

ISSC 2016 : International Soft Science Conference

## Gender Differences in the Psychological Well-being among Flood Victims in Malaysia

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### Abstract

Flooding in Malaysia has various impacts on the affected population in terms of damage to property, destruction of property and loss of life. Flood victims will suffer severe psychological effects and probably will continue for a long time. Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine whether male and female differ with regard to aspects of psychological well-being among flood victims. This study is based on a quantitative approach using cross-sectional survey. Data were collected through the distribution of questionnaires randomly to respondents. The sample consisted of 300 flood victims who were moved to shelters in the state of Kelantan. The results showed a no significance difference in score for males and females ( $t=1.194$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). The mean value between genders had 159.69 and the standard deviation is 17.25 for the male, while the mean for female is 157.29 and the standard deviation is 17.57. In addition, no gender differences were found in term of all the dimensions in psychological well-being among flood victims. It implies that there was no dissimilarity in term of perception toward psychological well-being for those male and female respondents.

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**Keywords:** Psychological well-being; flood victims; gender; Malaysia.

### 1. Introduction

Flooding is now the most frequent type of major disaster. In Malaysia, floods are regular natural disasters which happen nearly every year during the monsoon season. Floods in Malaysia have caused a change in the lives of those affected. This natural disaster affects people from various psychosocial aspects (Salleh, Mustaffa & Ariffin, 2013). The flood victims received the biggest impact thus affecting their psychological wellbeing. This is consistent with the previous studies have found that the

occurrence of severe events had a negative impact on psychological well-being of the victims (Norris, Matthew, Patricia, Christopher, Eolia & Krzysztof, 2002). Other than that, flood can change the victims' beliefs about themselves and the meaning of life (Adeola, 2009). The effects of flooding and disasters on people's health and psychological well-being can be extensive and significant. The foregoing proves that flooding could affect the psychological well-being of victims and there is need for the attention and action by those who are responsible for the welfare of the citizens.

Psychological well-being is a concept that is multi-dimensional because there are many aspects such as confidence, self-control, anxiety and loneliness (Sinha & Verma, 1992). Psychological well-being can be identified when a person obtains happiness, life satisfaction and did not show symptoms of depression (Ryff, 1995). Sandeep and Mansi (2009) mentioned that the psychological well-being is a subjective term that has different meanings to different individuals. Besides that, according to Ryff (1995), psychological well-being is a concept with different and various dimensions. These dimensions are what can be used to measure the emotional well-being of the persons (like the victims of the floods) that can be viewed and get the views on individual mental well-being.

Ryff (1989) identified and defined the concept of psychological well-being based on six dimensions of self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, personal growth and environmental mastery. Self-acceptance is referring to positive feelings toward oneself by recognizing and accepting various aspects of the self, whether positive or negative aspect. Autonomy means that persons are able to determine by themselves, what is best for themselves without a view or judgment of others. A positive relationship with others is the ability of individuals to establish good relations, mutual trust and mutual concern for the needs and wellbeing of others. Purpose in life refers to individuals who have the intention and goal to be achieved in his lifetime. Personal growth is the last dimension in psychological well-being which refers to the ability to adapt to changes that occur in life. Meanwhile, environmental mastery refers to individuals who use the opportunities that exist in an environment for effective selection or creation of an environment desired by themselves.

Demographic features of respondents are important factors that should be included in an investigation so as to determine the influence of demographic variables of the study. The observations need to be made about how to shape diversity and how gender may have impact on the vulnerability to disaster management (Fothergill & Peek, 2004). Following this, the present study focuses on gender differences in psychological well-being aspects among flood victims in Malaysia.

## **2. Problem Statements**

Research that investigates the gender differences in psychological well-being and dimensions of psychological well-being is important. Perez (2012) suggested that the future researchers to study more on the impact of gender on psychological well-being because the previous studies have yielded contradictory finding. This is because some studies have shown that there are important differences between men and women, while some other studies show there is not much difference between men and women (Gonzalez, Figuer, Malo & Casas, 2014).

In addition, there are very little information available on how gender differences are manifested in psychological well-being even numerous instruments which attempt to measure psychological well-

being have been developed (Roothman, Kirsten & Wissing, 2003). In view of the above, the purpose of this study was to determine whether significant gender differences exist with regard to psychological well-being aspects.

### **3. Literature Review**

Several studies have been done to investigate the possible effect of gender on psychological well-being. Gender differences are of interest to many researchers to conceptualize psychological well-being because the previous studies claim that there are many contrasting findings about the role of gender on different dimensions of psychological well-being.

