

Resilience And Psychological Well-Being of University Students During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted university students' psychological well-being (PWB). Resilience, the ability to adapt and bounce back from adversity, is crucial in maintaining and promoting PWB. Resilience has been found to play a significant role in how students cope with academic stress. However, there is still a lack of study on the relationship between resilience and PWB among undergraduates in Malaysia. Hence, this study aims to examine the association between resilience and PWB in the context of Malaysian students. A cross-sectional survey was used to analyze the relationship between variables. Self-rated Resilience Scale and the World Health Organization Well-Being Index (WHO-5) were used for data measurement. Data were collected online and a total of 185 university students from a public university in Selangor, Malaysia participated in this study. Regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses relationship between the constructs. The results showed that resilience has a positive and significant impact on PWB. Resilience is important for university students to cope with academic challenges, adapt to transitions, and foster personal growth. Based on the findings, future directions were discussed.

Keywords: Resilience, Psychological Well-being, COVID-19 Pandemic, University Students, Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the psychological well-being (PWB) of university students in many countries around the world (Alkhamees & Aljohani, 2021; Villani, Pastorino, Molinari, Anelli, Ricciardi, Graffigna & Boccia 2021; Liu, Pinder-Amaker, Chris & Chen, 2020). The pandemic has disrupted various aspects of student's life, including their social interaction, motivation, mental health, and PWB (Alkhamees et al., 2021; Villani et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020). The sudden transition to online learning has forced students to adapt to new technologies, social isolation, and increased uncertainty regarding their academic success and future careers (Aristovnik et al. 2020; Sundarassen et al., 2020). Additionally, the loss of in-person social interactions, reduced extracurricular activities, and lack of concentration and social support have contributed to increased stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, which consequently affected their PWB (Liu et al. 2020; Alkhamees & Aljohani, 2021; Villani et al. 2021).

Malaysia has experienced waves of COVID-19 infections since the onset of the pandemic. The government has implemented various measures to control the spread of the virus, including movement restrictions, lockdowns, and the implementation of standard operating procedures to ensure public safety. These measures have had a direct impact on the daily lives of university students and affected their well-being (Mohd Nasir, Ramli & Mohd Som, 2021; Makhtar, Rosli & Taha, 2021).

Previous research has indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused many individuals to experience emotional stress, trauma, anxiety, and depression, affecting their health and functionality (Holmes et al. 2020) and affected individuals' emotional and mental well-being (Liu et al. 2020; Alkhamees & Aljohani, 2021; Villani et al. 2021). Some studies have been undertaken to investigate the effect of the pandemic on the general population, including young people. For instance, Herrington et al. (2021) conducted a study involving 185 adolescents to assess the impact of the pandemic on their mental health. The findings revealed

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that the pandemic had disrupted the adolescents' adaptation to their new environment, resulting in emotional disruptions.

Killgore et al. (2021) undertook a study involving 1,013 individuals residing in the United States to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health. The results revealed that 32% of the respondents experienced symptoms of depression, 46% reported experiencing anxiety, and 25% reported struggling with insomnia. Within the Malaysian context, Wong and Alias (2021) have conducted a study involving 962 students from the University of Malaya to examine psycho-social responses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicated obvious psycho-social changes, such as increase in avoidance behavior, fear, anxiety, and stress levels.

Additionally, a study conducted by Mohd Nasir et al. (2021) on 606 postgraduate students during the pandemic revealed that respondents experienced stress related to financial difficulties and academic challenges. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Makhtar et al. (2021) on 113 students, which demonstrated that the pandemic had impacted their motivation and attitudes towards learning. Therefore, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic has harmed the mental well-being of university students.

However, it is important to note that the impact of the pandemic on PWB can vary among individuals. Factors such as mental health conditions, personal resources, and available social support can influence how students are affected (Yamamoto, Nishinaka & Matsumoto, 2023). Recently, the study of resilience has received attention in social work, education, and psychological research (Collins, 2020; Yamamoto et al., 2023; Burton, 2020). Resilience has been associated with numerous positive outcomes across various domains of life (Collins, 2020). For example, resilience fosters personal growth and development. Individuals who demonstrate resilience frequently have higher self-esteem, and a sense of purpose in life, are more likely to achieve personal goals, and contribute positively to their community. Furthermore, resilient individuals tend to have better mental health outcomes and perform better at work. They can handle stress at work better, are more adaptable, are better at problem-solving, and maintain productivity (Shatté, Perlman, Smith & Lynch, 2017; Avey, Luthans, Smith & Palmer, 2010).

