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THE EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF NGO VOLUNTEERS

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Abstract:

This study explores how demographic factors namely gender, age, ethnicity, religion, level of education, and marital status affect psychological well-being (PWB) among NGO volunteers. It also investigates the role of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) on Psychological Well-being (PWB). Data were collected from 377 NGO volunteers in Sabah, consisting of 99 male volunteers (26.3%) and 278 female volunteers (73.7%), and analyzed using SPSS version 29. Statistical methods used include independent sample t-tests, ANOVA, and simple linear regression. Results indicate that gender, level of education, ethnicity,religion, and marital status did not significantly influence PWB. In contrast, only the age group has a significant impact on PWB. Similarly, EQ has a meaningful impact on PWB. These findings highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in improving the volunteers' psychological well-being. Future studies are encouraged to examine other variables that can help in enhancing the mental health of the volunteers.

Keywords: *Non-government Organizations, Volunteers, Psychological Well-being, Emotional Intelligence*

1. INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being refers to a person's mental condition marked by appropriate emotional and behavioral regulation. From a positive psychology or holistic standpoint, mental health is reflected in one's ability to enjoy life and maintain a balance between daily responsibilities and efforts to build psychological resilience (Sama Afsana, 2016). It is a multi-faceted concept that encompasses elements such as self-esteem, life satisfaction, and overall perceptions of life quality (Zeike et al., 2019). This concept is crucial in understanding how content individuals feel when engaging in various activities, as well as how these experiences shape their sense of purpose. Volunteering, being a form of meaningful activity, should also be evaluated in terms of how much satisfaction it brings to those who participate in it.

Volunteering encompasses both formal and informal activities. In formal contexts, individuals often participate through non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which operate independently from government and corporate sectors and primarily focus on charitable work and advocacy efforts (Suis et al., 2017). NGOs in Malaysia are typically categorized into three main types: charities, voluntary welfare organizations, and institutions of public character (Cordery & Baskerville, 2007). As reported by the Registrar of Societies (ROS), a total of 15,521 NGOs were officially registered in Malaysia as of 2019, with the number continuing to rise annually. This trend underscores the increasing relevance of NGOs within various sectors. Furthermore, according to Tumin and Nurhadi (2017), NGOs are recognized as a crucial element of social movements and civil society,

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which includes a broad range of social structures such as associations, family units, and engaged individuals within the community.

NGOs continue to serve the community by giving back in terms of advocacy, support, and relief. They gain the trust of the community to contribute. In addition, NGOs are always associated with volunteers. Most NGOs use volunteers as workforce to run projects or community programs in delivering aid and services. Nowadays, volunteering can be defined as productive activity and compatible with the behavioral approach because it is defined as an activity that produces goods and services that are below the market rate (Wilson, 2000). There are differences between paid workers and volunteers when they are carrying out tasks within an organization (Cho et al., 2020). Volunteers that work with NGOs to deliver what has been planned also impact their mental health, especially their well-being. Despite many advantages in volunteering, this research will focus on the impact of volunteering towards the psychological well-being of volunteers.

Studying psychological well-being among volunteers is essential because it sheds light on the unique challenges and experiences they face. This research is especially relevant as volunteering has been shown to bring positive benefits to individuals, particularly in enhancing their mental health and overall psychological well-being. Recognising the potential benefits of volunteering for mental health requires an understanding of volunteers' psychological well-being. Ali, Khan and Zehra (2016) mentioned that individuals that engage in the activity of giving back to the community can enhance their level of happiness and mental health. Volunteers frequently express sentiments of happiness, purpose, and fulfillment from their charitable endeavors.

Prior discussion by Matthews and Nazroo (2012) also stated that involvement in volunteer activities has a higher possibility to produce positive impacts on health and well-being. The study emphasizes the notion that volunteering is more than just a selfless act; it is a powerful force that can impact many aspects of a person's health including physical and mental health.

This is also supported by Rogerson et al. (2017), both new and returning volunteers show improvement in their mental health; those who had the lowest level of well-being at the start of the program show the most improvements. Furthermore, compared to returning volunteers, new volunteers reported a significantly higher rise in well-being. There is a discernible pattern wherein volunteers, both new and returning see gains in their mental well-being. This implies that the positive impacts of volunteering extend to people who are just starting out and are not limited to those who have been involved for a long time. This wide range of good results attests to volunteerism's universal potential as a means of improving mental health.

People with higher emotional intelligence can help in their psychological well-being. This is because emotionally intelligent people's perceptions, behaviors, and thought patterns follow their emotions rather than the other way around. This lays the groundwork for personal development, self-motivation, self-awareness, relationship management, and empathy, all of which improve people's happiness and life satisfaction (Mehmood & Gulzar,2014).

