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MENTAL WELLBEING OF ASNAF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on issues related to the mental well-being of Asnaf students at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). Some indications of this issue such as financial burden, insufficient study facilities, increased cost of living and the dynamics of social interaction of them seem to give an impression of the quality or level of their mental well-being. Therefore, this study attemps to explore mental well-being problems among Asnaf students at UUM; and (ii) identify recommendations/measures to overcome mental well-being problems. Quantitative studies were conducted involving a total of 120 students. Some aspects like the issue of isolation from family and friends, unmet living needs and the problem of unstable sibling relationships (between family members and parents) at home can be attributed to mental wellbeing of Asnaf students. A discussion about the implications of mental wellbeing has been elaborated such as the role of family relationship, support from family members, and positive perspective on digital technology as possible ways to improve their mental well-being.

KEYWORDS: Mental wellbeing, family relationship, digital technology, Asnaf, Higher Education Institution.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the issue of the well-being of life is often discussed as a result of various issues and problems that occur in the community. Living well-being is a dynamic process of life and every phase it goes through will always change and develop continuously. The well-being of life includes aspects such as personal, family, community, economic, social, and educational well-being (Abd Wahab, Norizan & Hafiah, 2018). These changes are linked to several factors such as

environmental influences, family relationships; technological advances and online education have changed the lifestyle, attitudes, and behavior of the community. For example, the instability of family relationships; mistrust in the neighborhood, use of social media, online substance abuse, community crime, and poverty are among the catalysts for the decline in the quality of the community's mental and social well-being. Various factors can be seen to contribute to a decrease in the level of mental well-being of the community. These factors can be classified into two, namely risk factors or contributors and protective factors. There are several contributing factors associated with the quality of mental and social well-being such as unemployment, financial problems, family conflict, social isolation and exposure to violence or trauma. In addition, the increase in the use of social media and the internet is also associated with poor mental health among the community, especially teenagers and adults (Ruggerri et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2016).

1.1 Mental and Social Wellbeing Problem

Issues related to the well-being of youth, especially among students at Public Higher Education Institutions (IPTA) and Private Higher Education Institutions (IPTS) have been extensively studied by several previous researchers, especially those related to the index of well-being of life, moral values, life satisfaction and psychological well-being. (Emilly & Mohd Dahlan, 2014; Jauhari et al., 2022; Salleh Amat & Zuria Mahmud, 2009; Ummi Munirah et al., 2016). For example, a study by Ummi Munirah et al., (2016) found that 45.1% of students at IPTA have a good level of life well-being index and 49% at a moderate level. In the same development, the findings of the study by Jauhari et al., (2022) show that 15% of the respondents who are students at a public university have low mental well-being, 70.8% have moderate mental well-being, and 14.2% have high mental well-being.

Based on the situation above, questions arise about mental and social well-being of Asnaf students at IPTA/IPTS. Surprisingly, studies related to their mental and social well-being at Institutions of Higher Education in Malaysia still receive little attention. At the same time, not many statistics are reported about the quality and level of mental and social well-being of asnaf students, especially at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). As shown in Table 1, the trend of increasing these cases is also quite worrying when compared to the cases reported in 2019 to 2021.

Table 1: Statistics of student counseling sessions at UUM in 2019-2022

NO	ISSUE	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
1	Academic	241	669	1,337	203	2,450
2	Career and Placement	47	156	91	42	336
3	Financial	25	71	83	75	254
4	Personal	92	362	507	116	1,077
5	Consultation	59	41	18	82	200
6	Psychological Tests	6,796	4,567	22,003	7,391	40,757
7	Psychosocial	79	188	26	80	373
8	Mental Health	304	316	1,010	3,220	4,850

9	Health	26	39	13	96	174

For example, as many as 304 issues related to mental health were recorded in 2019, and this number increased to 316 cases in 2020, followed by 1010 cases in 2021. In the same development, the Counseling and Career Development Center also held a Mental Health Status Screening Test (SSKM) for Semester Students 1 on October 11, 2022 at each Student Residence. This screening test was given to 3917 students in Semester 1 consisting of 1019 male students and 2898 female students. The test results show that 2605 students have a score of 14 or above which indicates that these students have mental health issues. Furthermore, this test tool has focused on the 12th item which is 163 students who have suicidal ideation. Apart from the issue of mental well-being, students also face various other issues such as academic, career and placement, financial, personal, psychosocial, and health.