According to Yamamoto et al. (2023), students can foster resilience by experiencing and managing stress. But in time of adversity, resilience plays a crucial role in helping students cope with their academic challenges and decrease anxiety (Yamamoto et al., 2023; Sood & Sharma, 2020). In other words, resilience plays an important role in academic success. Resilient students are more able to overcome obstacles, adjust to changes, and persevere in the face of difficulty. Hence, they are more likely to achieve higher academic performance and success (Burton, 2020; Yamamoto et al., 2023).

Past studies have shown that resilience is important for individual well-being. Resilience can be defined as the enduring qualities possessed by individuals that enable them to effectively adapt and bounce back from adversity or difficult situations (Masten et al, 1990; Benson, 2002). Resilience in learning environments refers to the ability to adapt, remain persistent, and thrive in the face of academic challenges. Studies have consistently demonstrated that more resilient students tend to succeed academically at higher levels.

Studies on resilience have been linked to psychological factors, such as optimism, active coping, extroverted behavior, and mindfulness (Wu et al. 2013). However, there is still a lack of study on the relationship between resilience and PWB among university students in Malaysia. Therefore, the objectives of this study are:

- 1) To evaluate the resilience and PWB of university students in a public university in Malaysia.
- 2) To investigate the relationship between resilience and PWB among these students.

Understanding the role of resilience in promoting positive mental health and well-being among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological Well-Being, Resilience and Perspective Of Positive Psychology

Psychological well-being is imperative for students to thrive academically and personally. The construct of PWB embodies various aspects of an individual's mental and emotional state, including life satisfaction, emotional balance, positive relationships with others, and a sense of purpose (Ryff, 1989). Furthermore, PWB reflects an individual's overall happiness, mental health, the presence of positive emotions, and ability to thrive in difficult times (Diener, 2000). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2005) defines PWB as a condition in which an individual realizes their abilities, is able to cope with challenges in life, works productively, and contributes to society. It encompasses a sense of balance, purpose, and fulfillment in one's life, as well as positive functioning in daily activities.

Similarly, White (2004) relates psychological well-being with high self-esteem, positive interpersonal relationships, and the absence of depressive symptoms. Previous studies on PWB during the pandemic have primarily focused on identifying risk factors and symptoms of distress among general populations, including university students (Villani et al. 2021; Alkhamees & Aljohani, 2021). In this study, PWB refers to the quality of an individual's life, characterized by a sense of tranquility, enthusiasm, energy, and a perception of life's meaningfulness.

According to Kumpfer (1999), resilience is defined as the capacity to respond effectively in challenging circumstances. It also refers to the ability to bounce back from failure and trauma and adapt in difficult situations. Resilient individuals also tend to cultivate positive relationships with others, and exhibit motivation for self-improvement (Herrman et al., 2011), and develop personal capabilities and strength (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

From the perspective of positive psychology, resilience is viewed as a positive psychological trait that enables individuals to thrive in the face of adversity, drawing on personal strengths and resources (Seligman, 1998, 2000). This highlights the importance of protective factors, such as supportive relationships, self-regulation skills, and opportunities for mastery, in promoting resilience (Masten et al., 1990).

As highlighted by Knowles et al. (2021), investigating resilience is crucial in ensuring the academic success of students, particularly in the face of various challenges encountered during the pandemic. Previous studies suggest the importance of personal and social resources which can help students to increase self-efficacy and self-esteem (Yamamoto et al. 2023). Improving students' skills and abilities is important to increase their resilience. Resilience has been consistently linked to reduced psychological distress, including symptoms of anxiety and depression (Sood & Sharma, 2020). Individuals with higher levels of resilience often exhibit emotional regulation skills, more optimism, and greater life satisfaction (Yamamoto et al. 2023; Connor et al., 2003). Resilient individuals are also more likely to engage in proactive problem-solving, seek social support, and employ effective coping mechanisms, which contribute to their psychological well-being (Collins, 2020; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sood & Sharma, 2020).

