

**THE MEDIATING ROLE OF RESILIENCE
IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
STRESS, COPING STRATEGIES, AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG
MALAYSIAN FIRST YEAR UNIVERSITY
STUDENT**

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ABSTRACT

During transitions period, first-year students frequently face emotional and psychological stressors, which may lead to stress and reduced psychological well-being. Although various coping strategies are employed to manage these stressors, their effectiveness differs across individuals. Resilience, as a psychological resource, is believed to mediate the effects of stress and coping on well-being. This research aims to examine the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between stress, coping strategies, and psychological well-being among first-year student at Malaysian Public Higher Education. A quantitative, cross sectional survey design will be used, with participants selected through purposive sampling who meet criteria such as being full time undergraduate student from public university located at east cost zone, alumni from matriculation, foundation programs and Form 6 for Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM). Data will be collected using validated self-report instruments that are the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Brief COPE Inventory, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RICS-25) and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. Statistical analysis using SPSS will include descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression to assess relationship and predictors. The findings are anticipated to contribute to the development of targeted interventions and support systems to enhance the mental health, academic and personal growth of first-year students.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

These days, university students frequently encounter psychological stress as they adjust to living on their own, manage their academic work, aim for great marks, and get ready for future career opportunities (Shamuni and Mageswari, 2021). According to the Institute for Health Public (2023), a report from the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NMHS) 2023 stating that 4.6% of individual in Malaysia experience in mental health issues, the reports also shows a doubling in mental health cases, which are include the ideation of suicide, self-harm and depression among individuals in Malaysia compared to 2019, this increases also involves students at the secondary and university levels.

However, at university level, first year students frequently experience pressure in a variety of situations or circumstances, considering their transitions from being a high school student to university students. This period has become one of the most crucial periods in a young adult's life, which can affect their psychological well-being. For first year university students, the primary sources of stress can involve with academic pressure, new learning environment, personal issues, and financial concerns (Affan et al., 2025; Haruna et al., 2025). In Malaysia, students tend to encounter academic stress mainly because of high-performance expectations at both high school and university levels. The transition from high school to university contributes to this stress, as students must deals with new changes of environment in learning and lifestyle (Fauzi et al., 2021). Another research by Idrus et al. (2024), student who have loans also feel anxious regarding the pressure to repay their loans.

Furthermore, as stated by Mauren et al (2023), there are many events that may be experienced by university students that can cause the feeling of stress. Early life experiences at the university can be one of the impactful events on first year student which can impact their psychological well-being. In addition, a proof from finding shows that coping strategies have been seen as factors that help maintain psychological well-being, although the approach shows differ results from different studies. Thus, this research was conducted to examine the relationship between stress, coping strategies and resilience on the psychological well-being first year students. This research is also expected to contribute to the overall understanding of the development of intervention modules that can benefit the educational institutions.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Being enrolled in an undergraduate program may significantly influence students' lives, since student must deal with numerous types of academic and non-academic difficulties both within and beyond the classroom that contribute to stress throughout their time at university. Besides, academic stress can be known from heavily workloads, anxious on academic performance, poor skill on time management and stressor that related to the social and financial. (Murakami et al., 2025). Other than that, financial difficulties and an imbalance between home and university workload might lead to social and personal stressors (Nazari et al., 2025). High level of stress can lead to tension and anxiety, which make it harder for students to focus during class sessions. Plus, stress can affect students' emotion, which can lower their motivation and interest in their studies and eventually impact academic success (Ma, 2025).

As students transition from high school to higher education, first year students frequently experience mental health issues. Due to the increased expectations put on them in their personal, social and new academic lives, this phase is characterized by high level of stress, anxiety and depression (Gulliver et al., 2023). Challenges such as separation from family, financial constraints, and pressure to perform academically further exacerbate students' psychological distress (Farrer et al., 2024). Furthermore, students who hold stronger stigma toward depression and participate less in university activities are less likely to seek help for their mental health concerns, thereby worsening their difficulties (Gulliver et al., 2023). To help on these issues, effective coping strategies, including the development of resilience by means of structured mental health educations programs, have demonstrated the ability to diminish stress and enhance overall well-being (Wang, 2025). This highlights the importance of enhanced psychosocial support and mental health promotion for first-year students during their transition into higher education.

Coping strategies play a crucial part in influencing how first-year university students handle stress and their overall psychological well-being. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is generally defined as the cognitive and behavioral strategies individuals utilize to address internal and external stresses that

can be seen as challenging or exceeding their available resources. Research proves that various factors have been identified as fundamental stressors that cause both direct and indirect effects on mental well-being (Slimmen et al., 2022). Coping strategies are generally categorized into problem-focused coping, which involves addressing the source of stress, and emotion-focused coping, which aims to regulate emotional responses to stress (He & Zheng, 2022). Similarly, Alkhalaf et al. (2023) reported that students' coping methods substantially affect their stress levels and overall well-being. Students who frequently adopt avoidant coping strategies are more likely to experience greater stress. First year students commonly encounter considerable challenges in dealing with stress, which may worsen the adjustment process. As a result, how these students respond to stress serves as the main reason between their external stress and their internal psychological well-being.

