

Exploring The Relationship Between Pet Companionship, Family Support, Peer Support, and Social Media Support on Psychological Well-Being among Young Adults in Selangor, Malaysia

Seah Kha Xin², Aini Azeqa Ma'rof^{1,2}

¹Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, MALAYSIA, ²Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, MALAYSIA.

Email: azeqa@upm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i17/19843> DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i17/19843

Published Date: 07 December 2023

Abstract

This study investigates the complex dynamics underlying psychological well-being (PWB) among 317 young adults residing in Selangor, Malaysia. The research investigates the various determinants of PWB, with a focus on pet companionship, family support, peer support, and social media support. Using well-established measurement instruments, the study aims to elucidate the complex relationships between these variables and their collective effect on the psychological well-being of the participants. This investigation reveals significant positive correlations between PWB and each of the aforementioned support sources. First, pet companionship is associated with improved PWB, highlighting the therapeutic and emotionally enriching role that pets can play in the lives of individuals. Family support has an exceptionally strong positive correlation with PWB, highlighting the central role that familial relationships play in influencing the mental health of young adults. Peer support emerges as a powerful predictor of PWB, highlighting the central role of supportive peer networks in fostering psychological health. In addition, the study clarifies the central role of social media support in promoting PWB among respondents. Participants who perceive increased support through online interactions report higher levels of PWB, highlighting the evolving role of social media platforms as emotional and informational supports.

In conclusion, these findings demonstrate the complex interaction between pet companionship, familial support, peer support, and social media support in influencing the psychological health of young adults. This research, conducted in Selangor, Malaysia, contributes significantly to the increasing body of empirical knowledge regarding the multifaceted determinants of PWB. These findings have important ramifications for the design and implementation of targeted mental health interventions and programmes tailored to improve the well-being of young adults in modern society.

Keywords: Psychological Well-Being, Peer Support, Pet Companionship, Family Support, Social Media Support

Introduction

Psychological well-being (PWB) refers to the positive psychological functioning and psychological welfare of an individual. It is distinguished by the pursuit of excellence, self-actualization, and optimal functioning (Ryff, 1989a). PWB includes aspects such as life satisfaction and contentment with an emphasis on the actualization of one's potential and a sense of meaningful control over one's life (Ryff, 1989b). In addition, PWB incorporates multiple dimensions such as social and psychological needs and the pursuance of personal development (Asmawati et al., 2009; White & Jackson, 2005).

PWB is associated with positive emotions from the hedonic perspective, while the eudemonic perspective emphasises effective functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2008). According to Ryff (2014), PWB develops through positive psychological functioning which includes elements such as successful relationships, self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. This implies that PWB encompasses a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and life's meaning in addition to affective well-being.

According to research, there is a significant correlation between PWB and general health. Higher levels of PWB are associated with a decreased risk of chronic diseases and an increase in life expectancy (Boehm & Kubzansky, 2012; Steptoe, 2019). In addition, young adults with a higher PWB may prioritise personal development, whereas those with a lower PWB may engage in social activities as a coping mechanism or to seek approbation (Bahamón et al., 2019). According to Mustafa et al (2020), individuals with lower life satisfaction, notably adolescents, face obstacles in achieving well-being.

The government of Malaysia has long pursued a multifaceted development strategy that aims to promote both economic growth and the well-being of its citizens. Despite the absence of a universal definition, "well-being" generally refers to an all-encompassing quality of life that considers economic, social, physical, and psychological dimensions, and ultimately benefits society as a whole. Under its Eleventh Plan (2016-2020), the government aims to improve the well-being of Malaysians by ensuring that each person can lead a happy, healthy, and productive existence.

However, alarming global and Malaysian trends indicate a significant increase in psychological distress among young adults. According to the American Psychological Association (2019), between 2008 and 2017, the percentage of young adults reporting severe psychological distress in the previous 30 days increased by a remarkable 71%, from 7.7% to 13.0%. In addition, a substantial number of children and adolescents in Malaysia struggle with psychological distress that, despite not meeting the diagnostic criteria for a mental disorder, has a substantial negative impact on their health, development, and overall well-being (UNICEF Malaysia, 2022).

Rising rates of psychological distress among Malaysians remain a challenge despite government efforts to improve overall well-being. The Ministry of Health Malaysia, in the year 2023, identified six major themes that contribute to psychological distress: online learning challenges, financial hardships, relationship problems, the effects of social isolation, pandemic-related stressors, and the quality of living environments. Thus, this study seeks to investigate the social and relationship context that may promote psychological well-being (PWB) among young adults in Selangor, Malaysia, in response to this challenge. The increasing

prevalence of mental health disorders resulting from psychological distress among young Malaysians over time prompted this study's focus on young adults (Kok & Low, 2019).

Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge that PWB is influenced not only by internal factors, but also by external factors such as social support. This support can come from a person's innermost inner circle, which offers emotional, material, and informational assistance (Fauziah et al., 2018). Supporting to this, Ryff (2018) and Kaya, Iwamoto, Brady, et al (2019) highlighted on the experiences of adversity, supportive factors, and personality which are important factors of a person's transition into adulthood which further determine PWB. Meanwhile, according to Ngaru and Kageyama (2017), predictive function of social support from family and friends are also crucial in determining individual's PWB.

