THE EFFECT OF PERCEIVED SUPPORT ON SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING OF ACADEMIC INSTITUTION STAFF

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Abstract: This study aimed to examine the effects of perceived support on subjective well-being (SWB) among university staff in the context of COVID-19. The research sample comprised of 522 employees from Malaysia public universities, which included both academicians and non-academicians. The respondents completed two online questionnaires. Statistical analyses used were descriptive statistics and regression. The results revealed that perceived support directly affects higher institution employees' subjective well-being. The study confirmed the importance of perceived support for university employees' subjective well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Many more people are working from home under the present COVID-19 framework, with various degrees of results. The explanation for this is that many employees are now obliged to work from home, which is a new norm for most of them. This argument is reinforced by The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development's recommendation that when employees are working from home, companies should "watch out for their well-being" (CIPD, 2021).

In times of adversity, job-related stress experience can affect the levels of subjective well-being (Kasser & Sheldon, 2009) as well as the capacity to cope with and adjust to a challenging circumstance owing to exhaustion of psychological and physical resources (Kim & Florack, 2021). Previous studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of social connection and perceived support as a critical resource in the workplace, with favourable benefits on well-being (Rahnfeld, Palmerk & Cox, 2013).

Besides, it serves as a psychological resource to counteract the negative emotional and behavioural repercussions of a bad event. Both employers and employees play important roles in providing support at the workplace. In addition, Song and Gao (2018) suggest working from home has not been fully understood and recommend that future research explore how homeworking and perceived support relate to workers' well-being.

Happiness is a reliable indicator of people's quality of life, well-being, and progress in both personal and societal development (Hirai *et al.,* 2016). Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) developed an instrument to globally evaluate if a person is happy or unhappy, namely the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS). SHS reflects a broader classification well-being, measured through global self-assessments. It has also been one of the tools most frequently used to gauge subjective happiness.

Numerous facets of organizational behaviour are significantly impacted by support in the workplace (Yoon & Thye, 2000) and it has been discovered that social support is crucial for minimizing employee intention to leave (Firth *et al.,* 2004). Three facets of perceived support have been identified to examine the various exchanges that may take place in an organization, namely, perceived organizational support (POS), perceived supervisor support (PSS) and Perceived Co-Worker Support (PCWS) (Fuller *et al.,* 2006). Yoon and Thye (2000) also indicated that this approach has been used successfully in previous studies to measure co-worker and supervisor support.

Based on the previous findings of mentioned variables, the variables are perceived to have crucial importance for institution staff. According to Al Issa and Jaleel (2021), academic and administrative staff at universities are now exposed to new technologies and environments, which leads to workers having varying degrees of preparation and experience, with different outcomes noted in the two groups (Leal Filho *et al.,* 2021). Clearly, devising a suitable instrument for use with workers in universities would help to achieve more reliable data and result in individuals making greater contributions to their institution and wider society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace social support, which symbolises the quantity of care and affection, may be an important component in deciding an individual's subjective well-being, making the work environment appear more pleasant or less stressful. Furthermore, empirical studies have shown that when people feel closer and more connected to other people at work, they experience better levels of subjective well-being (Kasser & Sheldon, 2009). However, in the current pandemic outbreak, the perceived support criterion is no longer adequate since individuals have different requirements and support during pandemic isolation, and previous study findings may not be applicable to C generations.

In light of this shifting landscape, researchers are becoming increasingly interested in the precise implications of perceived support. According to Huang and Zhang (2021) research, the perceived support that an individual receives may determine its impact on subjective well-being. Several research investigations have found that co-worker satisfaction has a major impact on employees' internal work motivation (Chou, 2015). In other words, supportive relationships among co-workers may be important motivators for individuals and are likely to improve subjective well-being. Previous theoretical and empirical research has found that people have better levels of subjective well-being when they feel close to and connected to their co-workers (Kasser & Sheldon, 2009).

Similarly, co-worker support helps individuals to feel appreciated, cared for, and supported by their co-workers, making the workplace more enjoyable and gratifying (Van Yperen & Hagedoorn, 2003). Several researchers found that organisational support was critical in managing with negative psychology at work, such as stress and depression symptoms (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009). According to studies conducted in general and professional groups, perceived stress, sadness, or anxiety symptoms had a negative impact on SWB (Malone & Wachholtz, 2018). In conclusion, there is consistent evidence that the degree of subjective well-being is impacted not by perceived support in general, but by connections among supervisors, co-workers, and organisations.

Consequently, the aim of this study is to analyse the effect of perceived support on subjective well-being when applied to a university population. This is significant for several reasons. There is currently a lack of research

that specifically investigates the relationship between perceived support and SWB among university workers (Huang & Zhang, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Participants
This study was carried out at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) on 522 university staff members, and covered both academicians and non-academicians. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) with stratified random sampling procedure was used to choose the subjects from each group.