Resilience has been defined as the capacity to recover from difficulties and adapt positively to a stressful event (García-Martínez et al., 2022). Research found that resilience act as a mediating role in the relationship between coping strategies and psychological well-being, the research by Kaya and Yagan (2022) found that psychological resilience significantly mediates the relationship between coping humour and psychological well-being, suggesting that individuals who utilize humour to cope with stress may enhance their resilience, leading to improved well-being. Within the context of first-year student, the transition process particularly academic pressure and personal challenges, resilience enables them to deal with the pressure to a new setting (Xiaolin and Nursyuhaidah, 2024). Furthermore, students who use effective coping strategies are more likely to develop resilience, which may improve their psychological well-being. This suggests that resilience mediates the link between coping strategies and psychological well-being (Xu and Yang, 2023). Other than that, to effectively regulating stress and improve mental health, resilience is linked to positive coping strategies (Wu et al., 2020). This suggests that building resilience in first-year students is crucial for encouraging adaptive coping strategies and improving their mental health.

In Malaysia, studies on stress and coping strategies that consider resilience as a mediating factor in relation to psychological well-being of first-year students remain limited. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by examining the mediating role

of resilience in the relationship between stress, coping strategies, and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes. The decisions to focus more on first-year students is based on numerous research studies indicating that these students are more likely to experience signs of academic pressure due to changes in the learning environment. This situation is seen as a source of stress for the psychological well-being of first-year students. This research is also expected to make an important contribution to the educational institutions in Malaysia, as it will expand the understanding of the role of resilience as a mediating factor in the relationship between stress, coping strategies, and psychological well-being among first-year students. The findings of this research will also assist and serve as a reference for lecturers or parents in providing support that can help first year manage stress during this crucial period.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Generally, adapting to university life can be described as a crucial adjustment period for first-year students, which is occasionally followed by higher level of stress and various challenges that may affect their psychological well-being. During this transition phase, first-year students are required to adapt to a new academic pressure, new living environment, financial responsibilities, and social expectations (Khan et al., 2024). This experience is especially common among students transitioning from high school to university, as they must constantly adapt to both academic and personal changes within a brief period (Affan et al., 2025). As a result, the challenges may develop a higher stress level that may impact students' psychological well-being and academic progression.

In addition, research by Fellingham et al. (2024) indicates these transitions presents significant challenges, as students perceived a distinction in lecturers within higher education and regarded them as professionals, which restricted their willingness to seek assistance with academic difficulties, alongside the necessity for independent learning environment at university, that can lead to increased stress and anxiety. Moreover, these findings align with recent studies by Idrus and Robinson (2024) where mental health concerns are increasingly serious. Research shows that 32.6% of first-year students at University of Malaysia Sabah experience abnormal level of stress and anxiety with similar rates of depression observed at the University of Malaya (Amir Hamzah et al., 2019)

Prolonged exposing to stress may lead to lack of interest, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization as well as contribute to a decline in personal accomplishment (Adade et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the effect of stress on psychological well-being differs among first-year students. The ability to reduce stress is mostly influenced by the coping strategies an individual employs. Evidence from recent research show an adaptive strategies like social engagement promote better psychological well-being, whereas avoidant strategies often keep individual with greater distress (Xiaolin and Nursyahidah, 2024). Furthermore, resilience also acts as a significant factor in stress management. Building up resilience not only support overall well-being but also serves as a protective barrier that reduce the probability of stress and anxious signs.

In Malaysia, there is a significant lack of research investigating resilience as a mediating variable specifically among first-year undergraduates. Contemporary literature often highlights groups, such as service-oriented fields like healthcare and education, or focuses exclusively on university students. Moreover, a significant portion of the recent data regarding student mental health was collected during the COVID-19 Movement Control Order, yet as societal conditions have evolved, these findings may no longer accurately reflect the contemporary issues encountered by students. Therefore, this research addresses these gaps by focusing specifically on the experiences of first-year undergraduate students. This study seeks to investigate the relationship between stress and psychological well-being, with a particular focus on how resilience mediates the interaction among stress, coping strategies, and psychological well-being among first-year students at Malaysian public higher education institutions.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the level of stress, coping strategies, resilience and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
2. To establish the relationship between stress and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
3. To establish the relationship between coping strategies and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
4. To establish the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
5. To examine the relationship between stress and resilience among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
6. To examine the relationship between coping strategies and resilience among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
7. To investigate the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between stress and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
8. To investigate the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between coping strategies and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the level of stress, coping strategies, resilience and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?
2. Is there a relationship between stress and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?
3. Is there a relationship between coping strategies and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?
4. Is there a relationship between resilience and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?
5. Is there a relationship between stress and resilience among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?
6. Is there a relationship between coping strategies and resilience among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?
7. Does resilience mediate the relationship between stress and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?
8. Does resilience mediate the relationship between coping strategies and psychological well-being first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?

