RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REPETITIVE NEGATIVE THINKING, LIFE SATISFACTION AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: As stress, anxiety, and depression are on the rise among university students, it has become increasingly recognized as a public health crisis. This could hinder their achievement in university, relationships, and future career. Hence, this study investigates the relationship between repetitive negative thinking, life satisfaction and mental health among Malaysian university students. A web based cross-sectional study was conducted among 184 (female=129; male=55) Malaysian university students involved in the online cross-sectional study collected via Google Forms. Repetitive negative thing was measured using The Perseverative Thinking Questionnaire (PTQ). Mental health was ascertained using Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) and Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). Meanwhile, Satisfaction of Life Scale (SWLS) was used to measure participants' life satisfaction. The questionnaires used in the study and distributed via Google Form. The results suggest there is a relationship between psychological well-being (depression and anxiety) and subjective life satisfaction towards repetitive negative thinking. Therefore, it is critical to implement prevention and treatment programmers tailored to university students experiencing mental health issues.

Keywords: Repetitive Negative Thinking, Life Satisfaction, Mental Health, Depression, Anxiety, University Students

INTRODUCTION

According to statistics, 1 in 5 people—females 17.7% and men 18.9%—experience depression. Then, 2 in 5 people—42.3 percent of women and 37.1 percent of men—report feeling nervous. In the meantime, 10.3% of women and 8.9% of men in the population are under stress. These figures demonstrate how negatively impacted university students' mental health has always been over the years. Teenagers had the worst mental health and

higher levels of anxiety and depression than all other age groups, according to the "Stress in AmericaTM Generation Z" (2018) study. Repetitive negative thinking (RNT) is the over-analyzing and recurrent effects on university students' worrying about current issues as well as ones from the past or the future (Raes et al., 2020). University students now frequently confront academic expectations because of the fiercer rivalry in higher education, which might cause mental health issues in some of them (Fauzi et al., 2021). As a result, students constantly consider their future, which triggers negative thinking, makes them feel lousy about their education, and causes anxiety.

Mental health is a significant public health issue because university students experience high rates of psychological distress (Ghorbani et al., 2014). Due to the academic, social, and personal demands of navigating higher education, university students frequently experience significant levels of stress, anxiety, and despair. In other research, ruminating has also been shown to foretell the onset of post-traumatic stress disorder (Teismann et al., 2021) It has been linked to the persistence of an eating disorder-related psychopathology, insomnia, and Takano et al., 2014's citation of Norton & Abbott, and social anxiety disorder (Norton & Abbott, 2015). (Smith et al., 2018). Some adolescents are still unable to think of ways to solve their problems and this will lead them to think negatively of themselves therefore this can also make them slowly develop depression and anxiety in their mental health (World Health Organization, 2021).

According to the (National Health and Morbidity Survey, 2015), mental health disorders among Malaysian adults have increased from 10.7% in 1996 to 11.2 percent in 2006 and 29.2% in 2015. According to Hasani et al (2021), repetitive thinking as a transdiagnostic factor is important in the development and maintenance of emotional disorders. As a result, it was discovered that repetitive thinking has a positive and powerful relationship with other measures of rumination as well as symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Based on the study by Ram et al. (2020), studied on relationship between life skills, repetitive negative thinking, family function, and life satisfaction in attempted suicide. According to the study's results, inadequate living skills, a lack of happiness with one's situation in life, dysfunctional families, and intensified negative thought patterns are all risk factors for suicide attempts. The current study focuses

on the relationship between repetitive negative thinking, life satisfaction and mental health among Malaysian university students.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the relationship between repetitive negative thinking and depression symptoms among Malaysian university students.
- To investigate the relationship between repetitive negative thinking and anxiety symptoms among Malaysian university students.
- To investigate the correlation among life satisfaction with repetitive negative thinking among Malaysian university students.
- To investigate the relationship between depression, anxiety, and life satisfaction towards repetitive negative thinking among Malaysian university students.

METHODOLOGY

Using Google Form, a web-based cross-sectional survey was carried out to gather the data, which were then disseminated via social media (WhatsApp and Telegram). The participants were urged to give the questionnaire to other pupils as part of a snowballing strategy. Malaysian university students who are 18 years of age or older and enrolled in either a private or public university in Malaysia are eligible to participate in this survey as responders. All participants gave their consent, and all information was confidential.

Participants

Table 1 display the study involved a total number of 184 undergraduate students aged between 19 – 30 (M = 22.59; SD = 1.113). There are 70.1% females (n = 129) and 29.9% males (n = 55) among them. There are 8.2% of Year 1 students (n =15), 19.0% of Year 2 students (n =35), 63.6% of Year 3 students (n =117), 8.7% of Year 4 students (n =16), and 0.5% of Year 5 students (n =1). The CGPAs of all participants range from 2.00 to 4.00 (M =3.42; SD =.317).

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Information

	n	*%*	*M*	*SD*
Age			22.59	1.113
Gender				
Female	129	70.1		
Male	55	29.9		

Year of study				
Year 1	15	8.2		
Year 2	35	19.0		
Year 3	117	63.6		
Year 4	16	8.7		
Year 5	1	.5		
CGPA			3.42	.317

Instrument

The first part of the questionnaire is to capture participants' demographics information. The Perseverative Thinking Questionnaire (PTQ; (Ehring et al., 2011) was used to measure repetitive negative thinking. The questionnaire is composed of 15 items evaluating the core characteristics of RNT. The Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI; (Beck et al., 1996) is used to identify symptoms of depression on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 to 3. Meanwhile, the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; (Beck et al., 1988)is a 21-item self-report instrument to measure anxiety symptoms using a 4-point scale ranging from 0 to 3. The final instrument is the Satisfaction of Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). The SWLS is a 5 item- scale designed to measure global cognitive judgements of one's life satisfaction. By using a 7-points scale that ranges from 7 strongly agree to 1 strongly disagree. Overall, the internal consistency of the instruments in the pilot study was excellent, PTQ (α =.96), BDI (α =.91), BAI (α =.96) and SWLS (α =.88) respectively.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28 for Windows.

