

# PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG SINGLE MOTHERS OF RURAL AND URBAN AREAS IN SELANGOR

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**Abstract** This study explores whether differences in levels of psychological well-being exist between single mothers living in urban and rural areas in Selangor. Field studies were conducted on single mothers in both locations by using structured interviews. Psychological well-being questionnaires were modified by the researcher based on the Psychological well-being Scale (Ryff 1989). Psychological well-being was measured in terms of autonomy, control environment, personal development and positive relationship. This study involved 40 single mothers from Kota Damansara, Selangor and 40 single mothers from various villages in Sabak Bernam, Selangor. Data were analyzed with SPSS software using t-test. Result shows that the levels of psychological well-being between the two groups were not significantly different ( $t = 0.337, k > 0.05$ ). Future research can be improved by looking at single mothers from different state or district. Implications are also discussed.

**Index Terms**— : Single mother, single parents, psychological well being, social psychology.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being is an important element in human life. Ryff (1989) stated that psychological well-being refers to the pursuit of perfection based on actual real potential. On the other hand, [9] refers it as emotional health based on high self-esteem and having positive relationships with others, not withdrawn and not acting delinquent. Definitions stated earlier are coherent with the definition from the [10], psychological well-being refers to individuals who are mentally healthy and able to maintain harmonious relationships with others, get involved in community activities and can contribute in the community. In Malaysia, Ministry of Health (2005) denotes psychological well-being as individual's ability to handle stress, managing conflicts, stimulate motivation and increase one's self-confidence in life. In addition, from the Islamic perspectives, psychological well-being refers to aspects of harmony which reflects heart, soul, mental and human psychology [5]. However, the [10] foresaw a disease associated with mental are among the top five highest in the world and by

2020 and it is expected to be the second highest disease in the world. Therefore, psychological well-being needs to be given appropriate attention. In addition, according to the statistics recorded by the Ministry of Health (1996), 10.7% of the population aged 16 years and above have experienced mental problems. In 2001, the Ministry of Health reported that 18.8% people which comprises of adults and children are suffering mental problems. The rising numbers in statistics shown by Ministry of Health in 1996 and 2001 proves that psychological well-being problems have begun to exist in our country even only small percentage stated [6].

World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease an infirmity [10]. This definition clarifies that health is a state of individuals who are completely free from any diseases, and also having positive mental, physical and social. For WHO, health is not measured through the functions and structure of the body but also includes feeling, values and mental health. Health also encompasses of individual's interaction with environment as well as interpersonal relations [1].

Health and wellness play a vital role in encourage individuals to engage with a wide range of activities that could contribute to the development and growth of individuals at every stage of life. Thus, health and wellness also provides internal and external resources to individuals involved and develop a healthy life [3]. Based on the principle of health is important to communities throughout the world, WHO has taken steps to promote health awareness through a program called Health for all in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century [10]. This program is designed to fulfil two main objectives which are to improve the quality of life and life-expectancy and to demolished inequality based on gender differences, race, religion, ethnicity and educational status [7].

## A. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. What is well-being?

Research conducted shows that the key matters in enhancing well-being are happy marriage, having good friends, work that pays, good financial status, good dietary and activities, quality sleep, and could conduct religious activities. Other than that, optimistic attitude, people's trust towards us, honour and self-autonomy also could make us happy. Having clear goals to be achieved, a sense of place and belonging, coherent and positive view towards the world and believe that we are part of something big will eventually increase the well-being [2].

However, factors leading to a blissful life are not purely a personal choice. It is also determined by the social conditions in which we live, and this is resolute by a government. For instance, the Australian Government believes that a good economic growth and wealth is a base to produce good quality of life [4]. Nevertheless, evidence shows that wealth could not produce well-being. Wealth can cause pessimism, where people struggle to achieve it and ignored the real source of happiness. The real fact is that the need to own is more important than being rich. Well-being has multiple dimensions. It includes the human perception about social and psychological well-being. Study found that nearly twice the population in Australia regards quality of life decreased compared to those who expressed it better. This is due to many people give concerned about possession and greediness which believed to cause social problems and threatens the future of their children.

### B. Psychological Well-Being

According to [2], psychological well-being is based on individual experiences. It is individual's assessment of his life in the form of life satisfaction (cognitive evaluation) or affect (emotional reactions). Psychological well-being also refers to the well-being which has been socialised and obtained from various needs, psychology and needs or freedom. Its implications are in personal development and depend on subjective well-being evaluation.