1.5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

- H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between stress and psychological well-being among first year students at Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
- H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between coping strategies and psychological well-being among first year students at Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
- H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between stress and resilience among first year students at Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
- H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between coping strategies and resilience among first year students at Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
- H₀₅: There is no significant relationship between resilience and psychological well-being among first year students at Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
- H₀₆: Resilience does not significantly mediate the relationship between stress and psychological well-being among first year students at Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.
- H₀₇: Resilience does not significantly mediate the relationship between coping strategies and psychological well-being among first year students at Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes.

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

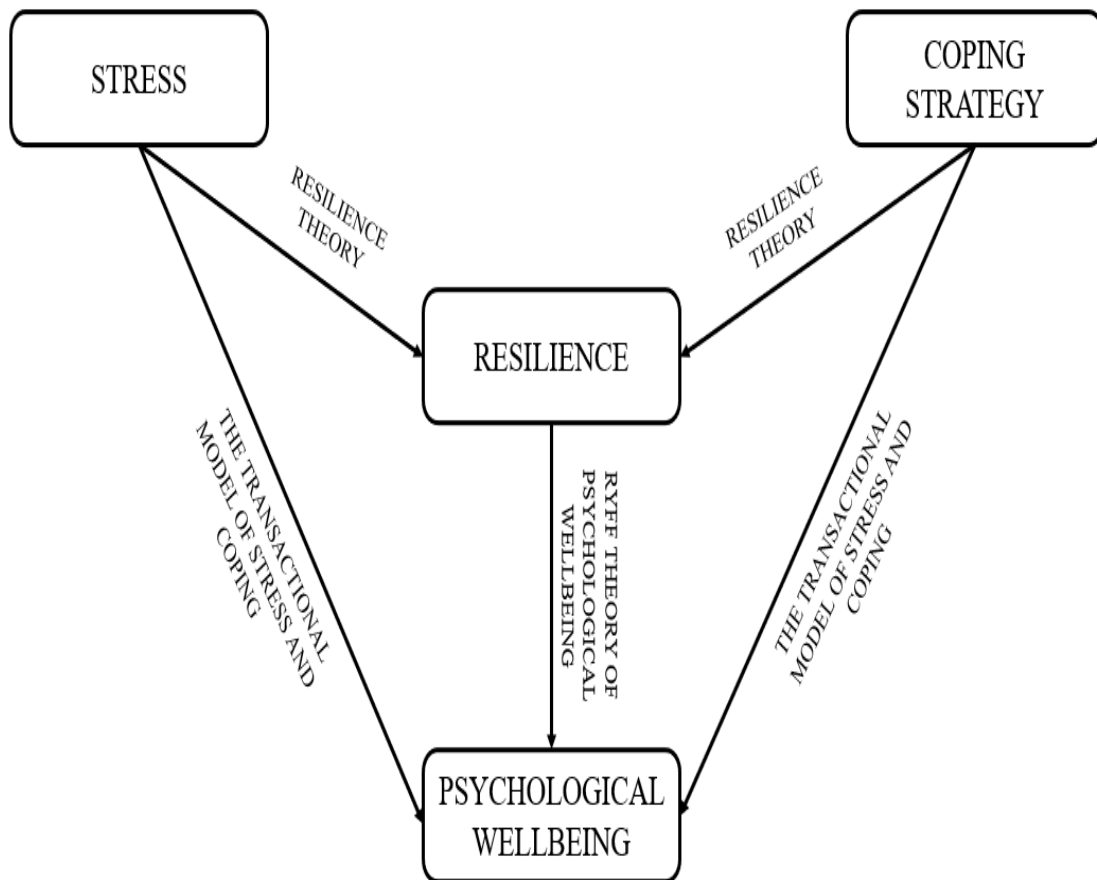


Figure 1.1: Theoretical Framework

This research is based on three main psychological theories that support the relationship between the independent variables, which are stress and coping strategies, the mediating variable that is resilience and the dependent variable that is psychological well-being. These theories include The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, Resilience Theory and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Theory. In conjunction these frameworks provide an understanding of how students perceive and manage stress, how resilience and other adaptive resources grow, how these processes affect their psychological well-being as they enter and adjusting on university life.

