

The Influence of Emotional Regulation and Self-Motivation on Happiness and Psychological Well-Being during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Counseling Sessions in Malaysia

By

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Abstract

Emotional problems have been identified as a significant concern in dealing with mental health issues in Malaysia during the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO). Depression and anxiety contributed to a 2.4 percent increase in Malaysian psychiatric problems. This study aims to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence (emotional regulation and self-motivation), happiness, and psychological well-being among counseling clients in one of Malaysia's counseling agencies. A total of 83 counseling clients responded to the questionnaire. Structural Equation Modeling in SmartPLS was used to test the research hypotheses. The results of the analysis yielded several significant findings: First, there was a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence (emotional regulation), happiness, and psychological well-being. Second, there was a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence (self-motivation), happiness, and psychological well-being. This study confirmed that practitioners' emotional regulation and self-motivation are essential variables in building joy and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the findings of this study can be used as essential recommendations to help practitioners understand the diversity of perspectives regarding the construction of emotional intelligence and serve as a guideline in counseling sessions to help achieve and maintain their emotional well-being in daily life.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, happiness, psychological well-being

Introduction

Emotional intelligence is a significant skill for overcoming hardship since it can improve leadership, teamwork, and personal resilience, allow a person to make good decisions, build and maintain cooperative relationships, cope with stress, and deal with higher levels of continuous change (Romanelli, Cain, & Smith 2006; Yamani, Shahabi & Haghani, 2014). Psychologists define emotional intelligence (EQ) as a capacity to comprehend, utilize, and control emotions reasonably to minimize stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome obstacles, and resolve conflicts (Daniel Goleman, 1998). Additionally, emotional intelligence is defined as the capacity to monitor one's own feelings and those of others, effectively differentiating between emotions in order to use emotional information to influence one's ideas and actions (Mayer, Roberts & Bercade, 2008). Individuals with a strong proclivity for emotional intelligence perform well in the workplace and achieve various goals for themselves and their lives. It is also crucial for conflict resolution in the workplace and in all aspects of life, including the ability to assist others in stressful situations, deal with misunderstandings, and be open to problem-solving. The preservation, conservation, and enhancement of one's emotional intelligence are critical, especially as the world faces the Covid-19 pandemic. When the coronavirus appears, everyone on the planet can become depressed, worried, and uncertain.

Thus, emotional intelligence is the point at which cognition and emotion intersect. This consistency will improve resilience, motivation, empathy, reasoning, stress management, communication, and the ability to comprehend and navigate a wide range of social situations and conflicts. According to recent research, emotional intelligence significantly impacts a person's resilience or ability to deal with stressful situations (Tri-gueros et al., 2020; Choudhary, 2019; Magnano, Craparo & Paolillo, 2016). Those with high emotional intelligence are less likely to succumb to the adverse effects of stress. As can be seen, emotional intelligence is a prerequisite for increasing one's resilience because resilience through emotional intelligence can lead to better motivation, joy, and overall well-being (Tiwari et al. 2020). In turn, this can assist individuals in managing stress, providing feedback, and collaborating with others.

However, having a high emotional intelligence does not guarantee that a person would not feel stressed or anxious about life difficulties, let alone experiences that amplify their feelings, unless the person is aware of the situation and their emotions. Such awareness allows a person to become capable of self-control, self-management and not be drawn by his anxiety, with very negative physical and psychological consequences. At the same time, a person who is aware of his emotional intelligence and manages to control it will be able to help people suffering from stress and negative emotions caused by social awareness, social skills and empathy that play a role in providing support to others. As a result, people facing a crisis will tend to stand together and work together because they understand that sharing problems with others can reduce existing risks. Additionally, in the critical situations experienced by humans today, the need for emotional intelligence is paramount. Thus, understanding the role of emotional intelligence and emotional stability in coping with crises, such as the current COVID-19 crisis, has a global impact. It also demonstrates the need to develop emotional intelligence skills (Abdel-Fattah, 2020).

This article provides some findings related to the determinants of emotional intelligence and its efficiency in reducing stress in daily life and highlights the need for awareness, self-control, and empathy to cope with crises like Covid19 in self-counseling clients. Furthermore,

the importance of integrating emotional intelligence in counseling sessions at all processes and levels cannot be refuted. It will also aid counselors in conducting in-depth research on the subject.

