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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP ON WELL-BEING: CASE STUDY OF JAKUN

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Abstract

This study is focusing on the influence of interpersonal relationship on the aboriginal well-being. Interpersonal relationship is an essential part of human life particularly for egalitarian society like aborigines. Most of framework in measuring aboriginal well-being has consistently included interpersonal relationship. It shows the importance of human relationship in determining and evaluating their life. Using qualitative study, we aim to understand Orang Asli perspectives on interpersonal relationship and the way it brings impact to their well-being. Participants were purposively selected from the largest tribe of Orang Asli in Malaysia. Based on the discussion, interpersonal relationship is needed for social support and affection. However, to give and gain these needs, people have to strengthen their relationship ties with other and participate in social activity which both relies on the frequency of communication and conflict management. By doing so, good interpersonal relationship will provide satisfaction which lead to the improvement of well-being.

Keywords: Orang Asli, interpersonal relationship, well-being.

1. Introduction

Recently, many countries adapted subjective evaluation of citizens' life in assessing national policy impact along with overall output of economy or societal indicators (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Moreover, many world indexes ranked countries based on various component of well-being. The comparison allows countries to evaluate their policies and government effectiveness in improving nation and society well-being. However, these indexes had generalized definition and components of well-being across geographical traits, cultures, economic condition, government administration along with others internal and external factors. Words like evaluation, feelings, experience, and assessment in defining well-being shows that well-being is uniquely different based on individual perspectives. Some definition of well-being relates to the way people view their life and evaluate their satisfaction or contentment (Maggino, 2015; van der Deijl, 2017). Meanwhile, other definitions of well-being based on their assessment of external factors like life events, life condition and environment circumstances, as well as assessments of internal factors such as mind condition, body condition, and behavioural response and subjective consequences of the process (Beddington et al., 2008; Diener, 2006; Michaelson et al. 2012; McClintock et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001; World Health Organization, 2001).

Interpersonal relationship found to be one of the determinants that has been consistently used in aborigines' well-being framework (see Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010; Durie, 1985; Nguyen & Cairney, 2013; Richmond & Ross, 2009). Interpersonal relationship involves situation that refer to a real interaction unfolding between two individuals or a mental representation of the relationship between self and others (Wilde & Dozois, 2019). It is largely governed by the principles of complementary where the two key components of interpersonal relationship are mutual dependence and relationship satisfaction (Cartwright, 2019; Wilde & Dozois, 2019). Satisfaction in relationship is when people feel content with the status and condition of their relationship dynamics where they feel that their needs are perpetually being gratified sufficiently (Cartwright, 2019). It indicates achievement of the innate human need to belong to good and satisfied relationship. The extent of relationship satisfaction is an important well-being indicator which moderated by interaction and relationship perceptions and behaviours (Murray et al., 2003).

This paper focuses on the influence of interpersonal relationship on well-being and examines the way interpersonal relationship affected aborigines' well-being. In Malaysia, aborigines are called 'Orang Asli' or 'Orang Asal' which can be directly translated as 'original people'. By the Malaysia Constitution, Orang Asli can be defined as any person whose father was a member, speak an aboriginal language, and follow the way of life and beliefs (Aboriginal Peoples Act, 1954). There are 213, 725 Orang Asli and officially divided into 18 groups which categorized to; Negrito (3%), Proto Malay (42%) and Senoi (55%) (JAKOA, 2014). Each group is characteristically different in term of their outward physical traits, language, culture and economic activity (Manickam, 2014).

2. Problem Statement

As the concept of well-being is subjective, it is essential to reach common ground where intuitions are the basic judgment (van der Deijl, 2017) and marker or determinants used in measuring well-being

(Taylor, 2015). Defining well-being from subjective perspectives is more complicated, more individualized, directed by many different directions of factors and impacts and can be based upon profound philosophical, ethical, moral and psychological principles than objective perspective that are more material, clearly tangible, and quantitative (Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2015). Consequently, measuring well-being that based on subjective view provides more challenge and prone to lack of reliability, validity as well credibility. Thus, it is essential to focus on specific context such as based on certain culture and worldview of unique society.