Measures
Information was gathered using several instruments, such as tests, scales, observational methods, questionnaires, and interview schedules (Isaac & Michael, 1995). In this study, the questionnaire was structured, and the items were closed type. The questionnaire consisted of six parts, namely a consent form, information sheets, demographic information, together with sections on technology efficacy, subjective well-being, perceived support, as well as a suggestion box.

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) was also utilized) to measure the subjective well-being of employees. The 4-items above and their response format (a 7– point Likert scale, ranging from 1– Not a happy person to 7 – A very happy person), made up the answer options. Item 4 on the scale was reverse coded.

Also utilized was Yoon and Thye's (2000) perceived support scale, which consists of 9 items related to three dimensions, namely the supervisor, colleagues, and organizational support. Respondents completed the questionnaire, which was based on a five- point *Likert* scale, ranging from 1 – Strongly disagree, to 5 – Strongly agree.

Procedure
The instruments and the participants' responses are presented in the Appendix (in English and Malay). This English version was translated into Malay and then back-translated into English by a second translator to ensure comparability and equivalence in meaning (Brislin, 1970). In order to demonstrate their voluntary involvement in the study, the respondents

were required to sign an informed permission form that was attached to the questionnaire before responding. The study was conducted electronically by distributing the self-report survey (Qualtrics) through email and WhatsApp. In order to assess the usability of the instruments, it was necessary to ask the respondents questions regarding the wording, timing, and their understanding of the items during the surveys. They were encouraged to offer suggestions for data that they felt would be more pertinent. The data collection process was completed in April 2022.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. In this research, the reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which is an internal consistency and convergent and discriminant validity to test the validity of the tools. After ensuring collected data did not violate any of the assumptions of regression, researcher analysed quantitative data using simple regression, as this method is appropriated for understanding variance when the study contains a continuous dependent variable (SWB) and continuous independent variables (perceived support) (Osborne, 2016).

RESULTS

The results showed that the Cronbach's alpha for the Subjective Happiness Scale and Perceived Support Scale were .704 and .878, respectively, while the Cronbach's alpha for perceived support sub-dimensions for supervisor support, co-workers support, organization support was .801, .883 and .835, respectively.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics for Each Construct

Scale	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)	4	.704
Perceived support	9	.878

Table 2: Reliability of Perceived Support Subscales

Subscales	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Supervisor support	3	.801
Co-workers support	3	.883
Organization support	3	.835

As for the validity of the instruments, convergent validity is considered as moderate when *r* value falls from .300 to .499 and high if r ≥ (Cohen, 2013). Contrary to convergent, a result less than .85 tells us that the measures are likely to have discriminant validity (Wikipedia Contributors, 2020). The results from convergent and discriminant validity once again reveals that the instruments used in this study, are valid.

Table 3: Correlation of Perceived Support Scale and Subjective Happiness Scale

	Subjective happiness scale	Perceived support scale	PSS supervisor	PSS co-workers	PSS organisation
Subjective happiness scale	--				
Perceived support scale	.277**	--			
PSS supervisor	.210**	.825**	--		
PSS co-workers	.246**	.750**	.371**	--	
PSS organisation	.224**	.876**	.647**	.487**	--

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Among 522 respondents, 272 (52%) are male, 246 (47%) are female and 4 (0.8%) of them are prefer not to say. In the job category, it is divided into two categories which are academicians with 286 staff (54.8%) and 236 are non-academicians (45.2%).

For the respondent's department, it consists of 17 departments. The respondents collected were from Academy of Arts and Creative Technology (N=13), Faculty of Engineering (N=51), Labuan Faculty of International Finance (N=20), Faculty of Computing and Informatics (N=27), Faculty of Islamic Studies (N=6), Faculty of Tropical Forestry (N=24), Faculty of Sustainable Agriculture (N=46), Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy (N=41), Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (N=71), Faculty of Psychology and Education (N=32), Faculty of Science and Natural Resources (N=47), Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition (N=25), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (N=26), Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation (N=20), Borneo Marine Research Institute (N=37) and Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning (N=36). The summary of the demographic information of the respondents are shown in Table 4.1

Table 4: Information of Respondents in Gender, Job category and
Departments (N=522)