Since emotions greatly influence how people experience and perceive their volunteer work, it is crucial to comprehend the role that emotions play in the psychological health of volunteers. Here's an exploration of the role of emotions in the context of volunteerism. During volunteering activities, volunteers will experience positive and negative emotions. Firstly, the positive emotions considered the driving forces of volunteers to join the activities. The intrinsic motivation such as sense of purpose, personal fulfillment and the desire to make a positive impact. This will lead to greater positive emotions that can improve life satisfaction and well-being of volunteers (Lorente-Ayala et al., 2020).

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Research Questions

These are research questions formulated to be focus on this research:

Research question 1: Is there any difference in demographic factors (gender, age, ethnicity, religion, level of education, marital status) of psychological well-being among NGO volunteers?

Research question 2: Is there any effect of emotional intelligence on psychological well-being among NGO volunteers?

Objectives

This study was conducted to achieve the objectives below:

Objective 1: To study the differences in demographic factors (gender, age, ethnicity, religion, level of education, marital status) of psychological well-being among NGO volunteers.

Objective 2: To examine the effect of emotional intelligence on psychological well-being among NGO volunteers

Theoretical Approach

Emotional Intelligence by David Goleman

The most recent influential work on emotional intelligence was authored by Daniel Goleman in his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Matters More Than IQ*. Since its release, the concept of emotional intelligence has gained widespread recognition and usage among scholars and the general public (Gonzalez, 2019). In 1998, Goleman introduced a framework for emotional intelligence consisting of five key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Mehta & Singh, 2013).

Later on, Goleman updated his Emotional Intelligence model to highlight not just emotions, but also emotional competencies that is the practical skills that help us navigate life more effectively. This newer version is organized into four main areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

The first area, self-awareness, is all about recognizing and understanding our own emotions. It's the ability to tune in to what we're feeling in the moment and understand why we feel that way. This awareness helps us make better decisions, often guided by our gut instincts. Self-awareness also includes important abilities like recognizing emotions as they arise, having an honest sense of our strengths and limits, and being confident in ourselves (Goleman, 2011).

The next personal aspect of emotional intelligence is self-management. Just like anyone else, emotionally intelligent individuals also experience bad moods and strong emotional reactions but the difference is, they know how to manage and redirect those feelings more constructively. The challenge is that these emotional waves can feel intense and overpowering. That's because our brain sends these signals as a warning, alerting us to something it perceives as a threat. When that happens, those emotions can take over and make it hard to concentrate or think clearly (Davidson & McEwen,2012).

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The interpersonal side of emotional intelligence covers two key areas: social awareness and relationship management. Social awareness involves empathy, the ability to understand what others are feeling and to respond appropriately based on their emotional state. In simple terms, it means being able to tune in to someone else's emotions and see things from their perspective (Bhoumick, 2018).

Relationship management, which was previously referred to as social skills, builds on both self-awareness and social awareness. It's not just about being nice or sociable—it's about using emotional insight to connect with others, build meaningful relationships, and even inspire or support them in reaching their goals (Friedman & Deakin, 2016).

Psychological Well-being by Carol Ryff

There are two main approaches to understanding well-being. The first is the *hedonic* perspective, which focuses on happiness, experiencing more positive emotions than negative ones, and overall life satisfaction (e.g., Bradburn, 1969; Pavot & Diener, 2008; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The second is the *eudaimonic* approach, which emphasizes personal growth, purpose, and psychological functioning (e.g., Rogers, 1961; Ryff, 1989 ; Waterman, 1993).

While these two frameworks offer valuable insights, many scholars now view well-being as a complex and multidimensional concept one that includes both emotional experiences and deeper aspects of human development (Diener, 2009)

Ryff (1989) criticized the existing concept of subjective well-being, arguing that it wasn't designed to fully capture psychological well-being. In response, she proposed a more comprehensive model made up of six dimensions, drawing from major personality theories by thinkers like Maslow, Jung, Rogers, Allport, Erikson, Bühler, Neugarten, and Jahoda. Ryff's approach brings together these diverse perspectives into a unified framework that reflects the deeper aspects of human functioning.

Her model outlines six core elements that define psychological well-being**:** positive relationships with others, purpose in life, personal growth, autonomy, environmental mastery, and self-acceptance**.** According to Ryff (2013) and Ryff et al. (2006), these components together offer a richer understanding of what it means to live a fulfilling and meaningful life.

