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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING FROM THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE AND CULTURE

Kamarul Md Shah^a, Jaharudin Padli^b, Jasmi Abu Talib^c, Farah Mukhtar^d,
^{abc} Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, 21030 Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, Malaysia, ^d Institut
 Pendidikan Guru Kampus Raja Melewar, 70400 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia,
 (*Corresponding author's e-mail: kamarul.shah@umt.edu.my)

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Abstract

Well-being is an important aspect of the life of every human being. This study emphasized the aspects of well-being, especially psychological well-being among students at one of the higher learning institutes in Malaysia. This study also attempted to provide a definition of well-being and dimensions or construct of well-being in the perspective of the students at the higher learning institute. This is a qualitative design which the case study was conducted using structured interviews. The sample of this study consisted of group of student leaders, group of excellent students in academic (based on CGPA), and group of excellent students in co-curriculum. The study data were analyzed using NVivo10 software. The findings show that there are three main themes encompassing six dimensions that are environmental control, personal growth, purpose of life, self-acceptance, autonomy, and positive relationships with others. These themes were supported by the subjectivity of the research subjects according to their respective perspectives. The results of this study are important for the higher learning institution and the Malaysia Ministry of Education (MOE) to find the most appropriate and effective method of student psychological well-being in building a generation that is capable of achieving strong self-development and ready for future challenges.

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2005). This definition explains that health is an individual condition that not only has no disease, but also emphasize that the individual is physically, mentally and socially affluent.

WHO also stated that health is not only measured by the body's function and structure, but also its feelings, values and thoughts. Health also plays an important role in motivating individuals to engage in a variety of activities that contribute to individual growth and growth at every stage of life. In addition, health is also the basis of an internal and external source for an individual to engage in and build self-growth and development of a perfect life (Donatelle et al, 2000). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2003) has estimated that mental illness is among the top five in the world and by 2020 is expected to be the second highest in the world. Therefore, the issue of well-being and especially psychological well-being should be given due attention.

Furthermore, WHO has introduced the concept of holistic health. In this concept the terms health and well-being have been used interchangeably to indicate the dynamics and similarities between the two terms. Holistic health or wellness encompasses psychological, physical, social, intellectual, spiritual, occupational and environmental dimensions. Individuals who are said to have achieved well-being are individuals who have reached the optimum level for all of the above dimensions. However, there is no denying that there is also a downward shift in these dimensions in the process of achieving well-being (Baker, 2003). Thus, individual well-being encompasses the seven dimensions of psychological, social, intellectual, physical, spiritual, occupational and environmental well-being (Stuart, Biddle, Kenneth & Stephen, 2000).

To achieve well-being, individuals must encounter their needs in every dimension of health. In this discussion, however, the study focuses on identifying definitions and dimensions of well-being that have a significant impact on the individual's life as many researchers have stated. Arulrajah (2000) conducted a study to determine the level of psychological well-being, pressure perception, stress coping style and social support among Malaysian university students. He found that coping with stress and social support had a positive relationship with psychological well-being. The findings show that there is a significant positive relationship between the personal development and psychological well-being of the patient. From the findings of previous studies (Arulrajah, 2000; Boman, Bryman & Moller, 2004; Wenzel et al., 2002) it is shown that although respondents belong to different groups, psychological well-being has a significant impact on their lives. This indicates that there is a need to identify the dimensions or construct of well-being among students at the higher learning institutes in order for them to lead a better life and achieve a high level of personal development.

Literature Reviews

Psychological well-being is an important aspect of the life of every human being. According to Ryff (1989), psychological well-being refers to the effort that is made to achieve perfection based on the state of one's true potential. While White (2004) refers to psychological well-being as a healthy emotion based on high self-esteem and positive relationships with others, less anxious, less depressed and less delinquent. The above definitions are in line with the definition by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2003) in which psychological well-being refers to healthy and mentally healthy individuals who are capable of maintaining harmonious relationships with others, engaging in community activities and being able to provide contributions to society. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the Ministry of Health Malaysia (2005) referred to psychological well-being as an individual's ability to deal with stress, avoid

conflict, increase peace, stimulate motivation and increase self-esteem in life. While from the Islamic perspective, psychological well-being refers to spiritual aspects that reflect the human heart, soul, mind and psychology (Muhammad Haniff, 2000).

