

The Influence of Socioemotional Well-being on Mental Health among University Students in Klang Valley, Malaysia

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of socioemotional well-being (SEWB) on mental health among university students in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. SEWB, encompassing emotional regulation, social support, self-esteem, and resilience, is critical in buffering mental health challenges. Utilizing a quantitative ex-post facto design, this study evaluates SEWB dimensions Status, Situation, Power, and Self and their impact on mental health, focusing on the moderating effects of cultural and gender contexts. Results indicate that SEWB significantly correlates with mental health outcomes, with Status emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by Situation and Power. The findings align with Self-Determination Theory, emphasizing autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key psychological needs influencing mental well-being. Notably, gender differences reveal that female students experience stronger correlations between SEWB and mental health, suggesting a need for gender-sensitive mental health programs. The study contributes to understanding how SEWB supports mental health in a collectivist context, highlighting implications for culturally tailored mental health interventions in Malaysian universities.

Keywords: Socioemotional, well-being, mental health, higher education, collectivist culture

Introduction

Mental health issues are increasingly prevalent among university students, representing a significant public health concern in Malaysia and globally. Studies have consistently shown that students face elevated risks of depression, anxiety, and stress due to the academic, social, and financial pressures they encounter during their university years. In Malaysia, the National Health and Morbidity Survey reported a high prevalence of mental health challenges among

youth, a trend that reflects similar patterns in higher education institutions where students grapple with intense academic expectations, financial burdens, and social pressures (Ibrahim et al., 2019). The pressures of university life, coupled with cultural expectations to succeed, place Malaysian students at heightened risk for mental health challenges, underscoring the critical need to explore factors that may alleviate or exacerbate these issues. One such factor is socioemotional well-being a construct that encompasses students' abilities to manage their emotions, maintain positive social interactions, and build resilience against stress.

The socioemotional well-being of students in higher education is influenced by a range of factors, including their social support networks, and the specific academic environment. Socioemotional well-being is particularly important in the context of Malaysian higher education, given the cultural factors that influence emotional expression and mental health. Malaysia's collectivist culture emphasizes harmony, social support, and family expectations, which can impact how students experience and manage stress. For example, while some personality traits, such as agreeableness, may align with collectivist values by fostering group harmony and positive social interactions, other traits may be less socially encouraged (Noordin et al., 2022). This cultural orientation can shape students' socioemotional well-being by influencing how they perceive and handle emotional challenges, as well as by affecting their willingness to seek help. Mental health stigma remains a significant barrier to seeking support among Malaysian students, who may view asking for help as a sign of weakness or failure. This stigma can reduce students' social support networks, which are critical for maintaining socioemotional well-being, and contribute to a higher risk of mental health issues such as stress and depression (Abdullah & Brown, 2020). Therefore, understanding the socioemotional well-being of students requires a culturally sensitive approach that considers both individual personality traits and societal expectations.

Students with high socioemotional well-being, who experience more positive emotions, are likely to have better emotional regulation and coping mechanisms, which buffer them against academic stress. Self-Determination Theory further emphasizes the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation and emotional stability. These factors are critical for maintaining mental health in an academic context, as they promote resilience and positive self-regard, both of which contribute to socioemotional well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Such theories underscore the value of socioemotional well-being in enhancing students' mental health, especially in a multicultural environment like Malaysia's Klang Valley, where students encounter diverse challenges related to academic expectations and social dynamics.

Despite the growing recognition of mental health challenges among university students, there is limited research focused on the specific influence of socioemotional well-being on mental health within the Malaysian higher education context. Previous studies have largely concentrated on the prevalence of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and stress, rather than on the broader construct of socioemotional well-being, which encompasses emotional regulation, social skills, and resilience. Additionally, existing research often overlooks the complex interactions between personality traits, cultural expectations, and socioemotional well-being that can shape mental health outcomes (Roslan et al., 2017). Addressing this gap, the current study aims to investigate how socioemotional well-being influences mental health among university students in Klang Valley, examining the mediating role of personality traits and the impact of cultural factors on this relationship.

