

The Relationship between Academic Stress and Uncontrolled Eating Behaviour among University Students in Kelantan

Nurul Hidayah Binti Ahmad Sabuddin, Zunnurain Binti Zakaria, Nur Asyima Binti Mohd Yacob, Nur Liana Atikah Shahrol Mizan, & *Mohd Hakam Bin Nazir

Faculty of Hospitality, Tourism, and Wellness, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan

Corresponding email: hakam.n@umk.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Academic stress is one of the most common psychological variables used to assess teenager subjective well-being in educational settings. In the era of the pandemic, the problem of uncontrolled eating among student has become serious. This study aims to identify the components of academic stress and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan. The components of academic stress are academic anxiety, academic pressure, academic frustration and academic conflict. There are 370 respondents from UiTM Machang and USM Kubang Kerian involved in answering the questionnaires distributed by the researcher. Data analysis was conducted by using SPSS. The findings have indicated a relationship between the components of academic stress and uncontrolled eating behaviour with a p-value less than 0.001. The results show that the relationship between the components of academic stress and uncontrolled eating behaviour is very significant. Based on the research findings, it is found that all research objectives were supported, and all hypotheses were accepted. The researchers have also proposed a few recommendations related to the study.

Keywords: *Academic Stress, Uncontrolled Eating Behavior, Academic Anxiety, Academic Pressure, Academic Frustration, Academic Conflict*

INTRODUCTION

According to Mustelin, Bulik, Kaprio and Keski-Rahkonen (2017), uncontrolled eating behavior can be associated with a person's weight gain in general. Uncontrolled eating will make a person more likely to over eat thus bringing harm to the body in the future (Bongers & Jansen, 2016). Emotions also play an important role in life in suppressing feelings to keep eating behaviour under control. Therefore, this study focuses on students of UiTM Machang and USM Kubang Kerian in Kelantan to find out statistics on academic stress and uncontrolled eating behaviour faced by the students. This is because students do experience academic stress while studying due to unstable mental state.

Academic stress has four components namely academic anxiety, academic pressure, academic frustration and academic conflict (Bisht, 1989). Students can experience this academic stress with various factors such as an uncondusive learning environment and other learning-related problems. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2019) has defined stress as stress that does not match the knowledge and abilities of an individual who challenges the ability to cope.

This study consists of four objectives:

1. To identify the relationship between academic anxiety and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.

2. To determine the relationship between academic pressure and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.
3. To examine the relationship between academic frustration and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.
4. To identify the relationship between academic conflict and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.

Significance of the Study

University Students

This study is important to benefit university students on the academic stress experienced by many university students due to academic anxiety, academic pressure, academic frustration and academic conflict that can affect the performance and health of students in carrying out daily activities. This is because university students come from various backgrounds that can affect daily life and the learning process at university. This research can help students become active students and good at managing stress related to learning, personal and so on.

Parents

This study can provide some information to parents to be more sensitive and always pay attention to their children to avoid academic stress while studying at school or studying online at home. Therefore, parents need to provide a healthy and balanced diet so that children are more focused on carrying out activities and learning. In addition, parents can also spend time together in order to stabilise the children's emotions in order to make relevant decisions in completing tasks.

Society

This study is also expected to provide awareness to the community about the academic stress experienced by many individuals, especially students. Therefore, the surrounding community needs to encourage and encourage students to learn well. For example, village heads need to hold activities that can relieve stress due to academic anxiety, academic pressure, academic frustration and academic conflict. Indirectly, students are able to produce happy feelings and are able to complete learning -related tasks well.

University

This study can benefit every university in Malaysia in preventing and producing solutions for students who suffer from increasing academic stress and uncontrolled eating behaviour. This is because university students have a lot of assignments that need to be completed and do not manage time well, which can cause students to experience stress. Therefore, the university needs to provide a conducive learning space to give students peace of mind to learn, especially in online classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic Anxiety

Academic anxiety often occurs among university students because of having excessive anxiety about academic matters that distract students' focus and attention. Thus, academic anxiety that occurs to students can eliminate their motivation to study and make it difficult to achieve academic excellence (Rimonda, Bulantika, Latifah & Khasanah, 2020). Academic anxiety can also occur due to students' stress in relation to school work. Academic anxiety can cause psychological health to be affected and disrupt abilities, competencies, personality formation and even social identity.

