



Highly Sensitive Person, Stress, and Social Skill on College Students

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Abstract. A highly Sensitive Person (HSP) is an individual who has over sensitivity in catching stimulus or information from an environment than other people in general. The excessive reception of stimulus could increase central nervous system performance, so when this situation cannot be controlled, the highly sensitive person would feel exhausted and tend to have negative impacts on mental health conditions, for example, depression, stress, and anxiety disorder. Many kinds of literature have asserted that interaction ability was a factor that was expected to minimize the negative impact that appeared. This research was conducted to examine whether social ability could affect stress experienced by a highly sensitive person (HSP). The participants were 103 active students of the State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The scale of a highly sensitive person (HSP) was used to determine whether the individuals were included in the HSP or non-HSP category. After the subject was obtained with HSP, the researchers exerted PSS-10 to measure stress level, and a social skill scale was used to measure social skill level. Further, Moderated Regression Analysis was used to test the effects of moderating variables (social skill) on stress variables and HSP. The research result referred to the social skill played as a moderating variable between HSP and stress.

Keywords: Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) · Stress · Social Skill

1 Introduction

Recently, human lives in the modernization era, which is characterized by easy access available and often has an impact on the height of social conflict among groups or individuals considering the increasingly critical modern people (Febriyanti, 2018). This new phenomenon has appeared because of the modernization era by the rise of a new culture in that people will easily give criticism, resulting in an unfair judgment that is not balanced with good communication and a more dehumanizing relationship among individuals (Rusdi in Yusuf, 2018). Such a situation in some community groups becomes a risky problem; therefore, it is risky to bring either interpersonal or intrapersonal conflict. A variety of cultures, different social statuses, and individual knowledge are the bases of how individuals act and behave in certain situations. About 20% of human populations in this world have a deep cognition process, so one in five individuals has the potential

to have a higher sensitivity level as part of the deep cognition process (Aron and Aron, 1997).

Personal sensitivity is usually known as the term HSP (Highly Sensitive Person). HSP appears because of sensory processing sensitivity (SPS) performed by the individuals. Thus, HSP refers to either stimulus processing tendency or more substantial and deeper information than other people have in general, including mood, feeling, pain, loud noise, and caffeine (Aron and Aron, 1997). The condition of individuals who are more sensitive to subtle stimuli often has a negative connotation as weakness or disorder by society (Sierra, 2013). Moreover, many people dub that individual as 'too emotional' or 'uncouth' (Kirnandita, 2017). Such conditions are not widely understood or accepted normatively (Aron and Aron, 1997), then will worsen the mental health conditions of individuals with high sensitivity characteristics (Nathalie and Bernathsius, 2019).

The threat of mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress will have a higher chance of being experienced by individuals with a characteristic of high sensitivity (Brindle in Natalia and Bernathsius, 2019). Thus, it is important for the individual to manage those negative emotions, for instance, through social interaction ability. Social interaction ability is one of the aspects of emotional intelligence which is required to adopt moral values from culture and society (Mayasari, 2014).

Early adulthood is taken as the research subject, considering that this period, according to Ericson, is a period in which individuals have accepted and taken heavier responsibility due to the individuals having to start not to depend on parents. Next, according to Hurlock (2009), the growth task that should be settled in this period is joining a group. Moreover, Putri (2019) has concluded that early adulthood is referred to as a phase in which individuals are ready to take a role and take responsibility and also accept a position in society and get involved in social relations. However, the social relation in this early adulthood is based on social interest that can no longer simply enjoy spontaneous communication as happens at school.

The phase in which the individuals are expected to be more independent and have more bounding with the social environment, regarding that in this early adulthood, the individuals have the growth task of joining into a social environment. This condition is an interesting topic to be identified by connecting sensitivity levels on HSP in early adulthood since Anderson (in Mappiare, 1983) has said that early adulthood is characterized by a period in which individuals are more capable of controlling personal feelings. That reason is taken as a basis for choosing early adulthood as this research subject, added by subject criteria that are selected in this research, the students who are staying in university dormitories. The new students are required to stay for a year in a university dormitory as a mandatory requirement to continue their education. The demand of staying at the dormitory and participating in all daily activities enables a primary interaction among students, and this intense interaction is really significant for students to put and position themselves well into a new social environment. The similar experience that all students of the State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang are related to the mandatory of staying at the dormitory. It is interesting to be examined its relation to the social interaction ability experienced by every student of the State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.