To define psychological well-being, Ryff's (1989) philosophical and psychological perspective is applied through six dimensions of psychological well-being: (i) environmental mastery, (ii) personal growth, (iii) purpose of life, (iv) self-acceptance, (v) autonomy, and (vi) positive relationships with others. Environmental mastery is related to the ability to manage one's environment and the ability to choose and create appropriate contexts to meet their needs. Personal growth refers to one's feelings of continuous personal development (Ryff, 2008). It is closely related to self-realization, which has been defined as 'the process of self-realization' (Jones, 1986). Life goals are related to someone who has a sense of direction and purpose in life (Ryff, 2008). Self-acceptance is a positive attitude toward oneself (Ryff, 2008). It is closely related to self-esteem and the extent to which a person is proud of themselves (Davis-Kean & Sandler, 2001). Autonomy consists of the desire and ability of the individual to make independent decisions (Ryff, 2008). While positive relationships with others are related to friendly and positive relationships rather than satisfying others.

Psychological well-being has various definitions in many fields (Gao, & Mclellan., 2018; Gartoulla, Bell, Worsley, & Davis, 2015). It incorporates positive aspects across all aspects of life such as life satisfaction, both physical and spiritual and can function optimally (Stamp, Crust, Swann, Perry, Clough, & Marchant, 2015). In addition, psychological well-being also refers to how individuals are able to control their lives and activities. The psychology of well-being is not only when we feel good all the time but also involves negative emotions such as frustration, failure, and sadness that are common in life (Stamp et al., 2015). Therefore, managing negative emotions is important for long-term psychological well-being (Huppert, 2009). Emotional support and positive social support play a fundamental role in the development of psychological well-being (Siddiqui & Khan, 2016). An individual with a high degree of psychological well-being will lead a happy and contented life with professional and personal life, capable and well-supported (Panahi, 2016). Based on the theory of psychological well-being, the health of an individual's psychology is determined by its function in certain aspects of life (Udhayakumar & Illango, 2018). An individual should have a good relationship with others, respect the environment, accept themselves now and in the past, have goals in life, strive to build and make their own decisions (Siddiqui & Khan, 2016).

However, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2003) has predicted that mental illness is among the top five diseases in the world and by 2020 is expected to be the second highest in the world. Therefore, the issue of psychological well-being should be given serious attention. Furthermore, according to the Malaysia Ministry of Health statistics (1996), 10.1% of 16 years of age and older have mental health problems. Meanwhile, in 2001, the Ministry of Health reported that 18.8% of adults and children had mental health problems. Thus, the statistics of the Ministry of Health in 1996 and 2001 showed that the problem of psychological well-being began to exist in our country and showed an increase even though the percentage was still small.

A study by Haleh Heizomi et al. (2018) on factors affecting stress and psychological well-being among adult women in Iran found that 64.7% reported mental health problems and 74.3% reported levels high pressure. In the unadjusted analysis, PWB correlated positively with life satisfaction, happiness, hope and self-efficacy, and it was negatively correlated with self-perceived stress ($P < 0.01$ for all correlations). In the adjusted analysis, higher life satisfaction and lower stress levels were associated with better PWB ($P < 0.001$ for all associations). Higher levels of happiness and self-efficacy are associated with lower levels of stress. A study in Malaysia on psychological stress and well-being among students of higher education institutions found that depression, anxiety, and stress found among UniSZA students were 42.2%, 73.7%, and 34.8% respectively. Findings revealed that students who faced psychological distress level possessed relatively high tendency for depression, stress, and anxiety. Psychological distress poses negative impacts on the physical, mental and academic. What is more worrying is that students who faced this kind of problem do not seek help or treatment because of the public stigma against mental illness (Shahira, et al., 2018)

