

## PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG INDONESIAN STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the most important elements of academic success is determined by the conditions of the students' psychological well-being. Previous studies suggested that psychological well-being contributed to individual adjustment, which is the key to academic success. The present study aims to identify psychological well-being among postgraduate Indonesian students studying in the United Kingdom (UK). This is a descriptive explorative study with 75 Indonesian students studying across the UK by utilising questionnaires. The result confirms that psychological well-being among the Indonesian postgraduate students studying in the UK categorised in a high level (69.3%). The study indicated the dimensions of psychological well-being from the respondents were in high autonomy (54.7%) but low environmental mastery (53.3%), high personality development (58.7%), high positive relationship with others (56.0%), high purpose of life (56.0%) and low self-acceptance (52.0%). The Indonesian postgraduate students studying in the UK had a high level of psychological wellbeing especially in terms of their personality development. The study suggests to increase environmental mastery and self-acceptance by strengthening the Indonesian student organisation activities with peer-support and building relationship with both Indonesian and international students in the UK and worldwide. This will increase their insight as international students and learn to cope and minimise stressful life events during their study period.*

*Keywords: psychological well-being, Indonesian, students, education.*

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an increasing number of students undertaking or continuing their education overseas. One of the countries that become the major global provider of international education is the United Kingdom (UK). There has been a rapid growth in the number of students from various countries around the globe studying in the UK universities, especially their higher education. Indonesia is also one of the countries that has a number of students undertaking their education in the UK especially in postgraduate programs.

Postgraduate students confront several challenges while living their academic lives since they experience some changes in the academic environment (Roslan, et. al., 2017). Postgraduate students also dealing with changes in academic system from structured academic by undertaking established courses; to unstructured academic system by undertaking independent research (Lovitts, 2005; Abidin & Ismail, 2011). Furthermore, Postgraduate education is very diverse in terms of their level of education. It consists of dependent studies which usually undertaken at the master degree level and independent studies that usually took place at doctoral

study programs (Lovitts, 2005; Roslan, et. al., 2017).

Such academic atmosphere requires not only the intellectual ability but also social and psychological maturity. Postgraduate students often deal with several challenges and problems during the completion of their study. Apart from the academic problems and challenges, they also have to deal with financial and work problems for those undertaking part time studying. Furthermore, postgraduate students studying abroad also have to deal with being distance from their family as main source of support and the time with their close relatives (Novera, 2004; Udhayakumar & Illango, 2018). The complex atmospheres during academic life encountered by the postgraduate students, require adequate support and state of well-being both physically and psychologically.

Psychological well-being is an important element that students must possess during their academic lives. It enables the students dealing with and living their academic lives successfully and enable to perform better academic achievement (Lovitts, 2005; Roslan, et. al., 2017). Psychological well-being is defined as a state of mental well-being which can fulfil the

happiness and accomplishing goals (Heizomi et. al., 2015). It is also explained as having a healthy mental function in order to live their life and able to accept their own strengths and weaknesses (Udhayakumar & Illango, 2018). According to Ryff et. al., (2013) psychological well-being described as having control of their lives and activities and living meaningfully. This condition could support individuals to perform and achieve better within their daily lives.

Ryff & Keyes(1995) introduced the principal dimensions of psychological well-being which explain the state of healthy mental condition. There are six dimensions which include: 1) autonomy, explains the ability from the individuals to be independent; 2) environmental mastery, describes the capability to adapt, create or change the environment based on individuals need; 3) self-acceptance, defines the capability to accept and see positive things in one-self; 4) positive relation with others, explains the ability to interact and engage well with others; 5) purpose in life, describes the ability to have goals in life and 6) personal growth, defines as the capability to grow and expand the life based on individuals' goals. This multidimensional concept of psychological well-being is closely related to the ability to adapt and achieve targets in both social and academic life (McKenna, et. al., 2017).