Specifically, PWB has been linked to pet companionship, family support, peer support, and social media support. In supporting to this, it is known that pet ownership has beneficial effects on the physical and mental health of proprietors (Scoresby et al., 2021). In addition, family support includes emotional, instrumental, and informational assistance, all of which contribute to a reduction in psychological distress (Ngaru & Kageyama, 2017). Meanwhile, Mead and McNeil (2006) study shows that peer support facilitates comprehension and validation, thereby reducing psychological issues. Furthermore, while social media is a platform for online communication and engagement, it has become an integral part of the lives of young adults where it provides opportunities for social interaction and support, thereby enhancing well-being (Yang et al., 2021).

In light of the above concerns, this study aims to look at the social support and psychological well-being with specific research questions as follows

1. What are the levels of pet companionship, family support, peer support, social media support, and psychological well-being of the young adults in Selangor, Malaysia?
2. Are there any differences between gender on psychological well-being among the young adults in Selangor, Malaysia?
3. What are the relationships between pet companionship, family support, peer support, and social media support with psychological well-being among the young adults in Selangor, Malaysia?
4. What are the unique factors that predicts psychological well-being among the young adults in Selangor, Malaysia?

Social Supports and Psychological Well-being

Pet Companionship

Consistently, previous research has demonstrated the positive effects of pet companionship on individuals. Specifically, study shows that pet owners had substantially greater levels of coping self-efficacy, psychological well-being (PWB), and positive emotions than those without pets (Grajfoner et al., 2021). Similarly, the research conducted by Sarkar et al (2022) revealed that pet owners tended to experience enhanced PWB and employ more positive coping strategies such as problem-solving and distraction which further report lower stress levels than non-pet owners.

Recent research has further elucidated the positive effects of pets on their owners' psychological health. These studies demonstrate that pets enhance pet owners' subjective feelings and positive psychological changes (Xin et al., 2021), reduce negative emotions while fostering positive emotions during interactions (Janssens et al., 2020), and improve physical

health through daily activities such as dog walking (Ikeuchi et al., 2021). Moreover, pets play an important role in reducing the deleterious effects of significant social losses, such as depression and loneliness, particularly among older pet owners (Carr et al., 2020). Even interactions with animatronic creatures have the potential to reduce loneliness, improve quality of life, increase mental well-being, and enhance overall PWB (Tkatch et al., 2020).

In addition, pet companionship has a greater influence as a source of social support for pet owners, particularly in terms of their psychological health. Studies have shown that pets serve as sources of solace and support for young people with neurodevelopmental disorders, assisting with emotional regulation in social and emotional settings (Chadwick et al., 2022). As dogs provide emotional support, isolated individuals, both current and former dog owners tend to have improved psychological health (Ikeuchi et al., 2021). According to Wanser, Vitale, Thielke, et al (2019), the attachment to pets, particularly canines and cats, is associated with increased social support and positive effects on both physical and psychological well-being in both adults and children. Even during difficult periods such as the Covid-19 pandemic, human-pet interactions have proven to be beneficial sources of social support that contribute to emotional health (Hajek & Konig, 2019). Meanwhile, according to Purewal, Christley, Kordas, et al (2017), the dynamic relationships between individuals and their feline companions have the potential to promote emotional health and overall well-being.

It is important to note, however, that not all studies have reported positive psychological effects of pet companionship. Some investigations, such as that of (Maran et al., 2022). Similarly, Roux and Wright (2020) found no significant differences between pet owners and non-pet owners in terms of life satisfaction. In addition, Rehnfeldt (2020) also found no significant association between attachment to a childhood companion and later well-being. In some instances, pet owners reported lower psychological well-being on specific measures, including vitality, life meaning, life satisfaction, and higher levels of loneliness (Amiot et al., 2021).

Family Support

A substantial corpus of research examining family support consistently reveals positive associations between family support and PWB. Studies such as Mendoza et al (2019) demonstrate that higher levels of familial involvement, warmth, and support for autonomy are associated with increased PWB and decreased psychological distress among adolescents and young adults. Family often provides financial support and a nurturing environment for the transition into maturity, thereby contributing to the well-being of individuals as a whole. These findings are supported by Ngaru and Kagema's (2017) research, which demonstrates a significant correlation between familial support and students' PWB.

Studies demonstrate the positive impact of family support on PWB from the perspectives of both carers and care recipients. For example, Hizbullah and Mulyati (2022) discover a positive correlation between gratitude, family support, and the PWB of mothers raising children with autism spectrum disorders, with emotional support from family members having the most significant effect. Similarly, women undertaking infertility treatment who receive emotional support from family and friends report improved adjustment and PWB (Abubakar et al., 2020). Family support also plays a crucial role in the PWB of patients with schizophrenia, particularly through its mediation of self-care. In addition, Latipun, Amalia, and Hasanati's (2018) research demonstrates that family support has a substantial impact on patients' subjective well-being when channeled through enhanced self-care practices, highlighting its role in promoting overall well-being.

Numerous studies employing diverse measures of family support consistently report positive correlations with psychological well-being across diverse populations, emphasizing the central role of family support in promoting the mental and emotional health of individuals. Nonetheless, it's worth noting that a supportive environment and a broader social network can also mitigate psychiatric symptoms in adolescents, particularly those in residential youth care, potentially compensating for the absence of parental support (Singstad, Wallander, Lydersen, et al., 2022). In the absence of familial support, alternative sources of support may be instrumental in reducing negative outcomes.

