



**Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development**

**EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF FEMALE  
UNIVERSITY STUDENT LEADERS IN UNIMAS**

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**Bachelor of Psychology (Honours)**

**2022**

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SAWARAK

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Final Year Project Report

Masters

PhD

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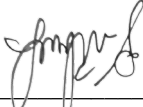
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UNIVERSITY STUDENT LEADERS IN UNIMAS**

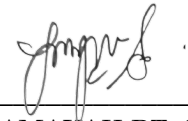
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Bachelor of Psychology with Honours

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK  
(2022)

The project entitled 'Exploring the Psychological Well-being of Female University Student Leaders in UNIMAS' was prepared by Priscarina anak Siaman Tylors (72635) and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Psychology with Honours

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of female university students as leaders of their clubs or organisations and their psychological well-being among UNIMAS students. More specifically, the study explored their challenges as female university student leaders and the coping strategies they have adopted to balance their leadership roles and academic success, as well as exploring their expectations for the future of female leaders. This study had a total of eight participants from UNIMAS who hold a leadership position in campus who were individually interviewed to obtain the findings of this study.

*Keywords:* psychological well-being, university students, female leaders, extracurricular activities

## **ABSTRAK**

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka pengalaman pelajar wanita universiti sebagai pemimpin kelab atau organisasi mereka dan kesejahteraan psikologi dalam kalangan pelajar UNIMAS. Secara lebih khusus, kajian ini meneroka cabaran mereka sebagai pemimpin pelajar wanita universiti dan strategi yang mereka guna untuk mengimbangi peranan kepimpinan dan kejayaan akademik mereka, serta meneroka jangkaan mereka terhadap masa hadapan pemimpin wanita. Kajian ini mempunyai seramai lapan orang peserta yang memegang jawatan kepimpinan di kampus, dan telah ditemu bual secara individu dalam kajian ini.

*Kata kunci:* kesejahteraan psikologi, pelajar universiti, pemimpin wanita, aktiviti ko-kurikulum

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Psychological well-being refers to an individual's emotional health and overall functioning or feeling good while also being able to function properly. A person's psychological well-being plays a crucial role in engaging with life activities or responsibilities in a healthier way. The development of psychological well-being may be critical to the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle. However, this phenomenon may be challenging to manage throughout life transitions, which are often accompanied by stressors or new responsibilities. Starting a new chapter in life as a university student can be a stressful period in a young person's life because of the need to adjust to a new environment, take on new academic duties, and for some coping with the stress that comes with the responsibilities of being a leader in campus. As a result, university students are particularly vulnerable when it comes to managing their psychological well-being and adapting into the new university environment or duties.

Women are increasingly striving for more gender equality. Women are still underrepresented in leadership roles and are seen as an exception when contrasted to males in high-ranking positions, particularly in higher education institutions (Chin, 2011). Leadership is a term that may be defined in a variety of ways. As it is "complex", it lacks universal and unanimous definition (Achua & Lussier, 2013). Leadership can be thought as the process of leaders and followers influencing one another to accomplish corporate goals through change (Knapp, 2008). The participation and involvement of females in various spheres of life, such as labour market or organisations have increased (Mokhtar, 2020). According to the Statistics on Women Empowerment in Selected Domains, Malaysia, 2021, the Malaysia Gender Gap

Index (MGGI), which measures the gap between men and women across four sub-indices, scored 0.714 or 71.4% in 2020, up slightly from 0.709 in 2019.

## **1.1 Background of Study**

Emerging adulthood, which is a stage between adolescence and adulthood, it is marked by a variety of obstacles that university students face as they take on adult tasks and responsibilities. Above all these responsibilities, it is especially common among university students, who are also subjected to higher academic expectations as well as abrupt changes in their social, geographic, and economic circumstances, to feel overwhelmed when they struggle to keep up with their psychological well-being. According to a recent study in 2018, the prevalence rate of perceived stress among the undergraduate students in a Malaysian university was 37.7%. University students go through a variety of life events at different stages throughout this transitional period, ranging from entering college, and making new networks, to sitting for examinations. Student clubs and organisations are an important component of a student's university experience. As university students are expected to enhance their personal responsibility and independence as well as making ongoing adjustments, including personal, emotional and social adaptations, these life events may become potential stressors. This especially applies to students who are occupied with positions of leadership in their club or organisation in university or college. How do their roles as leaders affect their psychological well-being while balancing their academic success and responsibilities as a leader?