Understanding psychological well-being in postgraduate students enable to improve their ability to adapt both social and academic life. Students studying outside their country of residents will have to deal with a new environment and a different system which is unfamiliar to them (Novera, 2004;Roslan, et. al., 2017). Therefore, good level of psychological well-being is needed in order to adapt and achieve good quality of life in living the academic life. Thus, this study aims to identify psychological well-being of postgraduate Indonesian students studying overseas especially in the UK.

## METHODS

This was descriptive explorative study by utilising cross-sectional design. It aimed to identify psychological well-being among Indonesian postgraduate students whom studying across the UK. There were 75 Indonesian postgraduate students participated in this study. They were recruited from

various places across the UK but mainly around the campus setting. The prospective participants should be Indonesian students at postgraduate level and had been living in the UK at least for six months. All respondents should completed self-report questionnaires for psychological well-being adapted from Ryff et. al (1995).

Data were collected by utilising questionnaires which consist of two parts. First part is socio-demographic information which includes: age, gender, marital status, living with and source of income. Second part of the questionnaires is 'Psychological well-being questionnaires' developed by Ryff (1995). This tool had 42 items version which include: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal development, positive relation with others, purpose of life and personality development. These items had been translated and validated ( $r= 0.72 - 0.97$ ) in various language and settings (Abbott et. al., 2006). For this study the original English language was provided to the participants. The items are rated in the likert scale from 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Data were analysed by using descriptive statistical methods.

## RESULT

### Socio-demographic Characteristic

All the participants were in the postgraduate level with the average age group of 25 – 30 years old (46.7%) and most of them were female (57.3%). The vast majority were single (69.3%) and only (29.3%) were married. Some respondents living in the student accommodation (34.7%) and many of them were under scholarship (58.7%) (Tabel 1.1).

**Table 1.1 Socio – demographic Characteristic of the Respondents**

Characteristics	f	%
Age (years)		
20 - 25	8	10.7
25 - 30	35	46.7
30 - 35	22	29.3
≥ 36	10	13.3
Gender		
Male	32	42.7
Female	43	57.3
Marital Status		
Single	52	69.3
Married	22	29.3
Divorce	1	1.3

Living With		
Alone	12	16.0
With partner or friend	21	28.0
With family	16	21.3
In student accommodation	26	34.7
Source of Income		
Working	8	10.7
Scholarship	44	58.7
Parent	22	29.3
Others	1	1.3

**Psychological Well-being**

The result confirmed that most of participants have high level of psychological well-being (69.3%) (Tabel 2.1).

**Table 2.1 Psychological Well-being of the Respondents**

Psychological Well-being	f	%
High	52	69.3
Low	23	30.7

The result of all psychological well-being dimensions from the participants provided in the table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Psychological Well-being Dimensions of the Respondents**

Characteristics	f	%
Autonomy		
High	41	54.7
Low	34	45.3
Environmental Mastery		
High	35	46.7
Low	40	53.3
Personality Development		
High	44	58.7
Low	31	41.3
Positive Relation with Others		
High	42	56.0
Low	33	44.0
Purpose of Life		
High	42	56.0
Low	33	44.0
Self-Acceptance		
High	36	48.0
Low	39	52.0

The result identified the high level of psychological well-being among postgraduate Indonesian students studying in the UK.

Majority of them had high level in terms of their autonomy (54.7%), personality development (58.7%), positive relation with others (56.0%), and purpose of life (56.0%). However, it appeared their environmental mastery (53.3%) and self-acceptance (52.0%) were in the low category.

**DISCUSSION**

**The Level of Psychological Well-being**

The descriptive analysis resulted that the participants in this study were in the high level of the overall psychological well-being. Thus, the highest scores of the psychological dimensions are: personal development, positive relation with others, purpose of life and autonomy. However, the environmental mastery and self-acceptance dimensions were in the lower level of psychological well-being.