Anxiety can be divided into two types, namely anxiety disorders in the form of acute stress and pathological anxiety of the mood. This is due to the use of unexpected threats in the academic field. Anxiety is fear about what is uncertain or will happen. Anxiety can disrupt a person's life if precautions are not taken. According to Hasty, Malanchini, Shakeshaft, Schofield, Malanchini and Wang (2020), academic anxiety hinders students' opportunities to learn and progress. Students with high academic anxiety will experience rapid heartbeat, panic, sweating and many more (Alizamar & Asri, 2017).

Academic Pressure

According to Durette (2020), academic pressure is a term that has been described formally as an experience in which a student is burdened by time and energy demands to accomplish certain academic goals. Many university students experience cultural shocks and academic challenges because of the differences while studying at the school level. Additionally, there are students from various states studying at the same university with different cultural backgrounds.

According to Thakkar (2018), academic pressure can arise from familial expectations, lofty objectives established by individuals, or obligations imposed by society at large. Coaches and school authorities may also push student to achieve something. Whatever the cause of academic pressure, the consequences can be damaging to one well-being on a variety of levels (Thakkar, 2018).

Academic Frustration

Academic frustration can be defined as a learning theory in which learning discrimination occurs, affecting a person's persistence to learn and behaviour conceptualisation (Amsel, 1992). A person who suffers from academic frustration will cause daily activities to be disrupted. This is because students cannot live a normal life due to financial problems, family issues, and the environment that disturbs the students' peace. Academic frustration can influence students' eating behaviours, which can cause students to consume unhealthy food, thus leading to depression (Kennedy & Ivanov, 2020).

A person experiencing academic frustration can worsen their mental health and cause academics and daily activities to be impaired (Levine et al., 2021). As a result, many students experience uncontrollable psychological and emotional disorders while studying at university due to the inability to solve problems properly and lacking support from those around them.

Academic Conflict

Academic conflict occurs when personal interests exceed professional obligations. Conflict is a perception that positively or negatively impacts people when communicating. Conflicts that occur can lead to fights and violence involving the community. Students who are unable to work together in a team can cause conflict. Academic conflicts have many disadvantages as they will be burdensome when students cannot complete assignments on time. Indirectly, it can affect the academic performance of a student.

Uncontrolled Eating Behavior

Uncontrolled eating can be defined as a person's tendency to eat excessively and not control daily food intake. A person who does not control their diet has a high chance of having an obese weight, thus affecting health and daily activities. Other than that, the most notable uncontrolled eating behaviours can be seen as eating too fast, eating even when they are not hungry, not following a meal schedule and many more. Several factors can be associated with uncontrolled eating behaviours, such as demographic, behavioural, social and industrial economic factors (Bahaman et al., 2017).

Research Hypotheses

In this study, the following four hypotheses have been demonstrated based on the objectives of the study:

- H1 There is a relationship between academic anxiety and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.
- H2 There is a relationship between academic pressure and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.
- H3 There is a relationship between academic frustration and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.
- H4 There is a relationship between academic conflict and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.

Research Framework

A research framework has been developed to investigate the connection between the research variables. The dependent variable of the study includes uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan, while the independent variables include academic stress, which are academic anxiety, academic pressure, academic frustration and academic conflict.