Based on the above discussion, the hypothesis to be tested is as follows:

Hypothesis: There is a positive and significant relationship between resilience and the psychological well-being of university students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Design, Participants, Measurement, And Data Analysis

This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. Data were collected through an online questionnaire using the Google Forms application. The respondents consisted of undergraduate students from Malaysian university. A total of 185 respondents took part in the study, with the surveys being

distributed in May 2022 during the implementation of online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of the 225 responses received, only 185 were selected for further analysis.

The questionnaire utilized in this study encompassed two measures: The Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003) comprises of 25 items, and the psychological well-being instrument based on the World Health Organization Well-Being Index (WHO-5) comprises of 5 items. These measures were rated using likert scales, with the resilience scale using a 5-point scale ranging from "0-Not true at all" to "4-True nearly all of the time," and the well-being instrument employing a 6-point scale from "1-Not at all" to "6-All the time." Higher scores reflecting greater resilience and well-being. Sample of resilience items (*'I am able to adapt when changes occur'*, *'I can deal with whatever comes my way'*, *'I tend to bounce back after illness or other hardships'*, and *'I believe I can achieve my goals, even if there are obstacles'*). The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to assess the relationships between resilience and psychological well-being. Statistical significance was determined by a $p < 0.05$. Regression analysis was then conducted to examine the extent to which resilience predicts variations in psychological well-being among university students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 provides a description of the general characteristics of the students. From the 185 participants, 76% consist of female, and 24% male. The age of participants ranged from 19 to 24 (91%). Regarding race or ethnicity, 84% of the participants belong to the Malay ethnic group. In terms of academic achievement, based on the current CGPA results, 55% of the respondents have a CGPA between 3.0 - 3.66, followed by 32.9% of the respondents achieving a CGPA between 3.67 - 4.0.

Table 1: Respondent Profile (N = 185)

Respondent Profile	Characteristics	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	45	24.3
	Female	140	75.7
Age	19-21	73	39.5
	22-24	95	51.4
	25-28	11	5.9
	29 and above	6	3.2
	3.67 - 4.00	61	32.9
Current CGPA	3.00 - 3.66	102	55.1
	2.50 - 2.99	20	10.8
	2.00 - 2.49	2	1.08
	Malay	156	84.3
Race	Chinese	15	8.1
	Indian	9	4.9
	Others	5	2.7

To assess the levels of resilience and psychological well-being among the participants, descriptive analysis was performed. The findings from the descriptive analysis reveal that the respondents exhibited high levels of resilience and psychological well-being, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviations for Resilience and Psychological Well-being

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Resilience	4.03	0.535	High
Psychological Well-being	4.60	0.846	High

Next, a normality test was conducted to ensure that the data is normally distributed. This needs to be done before conducting further analysis. Data is normally distributed if the skewness and kurtosis values are within or close to the range of ± 1.0 (Pallant, 2011). The results showed that the skewness and kurtosis values are between -1 and +1 (Table 3).

Table 3: Normality Analysis for Resilience and Psychological Well-being

Variables	Skewness Value	Kurtosis Value
Resilience	-1.335	1.042
Psychological Well-being	-0.827	-1.448

Next, a reliability analysis was conducted to assess the consistency and stability of the instrument. The findings demonstrate high Cronbach's alpha values for both constructs, with a value of 0.95 for resilience and 0.90 for PWB (Table 4). These values surpass the threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency and stability (Hair et al., 2010; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Thus, the research instrument demonstrates strong reliability and is appropriate for use within the context of this study.

