

# Psychological Well-Being of Counsellors in Malaysia: A Descriptive Study

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## Abstract

The importance of psychological well-being in the counselling profession is undeniable as it ensures that counsellors are always able to provide counselling services effectively. The Counsellor's Code of Ethics emphasizes that every counsellor needs to be sensitive to the signs of physical, mental or emotional disability, including psychological well-being. This is to avoid interference with the effectiveness and efficiency of dealing with a client. If a counsellor's psychological well-being deteriorates, the counselling session should be postponed or terminated, and the client should be referred to another qualified counsellor. This procedure ensures that both the client and the counselling service are not adversely affected. Therefore, this study was carried out to uncover the level of psychological well-being among counsellors in Malaysia through a survey study involving 100 registered counsellors. The level of psychological well-being of counsellors was measured by using the Psychological Well-Being Scale and was analysed using descriptive statistics. The results showed that the level of psychological well-being of counsellors was at a high level. Psychological well-being deserves attention as its deficiency can be extremely dangerous when uncontrolled. Therefore, this study serves as a guide for counsellors regarding the role of psychological well-being in the workplace and for the counselling profession. The findings can help raise awareness among counsellors on the importance of psychological well-being as a protective factor as well as to mitigate risk factors in their careers.

**Key Words:** Counsellors, psychological well-being, workplace, counselling services, careers.



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## Introduction

Guidance and counselling services aim to help individuals, families or community groups, whether young or old, to achieve harmony in life. The service is offered in various institutions such as public or private educational institutions, rehabilitation centres or prisons, community

welfare departments, and others. In a counselling session, a counsellor must address various client issues within the client's personal life, career, education, mental health, relationships, and many more. However, this crucial role and responsibility assumed by counsellors can lead to unavoidable work pressure. If such stress is not properly dealt with, this could lead to other risk factors such as emotional exhaustion, mental stress, and extreme anxiety, which subsequently causes the level of psychological well-being to deteriorate (Jones & Pijanowski, 2023). This highlights the close relationship between the counselling profession and its exposure to the risk of psychological stress.

One way to ensure that counselling services are not affected is to focus on the psychological well-being of counsellors. This is to safeguard the welfare of the client and the therapeutic relationship between the counsellor and the client to avoid any negative impact on the effectiveness of the counselling session (Voon et al., 2022). The multidimensional model of psychological well-being introduced by Prof. Dr. Carol D. Ryff in 1989, depicted in Figure 1 below, highlights six main aspects to measure an individual's psychological well-being.

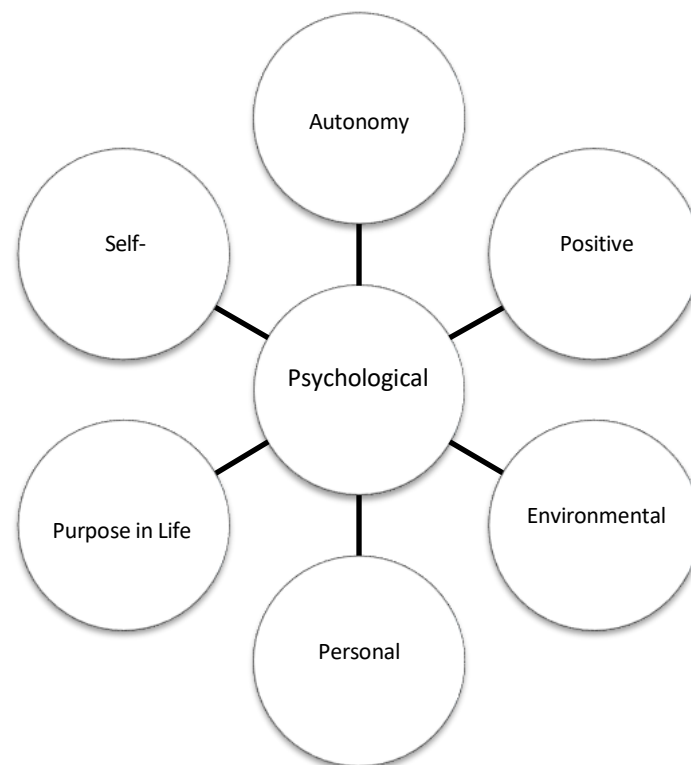


Figure 1: Ryff's Six-Factor Model of Psychological Well-Being (1989).

