

Urban Youth Subjective Well-Being in Malaysia: Potential Factors

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Abstract

This conceptual paper aims to identify the potential factors for subjective well-being among urban youth in Malaysia. To understand urban youth's subjective well-being is important as it offers a comprehensive view on the issue. Based on a review of literature and document analyses, it concludes that subjective well-being is not merely covering the tangible aspects such as physical infrastructure and the economy, but also the non-tangible aspects such as emotional, social, political, spiritual, psychological, happiness and others.

Keywords: Urban Youth, Subjective Well-being, Youth Development

Introduction

To measure the level of community well-being is vital as it portrays the success of a country's development program. Well-being is divided into two categories; the objective well-being (OWB) and the subjective well-being (SWB). Ivkovic, Ham and Mijoc (2014) defined OWB as an economic development (e.g. living conditions) while Diener et al.(1997) defined SWB as an individual's evaluation of their own life, which includes their personal judgment or evaluation towards the current status of their life like life satisfaction.. McGillivray and Mathew (2006) on the other hand defined SWB as a life evaluation, comprising of three major aspects of life; cognitive judgments of life satisfaction, affective evaluation of moods and emotion, and experience.

Within the Malaysian scope, most of the existing well-being studies are objective in nature. The Malaysian Well-being Index (formerly known as Malaysian Quality of Life Index) for example, is based on secondary data measurement (Economic Planning Unit, 2013). Having the objective perspective alone is insufficient as it covers only the calculation of tangible aspects of well-being, thus it is vital to produce a more subjective well-being study as it includes non-tangible aspects such as emotional, social, political, spiritual, psychological, happiness and others. Despite the mounting needs, the existing number of subjective studies

is frustrating low. Generally, studies done in the past by Malaysian Well-being Index (2013), Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES) (2015) and Omar and Abu Bakar (2017) have placed their interests on the objective measurement of well-being and other community groups.

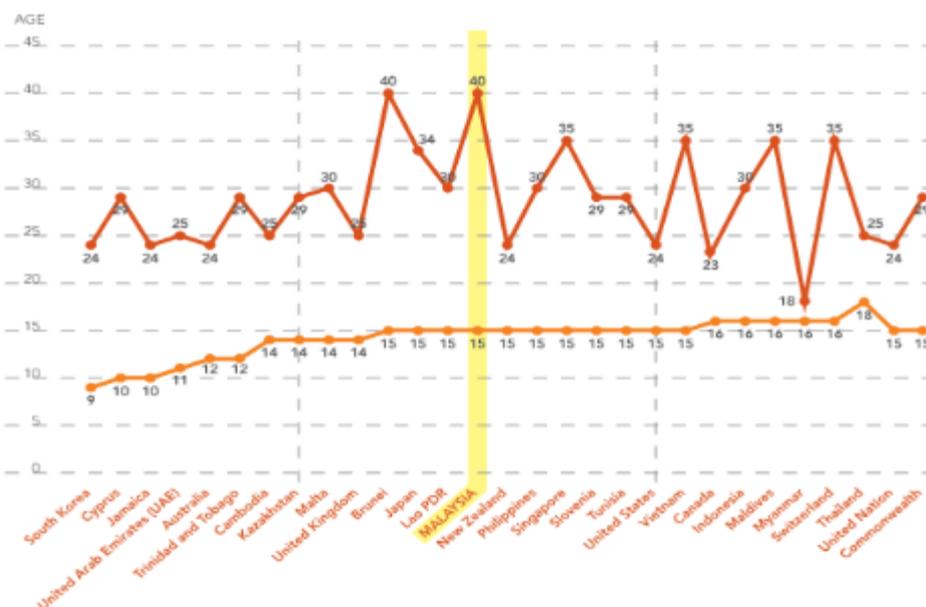
This paper is based on the reviews of literature and document analyses on articles and documents from sources such as the Economic Planning Unit, Institute for Youth Research Malaysia, Science Direct, Springer, Google search engine and Yahoo search engine. In the following we will discuss more on youth background in Malaysia followed by the potential factors of SWB for youth in Malaysia.

Youth in Malaysia

The United Nation defines youth as those who are aged between 15 to 24 years. Youth are the future of a country and to ensure their well-being development is vital. In Malaysia, according to the National Youth Development Policy 1997, youth are defined as those aged between 15 and 40 years. Several countries among South-east Asia also have their own youth age limits; Singapore and Vietnam (15 to 35 years old), Philippines (15 to 30 years old), Cambodia (15 to 24 years old), Brunei (15 to 40 years old), Indonesia (16 to 30 years old), Thailand (18 to 25 years old), Myanmar (16 to 18 years old), South Korea (9 to 24 years old), the United Kingdom (14 to 25 years old), and Japan (15 to 34 years old).

Recently, the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia has improved their youth policy whereby in 2018, the new youth age limit policy will be defined as those aged 15 to 30 years old. This new age limit is in line with the Commonwealth and international level criteria to assess the achievements of youth. The rationales of youth age limit are, to ensure the continuity of the country’s future leadership, to reduce the generation among youth, to expedite youth maturity process, to reduce risky behaviors among youth, to stabilize youth self-identity, to strengthen youth development process, to determine a more systematic approach towards adult-youth transition, and to benefit digital technology.

