

Psychological Well-Being and Social Support Among Form Five Students in Rural Areas

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Abstract

Psychological well-being plays a crucial role in a students' life, enabling them to realize their potential and function optimally to achieve excellence. This study aims to identify the relationship between psychological well-being and social support among form five students in rural areas. This study uses a quantitative method design in the form of a survey study. The respondents of this study were a total of 120 secondary school students aged 17 from three rural schools in Klang. This study employs the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS) to assess the psychological well-being of students and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) to evaluate the level of social support among form five students in rural areas. The research data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29. The findings showed that the level of psychological well-being and social support among form five students in the rural areas are a moderate level. Pearson correlation analysis showed that social support has a significant relationship with psychological well-being among form five students in rural areas. This study has implications for all concerned parties to strive to assist students in developing positive psychological well-being, enabling them to achieve excellence in life.

Keywords: Psychological Well-Being, Social Support, Form Five, Rural Areas.

Introduction

Psychological well-being is a vital aspect of a student's life. Adolescents, in particular, experience various transitions in physical, intellectual, emotional, and social maturity, all of which influence their psychological well-being. These transitions can impact a student's psychological well-being both positively and negatively. According to Ryff (1995), psychological well-being refers to the realization of one's true potential and the ability to function effectively to achieve satisfaction in life. Ryff's view is supported by Diener (2011) who states satisfaction in life determines the psychological well-being of an individual. According to Huppert (2009), psychological well-being encompasses not only the development of an individual's potential but also the ability to manage negative emotions and maintain control over one's life. Psychological well-being can also be assessed through

the cognitive and affective factors an individual considers in their pursuit of happiness (Trudel-Fitzgerald et al., 2021). Overall, psychological well-being encompasses a blend of positive emotions, such as happiness, and optimal individual functioning. In this study, psychological well-being is a crucial factor, particularly for form five students preparing for their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination, which will shape their future careers. Understanding the factors that contribute to psychological well-being is especially important for students in rural areas who face more challenging obstacles

In the context of today's competitive environment, the psychological well-being of students is an increasingly concerning issue. Past studies show that the level of psychological well-being of secondary school students is at a low level (Wan & Ahmad, 2020). When viewed in the context of secondary school students in rural areas, the study conducted by Rathakrishnan et al., (2020) showed that the level of psychological well-being of secondary school students in rural areas in Sabah is also at a worrying level. Low levels of psychological well-being among secondary school students have been found to contribute to serious social problems. Based on the research conducted by Kutty (2022), social problems and criminal behaviors among secondary school students in Felda Chini, Pahang are caused by the psychological well-being of students which is at a moderate level. This study also indicates that inadequate psychological well-being among students is a primary factor contributing to their difficulty in distinguishing between moral and immoral behaviors. According to Páez-Gallego et al., (2020), individuals with good psychological well-being tend to employ adaptive decision-making strategies, enabling them to make reasonable and rational decisions. Therefore, it is evident that a student's psychological well-being is a crucial factor in fostering a more productive next generation.

Psychological well-being is closely associated with an individual's mental health. According to Kaur & Pooja (2022), psychological well-being and mental health are two dimensions that mutually influence each other. Individuals who have a high level of psychological well-being are more likely to have better mental health. Adolescents are often described as being in a state of 'storm and stress,' characterized by conflict, tension, and hormonal changes. Students who maintain good psychological well-being are better equipped to navigate these challenges and are less likely to experience mental health issues (Holliman et al., 2021; Taifor et al., 2021). This coincides with the study conducted by Salihan & Din (2023) that showed that secondary school students who had high psychological well-being had better mental health. Research conducted by Rahim et al., (2023) found that low levels of psychological well-being among university students are linked to increased instances of depression and anxiety. The lack of satisfaction and happiness in the lives of students with low psychological well-being impedes their ability to manage their lives effectively, which adversely impacts their mental health. This situation is concerning, as statistics from The National Health and Morbidity Survey (2023) reveal that the rate of depression among teenagers has doubled from 2019 to 2023, with a prevalence of 4.6% among those aged 16 and over, equating to approximately one million individuals. Consequently, maintaining a high level of psychological well-being is essential for promoting healthy mental health among students. On the other hand, mental health issues can also affect an individual's level of psychological well-being. A student's life encompasses a range of scenarios that can increase their susceptibility to stress. Previous studies indicate that students are at risk of experiencing