Stress has been defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as an interaction between the individual and the environment, that emphasizes how stress is not just the event itself but also how the individual evaluates it (Folkman, 2013). According to the

Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, individual evaluates stress in differently based on how they understand and evaluates a particular situation. From this concept, there are two stages of cognitive appraisals that has been proposed. In the primary appraisal, individual will determine if an event presents a threat or a challenge, and in the secondary appraisal, individual will evaluate their own capability and available resources to handle the demands (Frydenberg, 2014). In the context of first year students, this theory approaches are specifically relevant to the first-year student who frequently experience challenges upon entering the phases of universities life. Challenges such as new academic environment and task, high expectations on oneself to do better and the pressure on making a cruelly decision for themselves become one of the contributions of stress during early universities life (Córdova Olivera et al., 2023).

The coping strategies used by individuals in response to stress can be best explained through the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). This model suggests that stress is not a fixed state but a process involving primary appraisal which assesses whether the stressor is threatening and secondary appraisal that is assessing one's ability to cope. Coping strategies can be broadly categorized into two styles which are problem-focused coping that aims to alter the stressful situation and emotion focused coping that aims to regulate responses. In the context of this research, the selection and use of these coping strategies who act as an independent variable can significantly impact the psychological outcomes. The theory shows how people's view of a situation and coping strategies they use directly affects how they deal with stress.

Resilience in this research has been described through Richardson's Resilience Model (2022), which conceptualizes resilience as a dynamic process of navigating challenges and adapting to change, ultimately growing stronger through hardship. In this process, it is not just a personal trait but a development process of coping with stress, adapting and learning from experiences. Resilience builds in first-year university students as they deal with the emotional, social, and academic challenges of getting used to university life. In this research, resilience acts as a mediating variable that improves psychological well-being and reduces the negative effects of stress.

Furthermore, Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Model (1989), which defines psychological well-being as more than just the absence of disease, serves as the foundation for the outcome of interest. The model includes six dimensions which are autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relation with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. The Ryff Psychological Well-Being scale be used to operationalizes these dimensions and offers a holistic framework to assess mental health outcomes (Suhaila et al., 2022).

In this research, this model is particularly suitable for first year students who psychological well-being may be affected by the transition from high school life to university life In general, these theories provide a reliable theoretical basis for examining how stress and coping strategies affect psychological well-being and how resilience plays a role of mediating towards psychological well-being among undergraduate first-year students.

1.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

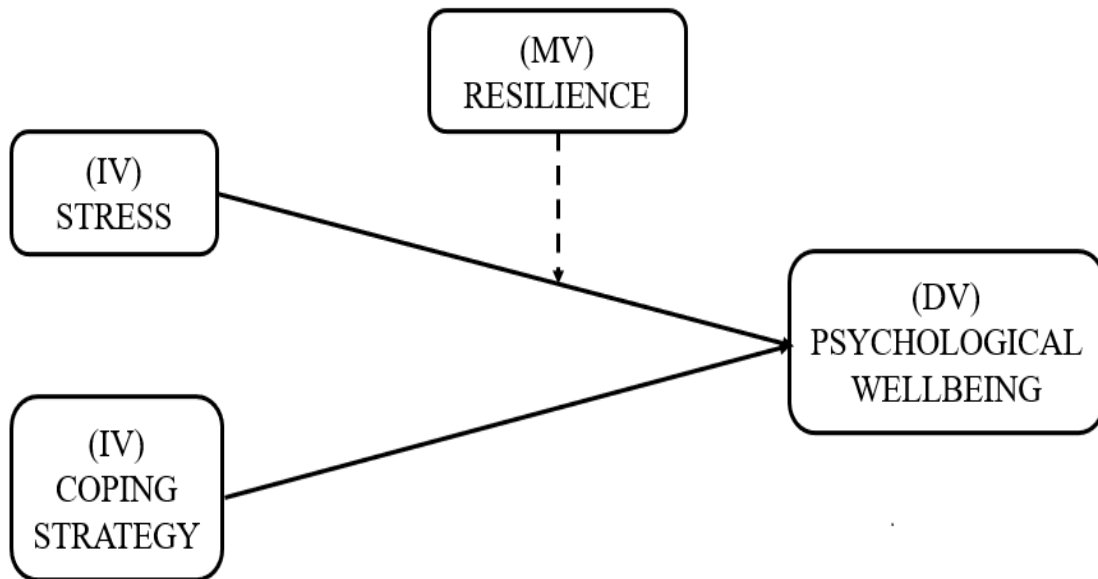


Figure 1.2: Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework for the research has been developed to explain the research that will be conducted by researchers. The conceptual framework of the research has been constructed to serve as a guide and as a reference source in the upcoming research. This research is conducted to examine the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between stress, coping strategies and psychological well-being among first year students at the Public Higher Education Institutes.

The conceptual framework of this research is based on four variables present in the research to be conducted, such as the independent variable, mediator variable and the dependent variable. The independent variable is a variable that influences other variables. In this research, the independent variable is stress, which refers psychological distress or anxiety experienced through a challenging situation. In addition, this research includes a second independent variable called coping strategies, which are behavioural and cognitive attempts to control the stress that encountered during the stressful experiences.

