Job Stress and Coping Strategies as Predictors for Psychological Wellbeing among Malaysian Anti-Drug Professionals

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Abstract
Existing studies have suggested that job stress and coping strategies are among the key factors of psychological wellbeing. Yet, the information on how these psychological factors contribute to psychological wellbeing in Malaysian anti-drug professionals is still scarce. Thus, the aim of this study was to examine the predicting roles of job stress and coping strategies on psychological wellbeing among Malaysian anti-drug officers. The participants were consisted of 1454 staffs from the National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA) aged from 21 to 59 who completed online self-report measures of job stress, control and avoidant coping strategies, and psychological wellbeing. Descriptive analysis indicated that majority of the respondents reported high levels of psychological wellbeing and avoidant coping strategy, but lower levels of job stress and control coping strategy. A multiple regression analysis showed that job stress was related to lower psychological wellbeing while control coping strategy was related to higher psychological wellbeing. Overall, the findings highlight the needs to consider job stress and coping strategies to understand psychological wellbeing among Malaysian antidrug professionals. Also, this study recommended future research to consider longitudinal research design to better understand the directions of the relations among the studied variables.
Keywords: Psychological Wellbeing, Job Stress, Control Coping, Avoidant Coping, Mental Health.

Introduction
One of the most important measures of human happiness is psychological well-being. It refers to a positive self-evaluation that takes behavioural, cognitive, and socioemotional elements into account (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). This self-evaluation is frequently based on one's

experiences and successes, especially how the person handles psychological challenges (Turashvili & Turashvili, 2015). Pleasant attitude, sense of fulfilment in life, emotional stability, and good mental health are among the essential characteristics of an individual with good psychological wellbeing (Ergun, 2020; Dhasmana et al., 2018).

Psychological well-being has a great impact on service operations. An organisation that prioritises the psychological well-being and mental health of its personnel is able to generate high-quality products and services (Alam & Rizvi, 2012). Employees that are psychologically well-adjusted are always content with their occupations (Sandilya & Shahnawaz, 2018), have a strong desire to go to work, are disciplined, and perform well at work (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). Yet, employees with poor mental health are more likely to exhibit withdrawal behaviours such as lateness, absenteeism, and turnover (Hennekam, Richard & Grima, 2020; Montano et al., 2017).

Previous research has found a number of important factors that can influence an employee's psychological well-being. One of these factors is job stress, which is usually caused by heavy workloads and unclear or conflicting tasks at work (Lee, 2016). Intense job stress, for example, can have a detrimental effect on an employee's physical, mental, and socioemotional functioning (Malek, Fahrudin & Kamil, 2009). Another factor that can contribute to psychological well-being is coping strategy, which refers to the problem-solving skills in dealing with difficult and stressful situations (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). When encountering problematic situations, employees who adopt adaptive coping mechanisms can effectively manage their emotions and encourage innovative thinking to tackle the challenge at hand (Salovey et al., 2000). Thus, the use of this approach leads to high-quality work.

Although prior studies have shown the impact of occupational stress and coping mechanisms on psychological well-being, yet, the majority of these studies have been conducted in Western or developed countries. Thus far, only a few local studies have looked into the impact of job stress and coping strategies on the psychological well-being of Malaysian public servants (Leong et al., 2019), and even fewer have looked into the context of Malaysian enforcement officers. Therefore, this study attempts to fill up the research gap by investigating how job stress and coping strategies contribute to the psychological well-being of Malaysian anti-drug professionals.

Job Stress and Psychological Wellbeing
Job stress, according to McGrath (1976), is the interaction between an individual and his or her work environment that surpasses his or her abilities and resources to the point of causing him or her to change. Long-term exposure to high job-related stress can have detrimental consequences to employees' mental health (Chen et al., 2020). Prior studies have established a relationship between job stress and psychological well-being. For instance, several studies conducted in Western countries argued that intense job stress can negatively impact an employee's psychological well-being (Brooks & Greenberg, 2017). In many situations, the sources of job stress or stressors are the lack of resources, ineffective organisational management, unfriendly workplace relationships, the load of administrative work, and insufficient time to perform given duties have been identified as the major stressors (Payne & Furnham, 1987).

Existing studies in Asian countries have yielded comparable results as in Western countries. For example, a study by Poormahmood, Moayedi, and Alizadeh (2017) among Iranian educators suggested that job stress can negatively affect four components of psychological wellbeing, namely life satisfaction, spirituality, happiness and confidence, and personal growth. Meanwhile, a more recent study conducted by Jeong et al (2020) on managers and employees from manufacturing companies in South Korea revealed negative and significant relations between job stress and psychological wellbeing.