This research is essential not only for understanding the mental health challenges faced by Malaysian students but also for informing mental health interventions and policies in higher education. Findings from this study could support the development of tailored mental health programs that incorporate socioemotional learning, resilience training, and culturally sensitive approaches to enhance students' well-being. By addressing both individual and cultural dimensions of socioemotional well-being, this research can contribute to creating a supportive academic environment that promotes mental health and prepares students to handle the stresses of university life and beyond.

The relationship between socioemotional well-being (SEWB) and mental health is underpinned by theoretical insights from socioemotional development and self-determination theories, particularly within collectivist societies like Malaysia. Socioemotional development theories highlight those competencies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are foundational to managing social contexts effectively, which is directly related to mental health outcomes (Jones et al., 2019). In the context of higher education, these competencies are crucial for university students, as they enable effective coping with academic stress and social challenges. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which has been applied broadly across mental health studies, emphasizes the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as critical factors that underpin well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020). SEWB directly supports these needs by fostering self-worth, perceived social control, and social competence, all essential for navigating mental health challenges, especially in high-pressure academic environments.

Within the SEWB construct, each dimension Status, Situation, Power, and Self uniquely influences mental health. The Status dimension, which reflects social recognition, can enhance self-esteem and buffer against feelings of isolation, significantly reducing the risk of anxiety and depression (Lee et al., 2022). In collectivist cultures like Malaysia, social recognition is highly valued, and students who feel validated by their peers and community experience better mental health outcomes. The Situation dimension, which relates to adaptability, plays a significant role in contexts that prioritize social harmony, as students who can flexibly navigate social expectations experience lower stress and enhanced well-being (Mahmood et al., 2023). The Power dimension, which involves perceived autonomy and control, aligns with SDT's autonomy component. A sense of control is particularly beneficial for students facing cultural expectations to conform, as it helps reduce stress and supports mental well-being (Ch'ng et al., 2023). Lastly, the Self dimension, encompassing self-worth and efficacy, aligns with SDT's competence need. Higher self-worth enables students to better manage academic and social pressures, providing a buffer against anxiety and depressive symptoms (Noordin et al., 2022).

The cultural context plays a critical moderating role in the SEWB-mental health relationship. In collectivist societies, cultural norms emphasizing social harmony and family expectations often influence socioemotional well-being by encouraging conformity and interdependence (Lim et al., 2021). For female students, in particular, who may rely more on socioemotional resources, the impact of SEWB on mental health can be even more pronounced. Understanding these gendered experiences is essential for culturally adapted interventions. The evidence highlights the need for culturally sensitive mental health programs that prioritize strategies to enhance autonomy, self-worth, and adaptability, empowering students within their cultural frameworks to manage emotional challenges effectively (Ali et al., 2021). This framework underscores the importance of developing mental health interventions that address the unique cultural and social dynamics affecting students in Malaysia, advocating for programs that integrate socioemotional learning and bolster self-confidence and social resilience to improve mental health outcomes (Elmer et al., 2020; Richards et al., 2021).