academic stress due to factors such as heavy workload (Yang et al., 2021), school belonging (Abdollahi et al., 2020) and the influence of family, friends and peers (Love et al., 2020). Academic pressure adversely affects students' emotional, cognitive, physical, and behavioral aspects. These challenges hinder students from experiencing positive emotions and diminish their overall satisfaction and happiness. This indirectly contributes to the deterioration of a student's psychological well-being. This finding is consistent with studies by Selian and Rosli (2020) and Aziz (2024), which demonstrate that academic pressure among university students significantly affects their psychological well-being. Their research found that academic pressure induces feelings of sadness, restlessness, and anxiety, all of which negatively impact students' psychological well-being. Similarly, in the context of secondary school students preparing for important examinations, a study by Omar and Abd Rashid (2023) revealed that form six students experience low levels of psychological well-being due to the academic pressure they face. During this phase, achieving academic excellence in public examinations, such as the Sijil Pelajaran Tinggi Malaysia (STPM), is a key priority for students as it influences their educational trajectory. Consequently, students, particularly those in their final year of schooling, experience significant pressure to excel academically (Wuthrich & Azzi, 2020). If academic pressure is not effectively managed, students may experience emotional disturbances, leading to a disruption in their psychological well-being. Based on the research done by Khan et al., (2023) such situation was also found to have caused suicidal thought among teenagers in Johor Bharu.

There are many factors that contribute to psychological well-being of secondary school students. Social support is one of the factors frequently linked to the psychological well-being of secondary school students. Social support is a crucial element, particularly for secondary school students who are navigating a challenging developmental stage. Research has shown that a strong social support significantly influences students' psychological well-being. A study conducted by Shamuni et al., (2021) on university students indicated that their psychological well-being was significantly low during the curfew imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as they had to isolate themselves from their peers. The curfews restricted social interaction and deprived students of essential social support. Gayatri et al., (2023) also found that social support enhances psychological well-being among university students in Bali. The study explains that social support fosters positive relationships with others and promotes self-development among students. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Zainuddin and Kutty (2022), who identified social support as a key motivator that empowers individuals to navigate life's challenges and achieve their goals. They argue that social support enhances the sense of belonging, which, in turn, promotes positive psychological well-being among students. According to Ryff's model of psychological well-being, nurturing the domains of positive relationships and personal development, as highlighted in both studies, is essential for maintaining an individual's psychological well-being.

Additionally, social support is crucial in assisting students with psychological issues. A deficiency in social support has been linked to mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and stress. The findings of the study conducted by Mamat & Ghaffar (2023) on Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) graduates studying at Politeknik Kota Kinabalu showed that lack of social support from parents caused depression among students. Support from family members, particularly parents, is crucial as parents serve as a key source of guidance and a

safe space for students to express their feelings. Without parental support, students may feel helpless and lose motivation to confront life's challenges, which can indirectly lead to mental health issues. This is consistent with the findings of Pramukti et al., (2020), which indicate that university students in Thailand experience significant anxiety, while Indonesian university students exhibit suicidal thoughts as a result of inadequate social support. In addition to parental support, social support from friends, teachers, and significant others has been shown to positively impact students' affective domains (Gusniarti et al., 2023). Thus, it is clear that social support plays a critical role in fostering positive psychological well-being among students."

While previous research has explored psychological well-being and support systems among secondary school students, there is a paucity of studies specifically targeting form five students in rural areas. This focus is crucial, as form five students in rural regions are particularly vulnerable to situations that may compromise their psychological well-being. Consequently, this study aims to offer valuable insights for parents, teachers, and researchers to support and enhance the psychological well-being of form five students in these areas. The objectives of this study are as follows:-

- I. Examine the level of psychological well-being and social support among form five students in rural areas.
- II. Examine the relationship between social support and psychological well-being among form five students in rural areas.