Peer Support

Existing research demonstrates that supportive partnerships have a significant impact on an individual's Psychological Well-Being (PWB). Multiple studies, including those by Ngaru and Kagema (2017); Khan and Arif (2019), have identified a positive and statistically significant correlation between peer support and PWB. Emotional support from companions, which includes the sharing of both joys and sorrows, emerges as a key factor in reducing the likelihood of psychological disorders among adolescents (Doan et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Pezirkianidis et al (2023) highlight the relationship between positive emotions and the character of friendships, the support received from friends, and the sense of being valued and cared for. This highlights the importance of friendships in satisfying fundamental psychological needs such as belonging to a community and experiencing mutual trust that both of which are closely associated with students' PWB (Hoferichter et al., 2021).

Peer support extends beyond emotional health which act as a buffer against negative life events. Studies such as Bernasco et al (2021) demonstrate that adolescents with strong friendships are less susceptible to psychosocial problems during crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic than those with weaker friendships. These connections serve as protective factors against psychopathology development. In addition, peer support can moderate the negative association between addictive behaviours and PWB in adolescents (Khasmohammadi et al., 2020). High-quality intergroup alliances, especially among members of minority groups contribute to social integration and empowerment through the perception of positive majority attitudes and increased collective self-esteem which further has a beneficial effect on PWB (Bagci et al., 2018).

Notably, some studies suggest that peer support can have a greater impact on PWB than family. For instance, Secor et al (2017) discovered that peer support had a positive impact on five out of six PWB domains, whereas family support had a positive impact on only two domains. Schacter and Margolin (2018) contend, however, that a supportive familial environment is still essential, especially for adolescents who may lack supportive friendships. Strengthening parent-adolescent relationships has the potential to improve psychological health, despite peer-related obstacles. Additionally, in certain contexts, such as among young people with type 1 diabetes, diabetes-specific support from acquaintances may not always be advantageous and may even increase diabetes-specific distress (Raymaekers et al., 2021). In such situations, support from alternative sources, such as parents, is indispensable for enhancing self-care and disease management (Berg et al., 2017).

Social Media Support

Research examining the effect of social media support on Psychological Well-Being (PWB) reveals contradictory findings. According to a study by Mishra's (2022), young individuals

exhibit a negative correlation between social media usage and lower PWB. In contrast, Erfani and Abedin (2018) discovered that social media platforms can improve users' PWB through the mediation of factors such as self-esteem, social support, perceived social support, social capital, and authentic self-presentation. Meanwhile, according to Agrawal, Someshwar, Ravi, et al (2021), interactions on virtual platforms can contribute to increased sensitivity, feelings of safety, a sense of connection, and positive emotions among individuals. In addition, Luo and Hancock (2020) demonstrate that self-disclosure on social media and PWB are interdependent. Disclosure of personal information on social media platforms such as Facebook is positively correlated with receiving genuine social support, resulting in increased life satisfaction and reduced depressive symptoms (Zhang, 2017).

There is no universal relationship between digital media use, PWB, and mental health. Liu, Baumeister, Yang, et al (2019) suggest that technology usage is significant. Utilizing social networking sites for communication, self-presentation, and entertainment is correlated with improved PWB and mental health. However, passive consumption, known as browsing on these sites, is linked to decreased PWB and mental health. While social media can provide support and improve well-being, Balt et al (2023) caution that relying solely on social media for support without seeking assistance from family, friends, or professionals when required, may reduce the benefits of social media. Therefore, social media should supplement and not replace other support sources.

The effects of particular social media platforms on PWB vary. For example, Instagram has both positive and negative effects. It can inspire individuals, provide useful information, and encourage participation in positive activities, thereby enhancing PWB. However, it can also cultivate a sense of social inequality and promote negative behaviour, thereby potentially undermining PWB (Kusuma & Yuniardi, 2020). In addition, Twitter is a platform for information sharing and hobby-related discussions, as well as a source of emotional and informational support for students. However, lower levels of trust in online interactions without social integration can impede its ability to increase PWB (Ye & Ho, 2023). Meanwhile, WhatsApp, on the other hand, can have a positive effect on PWB. The relationship between WhatsApp use and PWB is significantly strengthened by social integration (Bano, Cisheng, Khan, et al., 2019). Meanwhile, receiving social support on Facebook can improve physical and mental health and well-being overall. Nonetheless, problematic Facebook use is associated with psychological distress symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Marino et al., 2018).

Method

Participants

A total of 317 participants (199 females, 118 males) from diverse demographic backgrounds were included in this study. The age of participants ranged from 20 to 29 years, with 159 individuals (50.2%) falling within the 20 - 24 years category and 158 individuals (49.8%) in the 25 - 29 years category. In terms of racial composition, the majority of participants were of Chinese ethnicity, accounting for 66.6% (211 individuals) of the sample. Malays constituted 27.4% (87 individuals) of the participants, while the Bumiputera and Indian ethnic groups comprised 0.9% (3 individuals) and 5.0% (16 individuals), respectively.

This diverse group of participants provided valuable insights into the study's objectives and allowed for a comprehensive examination of various factors related to the research topic.

Table 1

Sociodemographic background (N = 317)

Category	Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	37.2
	Female	199	62.8
Age	20 - 24 years	159	50.2
	25 - 29 years	158	49.8
Race	Malay	87	27.4
	Bumiputera	3	.9
	Chinese	211	66.6
	Indian	16	5.0

Procedure and Measures

After participants had completed the informed consent process, they anonymously completed the online survey packet, consisting of the following self-report measures.

