International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences
2017, Vol. 7, No. 10
ISSN: 2222-6990

A Descriptive Study of Wellness among Undergraduate Students in a Public University in Malaysia

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DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i10/3407 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i10/3407

Abstract
Wellness among university students is vital to produce well-balanced and high-quality graduates as envisioned by the Malaysian National Education Philosophy. This study aims to examine wellness among undergraduate students in a public university in Malaysia. This study employed a survey method using cross-sectional design on 496 students in various semesters and from various faculties. The instrument used in this study is Wellness Five Factor Inventory for Adult (5FWel-A). This paper highlights descriptive findings based on a large study conducted under the university research grants scheme. Descriptive statistical analysis shows that "Essential Self Score" was the highest mean score among the students while "Physical Self score" was the lowest mean score among them. Based on the results, the findings of the study are discussed and implications of the study were put forward.
Keywords: Wellness, Wellness Five Factors, Undergraduate Student, Graduates, University,

Introduction

University life is a transition period experienced by students which brings with it a range of new challenges. In preparing themselves for a new phase in life and future employment, students are faced with high expectations in terms of achieving academic excellence (Uehara et al., 2010). This situation often takes a toll on their physical and mental health. According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Health known as the National Health and Morbidity Survey III (NHMS III), Malaysians aged between 16 (10%) and 24 years (26%) have a higher tendency to commit suicide than those of any other age (IPH, 2008) due to psychological problems related to stress and anxiety (Dyrbye et al., 2006).

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), "wellness" does not only imply freedom from any disease and physical illness, but also means having optimal health in all aspects of a person's life and his environment including physical, mental and social aspects (Mackey, 2009; Roscoe, 2009). Wellness also relates to an individual's holistic lifestyle that integrates six healthy dimensions, namely emotional, intellectual, environmental, physical, spiritual, and social (Sackney, Noonan and Miller, 2000). Thus, wellness can be understood as a holistic

construct that leads people towards a healthy lifestyle and developing a positive meaning in life and in their relationships with the environment.

Wellness is also an important agenda put forward by the Malaysian government to all university graduates. The Malaysian Education Development Plan 2015 has outlined the national goals of education to produce holistic, entrepreneurial, and balanced graduates (Ministry of Higher Education, 2015). The Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020) also seeks to enhance human capital through quality graduates who are knowledgeable, skillful, and have positive attitudes. Furthermore, the Graduate Action Plan (2012-2017) outlines efforts to prepare students for employment through a good curriculum that prepares students to not only have excellent basic knowledge of subjects but to also have competence in terms of skills, qualities, and attributes desired by employers. Thus, research related to wellness of university students needs to be conducted to identify the level of wellness and quality of life experienced by them. This paper discusses the descriptive study of wellness conducted on undergraduate university students in one public university in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Numerous studies on wellness among university and college students have shown the gender factor to be a significant element in differentiating wellness among students. Roothman, Kirsten and Wissing (2003) and Jofy (2014) in their studies found that male students achieved high scores in physical activity, display of positive thinking, flexibility, self-esteem, and emotional stability, while female students achieved high scores in emotional expression, somatic symptoms, religious spirituality, and social elements. Jofy's study also indicated that perceived problem-solving skills and leisure satisfaction were among the factors contributing to wellness among male and female students. A survey conducted by Crutcher (2015) also indicated no significant difference in perceived wellness and stress among university students (comprising 256 athletes and 233 non-athletes) in Midwest USA. High level of perceived stress is a significant predictor for low level of wellness, while high level of social support is a significant predictor for low level of stress and high level of wellness among students.

A survey conducted by Young, Turnage-Butterbaugh, Degges-White and Mossing (2015) also found that demographic factors have influence on wellness. MANOVA analysis of five wellness sub-scale indicated that academic probation students achieved a high wellness score compared to the non-academic probation students. Researchers have also found wellness to be correlated with nutrition and healthy lifestyle. Lopez (2016) highlighted that students' attitudes and exposure to wellness activities were among the predictors of their level of involvement in physical activities and their high intake of nutritious food. Fino (2010) indicated that 5587 college students from minority groups, particularly female students in the USA, did not take part in exercise and eating nutritious food.