Methodology

This research utilized a survey design. The respondents of this study are form five students in three secondary schools located in rural areas in the Klang district. These three secondary schools were chosen because these three schools are located in rural areas in the Klang district. The respondents of this study were a total of 120 form five students who will be sitting for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination in the year 2024/2025. The sampling method used by the researcher is the random sampling method.

The instruments used in this study are the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS) introduced by Carol (1989) and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) introduced by Zimet (1988). The Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS) contains 42 items that aims to measure the level of psychological well-being. This instrument includes six dimensions of psychological well-being, namely autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations and purpose in life (Ryff, 1989). This instrument was translated into the Malay language by Othman (2014). Findings indicated that the Malay version of Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS) is reliable (Cronbach's alpha= 0.91) and valid ($r= 0.94$) when employed with school teachers (Mokhtar & Aman, 2017). The response format for all items involved a six-point Likert scale which are, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2= Somewhat Disagree, 3= Somewhat Disagree, 4= Somewhat Agree, 5= Somewhat Agree and 6 = Strongly Agree. The interpretation of the scores for the six-point Likert scale are as follows:-

Table 1.0

Interpretation of the 6-Point Likert Mean Score

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00-2.66	Low
2.67-4.33	Moderate
4.34-6.00	High

Source : Yusoff (2020)

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) is a 12-item instrument designed to measure an individual's level of social support. This instrument includes three dimensions of social support which are family, friends and significant others. The Malay version of Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) used in this study is translated by Din et al., (2024). The instrument exhibited an excellent fit in the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), with satisfactory divergent and convergent validity and factor loadings ranging from 0.80 to 0.90. It also displays strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.91. Thus, this instrument demonstrates high validity and reliability (Lee, 2017). This instrument uses a 7-point scale from 1, strongly disagree to 7, strongly agree. The interpretation of the scores for the six-point Likert scale are as follows:

Table 2.0

Interpretation of the 7-Point Likert Mean Score

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.0 -2.9	Low
3.0-5.0	Moderate
5.1-7.0	High

Source : Zimet et al., (1988)

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29.0. This research, conducted as a survey, employed a descriptive study approach to determine the mean values, standard deviations, and levels of psychological well-being and social support among the respondents. Subsequently, Pearson's correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between psychological well-being and social support among form five students in rural areas.

Research Findings**Levels of Psychological Well-Being Among Form Five Students in Rural Area**

In this study, the level of psychological well-being is measured based on 6 dimensions, namely autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations and purpose in life. Based on Table 3.0, the dimension of autonomy (mean = 2.57, SD = 0.630) and self-acceptance (mean = 2.59, SD = 0.595) are assessed as being at a low level. In contrast, the dimension of environmental mastery (mean = 3.00, SD = 0.607), personal growth (mean = 2.93, SD = 0.615), positive relations (mean = 2.99, SD = 0.649), and purpose in life (mean = 3.48, SD = 0.564) are at a moderate level. Overall, these results indicate that the psychological well-being score among form five students in rural areas is at a moderate level (mean = 2.92, SD = 0.267)

Table 3.0

Mean and Standard Deviation of the Level of Psychological Well-Being

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Autonomy	2.57	.630	Low
Environmental Mastery	3.00	.607	Moderate
Personal Growth	2.93	.615	Moderate
Positive Relations	2.99	.649	Moderate
Purpose in Life	3.48	.564	Moderate
Self-acceptance	2.59	.595	Low
Overall psychological well-being	2.92	.267	Moderate

(Level: Low = 1.00 - 2.66, Moderate = 2.67 - 4.33, High = 4.34 - 6.00)

Level of Support System Among Form Five Students in Rural Area

In this study, the level of the support system was assessed based on three dimensions: friends, family, and significant others. According to Table 4.0, the dimension of significant others (mean = 2.74, SD = 1.006) is at a low level, while the dimensions of family (mean = 3.08, SD = 1.044) and friends (mean = 3.98, SD = 1.006) are at a moderate level. Overall, these results indicate that the support system score among form five students in rural areas is at a moderate level (mean= 3.27, SD = 0.599)

Table 4.0

Mean and Standard Deviation of the Level of Support System

Dimensions	Min	SD	Interpretation
Significant Others	2.74	1.006	Low
Family	3.08	1,044	Moderate
Friends	3.98	1.006	Moderate
Overall support system	3.27	.599	Moderate

(Level: Low = 1.0 - 2.9, Moderate = 3.0 - 5.0, High = 5.1 - 7.0)

The Relationship Between Social Support and Psychological Well-Being Among Form Five Students in Rural Areas.