Pet Companionship

The Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS), developed by Johnson et al (1992), was employed to evaluate the emotional attachments of individuals to their pets. This measure encompasses three distinct subscales: General attachment, People substitution, and Animal rights. However, for the purposes of this study, the analysis of pet companionship primarily utilized the General attachment subscale within the LAPS. This subscale specifically gauges the overall emotional bond or attachment that individuals have with their pets. It comprises 11 items, such as "My pet knows when I'm feeling bad" and "I often talk to other people about my pet," with responses recorded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from (0) Strongly disagree to (3) Strongly agree. Additionally, item 21 on the LAPS was reverse-coded due to its negative phrasing (i.e., "I am not very attached to my pet"). Higher scores on the General attachment subscale are indicative of stronger attachment to pets. In this specific sample, the reliability of the LAPS, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.74.

Family and Peer Support

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), developed by Zimet et al (1988), was utilized in this study to assess both family support and peer support. While originally designed to measure perceived social support from three sources, including family, friends, and significant others, the analysis in this study focused exclusively on family support and peer support, employing the Family subscale and Friends subscale, respectively. Within the Family subscale and Friends subscale, respondents were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement with a set of 8 items, such as "My family really tries to help me" and "I get the emotional help and support I need from my family." To record their responses, participants used a 7-point Likert scale, with options ranging from (1) Very strongly disagree

to (7) Very strongly agree. It's important to note that higher total scores on these subscales indicated elevated levels of perceived social support from either family or friends. In this specific sample, the reliability of the MSPSS was $\alpha = 0.92$ for family support and $\alpha = 0.94$ for peer support.

Social Media Support

In this study, the Online Social Support Scale (OSSS), developed by Nick et al (2018), was employed to explore the impact of online social support on the psychological well-being (PWB). The OSSS is designed to assess various subtypes of social support within the context of online interactions and consists of four distinct subscales: Esteem/emotional online social support (items 1-10), Social Companionship online social support (items 11-20), Informational online social support (items 21-30), and Instrumental online social support (items 31-40). However, this study focused exclusively on the Esteem/emotional online social support subscale, which encompasses components such as acceptance, esteem, caring, sympathy, and validation.

The Esteem/emotional online social support subscale comprises 10 items, such as "People show that they care about me online" and "Online, people say or do things that make me feel good about myself." Participants were asked to rate their agreement with these items using a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from (0) Never to (4) A lot. Higher scores on this subscale indicated a higher level of perceived online social support from peers. In this specific sample, the reliability of the LAPS, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.96.

Psychological Well-being

The Flourishing Scale, developed by Diener et al (2009) was used to assess the psychological well-being. This scale is designed to gauge individuals' perceptions of their success and well-being across various essential life domains, including relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. It comprises a total of 8 items that collectively provide a single score indicative of PWB. Participants in the study were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement with each of these 8 items, utilizing a 7-point Likert scale. For example, participants were prompted to indicate their degree of agreement with statements like "I lead a purposeful and meaningful life" and "My social relationships are supportive and rewarding." The Likert scale ranged from (1) Strongly disagree to (7) Strongly agree. Higher scores on this scale indicated a greater presence of psychological resources and strengths, reflecting a higher level of PWB among the respondents. In this specific sample, the reliability of the LAPS, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.96.

Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted using SPSS 29.0. Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables were calculated. A bivariate correlation analysis was then conducted to examine the relationship between pet companionship (LAPS), Family and peer support (MSPSS), and social media support (OSSS), in relation to psychological well-being. Finally, a regression analysis was conducted to evaluate whether pet companionship, family support, peer support, and social media support served as unique predictors for psychological well-being among the young adults.

Results and Discussion

From Table 2, 87.4% of participants reported a high level of attachment to their pets. This indicates that pets play a substantial role in nurturing emotional bonds and attachment

among the majority of respondents (Grajfoner et al., 2021). A significant proportion of participants (55.2%) reported high levels of family support followed by 32.5% of respondents reported moderate family support. These findings demonstrate the significance of family as a source of support in various facets of life (Garcia Mendoza, Sánchez Queija, & Parra Jiménez, 2019).

In addition, a substantial proportion of respondents (53.3%) reported high levels of peer support. This indicates that colleagues are an important source of support for many participants. Meanwhile, nearly half of the participants (42.0%), reported high support through social media interactions. This suggests that a substantial proportion of respondents perceive support from their online connections. The significance of pet companionship, familial support, peer support, and social media support in shaping participants' perceived levels of attachment and support in their lives is highlighted by these findings.

Table 2

Level of study variables

Level	n	%	Mean	SD
<u>Pet companionship</u>			2.90	.305
Low (0 - 1)	8	2.5		
Moderate (1.1 - 2)	32	10.1		
High (2.1 - 3)	277	87.4		
<u>Family Support</u>			2.43	.702
Low (1 – 3)	39	12.3		
Moderate (3.1 - 5)	103	32.5		
High (5.1 - 7)	175	55.2		
<u>Peer support</u>			2.45	.638
Low (1 - 3)	25	7.9		
Moderate (3.1 - 5)	123	38.8		
High (5.1 - 7)	169	53.3		
<u>Social media support</u>			2.24	.740
Low (0 – 1.33)	58	18.3		
Moderate (1.34 – 2.67)	126	39.7		
High (2.68 - 4)	133	42.0		