According to Caza and Rosch (2014), "preparing for future leaders is a long-time aim in higher education" (p. 1586). College is an opportunity for students to hone their leadership skills. At its finest, involvement and leadership in a student group allow students to experience organisational membership and leadership while developing their own methods of doing and leading. Participation in student activities or organisations also prepare the way for the



development of 21<sup>st</sup> century abilities, such as problem-solving and critical thinking, capacity to operate as part of a team, manage conflicts in a polite manner, and plan projects effectively (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This study aims to understand the unique experiences of university students, specifically in the perspectives of female students, in maintaining their psychological well-being while being involved with their responsibilities as leaders in UNIMAS. This study also aims to fill the gap in the literature regarding the lack of knowledge on this matter.

As a brief introduction to UNIMAS, the university currently has over 13,000 undergraduates spread across eight faculties (Study Malaysia, 2021). UNIMAS has been giving its students opportunities to get involved in various extracurricular activities or carrying out community programmes and competitions through the establishments of clubs and associations in campus. The female student leaders who will be involved in this study will come from various backgrounds, for instance leaders of an association within their faculty, college leaders, as well as leaders of clubs or club units.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Though there is growing research on students and psychological well-being, there is limited research on psychological well-being of university students on campus. More particularly, there is a scarcity of knowledge on female university students' unique experiences with managing leadership roles and psychological well-being.

According to the findings of a study conducted in 2018 to identify the level of psychological well-being of a university in Malaysia, there has been an increase in concern on the mental health and occurrences of psychological distress among university students. From the perspective of a Public Health, it is crucial to pay attention on the psychological well-being

of university students who are consistently facing psychosocial changes in their environment on campus as well as dealing with the academic and social demands. Starting the university experience can be stressful for students, as they go through the process of having to adapt to new social and educational environments. As a result, this study may be crucial in the addition of knowledge in this field to learn and apply effective psychological strategies and resources to cope with the responsibilities. Thus, enabling university students to enjoy both the optimal level of psychological well-being and academic success.

To the researcher's knowledge, although mental health studies particularly conducted among university students who constantly bear social responsibilities as well as academic pressure have successfully grabbed the attention of researchers (Cleofas, 2020; Hawkins, 2015; Slavinski et al., 2021; Wilson, 2009; Yoon & Hur, 2021), as well as among young adult female university students (Alshehri, 2021) however there is a lack of research on Malaysian students. There also seems to be insufficient literature on the unique experiences of university female student leaders in balancing their social and academic responsibilities from what the researcher has read.

Moreover, there is a considerable number of past studies looking into students' adjustment in university life (Park et al., 2020; Slavinski, 2021), or their involvement in extracurricular activities (Hilal, 2015; Wilson, 2019). Accordingly, this study will explore more into the psychological well-being and responsibilities of female student leaders specifically

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

### **1.3.1 General Objective**

The general objective of this research is to explore the experiences of female university students in UNIMAS with leadership roles in campus in maintaining their psychological well-being.

### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of this research are:

1. To determine the challenges of female university student leaders.
2. To explore the coping strategies in balancing leadership roles and academic success.
3. To explore the female university student leaders' expectations for the future of female leaders.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

The research questions of this research are:

1. What are the challenges of female university student leaders?
2. What are the coping strategies in balancing leadership roles and academic success?
3. What are female university student leaders' expectations for the future of female leaders?