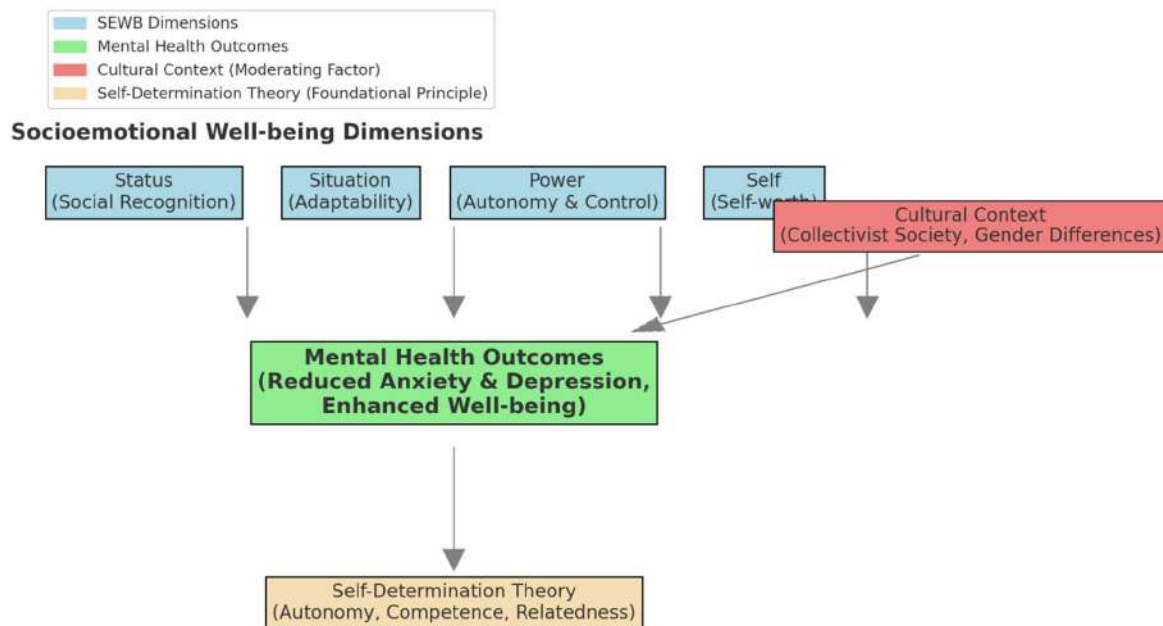


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of Socioemotional Well-Being Dimensions to Mental Health Outcomes in A Collectivist

Context

The theoretical framework illustrates the relationship between socioemotional well-being (SEWB) dimensions and mental health outcomes. Socioemotional Well-being Dimensions namely, Status, Situation, Power, and Self play a vital role in mental health by fostering aspects like social recognition, adaptability, autonomy, and self-worth. Each of these dimensions contributes uniquely to a student's mental health, enabling them to navigate social and academic environments more effectively. Cultural Context serves as a moderating factor, particularly within collectivist societies such as Malaysia, where social harmony and family expectations influence mental health outcomes. Gender differences further moderate this relationship, with female students often drawing more on social and emotional resources, which can amplify SEWB's impact on mental health.

Mental Health Outcomes reflect the positive influence of SEWB, as students with higher SEWB scores are likely to experience reduced levels of anxiety and depression, as well as an overall improvement in well-being. The framework is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which provides foundational principles such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness to explain how SEWB dimensions support mental health. SDT highlights that when students feel autonomous, competent, and connected, their socioemotional well-being enhances their resilience to stressors. Thus, this integrated framework underscores the importance of culturally informed mental health programs that nurture socioemotional dimensions and align with SDT principles, fostering mental well-being in students amidst cultural pressures.

In sum, the current study seeks to deepen our understanding of the role of socioemotional well-being in supporting mental health among university students in Malaysia, particularly within the unique cultural and academic context of Klang Valley. By exploring the relationship between personality traits, socioemotional well-being, and mental health, this study aims to provide insights that can guide the development of holistic and culturally responsive mental health strategies in Malaysian higher education.

Literature Review

Recent years have seen an increased emphasis on socioemotional well-being as an essential component of student mental health, particularly in the context of higher education. Socioemotional well-being (SEWB) is understood as the capacity to manage one's emotions, build positive relationships, and demonstrate resilience against stress (Jones et al., 2019). In university settings, where students face academic pressure, social expectations, and the transition to independence, SEWB becomes critical to mental health stability and academic success. Studies from 2019 onward have highlighted the increasing role of SEWB in fostering resilience, improving academic performance, and mitigating mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, which are prevalent among university students (Son et al., 2020).

Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden-and-Build Theory and Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) are frequently referenced in studies on SEWB. Fredrickson's theory posits that positive emotions help individuals expand their thought-action repertoires, building resources that support resilience and coping skills. Studies during the 2019–2024 period have applied this theory to university students, showing that those with high SEWB experience positive emotions that contribute to better mental health outcomes and lower stress levels (Fredrickson et al., 2021). SDT, which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, has been instrumental in understanding SEWB in educational settings, where students' motivation and emotional well-being are enhanced by a supportive environment (Ryan et al., 2022). These frameworks underscore the role of SEWB as a foundational aspect of mental health in students.