Based on Figure 1 above, autonomy is a determined and independent attitude, characterized by the ability to put aside social pressure by thinking and acting in a certain way, regulating behaviour from the inside, and evaluating oneself with personal standards. Good relationships with others refer to a relationship that is pleasant for both parties, characterized by warmth and trust in each other, caring about each other's welfare, and having empathy and love based on give-and-take relationships. Environmental mastery is characterized through the

ability or sensation to control the environment and a variety of outdoor activities, using the surrounding opportunities effectively, and ability to choose and build a suitable context based on personal values and needs. Next, personal growth is characterized by the desire for continuous development in life by improving one's personal quality over time, being open to receiving new experiences, and not remaining stationary. Following this, purpose in life is characterized as having goals and direction in life, feeling that there is something in the past that gives meaning in life, and holding on to the belief that life has its own goals and purposes. Finally, self-acceptance is feeling positive towards oneself, are open to accepting the reality of their past, present and future lives unconditionally, and accepting of one's personal qualities, whether positive or negative. Psychological well-being revolves around the combination of pleasant feelings and effective life functioning. However, emotional pain such as disappointment, sadness, grief, failure and stress are considered normal in life. Therefore, the ability to manage emotional pain and difficult experiences is essential for maintaining a high level of psychological well-being. Every profession has its benefits and challenges, and counselling is no exception. While counsellors could undergo a therapeutic process themselves when providing services, the profession can also pose risks to their well-being. Therefore, enhancing counsellors' psychological well-being is crucial in the counselling profession, as it helps ensure the effectiveness of the services provided, especially in safeguarding the client's welfare. Moreover, this is to reach the goal of counselling, which is to promote inner well-being and contribute to harmony in society.

## **Methodology**

This study examined the level of psychological well-being among 100 respondents, who were registered and certified counsellors with the Malaysian Counsellor Board. A simple random sampling technique was used to gather data from the participants. One of the most appropriate instruments for assessing psychological well-being is Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS; Ryff, 1989) consisting of 29 items (Blasco-Belled, A. & Alsinet, C., 2022). The questionnaire, along with an informed consent form, was distributed via email.

## **Results and Discussion**

The study involved 100 respondents who were registered counsellors in Malaysia. The demographic profile of the respondents is as shown in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' demographic profile.

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	34	34%
	Female	66	66%
Age	20 to 30 years old	33	33%
	31 to 40 years old	38	38%
	41 to 50 years old	22	22%
	51 years old and above	7	7%
Race	Malay	71	71%
	Chinese	8	8%
	Indian	7	7%
	Others	14	14%
Marital Status	Single	43	43%
	Married	56	56%
	Others	1	1%
Length of Service	Less than 5 years	49	49%
	5 to 10 years	13	13%
	11 to 15 years	13	13%
	15 years and above	25	25%
Income (RM)	2,000 and below	21	21%
	2,001 to 5,000	46	46%
	5,001 to 8,000	26	26%
	8,001 to 10,000	6	6%
	10,000 and above	1	1%

The descriptive analysis results, as shown in Table 1, reveal that 34% of the respondents were male, while 66% were female. Regarding age, most respondents were between 31 and 40 years old (38%), followed by those aged between 20 and 30 (33%), and 22% were between 41 and 50. Only 7% of respondents were over 51 years old.

The demographic profile based on race showed that Malays comprised the largest group at 71%, followed by other races at 14%, Chinese respondents at 8%, and Indian respondents at 7%.

In terms of length of service, the analysis indicated that the highest proportion of respondents (49%) had served for less than 5 years. In contrast, 13% had served between 5 and 10 years, and another 13% had served between 11 and 15 years. Those who had served for more than 15 years accounted for 25% of the respondents.