Literature review

Emotional intelligence is the capacity to manage one's and others' feelings and emotions and the ability to rationally guide all one's actions and thoughts (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Goleman (1998) categorizes EQ into five dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. In contrast, Salovey and Mayer divide EQ into four components: identifying emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions, and regulating emotions. Recent research has shown that emotional intelligence is created by focusing on two primary components (personal competence and social competence) and six main factors (Sandhya & Namrata, 2013). Only two of the six components of emotional intelligence, comprising self-awareness, self-motivation, emotional control, social awareness, social skills, and emotional receptivity, have been focused on. First, emotional regulation is the capacity to monitor and control one's emotions. This is the ability to respond socially acceptable to a variety of emotions. It promotes adaptability to rationalize impulsive reactions and the capacity to delay spontaneous reactions. Second, self-motivation is the capacity to perform what must be accomplished without being influenced by other individuals or circumstances. Self-motivated persons are able to find the motivation and strength to complete activities, even in difficult settings and conditions, without giving up or requiring external encouragement. Good emotional acceptance contributes to a person's emotional and social maturity. Additionally, it cultivates empathy and sensitivity to the needs of others. In general, emotional intelligence (EQ) is a person's capacity to manage and control his or her own emotions and those of others while providing a positive impetus toward forming human interactions that can lead to the accomplishment of a goal (Cooper & Sawaf 1997; McGarvey 1997).

The suggestions put forward by the theory are also supported by empirical studies that have been carried out by researchers. Joanna Samul (2020) studied 190 students from the University of Technology in Poland, Ardiana et al. (2019) studied 217 cadets at Surabaya Polytechnic, Jale and Meltem (2020) examined 217 university students, among them 94 males and 123 females aged between 19 and 25 years from various departments of Uludag University in Turkey. They found that self-resilience is a reinforcer of the relationship between emotional intelligence and well-being. A study conducted by Sanchez-Ruiz et al. (2021) involved 360 individuals between the ages of 18 to 69 in Lebanon. It was found that the nature of emotional intelligence allows it to deal positively with stressful situations such as pandemics. This can be established at both cognitive levels by re-formulating situations to see something valuable in them, and behavioral levels, by being proactive about it.

A study by Joan et al. (2019) used 646 students in years one, second, third, and fourth of secondary education, most of whom were aged between 12 and 17 years, from eight schools in the Community of Extremadura (Spain) in random. In this line, some researchers asserted that emotional repair is essential for psychological health and function. Higher levels of emotional development are associated with adolescent participation in pleasurable, disruptive activities, which contributes to greater feelings of happiness. These studies show that emotional intelligence, happiness and psychological well-being are interrelated and reinforce each other. Emotional intelligence can develop intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies that include happiness and psychological well-being closely related to good attitudes such as humility, forgiveness and gratitude. Therefore, this leads to the following hypothesis:

- Hypothesis 1:** Emotional regulation has a positive and significant relationship with happiness.
Hypothesis 2: Emotional regulation has a positive and significant relationship with psychological well-being.
Hypothesis 3: Self-motivation has a positive and significant relationship with happiness.
Hypothesis 4: Self-motivation has a positive and significant relationship with psychological well-being.

Although many previous studies had examined the influence of emotional intelligence in improving happiness and psychological well-being, most studies focused on the characteristics of emotional intelligence without taking into account the effect of the relationship between these variables (Badri et al. 2021; Drigas & Chara, 2020; Tripathy, 2018; Serrat, 2009). In conclusion, previous studies had limitations in the aspect of studying emotional intelligence as an important practitioner variable. They also employed simple correlations to measure the strength of the relationship between dependent and independent variables. Furthermore, past studies also used simple interview methods to explain different respondents' perceptions related to emotional intelligence, happiness and psychological well-being. The scarcity of relevant studies suggests a significant lack of evidence regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence, happiness, and psychological well-being. This prompts researchers to fill in the gaps and, at the same time, prove that this relationship is significant and should be given due attention in society. More importantly, it can be used to identify the effectiveness of counseling sessions conducted during Covid -19 outbreak. Fundamentally, this study was conducted to provide guidance to counselors, educators and organizational leaders on the importance of their role in improving happiness and psychological well-being.

Figure 1 depicts how the research literature guides the researchers in developing the conceptual framework for this study.