SEWB is closely tied to academic performance, with research showing that students with higher SEWB tend to have better focus, persistence, and resilience in facing academic challenges. In the competitive academic environment of Malaysian universities, where expectations are high, SEWB plays a pivotal role in helping students cope with academic stress and avoid burnout. A 2022 study by Zainuddin & Kutty emphasized the positive impact of SEWB on students' ability to manage stress, highlighting the importance of integrating SEWB-enhancing programs into university curricula. Further research by Durlak et al. (2021) has shown that students with higher SEWB have lower dropout rates and greater academic satisfaction, underlining its role in fostering an environment conducive to learning and growth.

The Malaysian cultural context, with its emphasis on collectivist values, significantly influences SEWB among university students. In Malaysia, cultural norms that prioritize family expectations and social harmony shape how students perceive and express emotions, impacting their SEWB and mental health. Studies by Abdullah & Brown

(2020) and Noordin et al. (2022) indicate that students in Malaysia often face pressure to uphold family expectations, which can exacerbate stress and hinder open expression of emotional struggles. The stigma associated with mental health issues in Malaysian society further complicates this issue, as students may be reluctant to seek help, impacting their overall SEWB (Visvanathan et al., 2021).

Students with high SEWB are better equipped to handle stress through adaptive coping mechanisms and resilience. Studies show that students who score higher in SEWB are more likely to use positive coping strategies, such as seeking social support and problem-solving, which in turn supports their mental health and academic success (Richards et al., 2020). Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, students with higher SEWB demonstrated greater resilience in adapting to remote learning and the associated isolation, suggesting that SEWB is a crucial buffer against crises and disruptions in academic settings (Elmer et al., 2020). Recent studies have examined gender differences in SEWB and mental health among university students, revealing distinct patterns in how male and female students experience and manage stress. For instance, female students tend to report higher levels of anxiety and depression, while male students often exhibit greater resilience in social contexts. Research by Zainuddin & Kutty (2022) found that female students scored higher on neuroticism, which could contribute to emotional vulnerability, whereas male students scored higher on extraversion and agreeableness, traits associated with more effective social coping mechanisms. These findings emphasize the need for gender-sensitive mental health interventions that consider the different SEWB needs of male and female students.

The period between 2019 and 2024 has seen a surge in digital mental health interventions aimed at supporting SEWB. Due to increased accessibility and the rise of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, digital tools such as online counseling, mindfulness apps, and virtual support groups have proven effective in promoting SEWB among university students (Lattie et al., 2019; Harrer et al., 2021). These tools provide an accessible way for students to receive support and develop coping skills, particularly for those who may be reluctant to seek help in person due to stigma. Studies suggest that digital interventions can significantly improve SEWB and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression when integrated into student support systems (Teuber et al., 2021).

Socioemotional learning (SEL) programs have gained traction as an effective way to improve SEWB and mental health in educational settings. Meta-analyses from 2019 onward indicate that SEL programs not only reduce emotional distress but also improve students' academic outcomes by enhancing emotional regulation, social competence, and motivation (Taylor et al., 2017). In Malaysia, the adoption of SEL programs in universities is still emerging, but studies show promising results in enhancing resilience and reducing stress. Programs focusing on emotional intelligence, empathy, and teamwork foster SEWB, which translates to improved mental health and academic persistence among students (Brackett et al., 2019). Despite the growing body of literature on SEWB and mental health in higher education, gaps remain in understanding how these factors interact within the specific cultural and academic context of Malaysia. Most studies from 2019 to 2024 have focused on Western contexts, with relatively few addressing the unique pressures and cultural influences in Malaysian universities. Future research should explore the longitudinal impact of SEWB on mental health, taking into account intersectional factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, and cultural background (Zainuddin & Kutty, 2022). Additionally, there is a need for culturally tailored interventions that align with the values and expectations of Malaysian students, promoting SEWB in a way that is both accessible and effective.

