

## College Students' Psychological Well-Being during the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Investigation Based on Students' Gender and Education Level

(Kesejahteraan Psikologis Mahasiswa Saat Pandemi Covid-19 Ditinjau dari Jenis Kelamin dan Jenjang Pendidikan)

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**Abstract:** This study aims to determine the level of psychological well-being based on gender and level of education being pursued during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants are students from various faculties and postgraduate programs from diploma, undergraduate, professional education, masters and doctoral education levels in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The instrument used is the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale which has been adapted by Engger with a content validity value of CVR equal to 1 which is in the good category and reliability is 0.935 in the good category. The data analysis used was Mann-Whitney non-parametric statistics for the different test of psychological well-being based on sex, and Kruskal Wallis as a different test for the level of education being pursued. The results showed that there was no significant difference based on gender, while based on the level of education on psychological well-being there were differences. The results of this study can be taken into account in the development of guidance and counseling programs and services for college students.

**Keywords:** psychological well-being; gender, education level, college student; Covid-19

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan mengetahui tingkat kesejahteraan psikologis berdasarkan jenis kelamin dan jenjang pendidikan yang sedang ditempuh pada saat Pandemi Covid-19. Partisipan merupakan mahasiswa dari berbagai Fakultas dan Program Pascasarjana dari jenjang pendidikan diploma, sarjana, pendidikan profesi, magister dan doktor di Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Instrumen yang digunakan adalah *Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale* yang telah diadaptasi oleh Engger dengan nilai validitas konten CVR sama dengan 1 yang berkategori baik dan reliabilitas 0,935 dengan kategori baik. Analisis data yang digunakan adalah statistik non-parametrik Mann-Whitney untuk uji beda kesejahteraan psikologis berdasarkan jenis kelamin, dan Kruskal Wallis sebagai uji beda pada jenjang pendidikan yang sedang ditempuh. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tidak ada perbedaan yang signifikan berdasarkan jenis kelamin, sedangkan berdasarkan jenjang pendidikan pada kesejahteraan psikologis terdapat perbedaan. Hasil dari penelitian ini dapat dijadikan pertimbangan dalam pengembangan program dan layanan bimbingan dan konseling untuk mahasiswa di perguruan tinggi.

**Kata kunci:** kesejahteraan psikologis; jenis kelamin, jenjang pendidikan, mahasiswa; Covid-19

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) has a wide impact on various sectors in Indonesia such as on health, socioeconomic and education sectors. In health sector, the number of deaths caused by Covid-19 infection reached 144,000 with a total addition of 11 deaths per 29 November 2020 (Dong, Du, & Gardner, 2020). On socioeconomic sector, 1.5 million children lost their guardians or parents to Covid-19 (Hillis et al., 2021), and in economic sector as many as 55% of men and 57% of women reported losing their jobs due to the pandemic (Hanna & Olken, 2020), which creates prolonged income insecurity for families across the country (UNICEF, 2020). This shows that handling the pandemic is important in the education sector.

In early childhood education sector, concerns with maintaining learning focus while engaging children in online learning processes has increased (Manurung, Wulan, & Purwanto, 2021). Meanwhile, in secondary and vocational education levels, limited interaction and lack of learning engagement (Fauzy & Nurfauziah, 2021), students' feeling of boredom and worry (Sholehah, 2021) were reported. Shortly, the pandemic has brought a variety of problems at different level of education

In higher education level, Indonesian universities has shifted to offer online learning models to cope with health emergency threats at present as mandated by the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 36962/MPK.A/HK/2020 requiring that learning both in schools and in universities be carried out online. Research showed that a variety of online learning models have been in place in universities across the globe, mostly using the smartphone as a platform (Muthuprasad, Aiswarya, Aditya, & Jha, 2021) and utilising Zoom video conferencing application (Islam, Kim, & Kwon, 2020), WhatsApp and Google Classroom (Saputra, 2021; Zhafira, Ertika, & Chairiyaton, 2020) for providing instruction. This is similar to what school counselors do in general who use Google Classroom and Google Forms for classical guidance services, and WhatsApp for individual and group counseling services (Hastuti & Tyas, 2021).