Method

This quantitative study applies the form of "cross-sectional" survey design conducted on 496 undergraduate students at a public university in Malaysia. The participants, who consisted of students from various faculties in various semesters, were randomly selected. They completed the 5F-Wel A inventory either using online or offline modes of survey distribution. Consent was obtained from each of the participants prior to the study. The descriptive findings presented in the study are based on a large portion of the study conducted under the university research grant scheme.

Instruments

This study employs the Five Factor Wellness Inventory for Adult (5FWel-A) by Myers and Sweeney (2005). The 5FWel-A comprises 91 items (73 attitudinal and behavioral statements and 18 additional experimental items). Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). The 91 questions are grouped to contribute to 17 subscales which can be further broken down into five factors of self that include “Creative”, “Coping”, “Social”, “Essential”, and “Physical”. The “Creative Self” dimension includes the subscales thinking, emotion, control, work, and positive humor. The “Coping Self” dimension includes the subscales leisure, stress management, self-worth, and realistic beliefs. The “Social Self” dimension includes the subscales friendship and love. The “Essential Self” dimension includes the subscales spirituality, gender identity, cultural identity, and self-care.

In addition to measuring wellness factor, the 5FWel-A identified four contexts within the individual functions, which therefore impact one’s wellness and vice versa. The four contexts addressed are local contexts (which include micro level systems such as family and community), institutional contexts (which include religion, government, business, and education), global contexts (which include politics, culture, global events, and the environment) and chronometrical contexts (which recognise the relevance of development over time). The final measure included in the 5FWel-A is a validity index. A single item, namely the life satisfaction index, measures overall satisfaction with one’s life, and correlates significantly and positively with total wellness (Myers & Sweeney, 2005, p.12).

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Findings

Table 1
Respondents' Demographic Information

Description		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	109	22.0
	Female	387	78.0
Faculty	FPPM	51	10.3
	FSM	40	8.1
	FSSK	61	12.3
	FBK	80	16.1
	FMSP	19	3.8
	FPTV	45	9.1
	FSKIK	77	15.5
	FSK	71	14.3
	FPE	52	10.5
Race	Malay	406	81.9
	Chinese	38	7.7
	Indian	13	2.6
	Others	39	7.9
Semester	One	200	40.3
	Two	32	6.5
	Three	82	16.5
	Four	39	7.9
	Five	95	19.2
	Six	26	5.2
	Seven	10	2.0
	Eight	12	2.4
Education status prior to entering the university	STPM	316	63.7
	Matriculation	180	36.3
Status	Single	484	97.6
	Married	12	2.4

N=496

Based on the table above, a total of 106 respondents (21.8%) were male students while 381 respondents (78.2%) were female students. There were nine faculties involved in this study, namely the Faculty of Human Development, Faculty of Science and Mathematics, Faculty of Sports Science and Coaching, Faculty of Languages and Communication, Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Faculty of Technical and Vocational, Faculty of Computing and Creative Industries, Faculty of Human Sciences, and Faculty of Management and Economics.

A total of 406 (81.9%) respondents were Malays, a total of 38 (7.7%) were Chinese, 13 (2.6%) were Indians, and 39 (7.9%) were from other racial groups. These respondents were students of various semesters; 200 (40.3%) were students of Semester One, 32 (6.5%) in Semester Two, 82 (16.5%) were in Semester Three, 39 (7.9%) were in Semester Four, 95 (19.2%) in Semester Five, 26 (5.2%) in Semester Six, 10 (2.0%) were students of Semester seven, and 12 (2.4%) were students in Semester Eight. Semester One and Two represented Year 1, Semester 3 and 4 represented Year 2, Semester 4 and 5 represented Year 3, while Semester 6,7, and 8 represented students' final year. The highest level of education among respondents prior to entering the university were STPM (Upper Six grade in secondary school) (316 (63.7%) and Matriculation (A-Level) 180 (36.3%). A total of 12 (2.4%) respondents were married while a total of 484 (97.6%) were not married.