Finally, the demographic profile based on income showed that 46% of respondents earned between RM2,001 and RM5,000. This was followed by 26% who earned between RM5,001 and RM8,000. Additionally, 21% of respondents earned RM2,000 or less, while 6%

earned between RM8,001 and RM10,000. Only 1% of respondents had an income exceeding RM10,000.

Table 2 displays the results of the descriptive analysis, including mean and standard deviation, used to determine the level of psychological well-being among registered counsellors.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis for psychological well-being

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Autonomy</b>		
(A6+) Being happy with yourself is more important than acceptance other people against me	5.23	1.053
(A3-) I tend to worry about what other people think about me	2.67	1.577
(A5-) I always change my mind about a decision if a family member or friend- friends disagree	3.11	1.435
(A7-) It is difficult for me to voice my own opinion on controversial matters	2.86	1.429
<b>Positive Relationships with Others</b>		
(R1+) Most people see me as a loving person	4.96	1.082
(R3+) I enjoy private conversations with family members	5.19	1.012
(R6+) People describe me as someone who likes to spend time with other people	4.49	1.337
(R7+) I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me	4.96	1.063
(R2-) I often feel lonely because I have few close friends to share my worries with	2.43	1.552
<b>Environmental Mastery</b>		
(E2+) I can manage many responsibilities in my daily life	5.06	.897
(E4+) In general, I can take care of my personal affairs well	5.18	.757
(E5+) I manage my time well, so I manage things that need to be done	5.06	.802
(E7+) I can build a lifestyle the way I like it	4.95	.925
(E3-) I often feel burdened by my responsibilities	2.59	1.512
(E6-) I have difficulty organizing my life in a way that satisfies me	2.48	1.467
<b>Personal Growth</b>		
(G3+) I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge the way I think about myself	5.15	.903
(G5+) I have grown a lot as an individual over time	5.26	.705
(G1-) I am not interested in activities that will broaden my range of experience	2.13	1.390

(G2-) I don't want to try something new because I'm comfortable with my current life	2.07	1.225
(G4-) When I think about it, I find myself not growing much during these few years	2.46	1.487
(G6-) I don't like being in new situations that require me to change my habits	2.32	1.370
(G7-) There is truth in the proverb "it is indeed impossible for the old or the elderly to make changes in life"	3.03	1.749
<b>Purpose in Life</b>		
(P5+) I am a person who actively implements the plans I set for myself	5.01	.904
(P7+) I enjoy making plans for the future	5.15	.796
(P2-) My daily activities often seem insignificant to me	2.10	1.275
(P6-) Sometimes I feel as if I have done everything there is to do in life	3.02	1.557
<b>Self-Acceptance</b>		
(S2+) I have made some mistakes in the past, but I feel that everything has ended well	4.55	1.298
(S5+) The past has its ups and downs, but normally I don't want to change the past	3.80	1.670
(S3-) In most things, I am disappointed with my achievements in life	2.20	1.255
<b>Overall</b>	<b>4.71</b>	<b>0.632</b>

The construct of psychological well-being comprises six components: Autonomy, Positive Relationships with Others, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Purpose in Life, And Self-Acceptance. The Autonomy component comprised four items, the Good Relationship with Others component comprised five items, the Environmental Control component comprised six items, the Personal Growth component comprised seven items, the Purpose in Life component comprised four items, and Self-Acceptance comprised three items. Table 2 presents the mean values and standard deviations for each item within these components.

The results for the Autonomy component showed that only one item was rated highly. This item was, "Being happy with myself is more important than acceptance from others" (Mean = 5.23, SD = 1.053). For the component of Positive Relationships with Others, four items were rated highly: "I enjoy private conversations with family members" (Mean = 5.19, SD = 1.012), "Most people see me as a loving person" (Mean = 4.96, SD = 1.082), "I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me" (Mean = 4.96, SD = 1.063), and "People describe me as someone who likes to spend time with others" (Mean = 4.49, SD = 1.337). However, one item, "I often feel lonely because I have few close friends to share my worries with" (Mean = 2.43, SD = 1.552), was rated at a medium level.