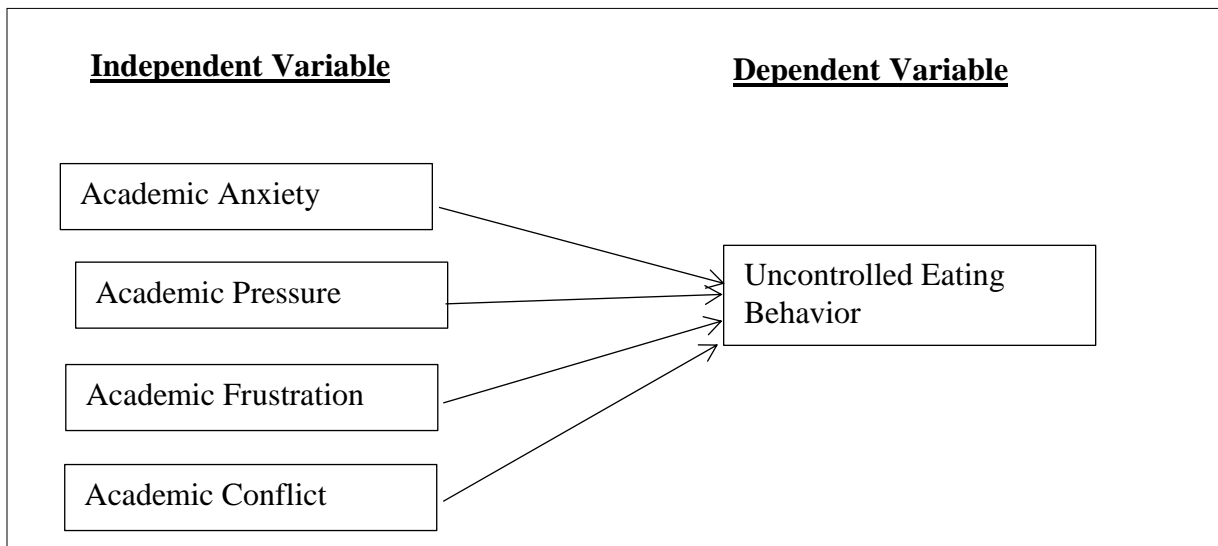


Figure 1: Research Framework

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researcher has utilised the quantitative research approach to collect data using the academic stress questionnaire from university students in Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Machang and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Kubang Kerian. The quantitative approach is the process of collecting and analysing numerical data. It can be used to find the patterns and averages, make predictions, test causal relationships and generalise results to wider populations. This is because the quantitative approach strategy can assist in analysing continuous and distinct numerical data. This study focuses on descriptive research. According to Nassaji (2015), the descriptive research is a phenomenon, a current condition, and the features of a community of organisations and people. Descriptive research is a study that is employed to describe a population characteristic.

Data Collection

Data collection is the efficient approach to assembling and measuring the information from an assortment of sources in order to get a comprehensive and accurate data. In the first stage, this study has involved primary data collection using questionnaires via Google Forms, which were distributed to 370 respondents who participated in this study. The respondents from UiTM Machang Campus and USM Kubang Kerian Campus have answered the questions related to the relationship between academic stress and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan. Google Form questionnaire is suitable for this study because everyone uses a smartphone nowadays.

Sampling

In this study, the researchers have selected non-probability sampling technique, the snowball sampling technique. Non-probability is a sampling technique in which the researcher chooses samples from the subjective assessment of the researcher instead of from a random point of view (Schuurman, 2020). In this research, researchers have distributed the questionnaire to one student, and the student needs to pass it to other students in their universities. Furthermore, the snowball sampling approach used in this study was chosen because it has the potential to save both time and money when it comes to data collection.

Data Analysis

The tool employed in analysing the data is a statistical tool or Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS), programmed version 25. SPSS data will be interpreted into statistics such as valid percentage and cumulative percentage. The researcher has chosen a simple descriptive analysis to evaluate the data. A frequency distribution is a mathematical distribution whereby one variable is considered simultaneously. The researcher has used this method because it is easy to understand and analyse.

FINDINGS

Result of Frequency Analysis

Table 1 shows the result of the frequency analysis for this research.