To determine the difference in Psychological Well-Being (PWB) between the gender, a t-test on independent samples was utilized. Table 3 presents the results, which reveal a statistically significant difference in PWB between male and female respondents ($t = 5.778, p < .01$). Males score an average of 45.37 on the PWB, while females average 39.04. On average, males have higher PWB scores than their female counterparts, as indicated by these statistics. This finding

was support by other studies which found that females are more likely than males to experience psychological distress (Al-Hanawi et al., 2020; Agteren et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Viertiö et al (2021) provide additional support for this finding by observing that women consistently report higher levels of psychological distress than men. This elevated risk of psychological distress is closely associated with factors including isolation, job dissatisfaction, and family-work conflict. The etiology of these gender disparities involves a complex interaction of biological and societal factors, including but not limited to gender stereotypes, social isolation, autonomy, and disparities in societal roles, all of which make females more prone to psychological challenges (Boyd et al., 2015). Furthermore, Matud et al (2019) report that machismo has a stronger association with PWB than femininity. Regarding the academic sphere, a Malaysian study by Radeef and Faisal (2019) hypothesises that female students frequently exhibit low self-esteem, which correlates with increased psychological distress among undergraduate students. In addition, study by Zhang et al (2018) shows that Chinese female college student are more susceptible to psychological distress than their male counterparts. The study concludes that resilience plays a more significant role in reducing psychological distress among male college students, whereas females benefit more from perceiving social support

Table 3
Differences in gender on psychological well-being

Variables	Gender				t(df)	Sig.
	Female		Male			
	Mean	Sd.	Mean	Sd.		
Psychological well-being	39.04	11.10	45.37	8.29	5.78 (317)	0.001

The correlation analysis between the variables of the study revealed several noteworthy associations that shows in Table 4. Significant positive correlations were found between psychological well-being and pet companionship ($r = .273$, $p < .01$), family support ($r = .345$, $p < .01$), peer support ($r = .652$, $p < .01$), and social media support ($r = .546$, $p < .01$). These findings indicate that attached to these groups may help in enhancing one's psychological well-being.

Specifically, the observed positive association between psychological well-being and the four support variables highlights the potential protective and enhancing roles these variables may play in a person's mental health. The significant correlation between pet companionship and psychological well-being is consistent with the findings of Amiot et al (2022), who found that pets frequently function as emotional anchors, providing unconditional support and reducing feelings of isolation. Similarly, the relationship between family support and well-being is well-established. According to Kamaryati and Malathum (2020), familial ties frequently serve as essential pillars during difficult times that foster resilience and emotional stability.

The strongest correlation was found between psychological well-being and peer support, corroborating the claims of Nesi et al (2018) that peer relationships, particularly during adolescence and early adulthood, can have a significant impact on an individual's sense of self-worth, identity, and overall contentment. Lastly, the positive relationship between social media support and psychological well-being provides a counternarrative to commonly held

beliefs regarding the potential negative effects of social media. This is consistent with the findings of Ostic et al (2021), who concluded that social media, when utilized constructively can indeed serve as a vital support network, bridging geographical gaps, and nurturing genuine connections.

Table 4

Correlations among study variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Psychological well-being	-				
2. Pet companionship	.273**	-			
3. Family support		.345**	-		
4. Peer support			.652**	-	
5. Social media support				.546**	-

N = 317, ** p < .01

In determining the primary determinants of psychological well-being, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The derived model was statistically robust, $F(4, 312) = 41.34$, $p < .001$; explaining approximately 56.7% of the variance in psychological well-being. Meanwhile, among the variables examined, pet companionship exhibited no significant association with cyberbullying ($\beta = -.008$, $p = .851$). This suggests that the presence of pets in a person's life does not significantly affect their psychological well-being. In contrast, family support ($\beta = .354$, $p < .001$), peer support ($\beta = .299$, $p < .001$), and social media support ($\beta = .207$, $p < .001$) were all statistically significant and positively correlated with psychological well-being. This counterintuitive finding suggests that greater support from family, peers, and social media may be associated with an increase in psychological well-being.

Recent research into the determinants of psychological well-being has placed an emphasis on the multifaceted nature of factors that might influence an individual's mental state. The results from this regression analysis echo findings from previous studies by emphasizing the paramount importance of social support networks in contributing to psychological well-being. According to Killgore et al (2020), consistent and quality interactions within one's family, peers, and online communities significantly augment an individual's sense of belonging, self-worth, and overall life satisfaction. This analysis confirmed this perspective, as family support, peer support, and social media support were all statistically significant predictors and were positively correlated with psychological well-being. This suggests that fostering strong relationships both offline and online can serve as protective factors against psychological distress.

Interestingly, this analysis found no significant correlation between pet companionship and psychological well-being. This finding stands in contrast to some studies that have underscored the positive impacts of pet ownership on mental health, including reducing feelings of loneliness, boosting mood, and even acting as buffers against psychological stress (McConnell et al., 2011). However, it is crucial to note that the benefits of pet companionship can vary based on individual preferences, the nature of the human-animal relationship, and cultural contexts. It is possible that, within the demographic examined in this study, other social support structures like family, peers, and social media interactions held a comparatively higher influence on an individual's well-being.

Table 5

Multiple regression in determining the main predictor of psychological well-being.

Variable	Psychological well-being			
	B	SE. B	Beta, β	p
Pet companionship	-.030	.161	-.008	.851
Family support	.296	.044	.354	.001
Peer support	.273	.051	.299	.001
Social media support	.276	.064	.207	.001
R²	.345			
Adjusted R²	.567			
F	41.34			

Psychological Implications of social support and psychological well-being

According to the results, the profound interaction between psychological well-being and various sources of support provides insights into contemporary human behaviour and mental health dynamics. At its core, the positive correlation between psychological well-being and pet companionship in line with what Beck (2014) call the "Human-Animal Symbiosis Hypothesis." According to this theory, animals, particularly pets, elicit natural caregiving behaviours from humans, thereby satisfying innate psychological requirements associated with bonding and attachment. In exchange, pets provide unconditional affection and a nonjudgmental presence, which have the potential to increase a person's sense of well-being and reduce feelings of loneliness or depression.