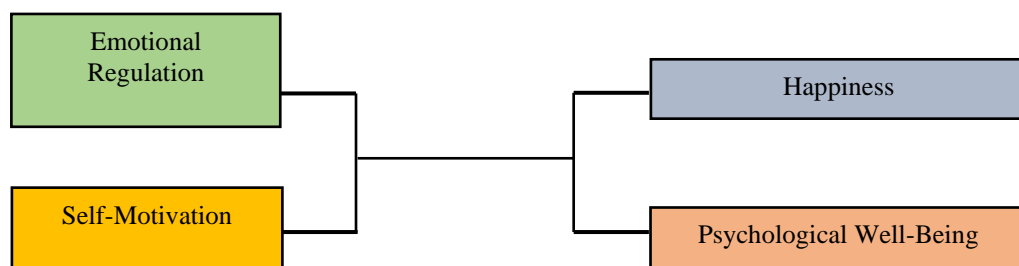


Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework*

Research methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted in one government agency that offers counseling services in the State of Pahang, Malaysia. The institution's name is not displayed for reasons of confidentiality. This study employed the survey methods and a cross-sectional research design as suggested by Sekaran and Bougie (2016) to help researchers collect accurate data, reduce bias, and enhance the quality of the data collected. Early in the data collection process, questionnaires were compiled based on the literature on emotional intelligence, happiness, and psychological well-being. In addition, back-to-back translation techniques were used to translate the survey questionnaires into English and Malay to enhance the research findings

(Lomand, 2016). Next, this study used a sampling method to distribute 100 questionnaires to counseling clients in one of the government agencies offering counseling services in the State of Pahang, Malaysia, but only 83 questionnaires were received and used. For this study, this sampling technique was chosen because the agency's management was unable to provide detailed information about the counseling clients due to confidentiality reasons. This limitation did not allow researchers to use random sampling techniques in selecting participants for this study.

Sample Study

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents are female (71.1%), aged between 25 to 40 years (49.4%), living in the city (63.9%), the majority are Muslim (94.0%), Ma-lay (96.4%), education level certificate (36.1%), working in the government sector (57.8%), married (51.8%) and earning in the range below RM1999 (43.4%).

Measurement Tools

The questionnaire of this study included four main sections: First, emotional intelligence, which used 6 items adapted from the study of Sandhya and Namrata (2013). These constructs were assessed using two elements: emotional regulation and self-motivation. Second, happiness, which used 4 items adapted from the study of Hill and Argyle (2002). Third, psychological well-being, which employed 4 items adapted from a study conducted by Ryff (1989). A 5 -point Likert scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree" was used to rate the items. Demographic variables such as gender, age, place of residence, religion, citizenship, higher education, occupation, marital status, and monthly income, as this study assessed the emotions of the counseling clients. Survey questionnaire data were analyzed using SmartPLS to provide latent variable scores, address small sample sizes and abnormal data, and evaluate complex research frameworks (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016; Henseler, Ringle and Sinkovics, 2009).

Findings

Reflective Measurement Model

According to Hair et al. (2017), survey questionnaire data must be filtered first before being used to analyze measurement models and structural equation models. Based on this recommendation, questionnaires with no missing value were used, and items with suspicious answers, Skewness and Kurtosis values greater than +/- 2.0 were removed from this questionnaire. Hence, only questionnaires that met the validity and reliability analysis criteria were used in this study. Table 1 shows that all the outer loading values recorded values, as recommended by Hair et al. (2017), are above the value of 0.708. Convergent validity is seen in the value recorded by AVE, which must reach at least 0.5. For internal consistency reliability, the defective composite reliability value is > 0.708.

Table 2 presents the results of construct validity and reliability. The Heterotrait-Monotrait correlation ratio (HTMT) is less than 0.90 for each construct (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2009), indicating that the construct meets the discrimination validity criteria (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2017; 2009). In addition, each construct's interval value falls below 1 (Hair et al., 2017), indicating that the construct meets the criteria for discriminatory analysis.

Table 1. *Values of reflective measurement model*

Indicator	Convergent Validity		Internal Consistency
	Outer Loadings	AVE (>0.50)	Reliability Composite Reliability
B01: I manage the emotions of disappointment well	0.825		
B02: I keep myself positive and calm even in frustrating situations.	0.881		
B03: I stay focused and clear thinking even under pressure	0.883	0.710	0.907
B04: I was able to avoid outside temptations in order to fulfill my dreams.	0.777		
B05: I am determined to achieve my goals despite the obstacles	0.933		
B06: I have the confidence to take full responsibility and make decisions for myself.	0.934	0.871	0.931
D01: I feel that this life is very rewarding	0.822		
D02: I find most things enjoyable	0.835		
D03: I am satisfied with everything in my life	0.811	0.682	0.895
D04: I always make a cheerful impression on other people	0.803		
E01: I had a sense of direction and purpose in life.	0.785		
E02: I enjoy making plans for the future and trying to make them happen	0.852	0.669	0.890
E03: When I look at my life story, I'm happy with how it is.	0.784		
E04: I feel confident and positive towards myself.	0.877		