Table 5: Frequency Analysis

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	114	30.8
Female	256	69.2
Age		
19 -21 years old	91	24.6
22 -24 years old	262	70.8
25 years old and above	17	4.6
Race		
Malay	348	94.1
Chinese	5	1.4
Indian	17	4.6
Study Place (University)		
UiTM Machang Campus	225	60.8

USM Kubang Kerian Campus	145	39.2
Faculty		
Faculty of Accountancy	54	14.6
Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies	16	4.3
Faculty of Art and Design	38	10.3
Faculty of Business and Management	55	14.9
Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences	43	11.6
Faculty of Information Management	19	5.1
Faculty of Medical Science	17	4.6
Faculty of Dental Science	42	11.4
Faculty of Health Science	86	23.2

Table 1 shows the frequency analysis characterisation of respondents. 114 out of 370 respondents are male which represents 30.8% of the total of sample, while 256 respondents are female, representing 69.2% of the total of sample. 91 (24.6%) respondents are 19 - 21 years old. While the majority respondents are in the age range of 22 - 24 years old, which are 262 (70.8%) respondent and only 17 (4.6%) respondents are reported to be at the age of 25 years old and above. The majority of respondents' race is from Malay, 348 (94.1%). For Chinese, there are only 5 (1.4%) respondents, while for Indians, the number of respondents is 17 (4.6%). For UiTM Machang Campus, there are 225 (60.8%) respondents, while in USM Kubang Kerian Campus are 145 (39.2%) respondents. For the Faculty of Accountancy, there are 54 (14.6%) respondents, while for the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, the number of respondent is 16 (4.3%). For the Faculty of Art and Design, there are 38 (10.3%). Besides, the Faculty of Business and Management, the Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences and the Faculty of Information Management respondents consist of 55 (14.9%), 43 (11.6%) and 19 (5.1%) respectively. There are 17 (4.6%) respondents in the Faculty of Medical Science, 42 (11.4%) respondents in the Faculty of Dental Science, and the majority respondents in the Faculty of Health Science, which are 86 (23.2%) respondents.

Result of Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 shows the result of the descriptive analysis of this research.

Table 6: Descriptive Analysis

Variable	Items	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Academic Anxiety	I am anxious that other students may exceed me in my studies.	3.58	0.740
	I feel sad when I cannot recall the lessons learned when it is required.	3.70	0.510
	I am always anxious that the lecturer may ask any question which I cannot answer.	3.61	0.585
	I feel afraid of what will happen if I fail the exam.	3.56	0.534
	I am always afraid of falling sick during an examination period.	3.56	0.661
	I am afraid of the word "examination".	3.55	0.750
	I am always afraid that the lecturer may ask about assignments.	3.57	0.734
Academic Pressure	I consider studying as a burden.	2.79	0.952
	The extreme work done to secure a high grade in the examinations makes me tired.	3.40	0.787

	I feel angry when lecturers give extra assignments during holidays.	3.46	0.736
	I like vacation because I can get rid of my studies.	3.26	0.889
	I get a headache due to thinking about my studies.	3.26	0.778
	I feel at ease when lecturers fail to come to class.	3.23	0.799
	I get a sigh of relief when my class is over.	3.40	0.627
	I feel tired of answering questions in my studies.	3.28	0.760
	I think that at my university, they teach more than required.	3.36	0.809
Academic Frustration	I am sad that I am not good at studying like other students.	3.62	0.681
	It makes me frustrated when I see my lecturer only impressed with a few students.	3.55	0.721
	I feel frustrated because my examination results are not up to my expectations.	3.51	0.668
	I feel embarrassed with my classmates for not being able to answer questions asked by the lecturer.	3.45	0.662
	I feel jealous of the bright students in my class.	3.44	0.734
	I feel frustrated that in spite of studying hard, I could not get first place in class.	3.48	0.683
	I feel jealous when I see other students' study-related equipment facilities.	3.36	0.805
	I feel sorry that I could not focus on my studies and wasted my time on worthless activities.	3.54	0.650
Academic Conflict	In spite of knowing that cheating is wrong, I still copy in the examinations.	3.29	0.908
	I am in a dilemma due to the differences in my desires and my parents' desires in study-related matters.	3.36	0.868
	My attention gets diverted when I try to focus on my studies.	3.31	0.745
	I keep on thinking about whether I should continue to study or not.	3.31	0.832
	I like going to class, but I avoid it because of the fear of studying.	3.11	0.927
	I am in a dilemma, whether to do revision or not after seeing those who revised and scored good marks.	3.40	0.814
	I have difficulties deciding how much time I should allocate for my studies.	3.46	0.751
Uncontrolled Eating Behavior	Sometimes when I start eating, I just cannot seem to stop.	3.52	0.683
	Being with someone who is eating, makes me feel like eating too.	3.58	0.603
	When I see a real delicacy, I will hungry and eat right away.	3.46	0.642
	I get so hungry that my stomach often growls.	3.39	0.710