In Malaysia, Malaysia Well-Being Index has been developed to measure benefits of economic growth to the improvement in the quality of life and satisfaction by comparing several indicators with Gross Domestic Products (Malaysia Wellbeing Report, 2013). However, this is based on objective indicators where the components of the index focused on the objective statistical indicators aimed to measure outcomes of socioeconomic policies towards citizen disregard the cultural affect and citizens' perception (Malaysia Wellbeing Report, 2013). In addition, Malaysia is a multi-races nation that need which each race has their unique culture. Accordingly, the total population in Malaysia was 28.3 million with 67.4% are Bumiputera, 24.6% of Chinese, 7.3% of Indians and 0.7% of others ethnic (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). Meanwhile, Orang Asli constitutes 0.6% of the total population and show 166% increment compared with the population of Malaysia which increased by 106% within 30 years, 1980 to 2010 (SyedHussain et al., 2017). If this trend continues, Orang Asli society will represent bigger portion in Malaysia population and their society inclusion on nation growth become more critical. Furthermore, as the direct descendants of the earlier inhibitors of peninsular Malaysia, Orang Asli has a special place in Malaysia diverse community. Even the term 'Orang Asli' is directly translated to 'original people' in Malay language.

Most of study on Orang Asli focus on the deprivation on socioeconomic, health, living conditions, political and human rights that point outs their low level of well-being (see Abdullah et al., 2013; Howell et al., 2006; Mohd Harun & Idris, 2012; Shah et al., 2015; Zal et al., 2013). There is lack of study that explores their social condition particularly their interpersonal relationship within the community. Previously, they were known as egalitarian society that has close relationship with one another which shares their resources in the community and channelled all kinds of support in their social network (Speth, 1990). However, globalization and modernization has brought changes in their life and surrounding environment (Phua, 2015). These changes whether positive or negative requires exploration and understanding especially on the mechanism of relationship and well-being.

3. Research Question

This study aims to address the following critical research questions:

1. How does interpersonal relationship affect the well-being of Orang Asli?
2. What are the indicators of interpersonal relationship that influence the well-being of Orang Asli?
3. What is the level of influence of each indicator on Orang Asli well-being?

4. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to understand the importance of interpersonal relationship on the well-being of Orang Asli. Through this study, we aim to investigate related indicators of interpersonal relationship and its level of influence on Orang Asli well-being.

5. Research Methods

As we aim to understand, qualitative study was chosen as our research method. This study employed semi-structured interviews as data collection method as it allows interviewer to probe necessary questions to gain in-depth data. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews, lasting between 30 minutes to 45 minutes were conducted in participants' homes by pairs of trained interviewer. For each interview, conversations were digitally recorded with consent and written notes are taken. We seek for a naturalistic setting while investigating a social phenomenon in order to increase reliability of our data and to minimize data loss due to different in first language of interviewer and participants (Heppner et al., 1999).

5.1. Data Collection and Sampling

Participants for this qualitative study were purposely sampled from among Orang Asli members from the largest group of Orang Asli; Jakun. In total, more than 30,000 of Orang Asli in Pahang are Jakun, making them the largest ethnic group of Orang Asli in Pahang and Malaysia (JAKOA, 2014). However, this study focus on life experience thus participants are not selected to represent statistical requirement but rather to provide substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation (Polkinghorne, 2005). Since this study is part of project in developing well-being index for Orang Asli, the selection criteria for purposively sampling was based on the project requirement. The purposive sampling enables selection of participants that align with the purpose of the research (Merriam, 2002). Table 1 shows the demographic information of 16 participants selected in this study. 2 settlements were chosen with multiple participants each is to ensure data triangulation by studying various data points within one study (see Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). It allows us to gain credibility in gathering data based on the standard practices (Lather, 2017).