Therefore, this study emphasized on the well-being aspects of psychological well-being among students at higher learning institution in Malaysia. This study also attempted to provide a definition of well-being and dimensions or construct of well-being. Undergraduate students who were selected as respondents of the study due to several factors. One of the factors is that higher education students are more prone to psychological well-being (Hamdan-Mansour, Halabi & Dawani, 2009). This statement is also supported by Council Report CR112 (2003) in which students were believed to be more vulnerable group of psychological well-being as a result of the transition from home and school to university or college environments. In addition, the increase number of students entering institutions of higher learning year after year led to competition among students including competition for employment, financial burden and pressure to earn a degree (Council Report CR112, 2003). If this situation is not well managed, it will put pressure on the students. Therefore, due to various factors contributing to well-being, especially psychological well-being among students, this study was conducted to define and identify the dimensions or constructs of well-being that help students to lead a better life and achieve greater levels of personal development.

Objective

The purpose of this study is to study explore the definition and dimensions of psychological well-being from the perspective of university students

Methodology

Research Design

Each study is carried out based on a cautiously planned and systematic design involving aspects of the organization, data collection and analysis that lead to the achievement of the goals or objectives of the study (Creswell & Plano

Clark 2007; Seltiz 1961; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003). The design of the study also refers to a plan of actions that will be carried out to link philosophical assumptions using scientific methods (Creswell2003; Crotty1998). According to Kerlinger (1986), study design is a process of processing data obtained based on a specific and systematic design by linking and describing each of the variables involved. Planning is intended to answer research questions and control variance.

This qualitative study was applied using the case study method, multicase-multisite case study by Yin (2003). Multicase refers to more than one unit of analysis and multisite refers to more than one study area. This means that researchers have followed this method by studying several groups of students with different backgrounds. This case study is descriptive and explanatory in which this group of students explores in particular the understanding of psychological well-being and other issues related to it (Yin 2003). According to Yin, this descriptive case study is trying to give an overall picture of the phenomenon to be studied in its context. While exploratory case studies try to present data that explain the causal relationship of a phenomenon, that is to explain what caused it to occur.

The case study method in this qualitative research also maintains the real environment during the process of data collection and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen 2003). This enables the researcher to respond directly to the study participants in the context of the study and thus develop a better understanding for the researcher to interpret the data (Cronbach 1975; Marohaini 2001). The case study method in this qualitative study enables the researcher to examine the focus of research closely and in detail and the data provide a holistic picture of a phenomenon occurring (Marohaini 2001). Therefore, this study will use qualitative case study as this method is well suited to research questions to obtain rich and accurate information related to finding definition of well-being and identifying dimensions or construct of well-being among students at higher learning institutions.

Research Sample

According to Konting (1993), sampling is a research strategy whereby researchers can obtain information about a population from a number of individuals who are members of that population. The information obtained through the sample can be used to estimate information about the population studied. Sampling is also a process of selecting an individual group for a research from a selected large group. It also includes a group of people, institutions, places, or phenomena that researchers want to investigate (Noraini Idris 2010).

Sampling also enables researchers to save time especially when entering data into computers is shorter compared to population (Fraenkel & Wallen 2006). This study used random sampling aimed at the multi-side expletory case study. According to Yin (1994), multi-case refers to more than one basic unit, while multi-side refers to more than one study location. Therefore, this study will utilize a sample of studies that have high well-being characteristics from a variety of backgrounds based on the tasks, responsibilities and areas of study at higher learning institution. This is done on the basis of several things:

1. Sample from student leadership group.
2. Samples from the student body based on CGPA.
3. Sample of excellent student group based on the curriculum.