Based on the literature review, there is still a gap on the issue of mental well-being among Asnaf students. A comprehensive exploration to identify more clearly the problems of mental well-being among asnaf students at UUM should be carried out. Therefore, this study was conducted to describe mental well-being problems among Asnaf students at UUM. This study also focuses on identifying recommendations/measures to overcome mental and social well-being among them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Mental Wellbeing Concept

The concept of well-being is generally defined as an individual's internal (psychological) perception (something that happens within an individual) which is measured from the point of view of happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, self-efficacy, family life, physical health, the world of work, quality of education and financial ability (Ruggeri et al., 2020; Teghe & Rendell, 2005). Well-being can also be defined based on three paradigms namely subjective well-being, psychological well-being, and combined well-being. Subjective well-being (or Hedonia) defines and measures positive and negative effect, and satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1985). It is based on the notion that increased pleasure and decreased frustration lead to happiness (Carruthers & Hood, 2004). Psychological well-being (or Eudaimonia) defines and measures attributes such as autonomy, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, mastery, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989; Ryff and Keyes, 1995). It is based on the notion that well-being is a feeling that influences behavior and reflects a person's true potential (Waterman, 1984).

In this study, the main focus is on mental well-being. Mental well-being is defined as the ability to self-manage stress by avoiding conflict, increasing calmness, stimulating motivation, and increasing self-confidence (Abu Bakar, Safie & Suhaimi, 2022). This concept is also used to take into account aspects of positive mental health (positive mental health) (Jnaneswar & Sulphey, 2021). Meanwhile, social well-being is the ability to interact with the community and fulfill the responsibility as a community to accept the diversity of race, culture, beliefs, customs, and gender (Abu Bakar et al., 2022; Lages et al., 2018).

2.2 Theories Related to Mental Wellbeing

Centeredness Theory (CT) by Zephyr, Patrick, William and Justine, (2018) explains the concept of well-being by using a systems approach to "self-actualization" (realizing and achieving perfection of one's talents and potential) by crossing five domains of life namely Self, Relationship, Family, Work and Community. These five domains can be described as a geometric pattern of five spheres with the central sphere measuring Self, surrounded by four other spheres which are Relationships, Family, Work and Community as shown schematically in Figure 1. CT uses a heuristic model of mental balance that is considers the role of the five interrelated domains of life, and balance (or imbalance) in one domain facilitates (or hinders) balance in another domain. What is clear, this theory assumes that the level of individual mental well-being whether from a mental or physical aspect can be influenced by factors such as family, relationships, community and work.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Population and Sampling Technique

To achieve the research objective, this study used quantitative method. Quantitative research is research that achieves objectives through empirical evaluation that involves measurement and statistical analysis (Zikmund et al., 2013). The unit of analysis for this study is the individual, who is the Asnaf student at UUM.The study population is all asnaf students at UUM who receive zakat either from the Kedah State Zakat Board (LZNK) or from zakat boards in other states in Malaysia. Referring to LZNK (2023), students are eligible to receive zakat categorized under asnaf fakir and miskin or fi-sabilillah. Based on the ijtihad of scholars especially in Malaysia, students and seekers of knowledge are categorized as one of the groups entitled to receive zakat either classified under asnaf fakir and misikn or fi-sabilillah. At the same time, they are made up of students who are currently studying at UUM either at the Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctor of Philosophy level. Based on statistics provided by UUM's Strategy and Business Development Department, there are a total of 2143 asnaf students who will receive zakat in 2022.Based on the total population of 2143 asnaf students at UUM, the required sample size is 327 students (Cohen et al., 2001; Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The total sample size is sufficient for the collection of quantitative data through the distribution of questionnaires online. The sampling technique used for the quantitative method is the systematic random sampling technique (systematic random sampling).