Online learning has various impacts on students, i.e., starting to make students more passive, confused, less creative and productive, and increasing the accumulation of useless information and stress (Argaheni, 2020). Perception of stress is a feeling of depression in psychological conditions (Prasetya, Purnama, & Prasetyo, 2020). Feeling depressed during online learning will lead to burnout, depression, and anxiety (Fawaz & Samaha, 2021; Mheidly, Fares, & Fares, 2020). In addition, Covid-19 pandemic caused feeling of worry, fear, anxiety, and panic, as well as weight loss and reduced time to sleep (Brazendale et al., 2017; Dragun et al., 2021; Druss, 2020; Fruehwirth, Biswas, & Perreira, 2021; Kontoangelos, Economou, & Papageorgiou, 2020; Maulana, 2021; Sundarasan et al., 2020; Villani et al., 2021). Put simply, online learning has a tremendous impact on psychological conditions.

Since symptoms of depression can affect psychological well-being, universities, in this case counseling units or the like, need to pay attention to the psychological well-being of their students. Students need to have a good psychological condition in order to actualize themselves. It is important for individuals to have good psychological conditions in order to have independence in dealing with social pressures, control the external environment, have goals in life, and be able to realize their potential in a sustainable manner (Ryff, 1989).

In support for students' well-being, the provision of psychological support services is deemed necessary and needs to pay attention to gender. Because gender is an important determinant of health (Manandhar, Hawkes, Buse, Nosrati, & Magar, 2018), it is necessary to conduct an analysis of psychological well-being in terms of gender. In this light, Matud, Bethencourt, Ibáñez, dan Fortes (2020) stated that sex-based analysis was important in the context of both men's and women's health and health care. In addition, research by analyzing the level of education also needs to be done for different level might bring particular challenges to students' well-being. Several other studies had taken educational level domain into account when designing guidance and counseling services (Li, Kao, & Wu, 2015; Sun, Chan, & Chan, 2016; Xi, Lee, Carter, & Delgado, 2018), which responded to the call for the need for more comprehensive coverage in finding the latest data (Bordbar, Nikkar, Yazdani, & Alipoor, 2011).

A recent study by Zhang and Ma (2020) examined the well-being of recipients of higher education services during the pandemic. They found that from a total of 263 respondents, 52.1% of whom were afraid and worried due to the pandemic. Supporting, Ozamiz-Etxebarria, Berasategi Santxo, Idoiaga Mondragon, and Dosil Santamaría (2021) claimed that gender, education level, and age are variables that affect the level of psychological conditions. Yet, very little research has been done in Indonesian context to investigate students' well-being based on gender and level of education. The results of the present study are therefore expected to provide consideration and recommendation to mental health service providers across Indonesian universities in developing psychological well-being coaching programs. At faculty or department level, the findings of the research can inform the development of appropriate academic and student programs to improve the quality of students' psychological well-being.

## METHOD

The study was conducted using a cross-sectional survey method. This study aims to explore the dynamics of the correlation between causal and effect factors. Collecting data using a 42-items Psychological Wellbeing scale developed by Ryff (1989) with details of 21 favorable items and 21 unfavorable items. The value of construct validity shows a good description (fit) and content validity is in the good category (CVR = 1) and reliability shows the number 0.935 which means good (Engger, 2015). The answer choices use a scale of 1-7 from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Samples were taken using simple random sampling. Data were collected using the Google Form platform involving 7 faculties and postgraduate programs for students at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta.

The study involved a group of 425 sampled participants, with 146 males and 279 females. Among them, one student enrolled in diploma program, 371 in undergraduate, one in professional education, 51 were in master's programs, and one in doctoral program. Data analysis for the study used the non-parametric Mann Whitney U test to see differences in the psychological well-being of men and women. Meanwhile, in looking at the difference in psychological well-being in terms of the level of education being pursued, the Kruskal Wallis test was used with the help of the IBM SPSS Statistics 21 software.

## RESULTS

The results of this study describe the results of the analysis of psychological well-being based on gender and the results of the analysis of psychological well-being based on the level of education being pursued. In table 1 it can be seen that there is a difference in the average score between men and women.