## 1.5 Research Framework

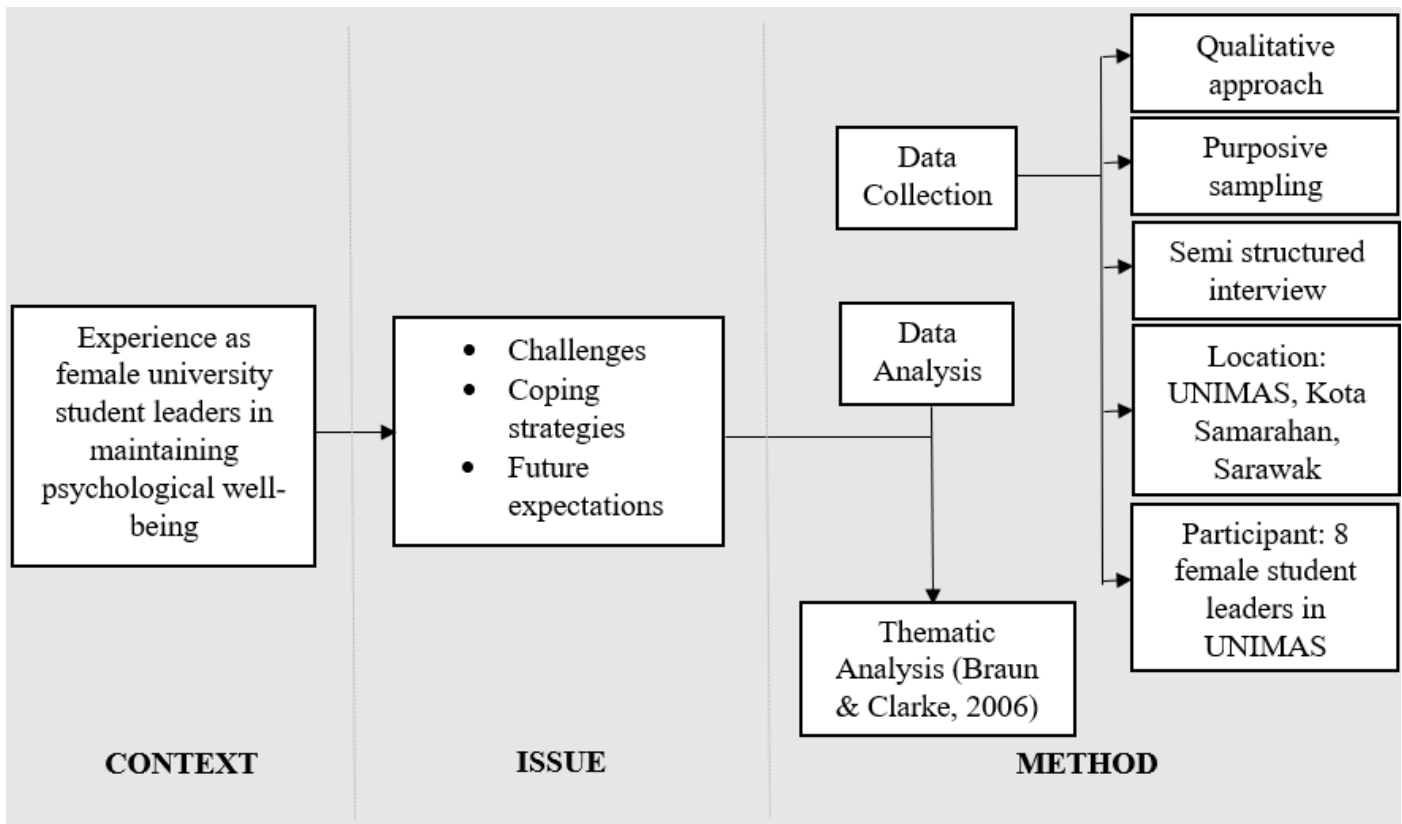


Figure 1.5. Research framework of the study

## 1.6 Significance of Study

This study can be seen as an opportunity to better understand the perspectives of female university student leaders and their coping strategies in facing the challenges. By exploring their perspectives, this study may enhance understanding and comprehension of this phenomenon in a public university. The data collected from the female university student leaders in UNIMAS can add to the new knowledge of current knowledge on students' psychological well-being.

The research information can be used to develop and implement helpful interventions to raise awareness. A better understanding and awareness of the experience of female

university student leaders can guide advisors from university student organisations or clubs on best practices for supporting students on campus. In addition, findings in this study should serve as the basis for future development of intervention programs to promote the psychological well-being of university students who are consistently required to handle several responsibilities at campus.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

### **1.7.1 Leadership Roles**

#### **Conceptual Definition:**

An individual with a leadership role has the power to influence others to achieve a goal and directs the organisation into a more unified and clear direction. A leadership role demands the person to manage people or situations successfully and ethically. Although formal and informal leadership roles exist, every component of leadership within an organisation serves to shape the organisation.