Table 2. *Results of discriminatory analysis*

Construct	Emotional Regulation	Self-Motivation	Psychological Well-Being
Self-Motivation	0.766		
Happiness	0.794 (0.358,0.662)	0.741	
Psychoogical Well-Being	0.771 (0.345,0.632)	0.648 (0.154,0.471)	0.655 (0.058, 0.376)

Note. The values in the parenthesis are the values of confidential interval at 5% and 95%.

Construct Analysis

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics and analysis of the variance inflation factor. The mean values for all constructs are between 4.26 and 4.77, indicating that some respondents rate their emotional regulation, self-motivation, happiness, and psychological well-being between (4) and (7). In contrast, the variance inflation factor for the relationship between the

independent variable (i.e., emotional regulation and self-motivation) and the dependent variable (happiness and psychological well-being) is less than 5.0, indicating that the data do not have severe collinearity issues (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3. Analysis of variance inflation factor and descriptive statistics

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance Inflation Factor	
			Happiness	Psychological Well-Being
Emotional Regulation	4.77	2.66	1.762	1.762
Self-Motivation	4.65	2.28	1.762	1.762
Happiness	4.26	2.15		
Psychological Well-Being	4.30	2.65		

Structural Model Measurement

Table 4 shows that 52.1 percent of the change in PWB and 46.1 percent of the change in H are explained by ER and Self_M for the direct effect model. This means that 47.9 percent of the PWB variance and 53.9 percent of the H variance could be explained by other factors that are not the focus of this study. The values of these two R²s are greater than 0.33, indicating that this model has a large effect. Next, the findings of the study hypothesis test show four important findings: First, ER is significantly correlated with PWB (B = 0.485; t = 5.414). Therefore, it supports H1. Second, ER correlates with H (B = 0.526; t = 5.590); thus, supporting H2. Third, Self_M correlates significantly with PWB (B = 0.310; t = 3.322); thus, supporting H3. Fourth, Self_M correlates significantly with H (B = 0.214; t = 2.257); thus, supporting H4.

Next, effect size (f²), model fit (SRMR value) and forecast relevance (Q²) were tested. The f² value for the relationship between ER and PWB (0.284) is higher than 0.15 (Hair et al., 2017), indicating that it has a moderate effect. The value of f² for the relationship between ER and H (0.297) is higher than 0.15, indicating that it has a moderate effect. The value of f² for the relationship between Self_M and PWB (0.116) is lower than 0.15, indicating that it has a small effect. The value of f² for the relationship between Self_M and H (0.049) is lower than 0.15, indicating that it has a small effect. The standard root mean residual value (SRMR) is 0.078, which is lower than 0.1, indicating that this model is appropriate. The Q² value for PWB is 0.347, and H is 0.299, which is higher than zero, indicating that the model has a relevant forecast.

Table 4. Results of structural model measurement analysis

Hypothesis	Relationship	B	P	t	Result	R ²	F ²	Q ²	SRMR
H1	ER → PWB	0.485	0.000	5.414	Accepted	0.521	0.284	0.347	0.078
H2	ER → H	0.526	0.000	5.590	Accepted	0.461	0.297	0.299	
H3	Self_M → PWB	0.310	0.000	3.322	Accepted	0.521	0.116	0.347	
H4	Self_M → H	0.214	0.012	2.257	Accepted	0.461	0.049	0.299	

Note. Significant at * t > 1.69 (one tail testing); ER: Emotional Regulation; Self_M: Self-Motivation; H: Happiness; PWB: Psychological well-being

Conclusion

Many past studies had extensively used direct impact models to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence, happiness and psychological well-being (Joanna
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Samul, 2020; Ardhiana et al., 2019; Jale & Meltem, 2020; Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2021; Joan et al., 2019). The test results of such models only determined the strength of the correlation between the variables. However, most researchers were unable to measure the elements of emotional intelligence (i.e., emotional regulation and self-motivation) on happiness and psychological well-being. This situation inspires researchers to expand the literature by evaluating the effects of the relationship between emotional intelligence (i.e., emotional regulation and self-motivation), happiness and psychological well-being. This study forms a conceptual framework based on the literature on emotional intelligence, happiness and psychological well-being. Structural models have shown that emotional intelligence (i.e., emotional regulation and self-motivation) act as significant practitioner variables in the relationship between happiness and psychological well-being. These findings indicate that the ability of counselors to apply emotional intelligence in the activities of counseling sessions and formal and/or informal guidance can drive the emotional effects of their clients. As a result, this condition can increase the development of their happiness and psychological well-being to go about their daily lives.