Although less studies are available in Malaysia, a few local studies have been identified. For instance, a study by Malek et al (2009) had investigated the influence of job stress on psychological well-being in Malaysian firefighters. The study underlined that job stress could lead to severe sadness and anxiety, and long exposure to such stress might be harmful to employees' health. More recently, a study was conducted on enforcement officials at the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs and found that excessive job stress could causes psychological wellbeing disruptions (Leong et al., 2019). The findings from these studies suggest a potential damaging role of job stress on psychological wellbeing among enforcement workers.

Coping strategies and psychological wellbeing
An effective coping strategy can help improving an individual psychological well-being (Dahlan et al., 2010). Coping strategies can be defined as the methods used by an individual, a group, or an organisation to reduce the negative impacts of stress, which can internal of external (Folkman, 1984). While existing studies have suggested multiple coping strategies, this study focuses on two strategies, namely control and avoidant coping.

Control coping refers to problem-solving skills that help people avoid being swept away by their emotions when confronted with difficulties or stress (Park, Folkman, & Bostrom, 2001). Control coping strategy is critical for resolving conflict, confronting an issue head on, and seeking social assistance to deal with the problem at hand (Cheng et al., 2012). This type of strategy is frequently linked to positive and desirable consequences, such as a reduction in aggressive behaviour (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Also, control coping can improve mental health too, an indicator of psychological wellbeing (Ponsam & Rachel, 2021). For instance, Teoh and Rose (2001) discovered that control coping strategies such as seeking advice from family and friends can aid the problem-solving process, as it indirectly minimises emotional instability issues like depression, stress, and anxiety. These findings were supported by Gustems-Carnicer and Calderón (2013), who discovered that effective coping strategies can reduce the stress and anxiousness experienced by individuals.

Avoidant coping, on the other hand, refers to the cognitive reaction and behaviour of avoiding or escaping from the difficulties or stress (Ottenbreit & Dobson, 2004). In contrast to the control strategy, this problem-solving method requires separating oneself from conflict (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002). Typically, those who engage in avoidant coping strategies only use methods like dodging, concealing, or redirecting attention away from their difficulties (Schotte & Clum, 1987). These approaches prevent problem resolution and destabilises a person's emotions, ultimately exerting psychological stress on him/her. Indeed, studies have shown that frequent use of avoidant strategy can cause negative social

consequences, which include intense anger and aggression (D'zurilla, Chang, & Sanna, 2003; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Although there is fewer research accessible in Malaysia, a few studies are available. For instance, a study by Razak and Kutty (2021) found that Malaysian educators who frequently used problem-solving coping were tend to experience higher psychological well-being. Meanwhile, an earlier study by Mahomed, Johari and Mahmud (2019) suggested that educators who offer counselling and guidance must be prepared with coping skills to maintain their psychological well-being, which is critical for the services that they provide. These findings point to a possible protective role of effective coping strategies in improving psychological well-being.

Present Studies
In general, the present study sought to examine the relationships between job stress, coping strategies, and psychological wellbeing among antidrug professionals. Specifically, the objectives of this study were threefold. First, to identify the demographic background of the respondents (age, gender, race, religion, marital status, socioeconomic status in terms of income and education level). Second, to determine the level of psychological wellbeing, job stress and coping strategies of the respondents. Third, to examine the predicting role of job stress and coping strategies on psychological wellbeing. It was hypothesized that psychological wellbeing would be positively predicted by control coping and negatively predicted by job stress and avoidant coping.

Method
Research Design
This study used a cross-sectional correlational design. The design allows researchers to determine the relationship between the studied variables using quantitative data collection at the same time (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Participants and Procedure
The participants were consisted of 1454 National Antidrug Agency (NADA) staffs aged between 21 to 59 years old (M age = 37.92 years, SD = 7.01 years; 68.2% male). Using convenience sampling, this study was conducted through online survey and involved staffs at NADA headquarters, NADA state and district branches, as well as Narcotic Drug Rehabilitation Centres (PUSPEN) in Malaysia, including Sabah and Sarawak. Prior to data collection, the permission was obtained from the top management of NADA and ethical approval was granted by the University Putra Malaysia's Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects.

Measures
Psychological wellbeing was measured using the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWS; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), which consisted of 18 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, to 7 = *strongly agree*). Some examples of the items are "*I like most parts of my personality*" and "*The demands of everyday life often get me down*". A high score indicated good psychological wellbeing.

