As for minor and major procrastination there were 3.6% (2) students and 33.9% (19) respectively. Whereas for female students, out of 248 female students, most of them i.e., 52.8% (131) were in the moderate procrastination level and none of them were in the minor procrastination, and 47.2% (117) were in the major procrastination level.

Comparatively, this study shows that female students engaged in major procrastination more than male students, while male students engaged in moderate procrastination more than female students.

Table 1: Percentage of Level of Procrastination Among Psychology Students According to Gender

| Procrastination | | Minor | Moderate | Major | Total | Total in Proportion |
|-----------------|--------|-------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Overall | | .7% (2) | 54.6% (166) | 44.7% (136) | 100% (304) | |
| Gender | Male | 3.6% (2) | 62.5% (35) | 33.9% (19) | 100% (56) | 56/304= 18.4% |
| | Female | 0% (0) | 52.8% (131) | 47.2% (117) | 100% (248) | 248/304= 81.6% |

Difference in procrastination between gender among psychology students

Even though overall female students engaged in major procrastination more than male students, and male students engaged in moderate procrastination more than female students by percentage, we do not know whether the difference is significant. Therefore, the difference between gender was investigated by using *t*-test. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumption of normality.

Table 2 shows the comparison between gender on procrastination. Based on Levene's test, the value of significance obtained was .323 (i.e., greater than .05). Hence, we assumed that population of variances were equal relatively. Table 2 shows also there was no significant difference between male and female students on procrastination, $t(302) = -.808$, $p > .05$.

Table 2: t-Test Result Comparing Males and Females on Procrastination

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|---|-------------|------------------------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| | | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
| Procrastination | Equal variances assumed | .980 | .323 | -.808 | 302 | .420 | -.57200 | .70802 |

Difference in anxiety between gender among psychology students

The difference in anxiety between male and female students was investigated by using *t*-test. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumption of normality.

Table 3 shows the comparison of gender on anxiety. Based on Levene’s test, the value of significance obtained was .986 (i.e., greater than .05). Hence, we assumed that the population of variances were equal relatively. Table 3 shows also there is no significant difference between male and female students on anxiety, $t(302) = -.797, p > .05$.

Table 3 : *t*-Test Result Comparing Males and Females on Anxiety

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | <i>t</i> -test for Equality of Means | | | | |
|---------|-------------------------|---|------|--------------------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| | | <i>F</i> | Sig. | <i>t</i> | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
| Anxiety | Equal variances assumed | .000 | .986 | -.797 | 302 | .426 | -1.03283 | 1.29552 |

Relationship between procrastination and anxiety among psychology students

The relationship between procrastination and anxiety was investigated by using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity.

Table 4 shows the result of correlational analysis between procrastination and anxiety. The result of the analysis demonstrated that procrastination and anxiety were significantly correlated ($r = .355, n = 304, p < .01$). This result explained that students with high procrastination reported themselves as having high anxiety. In other words, when procrastination is high, the level of anxiety is high also.

Table 4: Correlational Analysis Between Procrastination and Anxiety

| | Procrastination | Anxiety |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------|
| Procrastination | - | . |
| Anxiety | .355** | - |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion and conclusion

The *t*-test result indicated that there was no significant difference between gender on procrastination. The finding of current study was inconsistent with the finding from Khan et al. (2014) who reported that procrastination was mostly observed in male students. This study also indicated that there was no significant difference between gender on anxiety.

When students procrastinate, at the same time they are in a state of anxiety or feeling guilty as they do not do the task, thus making them keep finding reasons to feel better with their delaying attitude. That explained why procrastination prevailed regardless of gender in this study.