Variables		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	272	52.1
	Female	246	47.1
	Prefer not to say	4	0.8
Job category	Academic	286	54.8
	Non-academic	236	45.2
Departments	Academy of Arts and Creative Technology	13	2.5
	Faculty of Engineering	51	9.8
	Labuan Faculty of International Finance	20	3.8
	Faculty of Computing and Informatics	27	5.2
	Faculty of Islamic Studies	6	1.1
	Faculty of Tropical Forestry	24	4.6
	Faculty of Sustainable Agriculture	46	8.8
	Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy	41	7.9
	Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences	71	13.6
	Faculty of Psychology and Education	32	6.1
	Faculty of Science and Natural Resources	47	9.0
	Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition	25	4.8
	Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities	26	5.0
	Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation	20	3.8
	Borneo Marine Research Institute	37	7.1
	Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning	36	6.9

In addition, skewness and kurtosis are used to test the normality of the data of the instruments. As displayed in Table 3, both skewness and kurtosis value are near to zero and fall between -1 to 1. Thus, the mentioned variables in this study are assumed normally distributed.

Table 5: Normality Test of Perceived Social Support, and Subjective
Well-being (N=522)

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perceived Social Support	-.50	.81
Subjective Well-being	-.16	-.29

A bivariate regression was conducted to examine how well support could predict level of well-being. A scatterplot showed that the relationship between support and well-being was positive and linear. The correlation between support and well-being was statistically significant, $F_{(1, 520)}$ =

43.1, p < 0.001. The regression equation for predicting the well-being from perceived support was y = 14.71+0.18x. The R^2 for this equation was .077; that is, 7.7% of the variance in well-being was predictable from level of perceived support. This is a weak positive linear relationship (Cohen, 1988).

Table 6: Regression Coefficients of Perceived Social Support on Employees Subjective Well-Being

Variables	B	SE	t	p	95%CI
Constant	14.71	.96	15.30	<.001	[12.82, 16.60]
Social Support	.18	.03	6.56	<.001	[.13, .23]

DISCUSSION

In investigating the relationship of workplace social support with subjective well-being, as predicted, the results of this study show that perceived support contributes directly to subjective well-being. In other words, workplace social support is related to subjective well-being because it provides positive social relationships and confidants (Diener et al., 1999).

The findings of this study, which are consistent with the results of research conducted in the West (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Karademas, 2006; Spector & Jex, 1998; van Der Doef & Maes, 1999) with regard to the relationship between social support and subjective well-being, reveal some fundamental similarities in both the cognition and experience of happiness for the Taiwanese people and their Western counterparts (Lu, 1999). In other words, despite the absence of a universal structure of subjective well-being, there may exist a similar structure applicable to different cultures with resemblance in characteristics and features (Diener, 1984).

Furthermore, by receiving support, employees will perceived their surroundings more friendly and eventually affect their happiness (Adyani et al., 2019). By receiving social support employees will be able to deal with various stressors in their workplace and facilitate a positive adjustment process (Adyani et al., 2019) which will eventually influence their subjective well-being (i.e. happiness). It was revealed that organization members with positive view on social support tend to be happy and well-performed in workplace. It is also noted that the personnel

were also received support from colleagues, managers and organisation. Thus, hypothesis (H3) for the present study is accepted.

In conclusion, the findings of this research contribute in understanding subjective well-being of university staff both academician and non-academician. Findings form this study may be useful in assisting educators, counsellors, psychologists, as well as university board member to develop strategies to enhance employee subjective well-being. As indicated in the current study, social support is an important predictor in higher education sector. Employees who perceived to experience good support have better well-being.

This study addressed some associated limitations that must be discussed. The research needs to be validated with large sample size to enhance the generalizability. Furthermore, the data was collected through self-report questionnaire and is prone to biases inherent to such an approach. Moreover, quantifying the individual effect of each dimension of predictors on employees' well-being is not yet viable due to the insufficient availability of empirical studies.

A number of future research directions are suggested based on the findings and limitations of the current research. Both the present findings and previous research suggest there is inconclusive evidence to definitively state the effect of demographic factors such as age, gender, and length of tenure and organisational commitment. Therefore, further research may be undertaken to examine the effect of these factors on variables of interest. Future studies also need to identify the relative effects of each dimension of perceived support on employees' well-being and other work outcomes are warranted in order to for us to further understand which support dimensions and other sub-scales dimensions enhance or undermine work-related outcomes in employees.

Conflict of Interest
The researcher declares no conflict of interest when conducting the research.

Ethic Statement
All procedures utilized during this study that involved using human participants were carried out in according with the institutional research

committee's ethical guidelines. All participants gave their informed consent before answering the survey given.

Authors' Contributions
Najah Afina Mohd Harum has contributed primarily on the conception and design, data acquisition, data analysis and interpretation. Muhammad Idris Bin Bullare @ Bahari has critically analyzed in drafting phase, giving insights and constructive criticism, while revising, giving ideas on polishing intellectual content and final approval of the version to be published.

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