Nygaard and Heir (2012) conducted a study with the aim of gaining a better understanding of how changes in assumptions related to the well-being and posttraumatic stress symptoms after a natural disaster. Analysis of the data shows that, women have a higher quality of life and facing more pressure than men in posttraumatic situation. In another study, Nor Ezdanie (2010) conducted a research to identify the level of psychological well-being of students in private higher education institutions (IPTS) Kelantan. The study found that boys achieved a mean score higher psychological well-being than that of the girls.

Perez (2012) found significant difference for the purpose in life, autonomy, positive relations with others, spiritual experience, peer relationship and father relationship based on gender. But, no significant gender differences were found in the aspects of self-acceptance, positive affect, mother relationship, teacher relationship, personal growth, environmental mastery and negative affect among Filipino college students. Meanwhile, Joanne and Ferlis (2014) found significant difference for the positive aspects of the relationship with others and autonomy based on gender.

Furthermore, a study by Roothman, Kirsten and Wissing (2003) found no significant gender difference on sense of coherence, satisfaction with life, affect balance, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy and the components of self-concept and of fortitude. Amran and Khairiah (2014) also found no significant difference of general well-being towards sex.

Besides the research outcome discussed above, previous researches reveals that there is distressingly low self-esteem among women than men (Pipher, 1994) but Twenge and Campbell (2001) stated that gender difference in self-esteem ranged only from small to medium effect sizes. According to Ryff, Lee, Essex, and Schmutte (1994), men showed lower score in personal growth than women. But, Ryff and Keyes (1995) noted that no difference was found in personal growth between men and women and also no difference in environmental mastery between men and women.

In view of these previous study where results indicate contrasting findings on the difference in the psychological well-being aspects between the genders, this study intends to investigate the impact of gender differences on the psychological well-being and dimensions of psychological well-being among flood victims in Malaysia.

#### **4. Method**

The method employed in this study was the quantitative design using cross sectional survey. The sampling technique that was used in this research was random sampling. The population for this study was flood disaster victims at Kota Bharu, Kelantan during the flood disaster of 2014. The sample consisted of 350 flood victims selected among the victims that were moved to Kota Bharu, Kelantan for temporary shelter.

The questionnaire was classified into different parts. The first part of the questionnaire was about the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents namely gender, age, religion and race. Then, the second part focused on the psychological well-being of flood victims using Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale. This scale was developed by Carol Ryff (1989) to measure dimensions of psychological well-being namely, autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and positive relations with others. Cronbach's alpha was .89 for psychological well-being, .74 for autonomy, .69 for environmental mastery, .63 for positive relations with others, .78 for self-acceptance, .74 for personal growth, and .76 for purpose in life.

#### **5. Findings**

Out of 300 respondents who took part in the study, 151 respondents were male and 149 respondents were female, which demonstrate 50.3% and 49.7% respectively. The age group of 21-30 years old contributing 30.7% of the total sample population, followed by 80 (26.7%) of them who are in the range of 51 years old and above, 43 of the respondents were in the age range of below 21 years old and 31-40 years old (14.3%) and 42 of respondents were in the age range of 41-50 years old (14.1%). In term of race, majority of respondents which are 299 (99.7%) were Malays and followed by 1 (3%) Chinese. So, in term of religion, majority of respondents which are 299 (99.7%) were Muslim and 1 (3%) Buddha.

In term of gender and psychological well-being, an independent samples t-test is conducted to compare the perception toward psychological well-being based on gender. The result tabulated in table 1 indicates that there was no significance difference in score for males and females ( $t=1.194$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). The mean value between genders had 159.69 and the standard deviation is 17.25 for the male, while the mean for female is 157.29 and the standard deviation is 17.57. It implies that there was no dissimilarity in terms of perception toward psychological well-being for those male and female respondents.

The same analysis was conducted in order to look at the differences and dimensions of psychological well-being based on gender. The result illustrated that there also was no significance difference for the male and female respondents in terms of all dimensions of psychological well-being (autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, self-acceptance, and personal growth).