Research Methodology and Data Analysis

The study focuses on a targeted group of students enrolled in higher education institutions within Klang Valley, Malaysia, aiming to examine the socioemotional well-being, and mental health. This specific cohort includes students from a range of public and private universities in this region, selected for their diverse backgrounds and varied academic pressures, which provide a comprehensive context for analysing mental health and socioemotional well-being. Utilizing a quantitative ex-post facto research design, the study follows a structured data collection approach to assess key constructs.

Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique, ensuring proportional representation across demographic categories such as age, gender, and academic discipline, with a total sample size of 443 respondents. The study administered three standardized instruments: the Socioemotional Well-being Index (SEWBI), the Mental Health Inventory-38 (MHI-38) to assess socioemotional well-being and mental health outcomes. Data collection was conducted electronically via Google Forms to enhance accessibility, and participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from each participant.

The data analysis involved a series of statistical techniques, beginning with descriptive statistics to summarize demographic characteristics and reliability testing via Cronbach's alpha, confirming high internal consistency across the SEWBI and MHI-38 scales. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to identify relationships between socioemotional well-being and mental health outcomes. Further, a multiple regression analysis was applied to evaluate the predictive strength of each socioemotional well-being dimension on mental health, providing insights into the factors most strongly associated with students' psychological resilience. Additionally, moderation and mediation analyses were conducted to explore the role of demographic factors in the relationship between socioemotional well-being and mental health outcomes, particularly examining gender as a moderating variable. This comprehensive methodology enabled the study to yield data-driven insights into the factors influencing students' mental health and socioemotional well-being within a multicultural academic context in Malaysia.

Categories of the Respondents

This study focuses on university students in Klang Valley, Malaysia, a population that encompasses a wide variety of academic disciplines, institutions, and demographic backgrounds. The chosen respondents fall within the age range of 18 to 25, capturing a demographic that is often at higher risk for mental health challenges, due to the pressures of academic performance, social expectations, and the transition to adult responsibilities. Given the multicultural nature of Klang Valley, the sample represents students from different ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and academic standings, ensuring that the findings reflect the broader experience of university students in this region. Categories are further delineated by academic levels, from undergraduate to postgraduate, and by the type of institution, including both public and private universities. This categorization provides a comprehensive view of the socioemotional well-being and mental health of students, addressing potential variances across different subgroups within the student population.

Sampling Technique and Demographic of the Respondents

The study employs a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representativeness across various demographic subgroups. Stratified sampling is used to proportionally include students from different academic disciplines, year levels, and types of universities, addressing potential demographic disparities that could influence the generalizability of the findings. By dividing the population into strata based on relevant characteristics, this approach increases the likelihood that findings are applicable across the entire student body in Klang Valley. The sample size is determined following Krejcie and Morgan's guidelines, with an estimated 400 respondents deemed sufficient to achieve statistical power for robust analysis. Demographic details gathered include age (Table 1), gender (Table 2), ethnicity, academic year, and field of study, providing a rich dataset for identifying patterns in socioemotional well-being and mental health across various subgroups. This demographic information is essential in controlling for confounding variables that may influence the relationship between socioemotional well-being and mental health, allowing for more nuanced interpretations of the findings.

Table 1: Age Distribution

Age	Frequency	Percentage %
18-20 Years Old	279	63.1
21-23 Years Old	108	24.4
24-26 Years Old	21	4.8
27-29 Years Old	10	2.3
30 Years Old and above	24	5.4
Total	442	100

μ 1.62; M : 1.00; SD : 1.058

Note: μ = Mean; M = Median; SD : Significant Difference

Table 2: Gender distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	79	17.9
Female	363	82.1
Total	442	100

μ 1.82; M : 2.00; SD : .384

Data Collection Methods

Data collection is conducted through an online survey, which is both time-efficient and accessible, allowing the study to reach a wide audience within Klang Valley's student population. The survey is structured into three sections: demographic information, socioemotional well-being assessment, and mental health assessment. The demographic section captures basic respondent information to ensure that data can be segmented and analyzed across subgroups. The second section uses the Socioemotional Well-being Index (SEWBI), a validated tool designed to measure key components of socioemotional well-being, including status, situation, power, and self, with each item rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey is distributed via Google Forms to maximize reach and participation is voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and anonymity, are strictly upheld to protect participants' privacy and ensure ethical compliance in handling sensitive mental health information. A pilot study with 30 participants is conducted before the main survey to confirm the clarity, reliability, and feasibility of the survey instrument, with adjustments made based on feedback to improve the clarity and flow of the questionnaire.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