Data Analysis

This study used interview techniques as a qualitative data collection method. Interview methods can be considered as a channel for the researcher to approach the world of the study participants and then understand what they are actually experiencing and thinking (Patton 1990). Information from the study participants was obtained through face-to-face interaction. This method enables the researcher to understand an aspect that needs to be studied in more depth, clarity and accuracy (Merriam 2001). Through this method, the researcher will be able to gather insights, opinions, thoughts and experiences in the form of statements directly from the study participants (Bogdan & Biklen 2003). For that purpose, the researcher had developed a set of interview protocols to obtain qualitative data. The use of these structured questions will facilitate the researcher to focus on the important data to answer the research question (Yin 2003). Subsequent interviews of the study were transcribed and analyzed using Nvivo software 8. The researcher interpreted the meaning to derive the themes and sub-themes obtained in depth according to the objectives of the study.

Results and Discussion

Definitions / dimensions of Psychological Wellness

1. Individuals who are good in Personal Growth (spiritually and physically complete)

According to Ryff (1989), there are six dimensions of psychological well-being and one of them is personal growth. Personal growth refers to one's feelings of continuous personal development (Ryff, 2008). It is closely related to self-realization, which has been defined as 'the process of self-realization' (Jones, 1986). The findings of this study also showed that self-growth is one of the key things that the study wants to achieve. It covers spiritual and physical, emotional and spiritual aspects. If this is achieved, then a student will achieve a level of stability within himself. Among the statements of the study subject are as follows:

“This well-being for me is both spiritual and physical. When we are complete in spiritual and physical, we are at peace. For example, in this physical world we can do something that benefits others, if this is how we nurture ourselves more in spiritual, inner beauty in ourselves. We attain spiritual well-being and are outwardly....” (FG01 / MSD / RJ)

"To me, from what I know, this well-being, he embraces the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects, that is well-being, when the combination of physical, emotional and spiritual aspects ..." (FG02 / MSD / RJ)

“... It hurts us, our health, it hurts our physiology, our bodies, our physical bodies.” (FG02 / MSD / RJ)

"As a student ... we have to be stable in all aspects." (FG03 / MSD / RJ)

2. Being healthy, comfortable, happy, excitement, calm, stress-free, and independent

(Autonomy/Purpose in life/Self-acceptance)

Clear understanding of the purpose of life, full self-acceptance and ability for autonomy are also among the dimensions of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). Life goals are related to someone who has a sense of direction and purpose in life (Ryff, 2008). Self-acceptance is a positive attitude toward one another through various developmental processes in life (Ryff, 2008). It is closely related to self-esteem and the extent to which a person is proud of themselves (Davis-Kean & Sandler, 2001). Autonomy involves a person's desire and ability to make independent decisions (Ryff, 2008). This dimension is consistent with the findings of the study subjects who stated that they knew what to do in order to be comfortable living in university life. Engaging in co-curricular activities and actively associating will make them healthy, happy and fun. The freedom to determine and meet these needs will lead them to a life of purpose and to enhance their self-acceptance. Some of the statements of the study subject are as follows:

"Well-being for me when we're in a good state, which, in one community, means that they have a full set of things they want to achieve, for example as a student, so I want to be a good student if I can understand the way we learn, the way we involved actively in co-curriculum, it gives me well-being for me like no other, so it's for me well-being" (FG01 / MSD / STB)

"... then the individual's movements will be healthy and he will be happy with what he does and he will enjoy what he does ..." (FG02 / MSD / STB)

"If it's for me, well-being, this is how I like what I do, so when I have fun, if I feel what I do is fun, and then I will enjoy my life and then I can reduce my stress and all that kind of stuff and he'll give us his own feedback on ourselves and other people. " (FG02 / MSD / STB)

"If I, I want peace, my happiness is my peace, I don't want anyone to disturb me and I can do whatever I like, for example there are times when I feel like I'm alone and I want to be alone, there are times I want to do my work, I value myself, so that is my happiness." (FG02 / MSD / STB)

"... people love to be alone, to be free, aaa... love freedom, sure when I'm at third year, I become the member of student organization, so that freedom is a bit limited, there are weekends I feel like to sit alone in the room., but I was bothered to go to this place and that place, I went out most of the weekend, went around KL ... my freedom is disturbed, I become so unhappy. maybe I'm planning ahead that the next semester of the 1st month is coming out, so I just want to spend

the rest here, so, I don't want to disappoint myself to feel stress, I'd rather be happy to follow what do i want" (FG02 / MSD / STB)