3.2 Measurement of Variables

Mental Wellbeing - Mental wellbeing is defined as positive and stable emotions, well-being is achieved through optimal development, a meaningful life, and the satisfaction of basic human needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Clarke et al., 2018). In this study, a total of 13 items were used to measure mental well-being variables. For example, "I feel optimistic about the future", "I feel useful", "I feel relaxed", "I feel interested in others", "I have energy to use" and "I deal with problems well".

Open ended questions were also used to gather information about mental wellbeing issue and suggestions to improve Asnaf students' mental wellbeing. For isntance, they were asked about level of mental wellbeing, the importance of mental wellbeing in their life, factors that may effects their mental wellbeing and suggestion to improve mental wellbeing.

3.3 Data collection procedure

For the collection of quantitative data through online questionnaires, the following three steps have been taken:

- The researcher identified a list of samples (asnaf students) who were selected as the study sample by using a systematic random sampling method.
- The researcher has informed each asnaf student about the purpose of the study via email. Other information such as access to the online survey (google form), the time period for filling out the questionnaire and the researchers to be contacted are also stated in the email.
- A selected sample of students was also contacted via phone and reminder email two to four weeks after the online questionnaire was distributed.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Response rate

A total of 327 questionnaires were distributed online to systematically randomly selected respondents. A total of 138 responses were received at the end of the data collection period. However, only 120 data were used for the purpose of data analysis. This shows a response rate of 36.69%. This response rate is relatively low when compared to the standard response rate of online questionnaires, especially those related to research in educational institutions, which is 44% (Meng et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the response rate obtained is satisfactory based on the percentage rate adopted in online data collection which is between 34% to 36% (Daikeler et al., 2020; Shih, & Fan, 2008). Efforts have been made to increase the response rate through phone calls and email reminders, but no response was received after two months of the given time period.

4.2 Profile of respondents

In terms of age, 83.3% of respondents are between 21 and 23 years old, 83% are female students, 39.2% are studying in their 4th semester, 57.5% have between 4 and 6 siblings, 80.8% have less than 3 siblings who are still in school, 81.7% still have parents, and the majority of them are students in the Human Resource Management Program (23.3%) followed by Business Administration (5.8%) and Development Management (5%). While from the aspect of father's occupation, the highest percentages are those who are retired (17.5%), followed by farmers (11.7%) and self-employed (10.8%). As for the mother's occupation, the majority of them are housewives and do not work (61.6%), followed by self-employed (7.5%) and shop assistants (3.3%).

4.3 Descriptive Analysis of Mental Wellbeing

Table 2 shows the frequency score and percentage for each mental well-being item. For instance, the results of the study show that the highest number of respondents which is 56 (46.7%) choose to agree that they are optimistic about their future, while the lowest number of respondents which is 2 (1.7%) choose to strongly disagree with this statement. In addition, some respondents namely 62 (51.7%) agreed that they are useful, while no respondent strongly disagreed with this statement. Almost part of the respondents v61 (50.8%) agree that they feel relaxed, but from the total number, only 2 (1.7%) strongly disagree that they feel relaxed.

Next, 61 (50.8%) choose to agree with the statement that they feel interested in other people, and only 4 (3.3%) respondents strongly disagree regarding their interest in other people. In addition, 71

(59.2%) agreed that they have energy to use, but only 1 (0.8%) respondents chose to strongly disagree with this statement. For the statement "I deal with problems well", there are 62 (51.7%) respondents chose to agree with this statement, but there were no respondents who chose to strongly disagree with the statement that they deal with problems well. A total of 66 (55%) respondents also agree that they think clearly, while 1 (0.8%) strongly disagree with this statement. The study also explained that as many as 52 (43.3%) agree with the statement that they feel good about themselves, while the overall results of the study show that only 2 (1.7%) respondents strongly disagree with this statement.