Data interpretation and analysis are conducted using IBM SPSS Statistic 27 to ensure accurate and comprehensive statistical analysis. Initially, data cleaning is performed to address any missing or inconsistent responses, with incomplete cases exceeding 10% missing data being removed from the dataset to maintain data quality. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, are used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and provide an overview of the socioemotional well-being and mental health scores. Reliability testing is conducted using Cronbach's alpha for each scale and subscale to confirm the internal consistency of the SEWBI and MHI-38, with a threshold of 0.70 set for acceptable reliability.

For inferential analysis, Pearson's correlation coefficient is calculated to examine the relationships between socioemotional well-being and mental health outcomes, identifying the strength and direction of associations across various dimensions. Additionally, multiple regression analysis is performed to assess the predictive power of socioemotional well-being dimensions on mental health, with socioemotional well-being components as independent variables and mental health scores as the dependent variable. This regression analysis identifies which aspects of socioemotional well-being are most strongly associated with mental health, providing insights into key areas for intervention. Further, moderation and mediation analyses are conducted using Sobel test to explore the role of demographic variables and personality traits. Moderation analysis examines whether the relationship between socioemotional well-being and mental health varies by demographic factors such as gender or academic level. Finally, the results are interpreted in the context of existing literature, with findings discussed in relation to past studies to highlight contributions to the understanding of socioemotional well-being and mental health in university students.

Results and Discussion

The demographic analysis of the sample reveals a balanced representation across gender, academic year, and field of study. Descriptive statistics indicate that socioemotional well-being (SEWB) scores, measured through the SEWBI, are relatively high across the dimensions of status, situation, power, and self, with mean scores in the upper range of the 5-point Likert scale. Mental health scores, assessed via the MHI-38, reveal varying levels of psychological well-being, with a distribution that aligns with similar studies on mental health in higher education. Specifically, dimensions related to anxiety and depression show slightly higher average scores, suggesting moderate levels of these conditions.

among the respondents. These descriptive statistics provide a foundational understanding of the general mental health and SEWB landscape among Klang Valley university students.

The reliability analysis confirms the internal consistency of the SEWBI and MHI-38 scales, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the 0.70 threshold for all subscales, suggesting high reliability (see Table 3). Each SEWB dimension status, situation, power, and self-demonstrated strong internal coherence, supporting the robustness of the instrument for measuring socioemotional well-being among Malaysian university students. Similarly, the MHI-38 showed high internal consistency across its subscales, affirming its reliability in assessing mental health outcomes.

Table 3: Reliability Estimates for Each Construct

Dimension	No of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Socioemotional Well-being	23	.835
Mental Health Inventory	38	.933
Big Five Personality	44	.952
Overall	105	0.907

The multiple regression analysis provides insight into the relationship between each component of socioemotional well-being (SEWB) and mental health (see Table 4). Findings indicate that the status dimension has the strongest association with mental health, as evidenced by a significant positive correlation ($r = .241$, $p < .001$), suggesting that individuals with a heightened sense of societal recognition or acceptance experience better mental health outcomes. In contrast, the power and situation dimensions show weak, non-significant correlations with mental health ($r = .067$, $p = .159$; $r = .057$, $p = .228$, respectively), indicating that control over one's environment and contextual adaptability are not strong predictors in this model. Similarly, the self-dimension displays a very weak and non-significant relationship ($r = .024$, $p = .612$), implying that self-worth perceptions alone may not substantially influence mental health outcomes in this sample.