I would not stop eating until I finished the food on my plate.	3.45	0.662
I am always hungry which I feel like eating all the time.	3.32	0.773
I do binge eating, although I am not hungry.	3.32	0.853

Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis of the components academic stress and uncontrolled eating behaviour. Mean and standard deviation for the items was utilised to measure academic anxiety. The mean range for academic anxiety ranges from 3.55 – 3.70, and the standard deviation is from 0.510 - 0.750. Seven (7) questions were measured with the highest mean of 3.70 agree for item AA2 with the statement ‘I feel sad when I cannot recall the lessons learned when it is required.’ On the other hand, the lowest mean with 3.55 for item AA6, with the statement ‘I am afraid of the word ‘examination’.’ The mean values for other five (5) items for AA1, AA3, AA4, AA5 and AA7 are 3.58, 3.61, 3.56, 3.56 and 3.57, respectively.

Besides, the mean range for academic pressure is from 2.79 – 3.46, and the standard deviation is from 0.627 – 0.952. Nine (9) questions have indicated the highest mean of 3.46 implied by the item AP3 with the statement ‘I feel angry when lecturers give extra assignments during holidays’. Meanwhile, the lowest mean with 2.79 is for item AP1, which agrees with the statement ‘I consider study as a burden.’ The mean values for other seven (7) items of AP2, AP4, AP5, AP6, AP7, AP8 and AP9 are 3.40, 3.26, 3.26, 3.23, 3.40, 3.28 and 3.36, respectively.

Next, the mean ranged for academic frustration is from 3.36 – 3.62, and the standard deviation is from 0.650 – 0.805. Eight (8) questions have indicated the highest mean of 3.62, with AF1 indicating the statement ‘I feel very sad that I am not good in studies like other students.’ In the meantime, the lowest mean with 3.36 is for item AF7, which is in line with the statement ‘I feel jealous when I see other students’ study-related equipment facilities.’ The mean values for the other six (6) items of AF2, AF3, AF4, AF5, AF6 and AF8 are 3.55, 3.51, 3.45, 3.44, 3.48 and 3.54, respectively.

Besides, the mean range for academic conflict is from 3.11 – 3.46, and the standard deviation is from 0.745 – 0.927. Seven (7) questions are measured with the highest mean of 3.46 agree for the item AC7 on the statement ‘I have difficulties in deciding how much time I should allocate for my studies.’ Meanwhile, the lowest mean of 3.11 is for item AC5, which agrees with the statement ‘I like going to class, but I avoid it because of the fear of studying.’ The mean values for other five (5) items of AC1, AC2, AC3, AC4 and AC6 are 3.29, 3.36, 3.31, 3.31 and 3.40, respectively.

Lastly, the mean range for uncontrolled eating behaviour is from 3.32 - 3.58, and the standard deviation is from 0.603 – 0.853. There are seven (7) questions measured with the highest mean of 3.58 following the item U2 on the statement ‘Being with someone who is eating, often makes me feel like eating too.’ Meanwhile, the lowest mean with 3.32 is for the items of U6 and U7 on the statement that ‘I am always hungry which I feel like eating all the time and ‘I binge eat though I am not hungry.’ The mean values for other five (5) items for U1, U3, U4 and U5 are 3.52, 3.46, 3.39 and 3.45, respectively.