Table 2

Mean analysis of wellness among students

Wellness Element	Mean	Std. Deviation
Creative Self	**451.11**	**48.83**
Thinking	78.42	10.64
Emotion	77.36	10.24
Control	77.67	10.96
Work	73.10	9.87
Positive Humor	72.38	12.24
Coping Self	**409.07**	**38.33**
Leisure	74.63	9.88
Stress management	77.19	10.83
Self-worth	83.05	10.29
Realistic Belief	76.02	9.78
Social self	**512.66**	**62.39**
Friendship	80.33	10.70
Love	83.72	11.65
Physical Self	**349.01**	**57.20**
Exercise	73.21	13.20
Nutrition	66.40	13.50
Essential Self	**536.90**	**47.37**
Spirituality	88.18	10.14
Gender identity	82.28	10.33
Cultural identity	82.97	10.99
Self-care	90.20	10.33
Local context	82.46	10.95
Institutional	81.60	10.36
Global	78.29	12.10
Chronometrical	78.02	10.76
Life satisfaction index	82.46	15.07

N=496

The analysis of mean was used to identify the mean score of wellness elements among students. The findings among the five key elements of wellness (Creative Self, Coping Self, Social Self, Physical Self and Essential Self) indicated that the highest mean score was Essential Self (M = 536.90, SD = 47.37), followed by Social Self (M = 512, SD = 62.39), Creative Self (M = 451.11, SD = 48.83), and Coping Self (M = 409.07, SD = 38.33). The lowest mean score among students was Physical Self (M = 349.01, SD = 57.20).

Based on the sub-construct of the five key elements of wellness, Self-Care was found to reach the highest mean score among students (M = 90.20, SD = 10.33), followed by Spirituality (M= 88.18, SD= 10.14). Meanwhile, the lowest sub-construct of physical self was Nutrition (M = 66.40, SD = 13:50) and Exercise (M= 73.21, SD= 13.20).

In terms of the contextual elements experienced by students, the highest mean among students was the Local Context (M = 82.46, SD = 10.95) followed by Institutional Context (M = 81.60, SD = 10.36) and Global Context (M = 78.27, SD = 12.10), while the Chronometrical Context was the lowest mean (M = 78.02, SD = 10.76).

Discussion

Based on the findings of descriptive statistics, the highest mean score among university students was Essential Self Score (M = 536.90, SD = 47.37), followed by Social Self Score (M = 512, SD = 62.39), Creative Self Score (M = 451.11, SD = 48.83), Coping Self Score (M = 409.07, SD = 38.33) and the lowest was Physical Self Score (M = 349.01, SD = 57.20).

These findings are not consistent with the study of Osborn (2005) which found that the highest mean score of wellness among university students were Physical and Social while the lowest mean score was Spirituality. However, they are consistent with DiMonda (2005) which claimed that there was a statistically significant difference in the six aspects of wellness and the emotional aspects of the GPA and self-care. The findings in this study are also consistent with Bhatti, Batool and Riaz (2011) that indicated spiritual wellness had a significant positive correlation with the overall quality of life, including the dimensions studied.

In this study, “Essential Self” refers to the internalised meaning of life experienced by individuals, and their relationships with others. Essential Self consists of subconstructs of Spirituality, Gender Identity, Cultural Identity and Personal Care. These are among the constructs that build the students’ self-esteem. Essential Self includes students’ sense of awareness of their own customs, language, culture, and religion that are integral in shaping the development of their characters. This term is in accordance with the concept of cultural identity set by Taylor (1999) that refers to an individual’s perception about various things, such as their relationships and the interdependence of interaction between social status, language, race,

ethnicity, values, and behaviors that affect the individual's entire life and experiences in the world.

There is no doubt that the most important element in shaping students' identity is education, be it in a formal or informal way. University life is a process that enables students to build their self-identities including having their own sense of spiritual meaning, gender identity, cultural identity, and self-care. These processes can be successfully achieved through their involvement in various curricular and co-curricular activities. This fact is reinforced by Castells (2011) who pointed out that the individual identity is built by the institutions that have dominated the individuals' entire lives, where they feel greatly appreciated. According to Regina and Candis (2013), individuals who possess cultural identities are able to have a clear definition of self in terms of his or her identity. Exposure to experiences through involvement in various activities conducted by the university has a significant potential in shaping individuals' identities. Therefore, these findings indicate the students' clear definition of self where the assimilation of their roles and responsibilities as university students has taken place.