The mean for all mental well-being items is between 3.66 - 4.19.The lowest mean was recorded for the item "I feel close to other people" (mean=3.66), followed by the item "I feel interested in socializing and interacting with other people." (mean=3.74) and the item “I feel good about myself” (mean=3.79). While the highest mean was recorded for the item "I am interested in new things" (mean=4.19). Referring to Clarke et al., (2011), scale scores for all mental well-being items ranging from 14 to 70 or more indicate a positive level of mental well-being (geater positive mental well-being). Based on the total score obtained for all the items concerned, the study found that the range of mental well-being scores for 120 respondents was between 23 - 65. This score shows that the respondents (asnaf UUM students) have a positive (good) level of mental well-being.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage scores for mental well-being

No	Item	Min	SD	Scale				
				Strongly disagree	Do not agree	Not sure	Agreed	Strongly Agree
	Mental Wellbeing							
1	I feel optimistic about the future.	3.95	.934	2 (1.7%)	11 (9.2%)	15 (12.5%)	56 (46.7%)	36 (30%)
2	I feel useful.	3.97	.788	0	8 (6.7%)	20 (16.7%)	62 (51.7%)	30 (25%)
3	I feel relaxed.	3.93	.877	2 (1.7%)	7 (5.8%)	28 (23.3%)	61 (50.8%)	22 (18.3%)
4	I feel interested to know and communicate with other people.	3.74	.865	4 (3.3%)	8 (6.7%)	26 (21.7%)	61 (50.8%)	21 (17.5%)
5	I have energy to use.	4.11	.742	1 (0.8%)	5 (4.2%)	10 (8.3%)	71 (59.2%)	33 (27.5%)
6	I deal with problems well.	3.91	.820	0	10 (8.3%)	21 (17.5%)	62 (51.7%)	27 (22.5%)
7	I think clearly.	3.98	.943	1 (0.8%)	7 (5.8%)	18 (15%)	66 (55%)	28 (23.3%)

8	I feel good about myself.	3.79	.943	2 (1.7%)	13 (10.8%)	25 (20.8%)	52 (43.3%)	28 (23.3%)
9	I feel close to others.	3.66	1.065	5 (4.2%)	17 (14.2%)	19 (15.8%)	55 (45.8%)	24 (20%)
10	I feel confident.	3.87	.907	1 (0.8%)	14 (11.7%)	17 (14.2%)	60 (50%)	28 (23.3%)
11	I can make my own decisions about things.	3.94	.843	2 (1.7%)	7 (5.8%)	15 (12.5%)	68 (56.7%)	28 (23.3%)
12	I feel loved.	3.90	.893	3 (2.5%)	5 (4.2%)	23 (19.2%)	59 (49.2%)	30 (25%)
13	I am interested in new things.	4.19	.748	2 (1.7%)	3 (2.5%)	8 (6.7%)	66 (55%)	41 (34.2%)
	Mental Wellbeing Score	Minimum = 23 Maximum = 65 Min = 50.93 Std Deviation = 8.44						

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As described in descriptive analysis of mental wellbeing section, the study found that the range of mental well-being scores was between 23 - 65. Fortunately, the finding shows that Asnaf students in UUM have a good level of mental well-being. This means that even though they have to struggle with limited financial support from their parents, they are able to control and manage mental strength in persuing their study in UUM.