Result of Reliability Analysis

Table 3 shows the result of the reliability analysis of this research.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
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Academic Anxiety	7	0.721
Academic Pressure	9	0.918
Academic Frustration	8	0.860
Academic Conflict	7	0.909
Uncontrolled Eating Behavior	7	0.817

Table 3 shows the reliability analysis of the four variables of uncontrolled eating behaviours. The reliability Cronbach's alpha coefficient value for academic anxiety is 0.721, which is acceptable and academic frustration is 0.860, which indicates a good level. In contrast, the reliability of Cronbach's alpha coefficient value of academic conflict and academic pressure has indicated the highest score, which is 0.909 and 0.918 indicating excellent reliability. However, the uncontrolled eating behaviour is 0.817, which indicates good reliability.

Result of Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 4 shows the result of the pearson correlation analysis of this research.

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Hypothesis	P-Value	Result (Supported / Not Supported)
H1: There is a relationship between academic anxiety and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.	0.684	H1 is supported
H2: There is a relationship between academic pressure and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.	0.741	H2 is supported
H3: There is a relationship between academic frustration and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.	0.733	H3 is supported
H4: There is a relationship between academic conflict and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan.	0.769	H4 is supported

Table 4 shows the pearson correlation analysis of the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable accordingly. Overall, all the relationship between the variables were significant positively correlated. The relationship between academic anxiety and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan has a significantly moderate positive correlation with 0.684. This implies that the relationship between academic anxiety and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan is positively related among students. The relationship between academic pressure and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan is high positive correlation with a correlation coefficient of 0.741. This implies that the relationship between academic pressure and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan is positively related. Besides, the relationship between academic frustration and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan is significantly high positive correlation with 0.733. This implies that the relationship between academic frustration and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan is positively related. Lastly, the relationship between academic conflict and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan is significantly high positive correlation with 0.769. This implies that the relationship between academic conflict and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan is

positively related. All the significant positive relationships have indicated that respondents are well- accepting components of academic stress and uncontrolled eating behaviour.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study only discusses some factors on the relationship between academic stress and eating disorders among university students at UiTM Machang and USM Kubang Kerian. Therefore, researchers have studied factors such as academic frustration, academic anxiety, academic pressure and academic conflict. The results of the analysis of the study would indicate the number of students in the university who experience academic stress. For suggestions, future studies could use other variables that can reduce the burden of university students on academic stress, such as academic performance. For example, improving the academic performance of students in a medical university is crucial to creating a quality doctor in the future and increasing the level of depression will affect the performance of students in the university (Yumashev et al., 2018). Thus, the variables of the previous study were related to the recommendations given by the researchers.

Future researchers could use this topic to create future studies to show the relationship between academic stress that occurs among students. Researchers hope that future studies will maintain the method of collecting data quantitatively from the intended respondents. This is because, researchers have selected the population among university students at USM Kubang Kerian as many as 3678 students and UiTM Machang, as many as 7729 students located in Kelantan. Therefore, the data were collected using an online questionnaire method to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak. Research done in the future is highly encouraged to use this method because researchers have now successfully conducted this study. Throughout the data collection, the researchers found that respondents were more inclined to fill out online questionnaires than the written questionnaires and in-person interviews that were commonly done by previous researchers.

In addition, researchers can also use various languages such as Mandarin and Tamil in future questionnaires. This is because most researchers only use English and Malay to conduct the questionnaire. It could make it easier for Chinese and Indians to understand the questions given and not cause stress when answering the questionnaire by the respondents. Indirectly, researchers can further increase the level of foreign languages to make it easier to communicate between races.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between academic stress and uncontrolled eating behaviour among university students in Kelantan. According to the result, academic anxiety, academic pressure, academic frustration and academic conflict are independent variable caused influences on the dependent variable, which is uncontrolled eating behaviour. Chapter 3 also mentioned the total numbers of 370 respondents were administered among the university students in UiTM Machang and USM Kubang Kerian. The population of respondent were students of UiTM Machang and USM Kubang Kerian. Next, Chapter 4 indicates the results from the questionnaire survey that was analysed using descriptive and inferential analysis. The data obtained from the questionnaire has been evaluated by software program, namely Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). Lastly, Chapter 5 summarises the results based on the data analysis. Thus, all the hypothesis such of H1, H2, H3 and H4 are accepted.

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