Sometimes students procrastinate because they do not see meaning in doing the task. According to the Temporal Motivation Theory (TMT), people always prioritise activities which promise the highest utility, at least in the perspective of that person for that certain time (Siaputra, 2010). In other words, if people think that the utility of doing a task is low, they will procrastinate. This mentality is regardless of gender. Maybe one of the weaknesses in the educational system in Malaysia is too much emphasis on marks. To pass a subject with an excellent grade has become students' goal of study; gaining knowledge is not their priority anymore. That is why students tend to delay doing their assignments as they think they gain nothing while doing the assignment. This phenomenon needs to be paid attention in order to maximise student learning outcomes. The Malaysian educational system needs to reinforce knowledge gaining rather than scoring high marks.

In this study, anxiety is seen as one of the sources that related to procrastination as there was a relationship between procrastination and anxiety. Students procrastinate to protect themselves from getting involved in a difficult task. In 1953, Freud tried to explain the tendency of procrastination based on the concept of task avoidance (Siaputra, 2010). To Freud, tasks that are not completed will be avoided because they pose a threat to the ego. Some people always find reasons for not acting immediately on a difficult task because they are unable to predict

the unknown difficulty. This unknown difficulty is treated as a threat when they do the task. So they procrastinate doing it (Siaputra, 2010) until the last minute. Once their anxiety is getting from bad to worse, it inversely motivates them into doing the task eventually, especially for those who successfully do tasks at the last minute.

Procrastination could foster procrastinators to remember the incidents following the success when facing a deadline until the final seconds (Siaputra, 2010). People tend to do work “last minute” as they see they can work more efficiently when tension or pressure reaches a higher level. This belief is likely to cause delay in starting, doing, and completing the tasks as it will lead to a state of anxiety. Anxiety can be considered as a state of tension that motivates us to do something (Corey, 2013). However, not every task can be done at the last minute. It is always safer to prepare and start work early. Students need to be convinced of this attitude of delaying. Mindfulness and Acceptance-Based Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (MACBT) (Corey, 2013) can be applied to help students to be aware of procrastination. The Ministry of Education and university administrators need to tackle this phenomenon before it is too late. The university students (especially Psychology and Social Work students who are crucial in reducing the psychological problems in future society) play an important role in national development so they need to combat procrastination attitude.

REFERENCES

- Corey, G. (2013). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning.
- Ebadi, S., & Shakoorzadeh, R. (2015). Investigation of Academic Procrastination Prevalence and Its Relationship with Academic Self-Regulation and Achievement Motivation among High-School Students in Tehran City. *International Education Studies*, 8(10), 193-199.
- Ellis, Dave (2009). *Becoming a master student*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Freud, S. (1920). *Beyond the pleasure principle*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Kamran, W., & Fatima, I. (2013). Emotional Intelligence, Anxiety and Procrastination in Intermediate Science Students. *Pakistan*

- Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 1-6. Retrieved from <http://www.gcu.edu.pk/FullTextJour/PJSCS/2013b/1.iramFatima.pdf>.
- Khan, M. J., Hafsa Arif, Syeda Sumbul Noor & Sidra Muneer. (2014). Academic procrastination among male and female university and college students. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(2), 65-70.
- Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 30(3), 607-610.
- Mandap, C. M. (2016). Examining the Differences in Procrastination Tendencies among University Students. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 431-436.
- McLean, Carmen T., Asnaani, A., Litz, B. T., & Hofmann, S. G. (2011). Gender differences in anxiety disorders: Prevalence, course of illness, comorbidity and burden of illness. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 1027-1035.
- Siaputra, I. B. (2010). Temporal motivation theory: Best theory (yet) to explain procrastination. *Anima Indonesian Psychological Journal*, 206-214.
- Spielberger, C.D. (1983). State-Trait anxiety inventory for adults: Manual, instrument and scoring guide. CA: Mind Garden, Inc.
- Steel, P. (2007). The nature of procrastination: A meta-analytic and theoretical review of quintessential self-regulatory failure. *Psychological Bulletin*, 65-94.
- Yerdelen, S. M. (2016). Longitudinal Examination of Procrastination and Anxiety, and Their Relation to Self-Efficacy for Self-Regulated Learning: Latent Growth Curve Modeling. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 5-22.