Ryff (1989) defined psychological well-being as a result of an assessment towards oneself, which is a valuation based on life's experiences. Assessment of experience can cause an individual to become resigned which leads to low psychological well-being or working to improve the conditions of his life. Meanwhile, [8] defines psychological well-being as the assessment of specific areas or fields of life such as family, and community or in other words how well a person be able to carry out their role and provide a good forecasting towards his psychological well-being.

Ryff (1989) summarizes that psychological well-being is an integration and human development theory; theory of clinical psychologist and mental health concept. Thus, psychological well-being instead, is a condition whereby an individual holds a positive attitude towards themselves and others, able to make their own decision and control his own character, able to create and organize appropriate circle that suits his needs and the purpose of life and turns them into a meaningful life, strive hard and able to explore them. Psychological well-being is also

an overview about the characteristic of individuals who has a positive psychological well-being which refers to Rogers's opinion about fully-functioning person, Maslow's view about self-actualization, Jung's observation about individuals, Allport concept about maturity which also fits the concept of Erikson in individuals who achieve integrity against despair. Psychological well-being can be marked with the acquisition of happiness, life-satisfaction and no symptoms of depression [8]. According to Bradburn in [8], happiness is the result of psychological well-being and is the highest purpose which intended to be achieved by every human being.

According to Keyes & Ryff (1995), psychological well-being consists of six different dimensions namely acceptance of yourself, having a positive relationships with others, autonomy and independence, mastery of circle, has a purpose of life and the meaning of life as well as the continued growth of expansion. Each dimension clearly explained the differences that should be faced by individuals and strive to function positively. It can be concluded that the psychological well-being of an individual is a condition marked by the existence of a happy feeling, having satisfaction of life and shows no symptoms of depression. These conditions were influenced by positive functions of psychology such as self-acceptance, positive social relationships, having a purpose of life, personal development, mastery of circle and autonomy.

### C. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aimed to:

1. Identify the level of psychological well-being among single mothers with low income in urban and rural areas in Selangor.
2. Measure each level of psychological well-being components (autonomy, control of the environment, personal development, personal development and positive relationships) among single mothers in Selangor.
3. Identify the difference between the two levels of psychological well-being of urban and rural areas.

### D. METHODS

A field study was conducted in both locations of single mothers in rural and urban area in Selangor. The selected location is Kota Damansara, while rural locations are from two different villages located within two *mukims* in Sabak Bernam, namely Mukim Pasir Panjang and Mukim Sungai Panjang. Two villages and sub-district has been selected by researchers based on the high population of single mothers lived in two concerned locations. The distance between the villages in Sabak Bernam is 90km from Shah Alam city centre. 80 Malay single mothers were selected randomly. The interview is based on the set of questionnaire. Psychological well-being questionnaires were modified by the researcher based on the *Psychological well-being Scale (Ryff 1989)*. The questionnaire is developed to measure Ryff's six different theoretical construct of psychological well-being, but researchers only take and modify four constructs which are autonomous

(independent and self-determination), control of the environment (capability of managing themselves), personal development (open to new experiences) and positive relations with others (have high quality and satisfying relationships). Two other constructs that are not retrieved are self-acceptance (positive attitude towards oneself) and the purpose of life (believe life means). A total of 80 single mothers with low income between RM500 to RM1000; 40 of them live in Kota Damansara (urban) and another 40 live in Sabak Bernam (rural). The data is obtained and analysed by using SPSS with the use of T Test to identify the differences in psychological well-being respondents.

#### E. FINDINGS

##### A. Background of respondents

Based on the 80 respondents, data showed that 40 single mothers (50%) lived in urban areas and another 40 single mothers (50%) lived in rural areas. All single mothers (100%) selected in this study are Malays. The findings showed that the majority of the respondents surveyed, which are 60% (48 people) earned between RM500 to RM700 monthly, 30% respondents (24 people) earned between RM701 to RM900 monthly while 8 respondents (10%) earned between RM901 to RM1100 monthly. Based on the research conducted, single mothers in urban areas work as tailor, laundry helper, supermarkets cleaner, selling cakes, clerk and kindergarten assistant. Conversely, single mothers in rural areas work as kindergarten assistant, rubber-tapping, farmer, cooker for school canteen, cleaner and teaching the reading of Quran. The majority of respondents surveyed (70%) had a number of children ranging from three to six. The results recorded 50% (40 people) of the respondents surveyed aged between 40 to 55 years old, 30% (24 people) aged between 31 to 40 years old and another 20% (16 people) aged between 20 to 30 years old.

##### B. Descriptive Analysis of Well-being

The overall level of well-being among single mothers in rural and urban area is summarized in table 1 to table 5.