The participants in this study had the highest level in terms of personal development in psychological well-being. Most participants had positive agreement on the item of “I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world” and negative agreement on the item “I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things”. Postgraduate students who studying abroad encounter different system in all aspects of their lives, which require them to continue dealing with new situations and able to make adaptation in order to survive successfully. The postgraduate students who preferred to study overseas usually have the desire to see new situation and have prepared themselves to deal with all challenges in their new environment. According to Roslan, et. al., (2017) and Heizomi et. al., (2015) personal development usually incline when facing the life risk and difficult situations. Therefore, it will increase their ability to find potential and dealing with challenges as well as their personal development.

The dimension of positive relation with others perceived as having the ability to involve in close and warm relationship (Ryff, 2013). Being away from family members and adapting to new environment have made the postgraduate students feel the importance of having a positive relationship with the people around them. Academic life requires intense peer-support since the students were in the

same situation and need strong collaboration in achieving goals. In addition, the new environment also requires a process of good adaptation by having a good relationship with the people around.

The purpose in life dimension had high score on positive item of "I have a sense of direction and purpose in life". Postgraduate students usually study for continuing and advancing their career pathway. Most postgraduate students studying at the postgraduate level had already know or planned for their future. This enables postgraduate students studying abroad especially participants in this study had a high level in the purpose in life. Furthermore, most participants in this study also in their young age. According to Pinquart et al. (2002) inclining the goals or purposes in life usually occur during the younger age and it will be declining with the aging process. Although the students in this study at the postgraduate level, most participants still in the young age category.

The dimension of autonomy from the participants in this study were categorised in high level of psychological well-being. Most postgraduate students are mature students who previously had experience in graduate studies. They already had experiences in solving the problems in academic life and live their lives in an independent academic environment (Harmer, Lee & Petty, 2015). Thus, it enables them to be responsible and making decisions in their lives. Most postgraduate students studying abroad also far from their family as the main support which enable them to be more independent in living their lives in a foreign countries (Ibrahim, et al., 2013).

Mean while, the environmental mastery dimension has the lower level in terms of psychological well-being from the participants. Most postgraduate students had low score in terms of positive item of "I have been able to build a living environment and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking" and high score in negative item of "I do not fit very well with the people and the community around me". Environmental mastery described as the ability to master the environment and take benefits and opportunities to make adaptation (Ryff, 2013). Although the postgraduate students categorised as mature students that have the

capability to adapt; yet, as foreign students they needed more support and skills in mastering the environment which totally different from their home countries. Therefore, most participants in this study were in the low category for environmental mastery.

The overall score of self-acceptance dimension from the participants in this study was the lowest among the other dimensions. Individuals who have self-acceptance portray characteristic that have positive attitudes towards one-self and could accept various aspects of their lives (Ryff, 2013). Most postgraduate students studying overseas found the unfamiliar system which enable them having low self-esteem to complete their study successfully. According to Heizome, et al. (2015), self-esteem is closely related to positive thinking which the fundamental of self-acceptance is. Most participants in this study found them-selves having less self-esteem since the challenges in adapting with the unfamiliarity situation. This had affected their self-acceptance within both their academic and social lives.

## CONCLUSION

This study illustrated that the Indonesian postgraduate students studying in the UK had high level of psychological well-being. All dimensions of psychological well-being also showed in the high level except the environmental mastery and self-acceptance dimensions. The study suggests increasing the lower dimensions by strengthening the Indonesian Student Association and other student organisations through peer-support activities, in order to provide support for the students in adapting to different environments from their home countries. Furthermore, enhancing the performance of students association by creating activities which focus on building relationship with other Indonesian and international students within the UK and worldwide is also compulsory. This enable increasing the postgraduate students insight as international students and learn to cope and minimise stressful life events during their academic and social lives overseas.

## ETHICS APPROVAL

This study submits with the rule for ethical conduct of research according to the Dutch law of medical scientific research.

Ethical approval according to this law is not necessary.

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