Figure 1: International Age Limit Best Practices



Source: www.youthpolicy.org

The statistic produced in 2016 by the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development had estimated a total 14,747.0 million of youth population, whereby 11,119.7 million of them settled in urban areas and the remaining 3,627.2 settled in the rural areas. Having this big of a number depicts the importance of ensuring the well-being of one of the biggest community group in Malaysia - the youth. The Malaysian Youth index summed up that the recorded index score for youth's well-being and quality of life was 68.7, the score is based on eight domains; personal development, social relations, identity, health, self-potential, penetrance media, leisure and deviant behavior. The same index also reported that three domains have recorded a high score (recorded score between 75 to 100); namely, social relationship, leisure activities and deviant behavior-free.

Potential Factors of SWB among Urban Youth in Malaysia: References from previous international and local studies

There are numerous factors for SWB. Past studies have established several criterias to identify the best potential factors. Studies by Revens-Sieberer et al. (2014), Galinda&Pais-Ribeiro (2012) and Durayahappah (2011) for example, had listed three basic components of SWB, namely cognitive factors, affective factors and contextual factors.

Deutsche Bank (2006) had named four SWB factors, namely happiness, living conditions, economic prosperity and GDP, while the Legatum Prosperity Index (2013) had included eight aspects of well-being, namely economy, entrepreneurship and opportunity, governance, education, health, safety and security, personal freedom and social capital. OCEC (2013) on the other hand listed income, employment, housing, environment, education and skills, health, personal security, social relations, civic involvement and work-life balance as the influential factors.

Alatartseva & Barysheva (2015) had yet listed communication, economic satisfaction, employee well-being, environmental well-being, education, general physical, political well-being, public safety, social well-being and spiritual well-being as the main components of SWB. In addition, Ravens-Sieberer et al. (2014), via their PROMIS project had listed three major elements of well-being, namely life satisfaction (global evaluations), positive affect (positive emotions and mood), and meaning and purpose. Global SWB is foreseen by domains of satisfaction with life, and the positive and negative state affects. There are three other SWB factors listed by Galinha & Pais-Ribeiro (2012), which are cognitive factors, affective factors and contextual factors. The cognitive factors are measured through depression, comparison standards, state and traits affect and several contextual variables. Meanwhile, the affective factors are measured through traits affect, depression, anxiety and contextual variables of educational status.

A local index developed by the Economic Planning Unit (2013) focused on aspects of communication, education, income and distribution, transport, employment, culture, environment, family, governance, health, leisure, public safety and social engagement. The index concluded the level of well-being of Malaysian have increased by 25.4 points in the last 12 years (2000-2012). Yassin et al. (2015) had demonstrated a good level of community well-being, the study then listed ten potential factors for SWB; communication, economic satisfaction, employee well-being, environment well-being, education, general physical health, political well-being, public safety, social well-being, and spiritual well-being. Another local study by Poverty Eradication Foundation Malaysia (2015) had demonstrated that Malaysians' well-being was only moderate. They categorized community well-being into individual thrust, social thrust, and physical thrust. They further concluded that the

community had yielded high scores on individual and social thrusts while the physical thrust yielded moderate score.

Table 1: Summary of well-being factors

Studies by	Well-being factors
Revens-Sieberer et al. (2014), Galinda and Pais-Ribeiro (2012), Durayahappah (2011)	Cognitive aspect – life satisfaction Affective aspect – happiness Contextual aspect – socio-demographic variables
Sulaiman et al. (2015)	Communication, Economic satisfaction, Employee well-being, Environment well-being, Education, General physical health, Political well-being, Public safety, Social well-being, and Spiritual well-being.
Deutsche Bank (2006)	Happiness, Living condition, Economic prosperity, and Gross domestic product (GDP).
Legatum Prosperity Index 2013	Economy, Entrepreneurship and opportunity, Governance, Education, Health, Safety and security, Personal freedom, and Social capital.
OCEC 2013	Income, Employment, Housing, Environment, Education and skills, Health, Personal security, Social relations, Civic involvement, Work-life balance.
Malaysian Well-being Index 2013	Economic well-being - Transportation, Communication, Education, Work Environment, and Income and Distribution. Social well-being - Housing, Leisure, Governance, Public Safety, Social Involvement, Cultural, Health, Environment and Family.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Direction

One of the national government's goals is to increase the nation's well-being and one way to monitor it is through well-being measurements. Despite having objective well-being measurements (e.g. Malaysian Well-being Index), there is a dire need for a subjective perspective as measuring well-being is not a mere calculation of a tangible data, but must also be supported by the community's judgments towards certain aspects of life based on their personal feelings. Having both measurements depict a comprehensive picture of community groups such as urban youth on things related to their well-being, which covers not only the physical aspects of economy and physical, but also the non-tangible aspects such as emotional, social, political, spiritual, psychological, happiness and others.

The reviews concluded well-being measurement is not solely based on the economic elements of life. It should consist the intangible aspects of life such as safety, happiness and security. Based on the analysis performed, numerous factors are associated with SWB, nevertheless, what these studies have in common are factors such as communication, economic, environment, education, health, housing, social, happiness, safety and security can be considerable factors in measuring the SWB of Malaysian urban youth. Towards this end, the author is planning to use these factors to conduct a research in four states; P.Pinang, Terengganu and Negeri Sembilan and Kuala Lumpur. These states are selected as they all have urban areas populated by youth, which is suitable for the study's objectives; to develop an instrument in measuring the SWB of Malaysian urban youth. Having the study will open more

opportunities to develop a ready made instrument for youth well-being, thus encouraging more SWB studies to be done, which currently is lacking.

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