The first component, self-acceptance, involves being able to evaluate yourself honestly embracing who you are, including your strengths and weaknesses, and viewing past experiences in a positive light. This is a crucial part of psychological well-being, as it shapes how individuals see their own lives and how they connect with others in society (Sogolitappeh, 2018; Abbott, Klein & Seifer, 2006).

Next is positive relationships with others, which highlights the importance of meaningful social connections. It reflects the ability to empathize with others, offer emotional support, and build close, trusting relationships. This aspect reinforces the idea that strong social bonds and emotional support are key protective factors that contribute to a person's overall psychological well-being (Sogolitappeh, 2018).

According to scholars like Chirkov et al. (2003) and Paradise & Kernis (2002), autonomy, as defined in Ryff's model, refers to the ability to manage oneself acting independently and making personal choices without excessive influence from others. However, autonomy goes beyond just having freedom; it also involves shaping one's life in alignment with personal values and

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preferences, giving individuals a sense of control over their life direction (Abbott et al., 2006; Oliva et al., 2020).

Ryff further emphasized that a person with strong autonomy is self-directed and capable of resisting social pressures to conform. Such individuals maintain their own standards and are confident in making decisions based on what they truly believe, even when faced with external expectations (Chirkov et al., 2003).

Another key dimension is environmental mastery**,** which refers to a person's ability to effectively manage their surroundings in order to reach their goals, using the resources available to them (Mergal et al., 2019; Aldawsari et al., 2018). This concept isn't just about being in control of one's environment but it also includes the ability to shape or adapt that environment in ways that support personal growth and well-being.

Ryff emphasized that environmental mastery is crucial because individuals who score high in this area tend to believe they have the power to influence their surroundings. This sense of control and adaptability plays a significant role in maintaining and enhancing overall psychological well-being (Aldawsari et al., 2018).

Another important dimension is purpose in life, which reflects an individual's sense of meaning, direction, and the belief that their life is worth living. It involves having meaningful goals and aspirations, and feeling that those goals are worth striving for (Triadó et al., 2007; Fernandes et al., 2015).

This sense of purpose is especially important when facing life's challenges, as it contributes to a more optimistic outlook and greater resilience. Research shows that individuals with a strong sense of purpose tend to report higher levels of psychological well-being (Zuccarella-Hackl et al., 2024; Sogolitappeh, 2018). According to Lindfors (2002), building on Ryff's theory, having purpose not only helps people stay focused and goal-oriented, but also enhances overall life satisfaction and emotional stability.

Another key element in Ryff's model of psychological well-being is personal growth. This refers to the ongoing process of developing one's inner potential and striving for self-discovery and self-fulfillment throughout life (Triadó et al., 2007; Sogolitappeh, 2018).

People who experience personal growth tend to see themselves as evolving, open to new experiences, and actively engaged in their own development (Chaika, 2020; Sougleris & Ranzijn, 2011). This dimension emphasizes continuous learning and self-improvement as essential parts of building a meaningful and satisfying life (Kaur, 2024; Puertas-Gonzalez et al., 2022).

Hypotheses

The following alternative hypotheses (Ha) will outline the study questions and objectives.

Ha1: There is a significant difference between genders in the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers

Ha2: There is a significant difference between age in the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers in Sabah

Ha3: There is a significant difference between ethnicities in the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers in Sabah

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Ha4: There is a significant difference between religions in the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers in Sabah

Ha5: There is a significant difference between the level of education in the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers in Sabah

Ha6: There is a significant difference between marital status in the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers in Sabah

Ha7: There is a significant effect of emotional intelligence on the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers in Sabah

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender and Psychological Well-being

One of the key demographic factors considered in this research is gender, which has been shown to significantly influence psychological well-being. Numerous studies have found notable differences between males and females in this area. From 2020 to 2024, research has provided a deeper understanding of how gender affects well-being across various contexts and age groups.

For instance, studies have found that older women tend to report higher levels of mindfulness and overall psychological well-being compared to men of the same age. This may be linked to women's generally stronger emotional awareness and intrinsic motivation, as supported by theories like social-emotional development and self-determination (Rawat & Gupta, 2024).

According to Mancini et al. (2017), emotional intelligence acts as a protective factor for teenagers, helping them navigate challenges more effectively. However, boys and girls often differ in how they express emotions and relate to others, which can influence their overall well-being.

Interestingly, a study by Marco et al. (2023) focusing on sexual and gender-diverse youth revealed that video games can serve as more than just entertainment. They also offer emotional support and a sense of social connection. However, these young people’s experiences whether they feel supported or face discrimination are often shaped by their gender identity.