For the Environmental Mastery component, four items were rated highly: "In general, I can take care of my personal affairs well" (Mean = 5.18, SD = 0.757), "I can manage many responsibilities in my daily life" (Mean = 5.06, SD = 0.897), "I manage my time well, so I can complete tasks efficiently" (Mean = 5.06, SD = 0.802), and "I can build a lifestyle the way I

like it" (Mean = 4.95, SD = 0.925). Two items were rated at a medium level: "I often feel burdened by my responsibilities" (Mean = 2.59, SD = 1.512) and "I have difficulty organizing my life in a way that satisfies me" (Mean = 2.48, SD = 1.467).

In the Personal Growth component, only two items were rated highly: "I have grown a lot as an individual over time" (Mean = 5.26, SD = 0.705) and "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge my self-perception" (Mean = 5.15, SD = 0.903). Three items were rated lower: "I don't enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my habits" (Mean = 2.32, SD = 1.370), "I am not interested in activities that will broaden my range of experience" (Mean = 2.13, SD = 1.390), and "I don't want to try something new because I am comfortable with my current life" (Mean = 2.07, SD = 1.225). The remaining two items were rated at a moderate level.

For the Purpose in Life component, two items were rated highly: "I enjoy making plans for the future" (Mean = 5.15, SD = 0.796) and "I actively implement the plans I set for myself" (Mean = 5.01, SD = 0.904). However, the item "My daily activities often seem insignificant to me" (Mean = 2.10, SD = 1.275) was rated low, and another item was rated at a moderate level. In the Self-Acceptance component, two items were rated highly: "I have made some mistakes in the past, but I feel that everything has ended well" (Mean = 4.55, SD = 1.298) and "The past has its ups and downs, but I generally don't want to change it" (Mean = 3.80, SD = 1.670). The item "In most things, I am disappointed with my achievements in life" (Mean = 2.20, SD = 1.255) was rated low. Overall, the level of psychological well-being among registered counsellors was relatively high, with an overall mean score of 4.71 and a standard deviation of 0.632.

The results of the study indicate that the psychological well-being of counsellors is at a high level. This suggests that counsellors in Malaysia are well-positioned to fulfil their roles responsibly. Psychological well-being is a critical aspect of self-care for counsellors and is essential for maintaining their effectiveness throughout their careers, especially in managing work pressures and emotional exhaustion.

Previous research has highlighted the consequences of insufficient psychological well-being, which can compromise the quality of counselling services and, consequently, the profession's reputation. For instance, an epidemiological study by Zeng et al. (2020) reported that 46.9% of employees in China experienced depressive symptoms, leading to issues such as decreased productivity, absenteeism, and high staff turnover. This situation poses a significant risk to the counselling profession, as it can adversely affect job performance and the creation of a positive and safe work environment.

Regular monitoring of counsellors' psychological well-being can help mitigate these risks by preventing negative impacts on their careers. Neglecting psychological well-being not only jeopardises the welfare of clients but also damages the professional image of counsellors. Jones and Pijanowski (2023) noted that a lack of self-care practices among counsellors increases work pressure within the profession. This study underscores the importance of self-care practices and encourages counsellors to recognise and address their own psychological needs to maintain professional effectiveness and client care.

## Conclusion

Psychological well-being in a career is crucial for both physical and mental health, fostering a positive atmosphere and emotions (Aryan & Kathuria, 2017). Previous studies have extensively explored the benefits of psychological well-being in professional settings, highlighting its positive impact on various aspects of work. For instance, it is associated with increased productivity, loyalty, and job satisfaction (Aryan & Kathuria, 2017); enhanced positive attitudes and behaviours, high commitment, and job satisfaction (Pagán-Castaño et al., 2020); and improved work performance (Priya et al., 2023).

Therefore, addressing psychological well-being is essential to ensure that counsellors can effectively contribute to the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. By maintaining their psychological well-being, counsellors are better equipped to foster professional relationships and support the development of a thriving community. In conclusion, psychological well-being is fundamental to career development in the counselling profession and plays a significant role in creating a prosperous and supportive society.

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