Table 01. Demographic Information of Participants

Village 1: Kampong Gadak			Village 2: RPS Bukit Serok		
ID	Age	Marital Status	ID	Age	Marital Status
Gadak1	42	Married	Serok1	53	Married
Gadak2	46	Widower	Serok2	44	Married
Gadak3	49	Married	Serok3	51	Married
Gadak4	28	Married	Serok4	45	Married
Gadak5	45	Married	Serok5	48	Married
Gadak6	24	Married	Serok6	42	Married
Gadak7	39	Married	Serok7	52	Married
Gadak8	32	Married			
Gadak9	47	Married			

5.2. Measures

In achieving validity for this qualitative study, data are aims to accurately represent feature of interpersonal relationship and well-being (see Hammersley, 1992). Thus, before data collection, predetermined construct had been created based on previous literature and sufficient operational sets of measure had been developed. By definition, the interpersonal relationship is based on the relationship an individual has with family, friends and society. The questions asked in this construct examine participants' level of relationship they have with others as well as the way they reacted in their relationship. It is partly based on the Fundamental Interpersonal Relationship Orientation (Schutz, 2012) which evaluates six interpersonal needs and expressed in relationship from inclusion, control and affection perspectives. This measure allows profiling of interpersonal behaviour. For instance, the participants were asked questions about the closeness of their relationship with others and how much affection they received based on the willingness of others to help during hard time. In addition, some questions asked are related to their society in order to see the influence of societal relationship in their life as they are well-known as egalitarian society that close to everyone in the villages.

5.3. Data Analysis

In analysing the data to answer the first and second question, we used template analysis method. It can be done by using initial codes which are refined during data analysis (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Steps taken in template analysis method were based on recommendations from previous study (see King, 2012). Initially, after familiarisation through transcribing process, as this study focus on well-being, all words that signified emotional reaction was identified. Then, the emerging codes were organised into meaningful clusters in the template. Once the initial template was completed, iterative processes of template modification continued until data reach saturation where no new codes or themes can be added. It allows a rich and comprehensive interpretation of the data (Brooks et al., 2015). Meanwhile, in answering the third question, we examine intensity of words chosen by participant in expressing their feeling (see Krueger, 1994). As this study aims to examine subjectivity of emotions and the way it influences well-being, assigning intensity of words to domain independent adjectives namely high, medium and low enable us to rank it into level of influences (Diener et al., 1985).

6. Findings

Our analysis revealed insightful view of interpersonal relationship and the way it impacted participant well-being. Through explaining the identified core findings for each indicator, we are able to highlight this impact. Table 2 shows the results of our analysis. It depicts the correlation between one indicators to another that emphasise dynamics in relationships. Firstly, findings on the need of relationship remark the importance of relationship in acquiring supports in social systems and getting satisfied affection. This result aligned with the theory of interdependence theory which stated two key components in relationship; mutual dependence and relationship satisfaction (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). For both villages, the need of relationship is high indicating the high value they put in the importance of relationship in influencing their well-being. Secondly, the findings show that in order to gain social support and affection, strength of ties and social participation is two dominance factors. Both social participation and strength of

ties become a catalyst in fulfilling the need of relationship in getting social support as well as affection. For these factors, both kampong shows high level of influences for their well-being. Finally, further probes into the mechanisms of relationship show that the frequency of communication and interpersonal conflict are two main components in determining strength of ties and social participation. Consequently, it will influence their fulfilment of the need in relationship and well-being. In term of the level of these influences, there is a contradictory result from two settlements. Participants in Kampong Gadak are more likely to be influenced by communication and conflict in their well-being compared to RPS Serok. This is due to the differences in opinion in regards to the intensity of communication frequency and interpersonal conflict in strengthening their ties as well as determining their level of involvement in social activities.

Table 02. Analysis Result

Indicators	Core Findings	Level of Influence	
		Gadak	Serok
Need of relationship	• Social support • Affection	High	High
Factors determined social support and affection	• Strength of ties • Social participation	High	High
Factors determined strength of ties and social participation	• Frequency of communication • Interpersonal conflict	High	Low

6.1. Need of Relationship

Before we can understand the effects of relationship, firstly we seek to understand the reason of participants' need of relationship. One of reasons of relationship stated by participants is the need of social support. One gains support behaviours from other people based on others' respond to their best interest through their perception of such needs of support (Reis & Gable, 2015). The needs of support can be fulfilled by sharing problems and trying to understand each other as stated by participant Gadak8 as below.