Resilience is used in this research as the mediating variable. An individual's ability to adjust and bounce back from perceived difficulties is seen as resilience. It is also playing an important role in reducing the impact of stress on the psychological well-being of first-year students and in enhancing coping strategies. Next for the dependent variable, psychological well-being is the dependent variable in the conducted research and seen as a variable that is affected by changes in stress and coping strategies.

A conceptual framework for the research has been developed to more clearly explain the relationship that exist between each of the variables presented.

1.8 DEFINITION CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL

This research uses various terms. Therefore, the terms concept and operation are defined in this section according to the sub-section.

1.8.1 STRESS

According to World Health Organization (2023), stress is described as a natural reaction that enables individuals to cope with the difficulties and threats in their lives. In the context of a transition phase to the university's life on first year student, the challenges of handling academic demands, managing financial and adapting to a new life circle can cause stress among first year students (McLean, Gaul, & Penco, 2023).

In this research, stress can be explained by an individual's emotional state over the past few months during stressful period on new semester, including their thoughts and feelings. The level of stress can be measured using the Perceived Stress Scale Instrument, which can determine an individual's stress level based on the score obtained. A higher score indicates a higher level of stress.

1.8.2 COPING STRATEGIES

For decades, coping has been defined as the process of engaging in cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage difficult circumstances, whether they originate from internal or external sources (Frydenberg, 2014). Similarly, coping strategies are the behavioral and psychological techniques people apply to learn how to control, tolerate, lessen, or restrict situations that are stressful. (Kosia et al., 2021).

In this research, coping strategies were measured using the Brief COPE inventory, which categorized three main strategies: problem-focused strategies, emotion-focused strategies, and avoidance. Each respondent will answer by assessing the frequency of use of these strategies using a Likert scale, which allows the

researcher to identify the response styles used by first year students as one of the strategies in coping with perceived stress.

1.8.3 RESILIENCE

According to the American Psychological Association (2020), resilience has been defined as the ability to adjust effectively in the face of major stressors and challenging situations. Resilience in the context of first-year students can also be considered a dynamic process of adapting to a new academic environment that includes the ability to control stressors such as academic and non-academic ones (Gause et al., 2025)

In this research, resilience can be measured using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RICS-25), which assesses five key aspects found in the inventory, namely personal competence, trust in one's instinct, positive acceptance of change, self-control, and spiritual influence. Each aspect will provide feedback in determining the resilience level of first year students throughout their semester.

1.8.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Psychological well-being is complex and multifaceted concepts that enclose an individual's overall emotional, thinking and social functioning. This also includes a positive emotion and a capability to deal and endure hardship in life (Kumari & Thapa, 2025). In the context of first-year students, psychological well-being can be conceptualized as the ability of the first-year students to attend to the emotional demand, maintain positives functioning and adapt to academic and university life challenges (Guamanga et al., 2024).

In this research, psychological well-being has six main dimensions, namely autonomy, self-acceptance, personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and purpose in life, which can be measured using the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale. The scores obtained can assess the level of psychological well-being of first year students in various aspects of life.

1.9 CONCLUSION

First year students are frequently exposed to negative experiences that can affect emotionally and physically during their studies. Because of this, first year students can develop conditions that can reduce their psychological well-being such as stress, anxiety and burnout that may affect personal growth, academic progressions and career development in the future. Coping strategies are often employed to manage stress, and the effectiveness also differs for individual resilience. From these issues, this research aims to explore the relationship between stress, coping strategies and psychological well-being, with resilience as a role of mediating. This chapter also discusses in the parts from introduction, background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, question, hypothesis, theoretical and conceptual framework to understand more about this research.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews literature related to stress, coping strategies, resilience, and psychological well-being among first-year undergraduate university students. The aim of this chapter was to attempt to explain about the issue of stress and its contributing factors and its relationship with coping strategies and psychological well-being, as well as to highlight the mediating roles of resilience in these relationships. The transition into university life represents a critical period during which first-year undergraduates are particularly exposed to various challenges. Therefore, this literature integrates relevant finding from previous studies to provide a foundation for the present research.

2.2 FIRST-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

First-year students experience a substantial shift to a higher education system that is characterized by increased independence in the learning environment and university culture (Fellingham et al., 2024). Following prior research by Osafo et al. (2025), first-year students have encountered difficulties with their academic, social, financial, and emotional state as a result of their transition. In addition, younger students between the ages of 20 and 25 are also more likely to experience social challenges during this transition period. Consequently, many students may feel the constant pressure from these changes that can bring burn out and find it difficult to meet the expectation of their new environment.

This gives rise to a more acute understanding, which highlight the necessity of analyzing stress, coping strategies, and resilience in first-year undergraduate students to comprehend their psychological well-being.