For example, Krause and Rainville (2017) studied the psychological effects of volunteering and found notable gender differences in well-being outcomes among volunteers. In a similar vein, Gómez-Baya et al. (2018) investigated how gender roles influence health and psychological well-being. Their findings showed that women in caregiving roles such as healthcare volunteers tended to report higher well-being, especially when they felt a sense of autonomy and believed they were competent in what they were doing.

Age and Psychological Well-being

Age is another important factor that influences psychological well-being. Numerous studies have identified significant differences in well-being across different age groups. For example, Orth et al. (2018) meta-analysis study revealed that self-esteem generally increases in young adulthood, peaks around age 60, and then declines in older age. Young people, especially those under 25, often report higher self-esteem (a key aspect of self-acceptance) than slightly older groups (e.g., 26–30 years). Moreover, findings from Carson and Butcher (2022) reported that individuals in the 18–24 age range demonstrate higher levels of self-acceptance and optimism than those aged 25–30, suggesting well-being may decrease slightly as adult responsibilities increase.

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This is supported by Ryff (2013), showing that self-acceptance is typically higher in late adolescence and early adulthood, with modest declines in the later twenties and thirties. These findings suggest that younger adults, particularly those in early adulthood, may experience more positive psychological states possibly due to active identity formation and strong social networks that are common during this stage of life.

Ethnicity and Psychological Well-being

Understanding ethnic differences in psychological well-being is essential for gaining insight into how diverse populations experience and manage mental health challenges. This section explores existing research on the link between ethnicity and psychological well-being across various cultural contexts.

In Malaysia, much of the research on ethnicity focuses primarily on populations in Peninsular Malaysia, particularly among the three major ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese, and Indians. For instance, a study by Ch'ng, Nor, and Cheong (2022) examined psychological flourishing among postgraduate students in the Klang Valley. They categorized ethnicity into four groups—Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Others—and explored how demographic factors relate to psychological flourishing. Their findings revealed no significant differences in psychological flourishing among the four ethnic groups.

This finding is consistent with research by Persson (2016), who explored the relationship between ethnic identity, self-identified ethnicity, and psychological well-being within a Swedish context. The study involved adults aged 18 to 36 and found no significant differences in psychological well-being across ethnic groups. Based on the results, the researchers recommended that future studies consider additional demographic factors such as age, gender, and occupational status to enhance the relevance and usefulness of psychological well-being measurements.

Religion and Psychological Well-being

A recent study by Akbayram and Keten (2024) involving Turkish medical students found that Muslim participants reported significantly higher levels of perceived psychological well-being (32.7%) compared to non-Muslim participants (14.3%). The findings also indicated that stronger engagement in religious and spiritual practices was linked to higher psychological well-being, resilience, and life satisfaction among the Muslim group. These results suggest that religious commitment may serve as a protective factor in supporting mental health.

Ding et al. (2022) highlighted findings from the Taiwan Social Change Survey, which showed that individuals affiliated with formal or institutional religions were more likely to engage regularly in religious activities, and this active participation was associated with higher overall well-being. Notably, the benefits appeared strongest among those living in urban areas, suggesting that for city residents, religious involvement may provide valuable emotional support and a sense of community. Similarly, Prati (2023) found that both the frequency of prayer and the perceived importance of religious identity significantly predicted subjective well-being, although their overall influence was relatively modest.

Level of Education and Psychological Well-being

Education level has consistently been linked to differences in psychological well-being, with numerous studies showing a positive relationship between higher education and better mental

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health. People with more education tend to experience greater life satisfaction, feel more in control of their lives, and handle stress more effectively.

This connection is supported by findings from Kondirolli and Sunder (2022), who reported that higher educational attainment significantly lowers the risk of experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety. In fact, their study found that each additional year of education was associated with an 11.3% decrease in the likelihood of depression symptoms and a 9.8% reduction in anxiety symptoms among adults.

Additionally, research by Jareebi and Alqassim (2024), which used advanced causal analysis methods like Mendelian randomization, found a direct connection between longer education and a lower risk of mental health disorders regardless of socioeconomic status. This suggests that the positive impact of education on psychological well-being isn't just about having better jobs or higher income. Instead, it may be linked to the cognitive, emotional, and social skills that individuals develop through extended exposure to formal education.

These findings are further supported by research from Shamsul Azman et al. (2023), which highlights that psychological well-being acts as a protective factor against mental health problems, especially within university settings. Universities play a vital role in creating supportive environments that promote students' mental health.

Similarly, Chaudry et al. (2024) found that students pursuing higher education tend to report greater levels of personal growth, self-acceptance, and stronger social connections, all of which are linked to more positive psychological outcomes.