Individuals who have a high sensitivity characteristic to stimulus, either internal or external stimulus, will usually give a more complex response to the individuals. The condition of individuals with this characteristic of a sensitive personality is called Highly Sensitive Person (HSP). Aron and Aron (1997) has defined HSP as individuals who have an awareness of the little things around them, and the individuals will be easily overwhelmed when he is in an environment that highly stimulates the senses (Kirnandita, 2017). The characteristic of HSP who are easily overwhelmed is impacted by the process of more information than non-HSP, so it affects the large amount of time needed to withdraw in order to be able to process information (Tillman, 2019). The different condition within the central nervous system of HSP, according to Rizzo & Sierra (in Natalia and Bernathsius, 2019), is caused by the more neurotransmitter concentration inside the brain of HSP. Tillman (2019) has said that besides biological factors, the environmental factor and parenting also play a role in creating individual personality.

The deep cognitive process carried out by HSP is caused by the perpetual perception of the presence of stimulus around them, then makes HPS prone to constant stress, according to Andresen, Goldmann & Volodina (in Cieslik, n.d.) in another previous research done by Brindle (2015), he has indicated a significant relationship between HSP (measured by HSPs) and symptoms of negative emotion such as anxiety, depression, and stress (measured by DASS) (Natalia and Bernathsius, 2019).

Cannon (1932) has asserted that if a human responds to any stressful event physically or psychologically in order to prepare himself to fight or overcome, and then dodge and escape from the stress appears (Yusuf, 2018). The stress experienced by individuals should be well-handled, which the social skill in the preliminary studies have found can reduce the stress that appears on individuals as the research done by Leme, Del Prette & Coimbra they have found that the level of social skills able to determine psychological well-being of individuals (Nugraini and Ramaghani, 2016).

This research is conducted to identify whether social skills can affect stress experienced by HSP students. It is expected that the research result can give a scientific contribution to the field of psychology concerning the phenomenon of HSP. Meanwhile, practically, this research result can deliver information to society to put more understanding on HSP and be open to the presence of HSP in their group.

2 Methods

This research used a non-experimental quantitative approach. The participants of the research were 103 active students of the Psychology Faculty of the State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The researchers exerted three scales: 1) the scale of HSPs, adapted from Aron and Aron (1997), which was aimed to measure the sensitivity level of students, 2) PSS-10 (The Perceived Stress Scale), adapted from Cohen (1994), which was aimed to measure the stress level of students, and 3) Social skill scale, adapted from Ramadhani (1994) based on the aspects developed by Michelson, et al.

The validity test was done by judgment experts, while the reliability test was done by identifying Cronbach's Alpha score (PSS-10 = 0.721, HPSs = 0, 853, social skill scale = 0, 702). Next, data analysis used the MRA (Moderated Regression Analysis) method. Besides, the researchers also examined each effective contribution of HSP, stress, and social skill variables.

Table 1. Results of Regression Test with Moderating Variable

Test	R Square Value	Percentage
1	0.048	4.8%
2	0.140	14%

3 Result

Based on the result of the partial regression test on stress and HSP variable, it showed that the sig value < 0.05 (Sig = 0.026). Thus, it was referred that HSP has a significant effect on stress, with a positive relation ($t\text{-value} = 2.257 < t\text{-table} (2.275)$).

On the moderated regression analysis test, it was indicated that the beta value resulted from the effect of the interaction of moderating variable (social skill) and independent variable (HSP), and the dependent variable (stress) has a negative value (-0.121). This value refers to the moderating variable that weakens the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The followings were the results of the test (Table 1):

Based on the table above, it was identified that on the first test (1) r square value was 0.014, which said that the independent variable (HSP) has an effect or contribution to the dependent variable (stress) of about 4.8%. Then, based on the second test (2) r square value was 0.140, which referred that in this research, social skill as a moderating variable could give a contribution to the relationship between HSP and stress variable up to 14%.