2.3 STRESS AMONG FIRST-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Stress was first conceptualized by Hans Selye (1956) as a nonspecific physiological reaction of the body to any imposed pressure. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) state that stress is not a direct result of an event but rather a transactional process influenced by an individual's appraisal of a circumstance and their coping ability. Recent research by Tambat et al. (2022) states that stress is a natural response that happens when individuals perceive that they can no longer cope with the pressures of demands or the circumstances they encounter. In the context of first-year students, these demands frequently present as transition challenges, academic difficulty, social adjustment, and a limited social support circle.

Previous research by Farrer et al. (2024) points out that students entering the university for the first time are at an increased risk of experiencing mental health problems and are particularly exposed to facing challenges during the early stages of their university experience. Moreover, first-year students encounter distinct stressors related to transition and adjustment to a new environment, whereas students in later years face greater academic and emotional stress (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2021). The transition to university life has led students to face many physical, psychological, social, and academic difficulties, possibly leading to emotional distress in the early stages of this adjustment. Research also found that 49% of first-year students report depression, while anxiety and stress levels are at 75% and 73.26% (Haruna et al., 2025). As stated by Visier-Alfonso et al. (2024), psychological well-being among first-year students has shown a negative impact caused by stress during study experiences.

The transition into university life brings a multitude of stressors for first-year students to face. First-year university students experience stress due to a confluence of academic factors, which include the workload on assessment, deadlines to meet, and the pressure to be the best on academic progression (Javaid et al., 2024). Stress also impacts first-year students who struggle to manage their finances, involving future loan repayments and expenses acquired during their education (Nguyen et al., 2024). Research has also identified that stress can arise from non-academic stressors, including interpersonal relationships, adaptation to a new living area, acclimatization

to food quality and local culture, financial support for others' expenses, and the obligation to engage in extracurricular activities (Murakami et al., 2025). Moreover, the utilization of English poses difficulties for students in their academic pursuits. Research in Hong Kong revealed that first-year students encounter obstacles related to academic unfamiliarity and vocabulary, resulting in difficulty in writing, reading, speaking, and listening (Shepard & Rose, 2023). The findings of this research demonstrate the variety of stressors that new students face and the significance of resolving these stressors in order to create a helpful and encouraging learning environment.

Stress has been widely related with negative psychological and educational achievement among first-year university students mainly due to the transition from dependent learning environment to independent learning environment (Fellingham et al., 2024). The prolonged stress during early stage of university life may increase risk of anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and threaten psychological well-being among first year students. Research found that high levels of stress are frequently related to high rates of depression and anxiety, especially among female students, who significantly report higher levels of stress and mental health difficulties (Haruna et al., 2025). Previous research by Alkhaldeh et al. (2023) has shown that effective coping strategies, such as problem-solving strategies, may reduce the negative impacts on academic performance and other challenges faced by university students, in contrast to avoidance coping strategies

2.4 COPING STRATEGIES IN MANAGING STRESS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

"Coping strategies" is a term that describes the behavioral and psychological efforts individual use to manage stressful situations and reduce their impact. Kosia et al. (2021) described coping strategies as a specific effort that individuals apply to manage and minimize any hectic situation. From a theoretical perspective, according to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984), coping strategies can be defined as constantly changing efforts that have been employed to manage specific external or internal demands by using the resources of individuals. These strategies are more important in defining how people react to stress rather than getting rid or avoid the stressor (Subhi et al., 2021). In the first-year students' context, coping strategies are particularly important during the beginning of the new semester, as student are going into the transition process that need to adapt to a new environment, academic learning and personal responsibilities.

University students might apply different coping strategies based on their thoughts and response to stressful situations. Research by Slimmen et al. (2022), state that students may employ the right coping strategies in managing with the stressful event and personal difficulties. Coping strategies are categorized into different style, which known as a problem focused coping, emotion focused and avoidant style (Veisi et al., 2024). Previous research has found that students who apply avoidant coping strategies tend to experience higher levels of stress compared to those who employ problem-focused coping strategies (Alkhaldeh et al., 2023). Another research by Amar et al. (2022) states that postgraduate counselor trainees mainly utilize emotion-focused coping strategies when managing stress during stressful events. This preference may be influenced by their background that focuses more on emotional intelligence and awareness. Therefore, among first-year students, the use of coping strategies may differ among them during the stressful event.

2.5 RESILIENCE IN FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Resilience has been defined as the capacity to recover from difficulties and adapt positively, has gained attention as a mediator between stressor and psychological outcomes. In recent research by Wang et al. (2025), resilience has been defined as a multidimensional construct, that includes both trait and process characteristics, in reflecting an individual's capacity to cope positively to negative aspects of events and stressful experiences. The research by Kaya and Yagan (2022) found that psychological resilience significantly mediates the relationship between coping humor and psychological well-being, suggesting that individuals who utilize humor to cope with stress may enhance their resilience, leading to improved well-being. In educational settings, resilience has been acknowledged as an important factor in reducing the symptoms of depression and anxiety, also positively affecting students' academic achievement and well-being in the future (García-Martínez et al., 2022).