Similarly, it is impossible to overstate the positive effects of family and peer support on psychological health. According to Butler et al (2022), in a world characterized by numerous sociocultural shifts, the consistent correlation between family support and well-being is a testament to the timeless psychological foundation that the family frequently serves as the primary socioemotional buffer against external adversities. It's a haven of comfort and security that foster resilience and stability even in hard times.

The remarkably strong correlation between peer support and psychological well-being sheds light on a new mental health paradigm. Peers play a crucial role in validating an individual's experiences, choices, and identity, particularly among young adults and adolescents (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021). Peer affirmation, comprehension, and shared experiences can be instrumental in fostering self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being as individuals navigate complex life transitions. Meanwhile, the relationship between social media support and psychological well-being is complex. This research findings are consistent with the study by Hrastinski and Aghaee (2012), which contradicts the commonly held belief that social media can be detrimental to mental health. They argue that digital platforms, when used mindfully, can enhance a person's sense of community, provide avenues for self-expression, and offer support systems that may be absent in physical settings. This is especially pertinent in modern contexts where digital interactions are becoming nearly as fundamental as face-to-face interactions.

In sum, the overarching implication of this study underscores the indispensability of support structures, be it from pets, family, peers, or digital platforms, in moulding and nurturing an individual's psychological well-being. While each source of support offers its own set of benefits, collectively they highlight the significance of connection, validation, and community in promoting mental health outcomes.

Limitations

In spite of providing valuable insights, the current research acknowledges certain methodological and theoretical limitations that require reflection. Initially, the scope of the study is limited by its regional focus, as all participants were Malaysian adolescents from the state of Selangor. This geographical specificity raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings to broader demographics or to other regions. In addition, a single instrument was used to measure each construct. This could potentially restrict the comprehension of the intricate psychological constructs under investigation. The reliance on self-reported data introduces additional potential biases, such as social desirability in responses. To enhance the robustness of findings in subsequent research, a diversified methodological approach integrating behavioural observations and physiological metrics might be beneficial. In addition, the cross-sectional nature of the study prevents causal inferences, thereby limiting a comprehensive comprehension of how these variables interrelate and evolve longitudinally.

Conclusion

The purpose of this exploratory study is to determine the intricate relationships between peer, family, pet companionship, and social media support and their impact on psychological well-being. The findings conclude that the support, regardless of its source, has a significant positive relationship with psychological health. Particularly, peer support emerges as the most powerful predictor, highlighting its central role in promoting mental health. This is consistent with the current understanding that particularly during a person's formative years, peer interactions and validations play a crucial role in influencing one's sense of self, sense of belonging, and overall psychological health.

However, the relationships between family and social media support and psychological well-being cannot be overstated. Significant positive correlations indicate that familial ties and digital connections have an undeniable effect on cultivating a sense of support, validation, and community. Intriguingly, while pet companionship did exhibit a positive correlation, its influence was significantly weaker than other support structures, suggesting that its function, while beneficial, may be supplementary rather than primary in terms of psychological well-being.

In conclusion, this study confirms that support networks, whether from colleagues, family, or digital platforms, are crucial for fostering and maintaining psychological health. The complex relationship between these support sources and well-being provides a fertile ground for future research, perhaps delving deeper into the individual and combined effects they exert on the psychological landscapes of diverse demographic cohorts.

Reference

- Abubakar, R., Zubairu, H. D., & Yohanna, S. (2020). Impact of family social support on psychological wellbeing of infertile women attending Yusuf Dantsoho Memorial Hospital, Kaduna, Nigeria. *Annals of African Medical Research*, 3(118), 19-22.
- Agrawal, N., Someshwar, A., Ravi, A., Dhas, A. A., & Srivastava, A. (2021). Understanding the role of participation in online support groups on mental well-being. *Indian Journal of Health and Well-being*, 12(4), 457-465.
- Agteren J. V., Woodyatt, L., Iasiello, M., Rayner, J., & Kyrios, M. (2019). Make it measurable: Assessing psychological distress, wellbeing and resilience at scale in higher education. *Student Success Journal*, 10(3), 1-13.
- Amiot, C. E., Gagne, C., & Bastian, B. (2022). Pet ownership and psychological well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Scientific Reports*, 12(1), 6091.