**Table 1. Psychological Well-Being by Gender**

Gender	N	Mean	Sum	Sig. (Mann Whitney)
Man	146	208.93	30503.50	0.621
Woman	279	215.13	60021.50	
Total	425			

Men have a lower average score than women in psychological well-being. In the analysis using Mann Whitney, no significant differences were found between men and women. This is because the significance value of psychological well-being is more than 0.05. On the other hand, if the significance value is below 0.05, it can be stated that there is a significant difference in the psychological well-being of men and women. Furthermore, Table 2 indicates that the average value of psychological well-being is different based on the indicated under and postgraduate programs.

The table also implies that well-being difference is indicated by educational level, with those admitted to professional education program having the highest average score in psychological well-being, followed by doctoral, diploma, undergraduate, and finally the master's program students.

**Table 2. Psychological Well-Being by Education Level**

Educational level	N	Mean	Sig. (Kruskal Wallis)
Diploma	1	403.50	0.000
Doctor	1	406.00	
Master	51	141.38	
Professional Education	1	408.00	
Bachelor	371	221.29	
Total	425		

The results of Kruskal Wallis' analysis show that there are significant differences between diploma, doctoral, master's, professional education, and undergraduate education levels in psychological well-being. This is indicated by a significance value of less than 0.05 on psychological well-being based on the level of education being pursued.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis suggests that the average psychological well-being scores of men and women showed differences. The average score of men is lower than that of women. However, the analysis using Mann Whitney as shown in table 1, shows a value of 0.621 or more than 0.05, which means that there is no significant difference in psychological well-being by gender. These results are in line with the results of several other studies that did not find significant differences in psychological well-being in terms of gender (Davoren, Fitzgerald, Shiely, & Perry, 2013; Hasan, 2016; Visani et al., 2011).

Salleh and Mustaffa (2016) also found the same thing that there was no significant difference between the psychological well-being of men and women in Malaysia with a significance value of 1.194. Ashok (2017) reported the same results, that there was no significant difference between the psychological well-being of men and women. It is marked with a significance value of 0.99. In line with these results, Kamaruzaman and Surat (2021) reported that there was no significant difference with a value of 0.154 on the psychological well-being of men and women. Based on these results, it can be concluded that psychological well-being in terms of gender has a difference in the average score, but it does not mean that it has a significant difference marked by a significance value of 0.621 which is greater than 0.05.

The above results certainly updates the research of the last five years related to psychological well-being in terms of gender which stated that there are significant differences between male and female psychological well-being. Waghmare (2017) conducted a study in Thailand and reported that the conditions of psychological well-being in men and women showed differences. This is in line with the research results by Krause and Rainville (2018) indicating that there are significant differences between men and women in terms of psychological well-being. Gómez-Baya, Lucia-Casademunt, & Salinas-Pérez (2018) reported the same thing, namely the psychological well-being of men and women had a significant difference.

Nandini and Wahyuni (2019) revealed that there were differences in the psychological well-being of men and women. Matud et al. (2020) surveyed 3400 participants and reported the same findings, namely, that there was a significant difference between the psychological well-being of men and women, the psychological well-being of men was higher than the condition of women's psychological well-being.

In particular, Matud explained that for the autonomy dimension, men have higher scores than women. Matud explained that thing that lower women's psychological well-being, among others, is femininity. Characteristics of masculinity and femininity can support greater well-being. Pumpuang, Vongsirimas, and Klainin-Yobas (2020) concured that there were differences in psychological well-being in terms of gender. The study shows that the psychological well-being of men has an average value of 73.55 while the average value of female psychological well-being is 72.91 which means that the value of male psychological well-being is higher although only slightly. In similar vein, Nwankwo,

Okechi, and Kalu (2017) reported that there were differences in the psychological well-being of male and female athlete students. Male athlete students had higher psychological well-being scores than female athlete students. Though those previous research are consistent with that there are differences in psychological well-being in terms of gender, this study found that psychological well-being in terms of gender did not have a significant difference.

Since the results of this study indicate that there is no difference in psychological well-being based on gender, higher education institutions need to consider other aspects of psychological well-being to improve students' psychological well-being. Daraei (2013) stated that knowledge of various aspects of psychological well-being can help institutions to design programs to improve psychological well-being.