"... Prosperity means happy, if I'm not happy my surrounding will not be able to deal with it, for the long term, maybe I might feel like giving up, to do something, to learn, I'm under pressure, confirm that I might end up like other few students, when he feels like giving up, and then he wants to stop studying..." (FG02 / MSD / STB)

"... not happy with the assignment, at that time, ok, out, even some of those people, he's a 3rd year, but at 2nd year, which is only after his second year he quit study." (FG02 / MSD / STB)

"I like myself more when I'm involved in the co-curriculum compared to lessons ... because I like what I do ... I'm tired of things that I enjoy rather than just studying I'm tired ... because I want balance it ... although I'm physically exhausted ... but when I get tired of studying, I'll become mentally exhausted ... I prefer more physically tired than mentally tired. " (FG03 / MSD / STB)

"But he is stressed Dr.... I see that he is very focused on studying. And then he didn't do anything else ... if he did something else, he said he's wasting his time ... study late at night ... but still his result he was not good ... that was the problem. " (FG03 / MSD / STB)

3. Constructing a positive self-concept, a sense of belonging, a sense of concern, a clear sense of the future and a desire, many friends, teamwork. (Environmental mastery / Positive relations with others)

Mastering the environment and establishing positive relationships with others is also one of the six dimensions of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). Environmental mastery is related to the ability to manage one's environment and one's ability to choose and create the right context to meet his or her needs. While positive relationships with others are related to friendly and vice versa that can satisfy others (Ryff, 2008). This dimension is in line with the statement of the subject of the study which emphasizes the aspects of feelings including cherished, clear to what is desired, having many friends and building friendly relations with friends in social work and social activities. This in turn will help build a positive self-concept that ultimately leads to prosperity. The stress that results from a rigorous learning process with assignments and tests can be overcome by good relationships with peers and lecturers who understand. In the end, academic decisions are also good and fulfill family expectations. Therefore, mastery of the environment and good relationships with others are among the determinants of students' psychological well-being. Some of the statements of the subject of this study are as follows:

"It is in us, that this well-being I think is self-concept Because with this knowledge, is as guidance in our life, so, without knowledge we may not prosper because whatever we do must be based on knowledge, first of all knowledge and then action..." (FG01 / MSD / KK).

"As for me, I would be happy to be in this university, because with my friends, I would be happy if I could get a caring lecturer, such as like he knew my existence, then, when I had problems, he came up to me ,asking what is my problem, how do i like it when, i like that in terms of lecturer, in terms of my classmates, for example when I was in my first year, i sat on the from row so if I wasn't around, other friends will find me, she'll ask in the group, WhatsApp why Liyana didn't come to class, so I feel like, every time during class , people ask me to come, if I don't come, people would come and ask why I didn't come, whether I got sick, I think that is why I feel happy being here "(FG02 / MSD / KK).

"It makes me happy to have such an amazing result, because it is so important to me to be academically good, because my parents are so concerned about it, despite the pressure, that is the pressure when it comes to get good results, we can make our family very happy when I get the dean's list, and that makes me feel I want to learn more because I know I can do it, then, in terms of lecturers like my friend said... "(FG02 / MSD / KK).

"... never thought that, as a student, so it was really fun for us to have parents-like at our own university, all of our parents are far away, but because of the lecturer, who treated us like their children, so, it feels like we are at our own home" (FG02 / MSD / KK).

"For the first year, he might be a little bit upset because the first year is the year for him to adapt to the new situation, but when he comes in the second year, when he has a good friend, he knows what he wants to do, already knows where to go, , more or less, mostly the 1st year students he'll have his own pressure when he doesn't know where he wants to ask for help, he might feel homesick la..." (FG02 / MSD / KK).

"... but I did try to convince her to stay, but no, she wanted to stop, so, she did, we try to help her but she didn't want to, for me I think if she is unhappy, she will not be able to survive, so well-being is very important." (FG02 / MSD / KK).