The findings also indicate that the subconstruct "Care" (M = 90) is the highest mean in the Essential Self Element. Care, being the well-being of individuals through self-care and personal security, is closely related to the students' understanding of their roles within the university, where they realise that they are responsible for taking care of themselves in the midst of dealing with stress in work and other related claims. Moses, Oguntuyo and Adedugbe (2015) found that practical nutrition and activities related to lifestyle significantly affects the well-being and lifestyle of students. This fact is also highlighted by Self-Care Theory (self-care) by Orem (2001) which emphasised the importance of an individual's actions to maintain his or her basic functions of life. It is a condition where individuals can fulfill their basic needs independently and can achieve optimum performance of self. Self-care is influenced by two factors, namely therapeutic self-care and self-care institutions. Obviously, students in this study embraced their roles in self-care based on their adherence to the mission and vision stipulated by the university.

However, the findings show that "Physical Self" element and the sub-construct "Nutrition" (M = 66.40, SD = 13:50) scored the lowest mean. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Gan, Mohd Nasir, Zalilah, and Hazizi (2011), who indicated that a majority of respondents, comprising both male and female students, do not take nutritious breakfast. More than half of the respondents are found not to meet the criteria of Malaysian Recommended Nutrient Intake (RNI) for energy, vitamin C, thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, iron, and calcium. The study also pointed out students' poor diet, low nutrient intake, and a high rate of underweight students. Furthermore, Moy, Johari Ismail, Mahad, Tie and Wan Ismail (2009) stressed that among the factors which contributed to this problem are students' time constraints, no appetite, not liking to eat in the morning or sleeping too late to get up early.

Further, these findings are also consistent with Lee and Loke Yuen (2005) who showed that very few students (6.5-27.1%) take responsibility for health awareness; only 31.2% participated in various physical activities and only 13.8% regularly work out. Less than half (35.2%) of the students take fruits and vegetables daily. According to Lee, Leung and Leung (1994), university students often do not eat a proper breakfast and simply grab a snack or fast food. In addition, they are found to be less involved in exercise as most of their times are allocated for academic matters (Lee and Yuen, 2005). Although health is highly valued by university students where a majority of them do realise the importance of health and nutrition, only a few of them practice a healthy lifestyle, with regular exercise and consumption of healthy food (Oleckno & Blacconiere, 1990; White, 1999). According to Carter-Parker, Edwards & Mc Cleary- Jones (2012), poor lifestyle among students leads to symptoms of obesity. Therefore, a healthy lifestyle and good eating habits are two vital elements to achieve good health status.

Implications of the study

The findings of this study provide significant implications to the understanding of wellness and its practices. They can serve as a foundation for the university to understand students' overall wellness, in order to be able to design appropriate activities and programs to cater to their needs.

The findings also illustrate that the implementation of wellness needs to be integrated with the university's curriculum. It is time for the university to incorporate the culture of wellness into its curriculum and way of life. The university also needs to set up appropriate campaigns to promote healthy lifestyle among students. Certain rewards should be introduced to enhance students' overall wellness, especially given that they are now engaged in gadgets and a wide range of technological equipment that lead to sedentary lifestyles.

The study also provides feedback to counselors in clinical settings, where they can explore dimensions of clients' wellness and their relationships with experiences and life goals by using various assessments and therapeutic activities. Further, according to Roscoe (2009), psychoeducation can also be implemented to educate clients towards understanding their state of wellness.

Conclusion

This study highlights the overall wellness among students in a university. In this study, the element of Essential Self was the highest mean score among students while the lowest score displayed was for the Physical Self. Students' Essential Self Score dimensions include the subscales Spirituality, Gender Identity, Cultural Identity and Self-Care, indicating clear sense of identity as university students. This study also place emphasis on the importance of practicing a healthy lifestyle as results indicated fewer students engaged in physical activities and had nutritious foods. This study brought about certain implications upon the university in terms of its role in enhancing wellness in the lives of its students.

Acknowledgments
The authors would like to acknowledge and thank all the participants for their contributions to this research project. This research project is funded by the University Research Grant Scheme.

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