However, there are a lot issues that need to be deal with their oevrall aspect of mental wellbeing. Regarding feedback obtained from open ended questions, respondents were asked to give their views on mental well-being issues. Based on the findings, the research team found that there were three main issues raised by the respondents, namely isolation from family and friends, life's needs not being met and the problem of relationship instability between family members and parents at home. This is in line with this study which found that almost 65% - 70% believe that their mental well-being is greatly influenced by a person's relationship with friends (peers), family and society. While mental well-being is linked to their ability to control their emotional level (happy or sad), and stress, depression or anxiety which may affect their level of mental well-being. and interfere with daily life.

In the same development, respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with the current level of mental well-being. Findings show that more than 75% of respondents answered 'YES' satisfied and the rest answered 'NO' satisfied with their level of mental and social well-being. Among the reasons given are (i) thinking about a matter too deeply, especially for matters involving individuals/other people; (ii) not addressing the challenges faced maturely; (iii) lack of getting the opinion of other people who can be trusted to solve a problem; (iv) not managing stress in a good

and suitable way; and (vi) less mixing and mingling with the public (fraternity networks and interweaving), especially in social activities.

Regarding factors that may influence mental welleing, the majority of students stated that good family relationships will have a positive impact on their mental health. The results of the study found that almost 80% of respondents stated that if the family is more understanding, supportive of each other, easy to discuss, and a peaceful home environment can improve mental well-being. Meanwhile, three questions were asked to respondents related to family conflict. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (90%) stated that family conflict occurs due to conflict or misunderstanding between family members. There are also respondents who state that family conflict involves physical abuse to family members. In addition, 7% of respondents gave different perceptions of the effects and impacts of family conflicts such as family conflict is something that cannot be avoided and family conflict occurs because there is interference from outsiders.

From the aspect of the influence of the use of digital technology on mental and social well-being, all respondents think that the use of digital technology can affect the mental and social well-being of individuals. They believe that digital technology has positive and negative effects on an individual. On the positive side, digital technology can help from the aspect of communication, access to the latest information and the learning process. While in terms of negative effects, students think excessive and unethical use of social media can result in a person being mentally affected such as the effects of cyber bullying and lack of self-confidence

Last but not least, Asnaf students also shared their opinion about suggestion for improving mental wellbeing.In general, respondents are of the view that mental well-being is a very important aspect for a person in life. A person who is good mentally and socially will be happier in life and able to live the challenges and tests of life well and rationally. In the current context (challenging and stressful times), there are respondents who note that mental well-being is very critical to ensure life as a student is not disrupted/affected. With mental stability, students can focus, stay calm and think well and reduce stress or depression. In short, the respondents concluded that mental well-being is influential and important to students in studies (curriculum and co-curriculum) as well as in daily life. Therefore, based on the issues, problems and importance of mental well-being that has been mentioned above, most Asnaf students shared almost similar views and recommendations, namely: (i) increase self-involvement with social welfare programs; (ii) avoid being silent for a long time with negative thoughts; (iii) strengthen relationships with family members, friends and acquaintances; don not burden yourself; and (iv) organize and divide time wisely; manage yourself in the right way and control emotions.

In a nutshell, it can be seen the importance of each member of the community playing a very active and effective role in creating a conducive and comfortable atmosphere to ensure the mental well-being of each individual. In the context of this study, Asnaf students need a high level of focus and commitment from family and other parties such as university management, lecturers, and friends on campus.

6. CONCLUSION

Issues related to the mental well-being of Asnaf students became the main focus in this study after looking at some basic issue such as the lack of empirical studies that report on the level of their mental well-being. Looking at it from a broader point of view, living a life as a student squeezed by financial problems, and increases of cost of living have an impact on their mental social well-being. This can be linked to statistics showing that a total of 3220 counseling sessions related to issues such as mental health, education were conducted in 2022.In this study, the finding shows that Asnaf students in UUM have a good level of mental well-being. However, three main issues raised by the respondents, namely isolation from family and friends, life's needs not being met and the problem of relationship instability between family members and parents at home need to be considered in the process of developing mental wellbeing programs or activities in the future. Regarding factors that may influence mental welleing, good family relationships has play significant role and family conflict should be avoided.

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