Resilience is a key factor in academic achievement and psychological well-being for first-year university students. Research has demonstrated that resilience serves as a mediating factor in the relationship between academic support from family, teachers, and academic achievement (Melaku et al., 2025). Furthermore, individuals with a higher level of resilience also appear to show better functioning after experiencing negative or stressful events (Wang, 2025). Therefore, these findings point out the significant importance of resilience in supporting first-year students' adjustment and psychological well-being during the challenging transition period.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the methodology implemented to complete this research. This chapter is divided into several sections and aspects that are discussed, including research design, research population and sample, research location, research instruments, validity and reliability, as well as the final summary of this chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research will be conducted using a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional approach. This design was chosen after considering its suitability for collecting data at one time to identify the relationships between the variables of stress, coping strategies, resilience, and psychological well-being among first year university students. Furthermore, this quantitative method allows for testing the role of resilience in influencing the relationship between stress and psychological well-being, as well as between coping strategies and psychological well-being. This quantitative research involves data collection through survey methods using questionnaires. The questionnaire will be prepared using Google Form as a medium to collect research data.

3.3 RESEARCH LOCATION

This research will be conducted at a Public Institutions of Higher Education (IPTA) in Peninsular Malaysia, which will be involving first year students as a research sample. In this research, the selection of the research location set at Eastern region at Peninsular Malaysia, to ensure a more narrow and controlled scope of research and to consider possible challenges in terms of time, cost and research logistics. Plus, this population is relevant because first-year students commonly experience academic and lifestyle transitions that may influence stress, coping

strategies, resilience and psychological well-being. Here is the schedule of zone and universities involved:

Primary Zone	Universities
Eastern Region (East Coast)	Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah (UMPSA)
	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)
	Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA)
	Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK)

Table 3.1: Research Location

3.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population of this research will involve first-year undergraduate students enrolled in Public Higher Educations Institutions located in Peninsular Malaysia. First-year students are selected because they are in a crucial stage of transitioning from high school setting to universities setting, which may put them at greater risk for stress and difficulties adapting. Therefore, understanding stress, coping strategies, resilience and psychological well-being during this transitional phase is extremely compatible.

This research will focus on universities that located in eastern coast zone, to ensure the data collection is more practicable and accurate within the study timeline. The sample will be drawn from first-year undergraduate student. A purposive sampling technique will be employed. Participant will be chosen based on appropriateness for the research. Participant must be a first-year undergraduate student enrolled full-time, as well as alumni from matriculation, foundation programs and Form 6 for Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM).

Therefore, from the sampling approach that has been chosen, it will come up with a more fully understanding of the levels of stress, coping strategies, resilience and psychological well-being among first-year students at the Public Higher Educations Institutions in Malaysia.

3.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

This research will conduct research using instruments developed by previous researchers. This research instrument will involve a questionnaire with 4 sections representing each research variable. The selection of the instrument was made after considering the validity and reliability that have been conducted by previous researchers. In the questionnaire that will be distributed, the four main sections are the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Brief COPE Inventory, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25), and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, which align with the objectives of this research.

3.5.1 STRESS

To measure the level of stress in first year university students, the researcher will use the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Cohen, Kamarch and Mermelstein (1983). This instrument is widely used psychological instruments for assessing the degree to which individual perceive situations in their lives as stressful. This instrument also available in several version, one of the versions is PSS-10, which are the most used due to its conciseness and consistent reliability. As follows the reliability of the instrument derived from previous studies:

Previous Research	Cronbach alpha
Sandhu et al., 2015	0.63
Kassim et al., 2021	0.85
Xiao et al., 2023	0.79

Table 3.3: The Reliability of PSS Based on Earlier Research

For scoring measurement in this instrument, all items use a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). The instrument is scored by summing up all of the answer, however four of the items need to score in reverse which are item 4,5,7 and 8. The total score ranges from 0 to 40, where higher scores imply to high level of perceived stress by a score of 27 to 40, moderate stress by a score of 14 to 26 and for low stress is indicated by a score of 0 to 13. This instrument is particularly suitable for use among first year university students considering of their adaptability and ease of administration.

3.5.2 COPING STRATEGIES

The Brief-COPE Inventory developed by Carver (1997) will be used to measure the coping strategies employed by first year university students. This instrument consists of 28 items across 14 aspects in 3 primary styles which is problem focused coping, emotion focused coping and avoidant coping style, each aspect also containing 2 items. This instrument uses 4 scale-Likert, from 1 “I haven’t been doing this at all” into 4 “I’ve been doing this a lot” scale. The Brief COPE has been validated across diverse populations with reliable internal consistency scores, such as:

Previous Research	Cronbach alpha
Zeladita-Huaman et al., 2024	0.90
Weeratunga et al., 2022	0.819
Zhang et al., 2021	0.873

Table 3.3: The Reliability of Brief COPE Based on Earlier Research

This tool measures both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. For scoring, higher scores on a subscale will be interpreted as a most used coping strategy for individuals and for the consistently lower score on all subscales may be interpret as a respondent has no coping styles. This research will use all the items in this instrument.