- Asmawati, D., Asmah, A., & Zaini, S. (2009). Psychological well-being of 'orang asli'. *Jurnal Psikologi Malaysia*, 23(2009), 19-25.
- Bagci, S. C., Turnuklu, A., & Bekmezci, E. (2018). Cross-group friendships and psychological well-being: A dual pathway through social integration and empowerment. *The British Journal of Social Psychology*, 57(4), 773–792.
- Bahamon, M. J., Alarcon, Y., Cudris, L., Trejos, A. M., and Campo, L. (2019). Bienestar psicológico en adolescentes colombianos. *Arch. Venezolanas Farmacol. Terapéutica*, 38, 519–524.
- Bano, S., Cisheng, W., Khan, A. N., & Khan, N. A. (2019). WhatsApp use and student's psychological well-being: Role of social capital and social integration. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 103, 200–208.
- Beck, A. M. (2014). The biology of the human-animal bond. *Animal Frontiers*, 4(3), 32-36.
- Bernasco, E. L., Nelemans, S. A., van der Graaff, J., & Branje, S. (2021). Friend support and internalizing symptoms in early adolescence during COVID-19. *Journal of research on Adolescence : the Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 31(3), 692–702.
- Boehm, J. K., & Kubzansky, L. D. (2012). The heart's content: The association between positive psychological well-being and cardiovascular health. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(4), 655–691.
- Boyd, A., Van de Velde, S., Vilagut, G., De Graaf, R., Florescu, S., Alonso, J., ... & EU-WMH Investigators. (2015). Gender differences in mental disorders and suicidality in Europe: results from a large cross-sectional population-based study. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 173, 245-254.
- Carr, D. C., Taylor, M. G., Gee, N. R., & Sachs-Ericsson, N. (2020). Psychological health benefits of companion animals following a social loss. *The Gerontologist*, 60(3), 428–438.
- Chadwick, Z., Edmondson, A., & McDonald, S. (2022). Engaging with animal-assisted interventions (AAIs): Exploring the experiences of young people with ASD/ADHD diagnoses. *Support for Learning*, 37(1).
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: An introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9, 1–11.
- Erfani, S. S., & Abedin, B. (2018). Impacts of the use of social network sites on users' psychological well-being: A systematic review. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 69(7), 900-912.
- Fauziah, M., Handarini, D. M., & Muslihati. (2018). Self-esteem, social support, personality and psychological well being of junior high school student. *Jurnal Pendidikan Humaniora*, 6(1), 17–23.
- Mendoza, G. M. D. C., Sanchez Queija, I., & Parra Jimenez, A. (2019). The role of parents in emerging adults' psychological well-being: A person-oriented approach. *Family Process*, 58(4), 954–971.
- Grajfoner, D., Ke, G. N., & Wong, R. M. M. (2021). The effect of pets on human mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19 lockdown in Malaysia. *Animals*, 11, 2689.
- Grajfoner, D., Ke, G. N., & Wong, R. M. M. (2021). The effect of pets on human mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19 lockdown in Malaysia. *Animals*, 11, 2689.
- Hajek, A., & Konig, H.H. (2019). How do cat owners, dog owners and individuals without pets differ in terms of psychosocial outcomes among individuals in old age without a partner? *Aging Mental Health*, 24, 1613–1619.

- Hizbullah, K., & Mulyati, R. (2022). The role of gratitude and family support on psychological well-being of mothers with autistic children. *International Journal of Islamic Educational Psychology*, 3(1), 2-18.
- Hoferichter, F., Kulakow, S., & Hufenbach, M. C. (2021). Support from parents, peers, and teachers is differently associated with middle school students' well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12.
- Hrastinski, S., & Aghaee, N. M. (2012). How are campus students using social media to support their studies? An explorative interview study. *Education and Information Technologies*, 17, 451-464.
- Johnson, T. P., Garrity, T. F., & Stallones, L. (1992). Psychometric evaluation of the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS). *Anthrozoös*, 5(3), 160-175.
- Kamaryati, N. P., & Malathum, P. (2020). Family support: A concept analysis. *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Resources*, 24(3) 403-411.
- Kaya, A., Iwamoto, D.K., Brady, J., Clinton, L., & Grivel, M. (2019). The role of masculine norms and gender role conflict on prospective well-being among men. *Psychology Men Masculinities*, 20, 142-150.
- Khan, M. J., & Arif, A. (2019). Role of social support as predictor of mental health among university students. *Journal of Research and Reflections in Education*, 13(1), 01-11.
- Killgore, W. D., Taylor, E. C., Cloonan, S. A., & Dailey, N. S. (2020). Psychological resilience during the COVID-19 lockdown. *Psychiatry Research*, 291, 113216.
- Kok, J. K., & Low, S. K. (2019). Risk factors contributing to vulnerability of mental health disorders and the protective factors among Malaysian youth. *International Journal of School & Educational Psychology*, 7(2), 102-112.
- Kusuma, I. J., & Yuniardi, M. S. (2020). The use of instagram and psychological well-being in the digital era. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 395, 104-107.
- Latipun, L., Amalia, D. R., & Hasanati, N. (2018). Relation social support and psychological well-being among schizophrenic patients: Self-care as mediation variable? *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (ASSEHR)*, 304.
- Laursen, B., & Veenstra, R. (2021). Toward understanding the functions of peer influence: A summary and synthesis of recent empirical research. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 31(4), 889-907.
- Liu, D., Baumeister, R. F., Yang, C-c., & Hu, B. (2019). Digital communication media use and psychological well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 24(5), 259–274.
- Luo, M., & Hancock, J. T. (2020). Self-disclosure and social media: Motivations, mechanisms and psychological well-being. *Current opinion in psychology*, 31, 110-115.
- Maran, D. A., Gianino, M. M., Serra, G., & Cortese, C. G. (2022). Potential benefits of human-animal interaction among nurses pet owners and non-pet owners: A pilot study. 294, 1-13.
- Marino, C., Gini, G., Vieno, A., & Spada, M. M. (2018). The associations between problematic Facebook use, psychological distress and well-being among adolescents and young adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 226, 274–281.
- Matud, M. P., Lopez-Curbelo, M., & Fortes, D. (2019). Gender and psychological well-being. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(19), 3531.