4 Discussion

This research was conducted to test whether social skills affected stress experienced by HSP students. According to Lovibond & Lovibond (1995), individuals who experience stress would tend to act sentimentally, shown to get angry easily, have difficulty calming themselves, and are impatient while facing certain situations. Especially in individuals with a high sensitivity level, which individuals have tolerance limits for fairly low pressure due to many stimuli or receptors that they receive through body senses. Such a condition was proven in the previous research done by Andresen et al. (2017) that the perpetual perception performed by HSP at every stimulus around them would affect HSP to suffer stress constantly.

Based on the research result showed that the stress level of students of the State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang was included in the mediate category. Moreover, this condition was possible to occur since the research data sampling was conducted during the new normal era, so it did not enable much interaction with other people or minimum variables of stress stimulus on HSP who were prone to a stimulus with high intensity around them.

Next, this research was in line with the opinion stated by Johnson and Johnson (1999) that social skills are useful for managing and handling stress. In which a good relationship is built from social interaction ability, so it could help the individuals to understand information around them or even for attention needs and feedback in communication.

The condition that was possible for HSP to consider was that they could handle stress effectively or assume that the stressor they received was significant for their life. Thus, it would tend to avoid dysfunctional cognitive conditions, like feeling helpless or negative reflection on the situation experienced.

Based on the data analysis results that have been carried out and explained in the previous point, the researchers concluded that the social skill level of HSP of active students of the State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang was average in the mediate category. The condition which denoted the level of social skill of active students of State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang in the mediate category might happen, considering the demand for a mandatory program of staying at a dormitory during the first year of study could be one of the factors that enabled the individuals to have an intense social interaction.

In many previous types of research, it was found that if the stress level of HSP was really high than non-HSP, like in the previous research done by Ahadi and Basharpoor (2010), Cieslik (n.d), Benham (2006), and Aron and Aron (1997). Ahadi and Basharpoor (2010) have explained that the tendency of HSP to excessive stimulus would impact the higher level of stress and result in bad mental health problems.

Such a sensitive condition of HSP would tend to suffer because of stress, so HSP would try to dodge unknown situations (Cieslik, n.d). However, the stress level could also be minimized if HSP believed in the assumption that they were able to handle stress effectively or if the stressor could give meaning or significance to their life, so it was highly probable that they would not experience cognitive dysfunction (Yano, Kase and Oishi, 2019). It was concluded that the dysfunctional cognitive condition, such as feeling hopeless, could be avoided if the individuals have self-confidence in dealing with the stressor they received. Self-confidence was obtained if the social interaction with the environment ran well, regarding that HSP was a congenital condition from birth. Therefore, the role of family was really needed to build self-ability on HSP.

Based on the research result showed that the stress level of individuals who were affected by HSP was about 4.8%, and social skill could affect the stress level experienced by HSP by about 14%, while the rest of 86% was affected by the other factors that have potentials contributing in the rise of stress level of HSP. The moderating variable in this research could give effects on an independent variable to the dependent variable, which is social skill could weaken stress level on its relation with HSP.

5 Conclusions

Stress is one of the conditions that is experienced by every individual, and it tends to be higher in Highly Sensitive People (HSP). This condition would clearly disturb individuals if it was not well-regulated. The skill ability in dealing with many kinds of situations, which was aimed to reduce bad impacts from the tendency of low mental health level on HSP, should be developed, for instance, social skill ability. The researchers concluded that social skill was a significant variable needed as a variable that could reduce negative impacts from stressful conditions suffered by HSP.

The researchers also realized that there were many shortcomings that appeared in this research, based on the research finding; it required further research by exerting the

other moderating variables such as social support and emotion regulation in order to identify the effects in minimizing negative impacts from HSP. It was important to conduct research by employing HSP as the research variable, which was aimed to increase information for HSP to equip and understand what was going on inside them, considering the lack of knowledge sources about HSP.

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