In contrast to psychological well-being by gender, the results of the Kruskal Wallis test on psychological well-being show that the results are significant. Psychological well-being in terms of education level gets a significance result of 0.000 which is smaller than the 0.05 provision in the Kruskal Wallis test. Other results in the Kruskal Wallis test also show that students who are pursuing master's studies has the lowest psychological well-being compared to those pursuing other levels of study such as diploma, bachelor's, professional education, and doctorate. This result is in line with Ryff (1989) that one the factor that affects psychological well-being is the level of education. Dimitrijević, Marjanović, and Dimitrijević (2018) in their research, involving 288 participants showed that the level of education is a strong predictor of the level of psychological well-being. Kumcagiz and Gündüz (2016) also explained that in addition to gender, education level also has a strong influence in determining the level of psychological well-being. Balidemaj and Small (2018) also investigated a group of graduate students and found that gender and education level were mediators for psychological well-being. Put simply, in addition to gender, education level has an influence in determining the level of psychological well-being.

Some other research generated similar findings that the level of psychological well-being differed significantly by education level. Roslan, Ahmad, Nabilla, and Ghiami (2017) in Malaysia states that there is a significant difference between psychological well-being in terms of the level of education taken. They also claimed that the psychological well-being of master's degree students was lower than other groups of students. Their finding, however, does not correspond to Dodd, Dadaczynski, Okan, McCaffery, and Pickles (2021) who reported that the psychological well-being of graduate students was higher than that of undergraduates. However, previous study by Liu, Ping, and Gao (2019) in China confirmed that there are significant differences in psychological well-being based on the level of education taken. Liu et al. furthered that the students in their study experienced depression, anxiety, and high stress in the first two years of their study but then had improved well-being conditions from the third to fourth years.

The results of this study indicate a value of  $0.000 < 0.05$  implying that psychological well-being differed significantly by the degree or program that the students were doing. Further, the master's level of education students had a slightly lower psychological well-being compared to other groups. This negates the results of previous research conducted by Freire, Ferradás, Valle, Núñez, and Vallejo (2016) which claimed that the level of education is not relevant to the level of psychological well-being because psychological well-being stands as a personal resource. Similarly, Schlechter and Milevsky (2010) also reported that there was no significance in psychological well-being based on the level of education taken. The findings of the study however indicate the otherwise.

The study administered the Mann Whitney and Kruskal Wallis test to describe the participants' psychological well-being by gender and level of education and found that the state of psychological well-being needs to be taken seriously. Improved psychological well-being is a necessity for the students to develop independence in dealing with social pressures, control the external environment, have life goals, and are able to realize their potential in a sustainable manner (Ryff, 1989).

The study provides some implications. First, it is important for educational institutions, especially universities, to improve the psychological well-being of students so that guidance and counseling service delivery can be in accordance with needs (Cabrera, Daya, & Echague, 2020). The differing

levels of psychological well-being found in this study can be used as a reference for counseling services unit or student to (self) develop optimal mental health programs that are suitable for students' psychological conditions. The findings in particular can inform the design of the training for teacher aide or lecturer assistants for fostering the mental health of their peers. Previous research by Setiawan and Arliansyah (2021) explained that one of the causes of failure in the psychological well-being training program for students who became lecturer assistants was the level of education. Therefore, in designing training programs, it is necessary to pay attention to the factors concerning students' education level. Meanwhile, at the department level, the results of this psychological well-being research can be taken into consideration in providing interventions with certain techniques to improve the psychological well-being of new students in online lectures (Faiqoturizqiah, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

The results showed that there was no significant difference in psychological well-being in terms of gender. Men and women have the same advantages in obtaining psychological well-being. In contrast, the psychological well-being test in terms of the level of education being pursued show significant differences. At the university level, strategies to improve psychological well-being can be carried out through related units. Meanwhile, at the faculty level, psychological well-being can be improved through training taking into account the level of education of the subjects participating in the training. At the department level, psychological well-being can be improved through online lectures with a combination of certain counseling techniques. Future research can expand the population coverage and detail the results of each dimension on psychological well-being. This needs to be done in order to have a wider generalizability and comprehensive results. Further research can also dig deeper into psychological well-being in terms of cohorts (years of class) and scientific disciplines.

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