#### **Operational Definition:**

In this research, a leadership role refers to a university student who holds responsibility for leading an organisation, club, or formal community in campus. This research will specifically focus on female UNIMAS students. Some leadership roles may include ranks such as president of an organisation or executive committee of a unit in a club.

### **1.7.2 Psychological Well-being**

#### **Conceptual Definition:**

Psychological well-being is referred to an individual's effective functioning and being able to manage negative or painful emotions, such as disappointment and failure, for long-term

well-being. Wright (2010) defines psychological well-being as a subjective and global assessment that a person is experiencing a fair amount of pleasant and relatively minimal negative feelings or emotions.

**Operational Definition:**

In this research, psychological well-being implies the unique experiences of female university student leaders in balancing their leadership responsibilities and academic success. This research will specifically explore on their coping strategies in overcoming challenges of being a university student with a leadership role.

**1.8 Summary**

The research is designed to explore the psychological well-being of female university student leaders in UNIMAS based on their experiences in balancing their responsibilities as leaders and adapting into the lifestyle of a university student. The research will be conducted in a qualitative approach. The research mainly aims in exploring the challenges, coping strategies and experiences of female university student leaders in maintaining psychological well-being. The information gained from this research may be helpful in the addition of knowledge in this field to learn and apply effective psychological strategies and resources to cope with the responsibilities, particularly in Malaysian context.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter will present a review of literature on psychological well-being and carrying the role of being a leader. This chapter is organised into five broad sections; these sections are: (1) Seligman's Theory of psychological well-being; (2) leadership concept, model, and theory; (3) student involvement in extracurricular activities and clubs; (4) factors that influence university students' psychological well-being; (5) coping. The review of literature of Seligman's theory of psychological well-being will include the PERMA theory of well-being. The second section of the literature review will consist of four concepts, models, or theories related to leadership. These theories include the Trait Theory, Contingency Theories (Situational), Transactional Theory of Leadership and Transformational Theory of Leadership, as well as discussion on female leaders. The third section of the literature review will touch on the benefits and potential negative impact of involvement in extracurricular activities, as well as the aspects of academic success, time management, and psychological well-being. The fourth section of this chapter will include factors such as college adjustment and social support. The final section will explain on emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping, as well as literature on coping behaviours among students. The general purpose of this study is to explore the psychological well-being among female university students in UNIMAS with leadership roles in campus.

#### **2.1 Seligman's Theory of Psychological Well-being**

Positive psychology aims to discover what works, what goes well in humans' lives, and what contributes to sentiments of pleasure and thriving. Martin Seligman offered a particular

theory of happiness in his book *Authentic Happiness* (2002), which aimed to break down the general term ‘happy’ into characteristics that could be found and investigated. The three factors that he concentrated on his theory were positive emotion, engagement, and meaning. However, for a variety of reasons, Seligman felt unsatisfied with his theory of authentic happiness (Seligman, 2011). He thought that the theory was excessively preoccupied with mood, particularly a ‘cheerful mood’, and he discovered that the three factors he had presented did not cover all aspects of what people seek in achieving positive well-being.

As a result, Seligman (2011) proposed a new theory of well-being in his book *Flourish*. His new theory dismissed the assumption that there was such a thing as happiness that could be assessed by a single metric such as life satisfaction. Instead, his new theory of well-being supported a construct view of well-being, in which well-being is made up of several elements, each of which does not define what well-being is but rather contributes to it. The five aspects of Seligman’s updated theory of well-being are: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (PERMA).

### **2.1.1 PERMA Theory of Well-being**

The Well-Being Theory differs from other multidimensional theories (e.g., Diener et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989) as it includes components on living a purposeful life, as well as living a life abundant with joy and pleasure. It also includes unique components that are less commonly included in other well-being theories such as engagement and achievement. For instance, Kern et al. (2014), revealed significant positive relationships between each PERMA indicator and physical state of being, life satisfaction, work satisfaction, and commitment in a sample of school personnel in one of the few direct assessments of well-being theory. As a result, each of these five aspects has been individually connected to being an important indicator of well-being.