"We can know what in their heart and they understand us. We can always share stories." [Gadak8]

The way they share and understand each other shows social support as a relationship-based practice where specific contents either emotion, instrument, appraisal or information are transferred across ties (House, 1981). Emotion in this context can be in the form of affection where reciprocity of affections is part of human necessity (Floyd, 2014). Furthermore, affectionate behaviour produces a pleasure-providing hormone that contributes to emotional rewards like happiness (Floyd et al., 2010). As illustrated by Serok3, interpersonal relationship particularly familial relationship is importance in creating a happy environment that later on will affects other type of relationship as well.

"Yes, it is important. Happy family is very important. It is because having a happy family will make us always positive. We will be happy with others too. If we don't feel happy here, then we will not be happy with other people. Everything starts at home." [Serok3]

The need of relationship particularly the need of affection is vital for well-being as fulfilment of this need will increase their well-being (Floyd, 2014; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Kahneman et al., 2004). For both settlements, their needs of relationship are high as they need other people to get support as well as love. They believe that interpersonal relationship is the basis of happiness hence desirable state of well-

being. Judging by the intensity of the word and the affirmation of their statements when describing the need of relationship, we can anticipate that the level of influence of this indicator is high for both settlements.

6.2. Factors Determined Social Support and Affection

In getting more understanding on the effects of interpersonal relationship on well-being, we asked participants on the way they express their social support and affection, by giving hypothetical situation as part of the questions. Based on their responds, social support and affection are indicated by strength or ties in the relationship and engagement in social activity. In relation to strength of ties, the accessibility of ties play an important role as it increases mutual awareness of needs and ease the assistance (Plickert et al., 2007). When participants were asked about their willingness to get help as well as to help others during difficult time, they stated that they are willing to do so. However, their willingness depends on the strength of ties.

"If I have a problem, I will share with my husband and my family, they are my priority. Friends are the last one I ask for help." [Serok2]

"If they ask for my help, I will help them…I don't ask for help from others, I ask help from my siblings." [Gadak4]

For participants, they rather ask for help or troubling for people that close to them. They expressed well their affection and support from others yet, they are keener to get affection and support from their family that closer to them than other people. It reflected the quality of relationship people had especially close relationship like familial which previously found to be linked with well-being (Denissen et al., 2008; Fingerman et al., 2004; Fiori et al., 2007; Pinquart & Sörensen, 2000; Wrzus et al., 2012). Thus, variations of asking and giving support show that the strength of ties acts as a catalyst in giving social supports and showing affection.

Afterwards, participants were asked about their engagement with society where any forms of social interaction in the society are considered as social participation as well as their feelings when socialize with others. Through this set of questions, we are able to study the extent of their inclusion within the society and how it affects their well-being in general. Answers given by participants are varied according to their preferences of spending time. For instance, some participants like Gadak4, Gadak5 and Gadak7 stated that they like to spend time with their family, close friends and neighbours.

"I don't going out much. My friends are around here, my neighbours. If I meet other villagers we just smile and say hi." [Gadak7]

Furthermore, in term of socializing with other people, other participants also claimed that they rarely going out except for feast. It is one particular time for them to mingle around and catch up with others.

"If they invite me to the wedding or any events, I will come if needed. I rarely go to communal work. Since I cannot go due to my work, I will donate something. Since I cannot come to help, I will assist in other way, financial assistance, and other things." [Serok3]

Her statement demonstrated that as part of the community, it is part of the norm to join social activities to the point that if they won't be able to, they will find a way to compensate. It also shows that as part of the community they will try to help according to their capability. For other participant, religion differences have no effects in their community especially in showing social support.