##### C. Inferential Analysis Results

F. Inferential analysis conducted to see the differences between the overall level of well-being of single mothers of both rural and urban areas. The results showed levels of psychological well-being between the two single mothers rural and urban areas shows no difference,  $t = 0.037$ ,  $k > 0.05$ . Min for single mothers is 2.15 and single mother in rural areas is 2.09.

## II. DISCUSSIONS

The findings indicate the levels of psychological well-being among single mothers in rural and urban areas in staging order are as follows: 40 people at high levels, followed by 24 people at a low level and 16 people at average level. The results of this study illustrate that half of single mothers surveyed are satisfied with their location of residence. Single mothers in the urban areas expressed that there are wide range of facilities such as employment opportunities, transportation facilities and other

readily available facilities. While single mothers living in rural areas stated that their location of residence is safer and free from sound pollution such as vehicle gas emission etc.

**Table 1: Overall Level of Psychological Well-being**

Level /Village	Urban (people)	Rural (people)	Total
High	19	21	40
Average	9	7	16
Low	13	11	24

**Table 2: Level of psychological well-being in autonomy aspect**

Level /Village	Urban (people)	Rural (people)	Total
High	18	21	39
Average	8	6	14
Low	16	11	27

**Table 3: Level of psychological well-being in terms of environmental regulation**

Level /Village	Urban (people)	Rural (people)	Total
High	16	21	37
Average	5	3	8
Low	17	18	35

**Table 4: Level of psychological well-being in the aspect of self-development**

Level /Village	Urban (people)	Rural (people)	Total
High	19	21	40
Average	9	7	16
Low	13	11	24

**Table 5: Level of psychological well-being in the aspect of positive relationships**

Level /Village	Urban (people)	Rural (people)	Total
High	20	20	40
Average	17	12	29
Low	6	5	11

However, there are also some of the respondents indicating low level of well-being (24 people). This situation occurs because they feel that the urban (city areas) is sometimes more noisy and less safe compared to rural areas. Additionally, single mothers who live in the urban areas said that they have to cope with the high cost of living relatively high renting fees compared to single mothers who live in the rural areas, owned a house or inherited by their parents. Besides that, single mothers in urban areas said that the cost of living in the city of

comparatively high makes it difficult for them to survive as they need to fend for their children all alone. Referring to the four constructs which are autonomy (independent and self-determination), control of environment (capable of managing themselves, personal development (open to new experiences) and positive relationships with others (have a high quality and satisfying relationships), researchers found that psychological well-being among single mothers in rural and urban areas both are at high levels according to the constructs (Refer to Table 2 to Table 5). These findings indicate that the low monthly income impacted the psychological well-being of single mothers and children. Therefore, the majority of the respondents surveyed still have low level of psychological well-being.

Consequently, the impact of low monthly income and hardships that they have to face not only diminish the relationships and social support but also weaken their personal control, including through autonomous confusion (the ability to act according to their own values and beliefs). The single mothers expressed that they had to work overtime and come home late every night. Findings also showed there is no difference in terms of culture. According to Diener & Seligman (2004), psychological well-being will differ if they adopt different cultures. Apparently, they adopt the same lifestyle, and it is no doubt if the findings have no difference. This means that the culture and ideology play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and expectations.

### III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research on levels of psychological well-being among single mothers with low monthly income (in both rural and urban areas) was held in Kota Damansara for urban areas and two villages in two different *mukim* in Sabak Bernam for respondents in rural areas. This research aimed to 1) Identify the level of psychological well-being among single mothers with low income in urban and rural areas in Selangor 2) Measure each level of psychological well-being components (autonomy, control of the environment, personal development, personal development and positive relationships) among single mothers in Selangor 3) Identify the difference between the two levels of psychological well-being of urban and rural areas. 80 single mothers were selected randomly and they are all Malays. The interview is based on the set of questionnaire. Psychological well-being questionnaires were modified by the researcher based on the *Psychological well-being Scale* (Ryff 1989). Based on the research conducted, single mothers in urban areas work as tailor, laundry helper, supermarkets

cleaner, selling cakes, clerk and kindergarten assistant. On the other hand, single mothers in rural areas work as kindergarten assistant, rubber-tapping, farmer, cooker for school canteen, cleaner and teaching the reading of Quran.

The results showed levels of psychological well-being between the two single mothers in rural and urban areas shows no difference,  $t = 0.037$ ,  $k > 0.05$ . Min for single mothers is 2.15 and single mother in rural areas is 2.09. The findings indicate the level of psychological well-being among single mothers in rural and urban areas in staging orders are as follows: 40 people at high levels, followed by 24 people at low level and 16 people at average level. Future research can be improved by looking at single mothers from different state or district.

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