This study provides two important impacts: theoretical contributions and practical contributions. In terms of theoretical contribution, the results of this study confirm that emotional intelligence influences the happiness and psychological well-being of counseling clients. These results are consistent with understanding (Bar-On, 2006; Emmons, 2000). Bar-On (2006) argued that emotional intelligence involves interrelated relationships between emotional and social competence. These theories tend to determine how we understand and express ourselves, how we understand others, how we relate to the people around us, and how we cope with daily emotional challenges. In contrast, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences finds that spiritual intelligence meets the criteria for an independent intelligence modality. As a result, happiness and psychological well-being can be enhanced through the client's emotional intelligence. The theories are supported by the study by Joanna Samul (2020), Ardhiana et al. (2019), Jale and Meltem (2020), Sanchez-Ruiz et al. (2021), and Joan et al. (2019) revealed that counselors' ability to practice emotional intelligence based on clients' diverse personalities, needs and expectations in formal and informal counseling activities could increase their client's happiness and psychological well-being in each counseling service agency.

Furthermore, in terms of practical contribution, the results of this study can be used by practitioners to improve the effectiveness of guidance and counseling management in counseling service agencies. To achieve this goal, management should pay attention to the following aspects: First, creative training programs should be precisely designed to help clients use standard content and methods in the application of practices to everyday life with different needs and expectations. This practice can make it easier for counselors to measure their clients' abilities in achieving guidance and counseling goals. Second, responsible centers in schools, universities, the public sector, the private sector, communities and NGOs should plan formal assembly sessions at least three times a year. This session is important to guide the client so that he can use his intellect to distinguish between truth and error, think about the existence of nature and the power of Allah SWT and balance the evil desires of the evil desires with the good desires. This practice can improve the clients' personality, morale, and confidence to continue their lives as normal human beings. Third, peer mentoring programs should begin by highlighting high-performing clients to become group leaders. They are directly able to share success stories, motivate and guide other group members to support the emotional, spiritual and psychological well-being of other clients. Fourth, special counseling programs for low-performing clients should be arranged to reinforce cognitive behaviors (e.g., fostering clients'

positive beliefs and expectations about realizing life goals, creating strong growing relationships between counselors and clients, and increasing client motivation. In terms of socio-motivational aspects, this can improve client adaptation, increase success, and maintain higher psychological well-being. Finally, guidance and counseling programs should diversify their focus from aspects of life such as soft skills, ethics, thinking skills, career, and personality development. Such aspects help prepare the client to improve their psychological well-being. The suggestions above are fundamental to motivating and helping the client to adapt to the various problems he or she is facing.

There are suggestions that can improve this study's methodological and conceptual limitations. Future research should begin by examining key client characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, occupation, income, and level of education. This can improve our understanding of how different client characteristics influence counseling sessions in different agencies. Second, longitudinal studies should be considered because they can show variables' patterns over a long time, provide useful data on individual changes, and assess the strength and nature of relationships between variables. Third, to increase the understanding of the mediating effects of emotional intelligence in counseling sessions in other agencies in Malaysia it needs to be studied in future research. Fourth, other specific theoretical terms about emotional intelligence need to be explored and published so that they can be widely recognized as an important link between the relationship between happiness and psychological well-being. Finally, probability sampling planning, especially stratified random sampling, should be considered as it will collect data randomly. Therefore, it can reduce the bias of the usual method. It is crucial that the recommendations made earlier be further addressed in future studies.

This research has identified several methodological and conceptual limitations. First, this research used a cross-sectional design, preventing causal inference between variables. Second, this research neglects to test the relationship between specific variables dimensions. Third, this study only used client perceptions as a measure to assess the relationships between variables in the hypothesized model. Fourth, this research was conducted in a counseling service agency in Pahang only. Finally, the sampling plan aims to not able to bypass the response bias. The above limitations may reduce the ability to generalize the results of this study to other agencies.

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