"I always attend feast. Some of my friends feel weird since I even come to the funeral of non-Muslim. But since I used to it, so I don't mind. Just go, show your face and give moral support." [Serok2]

In her statement, she mentioned that religion differences do not restrict them from attending feast or funeral even when there are some issues of religion practices. Thus, the finding indicates that social participation even in minimum interactions done by participants is part of the way to feel and expresses social support and affection with others. Previous study found that social participation in the community with neighbours and friends improve positive emotions (Schwanen & Wang, 2014), reduced emotional reaction to stress (Ahnquist et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2017) and have positive effect on well-being (Ettema & Schekkerman, 2016; Liu et al., 2017; Ettema & Schekkerman, 2016; Liu et al., 2017; O'campo et al., 2009).

6.3. Factors Determined Strength of Ties and Social Participation

In order to get better understanding on interpersonal relationship and well-being, we inquiries into the way participant describe the quality of their relationship with others. When describing their close relationship, participants use terms like having no fight, frequent communication, and a lot of time spends together to indicate their satisfaction in the relationship.

"We are close. I meet my mother every day. As for my siblings, they are still in school, live in this house, so, we are really close. Even some that live afar always give a call." [Gadak6]

Pertaining to communication, it is the basis of interpersonal relationship in relaying information as needed either for support or affection (Berdibayeva et al., 2016). Frequent communication in relationship reflected the strength of ties (Miritello et al., 2013) and facilitated delivery of support (Wellman & Frank, 2001). Through communication frequently by updating their life continuously will ultimately change the course of a relationship (Cartwright, 2019). In addition, communication also allows socialization into the group and internalization to groups norms that essential for cohesion in relationships (Carpentier & White, 2002; Tyler & Melander, 2012). In contrary, lack of communication often causes conflict in interpersonal relationship (Ackard et al., 2006).

"Usually, those who keep making trouble have a quite distant relationship with the family." [Serok1]

"We discussed and agreed that if there are any issues or problem, we will talk about it. Don't keep it in heart and don't fight." [Gadak1]

Based on above statement, conflict between people indicated the strength of ties and social participation where it may strain the relationship. As relationship progress, conflict and problems severity may increase due to the development of interdependence (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). In contrary, having lack of conflict described as a good relationship. The conflict in interpersonal relationship is the tension invoke by interpersonal incompatibilities due to distinct personalities, opinions or life values (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). It may cause destructive behaviours like verbal attack, over defensive or losing self-control during the conflict (Missotten et al., 2017).

Moreover, participants choose of term 'no problem' in describing the relationship shows meek response either demonstrating disinterest in explaining the relationship or it does not really bother their interpersonal relationship. Thus, it is indicated that the level of interpersonal conflict influences on well-being is low as it only reflected weak ties without any indications of its effect on well-being. It can be

concluded that the level of communication frequencies and relationship conflict influences on well-being are high as interaction is the basis to form and maintain relationship. Furthermore, communication allows people to sustain their relationship as well as resolve any conflict that happens in their interpersonal relationship. Based on the interview, their frequency of communication is high as most of them live together and meet their family every day. Meanwhile, there is not much interpersonal conflict which can restrain the bond they have with their family.

Participants from Kampong Gadak indicated the strength of ties especially with family members through frequency of communication and the absence of interpersonal conflicts. In contrary, participants from RPS Bukit Serok described the strength of relationship only by acknowledging there is no existing problem with their family members. It indicated that the influence of interpersonal conflict on the interpersonal relationship as well as well-being is low.

7. Conclusion

Based on the discussion, interpersonal relationship is needed for social support and affection. However, to give and gain these needs, people have to strengthen their relationship ties with other and participate in social activity which both relies on the frequency of communication and conflict management. By doing so, good interpersonal relationship will provide satisfaction which lead to the improvement of well-being. Through the result of level of influence, we can see that the positive sides of interpersonal relationship are remarked expressively by participants while dissatisfaction on relationship is justified accordingly.