In this part, correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between social support and psychological well-being among form five students in rural areas. Table 5.0 shows the results of the Pearson correlation analysis that has been carried out.

Table 5.0

The Relationship Between Social Support and Psychological Well-Being

Social Support	Psychological well-being	
	r	Sig. P
Significant Others	0.205*	.025
Family	0.257**	.005
Friends	0.259**	.004
Overall Social Support	0.417**	.000

** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05

The results of the study, as shown in Table 5.0, indicate that the dimension of significant others (r = 0.205, p < 0.05), family (r = 0.257, p < 0.01), and friends (r = 0.259, p < 0.01) each

have a significant relationship with psychological well-being among form five students in rural areas. Overall social support ($r = 0.417$, $p < 0.01$) has a significant relationship with psychological well-being among form five students in rural areas.

Discussion

The study's findings reveal that form five students in rural areas possessed moderate levels of overall psychological well-being. This result is consistent with the study conducted by Kutty (2022), which found that secondary school students in Felda Chini, Pahang, also have moderate psychological well-being. Similarly, Awang and Singka (2020) reported that secondary school students in Kanowit district, Sarawak, show moderate psychological well-being. However, these findings contrast with those of Omar and Abd Rashid (2023), who stated that form six students preparing for the Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) examination experience low psychological well-being due to high academic pressure. Nevertheless, the psychological well-being of Form Five students in this study is not as severely impacted as observed in previous research, despite their preparation for the significant public examination, Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). This is likely attributed to the students' use of effective coping strategies to manage academic pressure. According to Sanu et al. (2020), such strategies foster resilience and help mitigate negative emotions, ultimately positively affecting students' psychological well-being. Additionally, religion may play a role in maintaining psychological well-being, as indicated by Ahmad et al. (2022), who found that religious individuals possess inner strength that enables them to overcome obstacles. Although the psychological well-being of the students in this study is not critically low, the presence of moderate levels of psychological well-being remains a concern.

The psychological well-being of secondary school students in this study was analyzed based on six dimensions, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, personal growth, positive relations and purpose in life. The findings of the study show that the level of autonomy and self-acceptance of the respondents in this study is at a low level. According to Ryff (1989), individuals with low levels of autonomy tend to rely on the expectations, evaluations, and judgments of others when making important decisions. This indicates a lack of confidence among students in this study to make decisions based on what feels right for them. This is in agreement with Huntington et al., (2023) who stated that the technology gap among rural students is one of the factors that increase students' dependence on others. In addition, self-acceptance is an important aspect in fostering good psychological well-being among students. The low level of self-acceptance observed among students in this study suggests dissatisfaction with oneself and difficulty in accepting personal qualities. This may indirectly impact self-esteem and contribute to a decline in psychological well-being (Poudel et al., 2020)

Furthermore, the study findings revealed that other domains such as environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, and purpose in life are at a moderate level, which impacts the psychological well-being of the students. This finding aligns with Gayatri et al., (2023), who demonstrated that social support, which enhances dimensions of psychological well-being such as positive relations and personal growth, ultimately improves the psychological well-being of secondary school students. Similarly, Zainal (2020) noted that fostering positive relationships not only alleviates academic stress but also promotes positive psychological well-being among students. Therefore, it cannot be denied that all the dimensions in Ryff's psychological well-being model play an important role in fostering happiness and satisfaction in a student which is the key to psychological well-being.