For autonomy ( $t=-.365$ ,  $p>.000$ ), the mean value for men is 24.19 and the standard deviation is 3.23 and the mean for female is 24.34 and the standard deviation is 3.57. Environmental mastery ( $t=1.291$ ,  $p>.000$ ), the mean value for men is 27.44 and the standard deviation is 3.51 and the mean for female is 26.93 and the standard deviation is 3.43, while for the positive relations with others ( $t=.970$ ,  $p>.000$ ),

the mean value between genders had 26.97 and the standard deviation is 3.17 for the male and the mean for female is 26.62 and the standard deviation is 3.07. For self-acceptance ( $t=.351, p>.000$ ), the mean value for men is 25.37 and the standard deviation is 3.27 and the mean for female is 25.24 and the standard deviation is 3.09. Personal growth ( $t=1.837, p>.000$ ), the mean value for men is 27.70 and the standard deviation is 3.72 and the mean for female is 26.87 and the standard deviation is 4.03. While, purpose in life ( $t=1.502, p>.000$ ), the mean value between genders had 28.01 and the standard deviation is 4.24 for the male, while the mean for female is 27.29 and the standard deviation is 4.11. These results signify that males and females are not different in term of their perception toward all the dimensions of psychological well-being that were tested in this study.

**Table 1.** T-test result.

Variable	Gender	n	Mean	Std. Dev	t	Sig.
Psychological well-being	Male	151	159.69	17.250	1.194	.233
	Female	149	157.29	17.572		
Autonomy	Male	151	24.19	3.231	-.365	.715
	Female	149	24.34	3.565		
Environmental mastery	Male	151	27.44	3.511	1.291	.198
	Female	149	26.93	3.433		
Positive relations with others	Male	151	26.97	3.166	.970	.333
	Female	149	26.62	3.068		
Self-acceptance	Male	151	25.37	3.273	.351	.725
	Female	149	25.24	3.092		
Personal growth	Male	151	27.70	3.724	1.837	0.67
	Female	149	26.87	4.029		
Purpose in life	Male	151	28.01	4.244	1.502	.134
	Female	149	27.29	4.110		

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

In 2014-2015, a major flooding disaster hit Malaysia. This flood has been described as the worst floods in decades because more than 200,000 people were affected while 21 were killed. Johari and Ahmad Marzuki (2013) states that the floods did not only affects the victims physically, but also have implications from the security perspective as well as places of residence and family safety.

Many studies have been conducted specifically to identify the role of gender on the general psychological well-being and dimension of psychological well-being (Ryff, et. 1994: Colarossi & Eccles, 2003: Roothman, Kirsten & Wissing, 2003: Nor Ezdianie, 2010: Perez, 2012: Khairiah & Amran, 2014). However, the trends of their findings showed differences between these researchers. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this gap focusing on the specific situation of flood disaster victims in Malaysia.

The results from this study showed that there were no significant differences in terms of gender on psychological well-being and dimensions of psychological well-being (autonomy, environmental

mastery, positive relations with others, self-acceptance, personal growth, & purpose in life). It explains that there are no differences for the male and female in terms of psychological well-being among flood victims in Malaysia.

The results of this study support the finding of Amran and Khairiah (2014), which showed that no significant difference of general well-being towards gender. This is also in line with the findings by Casey (2011), which also showed that no differences according to gender on the level of anxiety, depression and well-being. Johari and Pusphavalli (2010) has also found that there were no significant differences in self-concept and the well-being of the juvenile toward gender. Besides, well-being is based on strength in some key components such as environmental mastery, good relationships, personal growth, autonomy, purpose in life and self-acceptance (Ryff, 1989). So, all of these factors will strengthen or weaken an individual, regardless of gender.

However, this finding contradicts the findings of a study by Perez (2012), which explained that there are gender differences in terms of purpose in life, autonomy and positive relations with others. But, for the present study the findings show that there is no differences between male and female toward of autonomy, positive relations with others, purpose in life and also for other dimensions of psychological well-being among flood victims in Malaysia.

Therefore, these findings support the requirement for information about how gender differences are manifested in psychological well-being. This is because this finding explained that there are no differences between male and female toward the general psychological well-being and also in terms all of the dimensions of psychological well-being.

In general, this study has limitations due to the sample. The results of this study cannot be generalized to the entire flood victims in Malaysia because the sample was just taken from the flood victims in Kelantan. Thus, future researchers need to expand the number of samples to get results that can be generalized and also expand the scope of this study. Besides that, future studies can also be conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to get the more comprehensive results. For example interviews may be conducted to gain more insights into the psychological well-being aspects between the men and female of flood victims to support quantitative results.

## **Acknowledgement**

The authors wish to thank the Ministry of Education, Malaysia for funding this study under the Long-term Research Grant Scheme (LRGS/b-u/2012/UUM/Teknologi Komunikasi dan Informasi).

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