Job stress was measured by using the 15-item Job-Related Tension Index (JRTI; Kahn et al., 1964). Some examples of the items are "*Not knowing what your supervisor thinks of you, how he/she evaluates your performance*" and "*Thinking that you'll not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands of various people over you*". All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, to 5 = *rather often*) to evaluate respondents' job stress score. A high score of JRTI indicated a high level of job stress.

Coping strategies were assessed using the Coping with Job Stress scale (CJS; Latack, 1989). The CJS questionnaire consisted of 28 items that measure control and avoidant coping strategies. The examples of control coping items are "*Try to get additional people involved in the situation*" and "*Give it my best effort to do what I think is expected of me*". Meanwhile, examples of avoidant coping strategy items are "*Remind myself that work isn't everything*" and "*Try not to get concerned about it*". A 5-point Likert scale (1 = *hardly ever do this*, to 5 = *almost always do this*) was used to derive respondents' score for each coping strategy. A high score for a coping strategy indicated a high usage level of the behaviour.

Table 1 shows the psychometric properties of each measure used in this study. The Cronbach's alpha values between 0.84 to 0.95 indicated high internal consistencies of the instruments.

Table 1
Psychometric Properties of the Questionnaire for Psychological Wellbeing, Job Stress, And Coping Strategies

Variables	n-items	range	Cronbach's α
Psychological Wellbeing	18	1 – 7	.90
Job Stress	15	1 – 5	.95
Coping Strategies			
Control	17	1 – 5	.92
Avoidant	11	1 – 5	.84

Statistical Analysis
Data collected using the online survey form was analysed using IBM SPSS version 25. Due to the normality of the data, parametric analyses were employed to achieve the research objectives. For the first and second objectives, descriptive analyses such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used. Meanwhile, to achieve the third objective, a multiple regression analysis was used to determine the unique predictors of psychological wellbeing.

Research Findings
Demographic Background of Respondents
Table 2 presents the demographic details of the 1454 respondents. The demographic characteristics of the participants were consisted of gender, age, marital status, race, religion, education level, and gross income range.

Table 2
Respondents' demographic background information (n = 1454)

Demographic variables	n (%)	Mean	S.D.
Gender			
Male	991 (68.2)		
Female	463 (31.8)		
Age		37.92	7.01
20 - 30 years	132 (9.1)		
31 - 40 years	918 (63.1)		
41 - 50 years	314 (21.6)		
51 - 59 years	90 (6.2)		
Marital Status			
Single	160 (11.0)		
Married	1254 (86.2)		
Divorced	34 (2.3)		
Widowed	6 (0.4)		
Race			
Malay	1204 (82.8)		
Chinese	5 (0.3)		
Indian	31 (2.1)		
Bumiputera (Sabah)	143 (9.8)		
Bumiputera (Sarawak)	65 (4.5)		
Other	6 (0.4)		
Religion			
Islam	1347 (92.6)		
Buddhism	6 (0.4)		
Hinduism	28 (1.9)		
Christianity	73 (5.0)		
Education Level			
SRP/PMR/PT3	49 (3.4)		
SPM/Vocational Certificate	553 (38.0)		
STPM/Diploma	533 (36.7)		
Bachelor's Degree	282 (19.4)		
Master's Degree	34 (2.3)		
Doctor of Philosophy	3 (0.2)		
Gross Income Range		3203.36	1299.68

S.D: Standard Deviation

Table 2 showed the demographic information of the respondents. Overall, majority of the respondents were male, married, in age group between 31 to 40, Malay ethnicity, and practicing Islam. For educational background, more than one third of the respondents reported that they had *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) or vocational certificate qualifications. At higher education levels, 21.9% respondents had at least a bachelor degree. The average income of the respondents was RM 3203.36 (standard deviation = RM 1299.68).

Descriptive Analyses of Psychological Wellbeing, Job Stress and Coping Strategies
Table 3 shows the results of descriptive analysis for all the studied variables.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of psychological wellbeing, job stress and coping strategies

Variable	n (%)	Mean (S.D.)
Psychological Wellbeing		5.72 (0.71)
High	829 (57.0)	
Low	625 (43.0)	
Job Stress		2.57 (0.90)
High	721 (49.6)	
Low	733 (50.4)	
Coping Strategies		
Control Coping		4.00 (0.61)
High	681 (46.8)	
Low	773 (53.2)	
Avoidant Coping		2.89 (0.72)
High	763 (52.5)	
Low	691 (47.5)	

S.D: Standard Deviation

As shown in Table 3, majority of the respondents reported higher levels of psychological wellbeing and avoidant coping, but lower levels of control coping. Also, the results showed an almost balance number of respondents who reported higher and lower levels of job stress.