"Maybe at the same time she had family problems, financial problems, so she became depressed, became one of the reasons for her to give up, in terms of what she's doing now, like, maybe, a lot of other factors, not just because oh, I can't do assignments, quit, many other factors. " (FG02 / MSD / KK).

"... Because if there is no well-being, then, he does not know how to take care of himself, so he has no happiness, he is not happy with what he does, and plus, it is like we do not fun in us, it could lead us to other things..." (FG02 / MSD / KK).

"...if we can choose, if we can choose friends like ourselves, in the group to feel happy, because they understand, our schedule is, so somebody will support us, it's okay to be braved, challenged you, share to to our part – you do this part, I mean there are friends who support us, so, it will be balanced ...". (FG02 / MSD / KK).

"The good fate is when our friends is accepting, they understand we are all friends, classmates ... so he understands us." (FG03 / MSD / KK).

"It's like my group ... when they know it ... when they want to play outside ... so we need to settle the work on Thursday ... to do what I can do before Thursday ... and the group understands me ... so I'm good it is up to them to resolve the matter early on. " (FG03 / MSD / KK).

".... we have the strength to have everyone support us, maybe because they are in the same organization so we can both support each other." (FG02 / MSD / KK).

"... as a student leader, when we sit together or when we live together, the relationships become very strong and we will support each other because only we know how hurt or criticized by others, we only know." (FG02 / MSD / KK).

"Like my group, knowing that I have a game outside of university means that group work needs to be completed before school including meetings, finding materials and more. Group members understand that our relationship is good because all work is done early." (FG03 / MSD / KK).

4. External / environmental factors affecting psychological well-being.

In addition to the above three factors that are important to internalizing a student's psychological well-being, there are also external factors and campus environment that are also considered important among the subjects of the study. These include campus sustainability, student welfare, opportunities, learning environment, sports and leisure facilities and a lecturer's charisma. Students feel that these external and environmental factors also play an important role in shaping a student's psychological well-being internally. If students are happy with the perfect environment with ease and opportunity as well as good support from the lecturers then they will achieve good psychological well-being, reduce stress and help improve academic achievement. Some of the statements of the subject of this study are as follows:

"..... one thing I see, this university is a sustainable campus, easy to go somewhere, not crowded and green" (FG01 / MSD / EE)

"..... the university is not a lot of students, so it was easy for me to take the opportunity and I became more active as I was able to go abroad and so on." (FG01 / MSD / EE)

"As students we are always stressed out but when we go back to the dormitories we see a green campus, not many vehicles make me feel safe."(FG02 / MSD / EE)

"..... I feel happy when I have a lecturer who cares so much that he knows my existence, when I have a problem he comes to ask me"
(FG02 / MSD / EE)

"I think if the university can provide enough facilities for sports, it will encourage a culture of sports among students that they will enjoy." (FG03 / MSD / EE)

"Transportation facilities are also important especially for students living outside of hostels as they will help students without vehicles and ensure student safety." (FG03 / MSD / EE)

Conclusion

This study found that psychological well-being is a vital aspect of life that every university student wants to achieve. Regardless of outstanding students, excellent leadership and excellent co-curriculum, psychological well-being is achieved and enhanced over time to make them more successful. They still emphasize the same dimensions of well-being as those described by Ryff (1989): mastery of the environment, personal growth, purpose of life, self-acceptance, autonomy, and positive relationships with others. Each of these dimensions is evidenced by the statements of the study subjects from their respective perspectives on psychological well-being. This group of students proved that while their lives are filled with a variety of activities based on their focus, it has a positive impact on achieving psychological well-being so that their lives on campus are filled with wonderful memories and are not focused solely on academic aspects. In conclusion, engaging in a variety of activities on campus will focus on facilitating students' pursuit of psychological well-being through these six dimensions. Therefore, university students should be encouraged to be active on campus and instead, the university should provide ample space and opportunities with the goal for students to achieve psychological well-being beginning with university and later life.

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