3.5.3 RESILIENCE

For resilience, the researchers will use the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RICS 25) developed by Connor and Davidson (2003). This instrument contains 25 items that have 5-point scale Likert range from 0 “not true at all” to 4 “true nearly all the time”. Other than that, this instrument assesses five domains which is personal competence, trust in one’s instinct, positive acceptance, control and spirituality to measure resilience among first year university students. The instrument also has demonstrated strong and consistent reliability in previous research.

Previous Research	Cronbach alpha
Bakhshayesh Eghbali et al., 2022	0.94
Sudraba, 2023	0.93
Miller et al., 2021	0.92

Table 3.4: The Reliability of CD-RICS 25 Based on Earlier Research

For scoring measurement, this instrument is calculated by total score from summing up all the 25 items, higher score which close to 100 will be interpreted as a higher level of resilience, for the opposite result, which closer to 0 will interpret as a lower score.

3.5.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

For psychological wellbeing, the research will use the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) developed by Ryff (1989). This research will use the original instrument, which consists of 54 items that represent 6 dimensions which are autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life and self-acceptance.

Previous Research	Cronbach alpha
Piñeiro-Cossio et al., 2023	0.956
Khanum et al., 2023	0.85

Table 3.5: The Reliability of PWB Based on Earlier Research

The instrument uses a six-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 6 indicating "strongly agree," for scoring measurement. The total score is calculated by summing all the item responses. The higher total scores will interpret a good psychological well-being.

3.6 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study is a small preliminary study conducted before a larger research project to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the study design and methodology, helping to identify potential issues and refine research tools before full-scale implementation (Soori, 2024).

Therefore, for this research, a pilot study will also be conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the research instruments used. This pilot study will involve a small group of respondents from the target population. The pilot study conducted will also help gather feedback from respondents to improve the questions in the interview before the main study is carried out comprehensive

4.0 EXPECTED RESULTS

This research aims to examine the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between stress, coping strategies and psychological well-being among first year university students. The finding of this research is expected to generate several significant from previous research on the relationship between stress, coping strategies, resilience and psychological well-being among first year university students at the Malaysian Public Education Institutions.

To begin with, it is expected that stress will show a negative relationship with psychological well-being. First year university students who report with higher level of stress are expected to report lower levels of psychological well-being, which is consistent with the previous studies that have been reported.

Further to this, it is also expected that coping strategies have a significant relationship with both resilience and psychological well-being. For each style of coping strategies, it is predicted that problem focused, and emotion focused coping style will be positively connected with psychological well-being, for the avoidant coping style, it may have a neutral or negative relationship with mental health outcomes.

Moreover, this research uses resilience as a mediating variable, it is expected that resilience will have a positive relationship with psychological well-being, which is proposed that individuals who have higher levels of resilience are more capable of maintaining their psychological well-being during the adaptation period.

Other than that, the research aims to investigate the mediating role of resilience in two different relationship which is the relationship between stress and psychological well-being where resilience is expected to moderate the negative impact of stress, for the relationship between coping strategies and psychological well-being, resilience has been expected to increase the effectiveness of coping mechanisms and contribute to more positive outcomes.

The finding of this research is also expected to support the improving education system and enhance the mental health preparedness of students in Malaysia.

The expected research results will be processed and explained through the data analysis process. The quantitative data analysis of this study will involve mean score analysis, correlation analysis, and mediation analysis. To explain the data analysis better, a summary of the data analysis is provided in the table below.

No	Research Question	Approach	Analysis
1.	What is the level of stress, coping strategies, resilience and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?	Quantitative-Questionnaire	Descriptive-mean score
2.	Is there a relationship between stress and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?	Quantitative-Questionnaire	Correlation
3.	Is there a relationship between coping strategies and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?	Quantitative-Questionnaire	Correlation
4.	Is there a relationship between resilience and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?	Quantitative-Questionnaire	Correlation
5.	Is there a relationship between stress and resilience among first year students Public Higher Education Institutes?	Quantitative-Questionnaire	Correlation
6.	Is there a relationship between coping strategies and resilience among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?	Quantitative-Questionnaire	Correlation
7.	Does resilience mediate the relationship between stress and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?	Quantitative-Questionnaire	Mediation
8.	Does resilience mediate the relationship between coping strategies and psychological well-being among first year students at the Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutes?	Quantitative-Questionnaire	Mediation

Table 4.1: Analysis Summary

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