The Predictors of Psychological Wellbeing
Table 4 depicts the results of a multiple regression analysis. As presented, all three predicting variables were significantly correlated to the outcome variables. A total of 25.8% of the variance of psychological wellbeing of the respondents were influenced by the three factors. The predictors of psychological wellbeing were control coping with the highest adjusted beta coefficient values (β = .44), and followed by work stress (β =-.24) and avoidant coping (β = .05).

Table 4
Regression analysis showing job stress, control coping and avoidant coping as predictors of psychological wellbeing

Predictor	Psychological Wellbeing (n = 1454)		
	B	β	p
Job stress	-.18***	-.24	.000
Control coping	.52***	.44	.000
Avoidant coping	.05*	.05	.044
R² = 0.26			
F = 168.22			

*$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***$p \leq .01$

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine the effects of job stress and coping strategies on the psychological wellbeing of antidrug professionals in Malaysia. Interestingly, the results of this study have replicated several important discoveries from previous research. Most notably, control coping strategy has positive implications for an individual's psychological wellbeing is also supported by this study. Control coping strategies, which are characterised by attempts to manage one's emotional responses to stress (e.g., presenting controlled emotional expressions and emotional modulation), can help an employee maintain his/her commitment and satisfaction towards work (Amiot *et al.*, 2006). Employees who can control their emotions are also more likely to display creativity in solving their problems. This can indirectly prevent the outbreak of any conflict among colleagues and preserve harmony in an organisation. A healthy, positive, and conducive work environment is a key ingredient in facilitating employees' achievement of good psychological wellbeing.

Furthermore, our findings also support the notion that job stress has the potential to negatively impact an employee's psychological wellbeing (Brook & Greenberg, 2017; Hoppe et al., 2010; Jeong et al., 2020). It is undeniable that employees in the enforcement and correctional sector, such as antidrug professionals, often encounter various challenges, either from their work environment (e.g., workplace situation) or their field of work (e.g., dealing with drug addicts). Moreover, the heavy workload borne by these employees in ensuring the organisation plays its role efficiently can also lead to high job stress. If not curbed, such stress can trigger mental issues like depression and suicidal tendencies, which are indicators of low psychological wellbeing.

Surprisingly, our findings also suggest that avoidant coping can potentially contribute to a better psychological wellbeing. Indeed, although avoidant coping is always viewed as a passive problem solving which can lead to mental health issues such as depression (Ottenbreit & Dobson, 2004), diverting attention from a problem can provide some space and time for an individual to relax and cool down. This situation can help the individual to deal with the worrying thoughts that can emerge from a conflict, which may help to lessen psychological burden and increase psychological wellbeing.

This study has several strengths, especially in its large sample size. Additionally, it is among the first to be conducted among antidrug professionals, specifically to investigate the potential predicting roles of job stress and coping strategies on psychological wellbeing. However, there are also limitations to this study that should be addressed in future research. First, the cross-sectional approach used in this study prevents the exploration of cause-and-effect relationships of job stress and coping strategies with psychological wellbeing. Cause-and-effect research would aid in determining the strength of association among the variables. There is also the possibility that two-way relationships exist between the study variables, such that psychological wellbeing potentially influences an individual's job stress and coping strategy. To overcome this limitation, we suggest that future researchers perform longitudinal studies or experiments to analyse the causal relationships among the study variables.

Second, the present study commenced when the world was struck by the pandemic in 2020. The pandemic situation directly affected human lives, worsening not only health and economic perspectives but also individuals' psychological and emotional states. Since this

study focused on the stressful situations faced by individuals at work, it is possible that the participants' responses in this study were influenced by the pandemic situation at the time. Thus, it is suggested that future research replicate this study in the post-pandemic period to confirm whether the pandemic had directly impacted the data collected for this study.

Third, this research only involved antidrug professionals at NADA. As such, the results cannot be generalised to employees in other enforcement agencies or other professions. With regard to this limitation, future scholars are recommended to study other enforcement organisations with the purpose of gaining a broader understanding of this phenomenon.

Despite its limitations, this study has successfully identified the roles played by job stress and coping strategies as key factors in building better psychological wellbeing among antidrug professionals. Therefore, the design of development programmes and staff training to be held at antidrug agencies must prioritise the aspects of coping strategies and job stress in the effort to enhance the quality of psychological wellbeing among anti-drug professionals in Malaysia.

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