As for the aspect of social support, the study indicates that form five students in rural areas receive a moderate level of support. This finding is consistent with Ibrahim et al., (2023) who reported that a moderate level of social support among upper secondary students at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Khir Johari, Kedah, affects their mental health. Additionally, Mai et al., (2021) found that moderate levels of social support among high school students in Shantou City, China, lead to a reduced likelihood of adopting positive coping strategies, resulting in poorer psychological well-being. Several factors may account for the moderate level of social support observed in this study. Socioeconomic status (Ibrahim et al., 2022), parents' workload (Zailan, 2023), and family issues (Umberson et al., 2020) have been reported to influence the level of support parents can provide. Busy work lives and personal issues can limit the support parents are able to offer their children. Furthermore, social skill deficits among students, who may struggle to form and maintain supportive relationships, can also contribute to a lack of social support from friends and significant others (Kiema, 2020). The level of social support of students in this study was measured based on three dimensions, namely family, friends and significant others. Findings indicate that social support from the dimension of family and friends is at a moderate level, whereas social support from the dimension of significant others is at a low level. The findings of this study indicate that, despite receiving social support from family and friends, the moderate level of support is insufficient to promote optimal psychological well-being. A low score for support from significant others suggests that students in this study do not receive substantial support from teachers, school counselors, or other significant individuals in their lives. This lack of support hampers their ability to navigate challenges and obstacles, increasing their vulnerability to mental health issues that can negatively impact their psychological well-being. This scenario is clearly demonstrated in a study conducted by Surat el., (2023), which explains that a low level of parental support among form four students in a secondary school located in Semenyih affects their mental health.

This study also shows that social support has a significant relationship with psychological well-being among form five students in rural areas. This finding reinforces previous studies by KA & Cheah (2020) who stated that secondary school students in Sarawak who have a high level of social support do not experience psychological stress and have positive psychological well-being. This is because social support provides emotional support, which contributes to the improvement of students' psychological well-being. According to Mamat et al., (2023) quality and effective communication among family members fosters emotional bonds and positive mental schemes among students. Social support provides a safe space for individuals to communicate, express their feelings and thoughts, and rely on in times of trouble. This is important to foster resilience especially among secondary school students who are in a world full of changes and challenges. Besides family, social support from peers has a positive effect on affective aspects, which indirectly fosters positive psychological well-being among secondary school students (Gusniarti et al., 2023).

The results of this study shows that all three dimensions of social support which are family, friends, and significant others have a significant relationship with psychological well-being among form five students in rural areas. This finding aligns with a study conducted by Arslan et al., (2023) which demonstrates that social support from friends, teachers, and counselors at school fosters a sense of belonging that protects students from psychological stress and contributes to positive psychological well-being. Tomás et al., (2020) emphasized that a sense of belonging facilitates students' adaptation to the school environment, which, in turn, positively impacts their psychological well-being. Furthermore, social support also mediates

the relationship between academic stress and psychological well-being. It provides students with the strength and confidence needed to overcome obstacles and pressure, facilitating their positive development. Thus, the findings of this study highlight the critical role of social support in promoting positive psychological well-being among secondary school students.

Implications of the Study

The research indicates that the level of psychological well-being among form five students is below satisfactory. To address this issue before it worsens, preventive measures are necessary. Furthermore, this study underscores the significance of social support in promoting positive psychological well-being among secondary school students. Therefore, it is essential to develop and implement programs aimed at enhancing the psychological well-being of secondary school students, with the goal of cultivating resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges. Additionally, future research should explore other factors, beyond social support, that impact students' psychological well-being, to contribute to the development of a more capable and resilient generation.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of a support system in enhancing psychological well-being among high school students. A robust support system not only provides a safe environment for students to express their emotions and thoughts but also offers encouragement and motivation, helping them navigate challenges and strive for excellence. Maintaining psychological well-being fosters happiness and life satisfaction, which contributes to their overall optimal functioning. Consequently, this study aims to benefit secondary school students, particularly Form Five students who are nearing the end of their secondary education before transitioning to higher education. Additionally, this research is intended to underscore the importance of promoting positive psychological well-being among students to develop a more efficient and productive generation.

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