Table 4: Correlation Between Socioemotional Well-Being and Mental Health Outcomes

Item	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Power	.067	.159	442
Self	.024	.612	
Status	.241	<.001	
Situation	.057	.228	

Based on Table 5, the findings suggest that gender plays a moderating role in the SEWB-mental health relationship, with female students demonstrating stronger associations between socioemotional well-being dimensions and mental health outcomes. Female students scored higher on the status dimension (Mean = 3.1047, SD = .64839) compared to male students (Mean = 2.9451, SD = .82333), possibly indicating a greater reliance on social recognition as a source of emotional support. This gender difference may be attributed to female students' tendency to draw more heavily on social and emotional resources, enhancing the influence of socioemotional well-being on their mental health. These insights underscore the importance of gender-sensitive mental health interventions in Malaysian universities, particularly those aimed at bolstering socioemotional well-being among female students to address their unique emotional needs.

Table 5: Gender Differences in Socioemotional Well-Being Dimensions

Dimension	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation
Status	Male	2.9451	.82333
	Female	3.1047	.64839
Situation	Male	3.5759	.67874
	Female	3.4261	.67602
Power	Male	3.3038	.58692
	Female	3.2573	.63160
Self	Male	3.5443	.71248
	Female	3.3278	.72899

Table 6 highlights gender differences in various dimensions of mental health and socioemotional well-being among male and female students. For anxiety, female students have a slightly higher mean score (Mean = 3.4353, SD = .55828) than male students (Mean = 3.4101, SD = .57903), indicating comparable levels of anxiety across genders. Depression scores also reveal a higher mean for females (Mean = 3.3581, SD = .68597) compared to males (Mean = 3.1682, SD = .69639), suggesting that female students may experience slightly greater depressive symptoms. In terms of behavior/emotion control, female students again show a marginally higher mean (Mean = 3.6305, SD = .58806) than males (Mean = 3.5678, SD = .58499), indicating better emotional regulation. Conversely, males score higher in general positive affect (Mean = 3.5418, SD = .57323) compared to females (Mean = 3.3949, SD = .56094), suggesting that male students report slightly higher positive emotions overall. Emotional ties show a higher mean for males (Mean = 3.3312, SD = .59944) than for females (Mean = 3.2190, SD = .64765), indicating stronger perceived emotional connections among male students. Lastly, in life satisfaction, female students have a slightly higher mean (Mean = 3.4789, SD = .67628) than males (Mean = 3.4051, SD = .72387), reflecting greater satisfaction with life among female students. These differences highlight subtle gender variations in mental health and socioemotional well-being dimensions, suggesting tailored approaches might be beneficial in supporting student well-being.

Table 6.: Gender Differences in Mental Health

Dimension	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation
Anxiety	Male	3.4101	.57903
	Female	3.4353	.55828
Depression	Male	3.1682	.69639
	Female	3.3581	.68597
Behavior/ Emotion Control	Male	3.5678	.58499
	Female	3.6305	.58806
General Positive Affect	Male	3.5418	.57323
	Female	3.3949	.56094
Emotional Ties	Male	3.3312	.59944
	Female	3.2190	.64765
Life Satisfaction	Male	3.4051	.72387
	Female	3.4789	.67628

While the study provides valuable insights, limitations should be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported measures may introduce response biases, and the cross-sectional design limits causative conclusions. Future research could employ longitudinal methods to explore how SEWB evolves over time in response to changing academic and social environments. Additionally, expanding the study to include students from diverse regions within Malaysia would enhance the generalizability of findings. Further exploration of the role of personality traits as mediators could also provide a more nuanced understanding of how individual differences shape the relationship between SEWB and mental health outcomes.

Conclusion

This study underscores the vital role of socioemotional well-being in mental health, particularly in the collectivist cultural context of Malaysia. The positive associations between SEWB dimensions especially Status and Situation and mental health outcomes suggest that university students with higher SEWB levels are better equipped to navigate emotional and social challenges. Gender differences in SEWB's impact reveal that female students may benefit more from SEWB-focused interventions, underscoring the need for gender-sensitive mental health programs. Integrating SEWB-enhancing strategies within university mental health services can foster resilience, autonomy, and social competence, equipping students to manage academic and social pressures effectively. Future research could explore longitudinal impacts of SEWB on mental health and investigate further demographic moderators to refine culturally responsive mental health interventions in higher education.

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