RESULTS

Table 2 displays descriptive information of the depression and anxiety level by gender. It also shows the level of depression according to the Beck Depression Inventory classification of four levels. The results indicated that a higher percentage of females (30.2 %) scored severe depression level as compared to males. experienced a higher percentage of severe anxiety (30.2%). Almost half of the male students are in the minimum level of depression (47.3%). As for anxiety level, the results indicated that both female (62.8 %) and male (69.1%).

Table 2: The Depression and Anxiety Level by Gender

	b		Male		Total (n=184)	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Depression Level						
Minimal	43	33.3	26	47.3	69	37.5
Mild	19	14.7	7	12.7	26	14.1
Moderate	28	21.7	14	25.5	42	22.8
Severe	39	30.2	8	14.5	47	25.5
Anxiety Level						
Low	4	3.1	1	1.8	5	2.7
Moderate	44	34.1	16	29.1	60	32.6
High	81	62.8	38	69.1	119	64.7

Table 3 displays the results of the independent samples t-test for both depression scores and anxiety scores between gender. The analysis showed that there is a significant difference in the depression scores between gender, t =2.185, $p < 0.022$. Females (M =21.18; SD =13.95) had higher mean scores on depression compared to males ($M = 16.64$; SD =10.00). As for anxiety, no significant difference was found in regards to gender.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test for Depression Scores and Anxiety Scores Between Gender

Gender	Female		Male		*t*	*p*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Depression	21.18	13.95	16.64	10.00	2.185	.022
Anxiety	42.17	14.67	45.34	13.98	-1.348	.720

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between repetitive negative thinking and life satisfaction among Malaysian university students. There was significant and negative correlation between the two variables *(r = -.325, n = 184, p = 0.001)*. A scatterplot summarizes the results in table 4. Overall, there was a negative correlation between repetitive negative thinking and satisfaction of life scale among Malaysian university students, the less their satisfaction in life. This shows that students' satisfaction in life deceases as they engage in more negative, repetitive thoughts.

Table 4: Correlation Between Repetitive Negative Thinking and Satisfaction of Life Scale Among Malaysian University Students.

		PTQ	SWLS
PTQ	Pearson Correlation	1	-.325[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001

	N	184	184
SLWS	Pearson Correlation	-.325**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	184	184

The results also shows that there was significant and negative correlation between repetitive negative thinking and life satisfaction among Malaysian university students *(r = -.325, n = 184, p = 0.001)*. This shows that students' satisfaction in life deceases as they engage in more negative, repetitive thoughts. A multiple linear regression was used to test if depression, anxiety, and satisfaction with life significantly predicted repetitive negative thinking. A significant regression equation was found $(F (3, 180) = 30.573, p <.001)$, with an R^2 of .338. Depression and anxiety are not significant predictors of repetitive negative thinking meanwhile satisfaction with life is a significant predictor of PTQ.

Table 5: Regression in Depression, Anxiety, And Life Satisfaction Towards Repetitive Negative Thinking Among Malaysian University Students.

Variables	Beta	*SE*	95% CI		β	*p*
			LL	*LL*		
BDI	0.47	0.08	0.303	0.633	0.48	.001
BAI	0.12	0.07	-0.010	0.250	0.14	.070
SWLS	-0.03	0.15	-0.315	0.265	-0.01	.865

*Note. * p < .05.*

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between repetitive negative thinking, life satisfaction and mental health among Malaysian university students. This study showed that there was a strong, positive correlation between repetitive negative thinking and depression symptoms among Malaysian university students. This finding is in agreement with the results of studies by Rood et al. (2010), which stated in youth, emotion-focused rumination is positively associated with concurrent levels of depressive symptoms and may predict increases in depressive symptoms over time. Similarly, there was a strong, positive correlation between repetitive negative thinking and anxiety symptoms among the students. This finding is in agreement with the results of studies by Rood et al. (2010), which stated that worry is yet another form of repetitive negative thinking and can be defined as a chain of thoughts and images that are negatively affect-laden and relatively uncontrollable. There was a negative correlation between repetitive negative thinking and

life satisfaction among Malaysian university students. Indicating that the more students repetitive negative thinking, the less their life satisfaction. The result from this study supports the claim by (Ram et al., 2020b) that report repetitive negative thinking patterns are strongly associated with suicide. The result of the present study indicated there is no significant relationship in depression, anxiety, and life satisfaction toward repetitive negative thinking among Malaysian university students. The study by Espinosa et al. (2022), reported that both depression and anxiety are common features of repetitive negative thinking. The current research can improve undergraduate students' understanding of life satisfaction, persistent negative thought patterns, sadness, and anxiety symptoms.

CONCLUSION
It is concluded that this quantitative study has shed light on issues regarding the relationship between repetitive negative thinking, life satisfaction and mental health among Malaysian university students. In addition, findings from this study have also demonstrated the effect of repetitive negative thinking towards mental health among Malaysian university students based on demographic characteristic of the respondents.

Informed Consent Statement
I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can end it whenever I want, for any reason, and without paying any expenses. I also understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form. I agree to take part in this investigation.

Conflict of Interest
No conflicts of interest are disclosed by the researcher.

Ethics Statement
All methods used in this investigation that involved using human subjects were carried out in accordance with the ethical standards established by the institutional research committee. Everyone who took part provided their informed consent.

Author Contributions
Most of the research's contributions, including the methodology, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation, come from Rayniesha MR

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