It is believed that this study has succeeded in making several contributions on the study of Orang Asli as well as on the study of well-being. Firstly, it can contribute to the field of well-being as it looks into another angle or perspective thus adding richness to the subject of well-being. Well-being especially from subjective perspective is a multifaceted construct that focus on individual value which it determinants can varied across human life spectrum. Thus, even it has been studied intensively from various cultures and fields; it still requires huge data in order for future research to come out with more comprehensive framework of well-being. Most importantly, this study emphasises the importance of interpersonal relationship in influencing well-being as well the interplay dynamics that infatuates level of well-being. The inclusion of interpersonal relationship in the framework of well-being is highly suggested as it has great impact on human life.

The results of this study also contribute to some practical implications that beneficial for government especially JAKOA. For many years, the government had spent millions of ringgit on the improvement of Orang Asli life and to ensure that they are able to enjoy Malaysia economic growth. However, many research had reported negative responses from Orang Asli and despite many changes, some are negatively affected Orang Asli well-being. In the context of interpersonal relationship, there are many areas that can be implored in assisting them in the future especially in adapting to changes they are facing nowadays. JAKOA and any related agencies may use the collectivity of Orang Asli community and their strong values in interpersonal relationship in executing policies or programs. Furthermore, this research also contributed to another study on aborigines in the world. As it is based on the indigenous assessment tool and use aboriginal worldview exclusively, it is useful for another research on aborigines. Aboriginal

study does not only inspire by their unique culture but also valuable in understanding human core nature since aborigines are the closest to our ancestor. For hundreds of years they stay true to their ancestor despite many changes in the world. Hence, to study on their humanity is part of studying human core nature before progression of human race which can be seen today.

Even though this study contributed to the understanding of well-being and its interpersonal relationship on Orang Asli, there are several limitations that need to be addressed. Through this limitation, future direction of the research can be discovered. Firstly, samples used in this study come from the same ethnics even though located in different areas and have different surrounding environment. Orang Asli have many ethnics that practice disparate culture and way of life, and focusing on one ethnic may provide bias results. As it is a qualitative study with the intention to understand Orang Asli well-being rather than for generalization, initially, there is no guarantee of any invariant across different settings. In order to discover the invariant properties, study need to find fundamental commonalities or appearance of singularity (Garfinkel, 2002). Unfortunately, limited samples from various ethnics and settings may distort the findings of invariant properties. In contrary, collecting data from various ethnics and settings may provide more comprehensive data for discovering the fundamental issues. However, it is not possible due to time and budget constraints. In the future, further study can be done across different location or across other ethnic groups. The findings from different ethnics may displays effects of culture in well-being. Furthermore, different ethnic also related to other location that is very crucial in the study of environment that found to be determinants well-being. If the results are similar, the data can be used for generalization and universal indicators for Orang Asli well-being. Thus, either the findings are similar or not, it will still give comprehensive understanding on well-being of Orang Asli.

Furthermore, data collection method like interview are risky and heavily influenced by researcher preconceived ideas or perspectives. This biasness caused by researcher personal lens is common and can happen either intentionally or unintentionally (Fields & Kafai, 2009). Hence, the transfer of information from researcher questions to participant answer may loss its richness of context and substance of meanings (Punch, 2001). The loss may also cause by potential bias especially since the variables discussed in the study is very subjective like feelings and emotions. For instance, some participants may exaggerate certain emotions or view that works for them. Besides that, participant may only recall certain memory and discuss certain events that they deem more desirable compared to one that may accurately respond to the question. However, the distortion caused by bias is covered by proper measures taken in the process of data collection and analysis, enables study to achieve good validity, reliability and credibility. In the future, other method can be used such as longitudinal study that allows further examination on the dynamics of interpersonal relationship and its influences on well-being over time. It also allows researcher to build good rapport and trust during data collection thus limiting potential bias such as exaggeration and selective memory. Other method like observation also beneficial as it let researcher to assess and judge participants life accordingly with less changes of dishonesty. Thus, it shows that variety of methods created more data from various aspects and perspectives. As the study of well-being is very subjective and sensitive to human nature as well as culture, more data is needed before any generalization can be made.

Acknowledgments

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