- McConnell, A. R., Brown, C. M., Shoda, T. M., Stayton, L. E., & Martin, C. E. (2011). Friends with benefits: on the positive consequences of pet ownership. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(6), 1239.
- Mead, S., & McNeil, C. (2006). Peer support: What makes it unique. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 10(2), 29-37.
- Mishra, A. (2022). Impact of social media usage on personality and psychological well-being of young adults. *Clinical and Experimental Psychology*, 8(6), 056-058.
- Nesi, J., Choukas-Bradley, S., & Prinstein, M. J. (2018). Transformation of adolescent peer relations in the social media context: Part 1—A theoretical framework and application to dyadic peer relationships. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 21(3), 267–294.
- Ngaru, P. N., & Kagema, M. (2017). The influence of social support on the psychological well being of students in University of Nairobi. *International Journal of Psychology*, 2(1), 1-13.
- Nick, E. A., Cole, D. A., Cho, S.-J., Smith, D. K., Carter, T. G., & Zelkowitz, R. L. (2018). The Online Social Support Scale: Measure development and validation. *Psychological Assessment*, 30(9), 1127-1143.
- Ostic, D., Qalati, S. A., Barbosa, B., Shah, S. M. M., Vela, G. E., Herzallah, A. M., & Liu, F. (2021). Effects of social media use on psychological well-being: a mediated model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 678766.
- Pezirkianidis, C., Galanaki, E., Raftopoulou, G., Moraitou, D., & Stalikas, A. (2023). Adult friendship and wellbeing: A systematic review with practical implications. *Frontiers Psychology*, 14.
- Radeef, A. S., & Faisal, G. G. (2019). Internet addiction among dental students in Malaysia. *Journal of International Dental and Medical Research*, 12(4), 1452 – 1456.
- Rehnfeldt, H. (2020). *Examining the relationship between pet-ownership & human physical and psychological wellbeing*. Unpublished bachelor's thesis dissertation, University of Gavle.
- Roux, M. C., & Wright, S. (2020). The relationship between pet attachment, life satisfaction, and perceived stress: Results from a south african online survey. *Anthrozoös*, 33(3), 371-385.
- Ryff, C. D. (2018). Eudaimonic well-being: Highlights from 25 years of inquiry. In K. Shigemasu, S. Kuwano, T. Sato, & T. Matsuzawa (Eds.), *Diversity in harmony - Insights from psychology: Proceedings of the 31st International Congress of Psychology* (pp. 375–395). John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989b). Happiness is everything, or is it? explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 1069-1081.
- Ryff, C. D. (2014). Psychological well-being revisited: advances in the science and practice of eudaimonia. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 83(1), 10-28.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989a). Psychological wellbeing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069-1081.
- Sarkar, S., Ghosh, S., & Bose, N. (2022). Psychological wellbeing, perceived stress, coping strategy of the Bengali young adult pet owners. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 10(4), 1596-1603.
- Schacter, H. L., & Margolin, G. (2018). The interplay of friends and parents in adolescents' daily lives: Towards a dynamic view of social support. *Social Development*, 28, 708–724.

- Secor, S. P., Limke-McLean, A., & Wright, R. W. (2017). Whose support matters? Support of friends (but not family) may predict affect and wellbeing of adults faced with negative life events. *Journal of Relationships Research*, 8(e10), 1-10.
- Singstad, M. T., Wallander, J. L., Lydersen, S., & Kayed, N. (2022). Perceived social support and symptom loads of psychiatric disorders among adolescents in residential youth care. *Social Work Research*, 46(1), 30-43.
- UNICEF Malaysia. (2022). UNICEF, National Institutes of Health Malaysia, Burnet Institute: Strengthening mental health and psychosocial support systems and services for children and adolescents in East Asia and the Pacific: Malaysia Country Report.
- Viertio, S., Kiviruusu, O., Piirtola, M., Kaprio, J., Korhonen, T., Marttunen, M., & Suvisaari, J. (2021). Factors contributing to psychological distress in the working population, with a special reference to gender difference. *BMC public health*, 21, 1-17.
- Wanser, S. H., Vitale, K. R., Thielke, L. E., Brubaker, L., & Udell, M. A. R. (2019). Spotlight on the psychological basis of childhood pet attachment and its implications. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 12, 469-479.
- White, H. R., & Jackson, K. (2005). Social and psychological influences on emerging adult drinking behavior. *Alcohol Research Health*, 28(4), 182-190.
- Xin, X., Cheng, L., Li, S., Feng, L., Xin, Y., & Wang, S. (2021). Improvement to the subjective well-being of pet ownership may have positive psychological influence during COVID-19 epidemic. *Animal Science Journal*, 92, 1-8. e13624.
- Yang, C-C., Holden, S. M., & Ariati, J. (2021). Social media and psychological well-being among youth: The multidimensional model of social media use. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 24, 631–650.
- Ye, S., & Ho, K. K. W. (2023). College students' Twitter usage and psychological well-being from the perspective of generalised trust: comparing changes before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Library Hi Tech*, 41(1), 152-173.
- Zhang, M., Zhang, J., Zhang, F., Zhang, L., & Feng, D. (2018). Prevalence of psychological distress and the effects of resilience and perceived social support among Chinese college students: Does gender make a difference? *Psychiatry research*, 267, 409-413.
- Zhang, R. (2017). The stress-buffering effect of self-disclosure on Facebook: An examination of stressful life events, social support, and mental health among college students. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 75, 527-537.
- Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 52(1), 30-41.