Table 4: Reliability Analysis Results

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Items
Resilience	0.952	25
Psychological Well-being	0.904	5

Based on the *Pearson* correlation coefficient values (r), the strength of the relationship between variables can be determined. Referring to Cohen (1998), the relationship between two variables is weak if the r -value falls within the range (0.20 - 0.39), moderate (0.40-0.69), strong (0.70-0.89), and very strong (> 0.90). The results of the correlation analysis show that resilience has a moderate positive and significant relationship with psychological well-being ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that students' well-being will increase if they are more resilient.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis Results

Hypothesis	PWB (r)
Resilience	0.612**

** Sig. at $p < 0.01$

Next, a linear regression test was conducted to determine the influence of resilience on the psychological well-being of students. The findings of the regression analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between resilience and PWB, indicating that higher levels of resilience were associated with greater psychological well-being among the students ($R^2 = 0.371$, $\text{Beta} = 0.310$, $p < 0.05$) (Table 6). Therefore, based on these results, the research hypothesis predicting a positive and significant relationship between resilience and psychological well-being of students during the COVID-19 pandemic is accepted. This result also indicates that resilience is a significant predictor of the psychological well-being of university students. The contribution of resilience to the variance of psychological well-being in university students is 37.1%.

Table 6: Regression Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Beta Coefficient	Adjusted R^2	F	P-value	Supported Hypothesis
Resilience $\rightarrow$ PWB	0.310	0.371	109.672	0.001*	Yes

*Significant at $p < 0.05$, PWB - Psychological well-being

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate a significant positive association between resilience and psychological well-being among university students. This suggests that higher levels of resilience are linked to greater overall well-being and positive mental health within the university setting. These results provide valuable insights into the factors that contribute to students' psychological well-being and highlight the importance of fostering resilience in university environments. Resilient students demonstrate better well-being as they possess the ability to adapt to challenging situations, solve problems, and effectively. This aligns with previous research, which views resilience as the capacity to confront difficulties, adapt, and persevere with determination and a strong sense of purpose in achieving life goals (Kumpfer, 1999; Othman, 2017; Glantz & Johnson, 1999). Barbara (2018) suggests that ongoing support, encouragement, and motivation are essential for fostering resilience among students. Moreover, this can enhance student engagement in learning activities, social interactions, and academic achievements.

Therefore, family institutions, universities, and society at large play crucial roles in instilling positive, religious and moral values and providing continuous social support to students, enabling them to develop resilience to navigate life's challenges. The implications of this study are significant for both academic and practical contexts. Theoretically, the findings highlight the importance of resilience in promoting psychological well-being among university students. It contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the relationship between resilience and well-being, specifically within the context of higher education. The study emphasizes the need for universities to prioritize resilience-building strategies and incorporate them into their support systems and educational programs. Practically, the findings provide guidance for universities in implementing specific strategies to foster students' resilience, such as enhancing mental health support, promoting stress management skills, and creating a supportive campus culture. By adopting these strategies, universities can contribute to the holistic development and overall well-being of their students, enabling them to thrive academically and prepare them for the challenges they may face in their future careers and personal lives.

There are several specific strategies that universities can implement to foster resilience among students: 1. Enhance mental health support: Universities can establish comprehensive mental health services that provide counseling, therapy, and support groups. This ensures that students have access to professional help when needed and promotes mental well-being. 2. Encourage self-care and taking responsibility: Encourage students to take care and be responsible of their physical and mental health. University can provide resources and support for healthy lifestyle. 3. Promote stress management and coping skills: Universities can offer workshops, seminars, or courses focused on stress management techniques, coping strategies, and resilience-building skills. These programs can teach students effective ways to handle academic pressures, setbacks, and personal challenges. 4. Encourage social support networks: Universities can facilitate the creation of social support networks by organizing student clubs, or mentor ship programs. These platforms provide opportunities for students to connect with peers, share experiences, and receive emotional support. 5. Provide leadership and personal development opportunities: Universities can offer leadership programs, volunteering opportunities, and extracurricular activities that foster personal growth and resilience. These experiences allow students to develop leadership skills, build confidence, and overcome challenges. 6. Foster a supportive and inclusive campus culture: Creating an inclusive and supportive campus environment is crucial for promoting resilience. Universities can implement policies that address discrimination, provide resources for diversity and inclusion, and foster a sense of belonging among students.

By implementing these strategies, universities can create a supportive and empowering environment that fosters resilience among students, equipping them with the skills and resources to navigate challenges and thrive academically and personally.

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