Marital Status and Psychological Well-being

Marital status has long been seen as an important factor influencing psychological well-being, though research findings show both clear patterns and some complexities. For instance, Barrett and Hsu (2020) note that many studies consistently find that married individuals tend to report higher levels of psychological well-being compared to those who are unmarried. This is often linked to the emotional support, companionship, and shared responsibilities that marriage can offer.

This is further supported by Umberson and Thomeer (2020), who found that married individuals generally report higher life satisfaction, greater emotional stability**,** and lower levels of depression and anxiety compared to those who are single, divorced, or widowed. Similarly, Downward et al. (2020), using longitudinal data from large-scale UK surveys, showed that married people consistently experience greater well-being and life satisfaction than those who are single or living together without being married. Notably, this positive effect tends to continue into older age especially when spouses consider each other best friends highlighting the importance of emotional closeness within a marriage.

Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Well-being

Emotional intelligence plays a big role in shaping our mental well-being. People who are better at understanding and managing their emotions often feel more satisfied with life and are less likely to struggle with emotional distress. This is supported by studies from Edara (2021), especially those involving college students, have found that individuals with high EI tend to be more optimistic, hopeful, and content with life. On the other hand, those with lower EI often report feeling more depressed and emotionally overwhelmed.

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Moreover, emotional intelligence also helps people build stronger social skills and deeper relationships. This social support, in turn, improves their overall happiness and emotional health. According to Malinauskas and Malinauskiene (2020) have shown that these connections act as a bridge between emotional intelligence and well-being. In fact, according to Rebhanh (2023) a number of reviews confirm that people with higher emotional intelligence experience less anxiety and stress because they're better at recognizing and regulating their feelings and they're often more empathetic too.

2.METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research approach as its research design, aimed at supporting the achievement of the study's objectives. As noted by Kandel (2020), the variables involved in this type of research are measurable, allowing for the use of statistical methods to analyze numerical data. The process of measurement plays a vital role in quantitative research, as it bridges the gap between real-world observations and the mathematical expression of relationships between variables.

The data for this study were collected using a survey method. According to Monfared and Derakhshan (2015), researchers typically aim for a sample size that ensures a 95% confidence level or higher, which enhances the reliability of the results. This is especially beneficial in quantitative research, as larger sample sizes support more robust statistical analysis. Unlike qualitative research which often focuses on a single individual or a small group, quantitative data allows researchers to generalize findings to a broader population, making it ideal for studying wider trends and patterns.

Participant

The sample size for this study was determined based on the widely used guidelines established by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), who developed a frequently cited sample size table. Building on their work, Bukhari (2020) introduced the *Bukhari Sample Size Calculator* to simplify the process of calculating appropriate sample sizes. As a result, the final sample for this study consists of 379 NGO-affiliated volunteers in Sabah**.**

To account for potential incomplete responses, the researchers distributed 400 questionnaires to volunteers from various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Sabah slightly more than the target sample size of 379. After one week, follow-up procedures were implemented to retrieve the responses. In total, 381 completed questionnaires were returned. After reviewing them for completeness, 377 were deemed suitable for analysis.

Research Instrument

According to Birmingham and Wilkinson (2003), collecting data in a clear and structured format from individuals can be both cost-effective and efficient. The questionnaire used in this study was divided into four sections: Parts A, B, and C. The instruments selected were based on previous studies and are known for having high Cronbach's alpha values, indicating strong reliability.

To assess emotional intelligence, the study used the Emotional Competence Inventory. Lastly, psychological well-being was measured using the Ryff and Keyes' Scales of Psychological Well-Being (1995)**.**

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Part A of the questionnaire was designed to collect the demographic information of the respondents. The items were aligned with the study's objectives to help answer the research questions. This section included questions on gender (male or female), age, education level (SPM, pre-university, diploma, A/O-level, bachelor's, master's, or PhD), and ethnicity (Malay, Chinese, Indian, Kadazandusun, Murut, Bajau, Bugis, or others). Respondents were asked to tick the appropriate boxes that best described their background.

Part B assessed emotional intelligence using the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI), adapted from the original version developed by Boyatzis, Goleman, and Rhee (2000), as cited in Bar-On and Parker (Eds.). The ECI is a 360-degree assessment tool grounded in the emotional competencies outlined in Goleman's *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998), the Hay/McBer Generic Competency Dictionary, and Boyatzis's Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ). The version used in this study consisted of 63 items, all measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with no reverse-scored items.

Part C utilized the Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB) developed by Ryff and Keyes, which includes six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Each dimension contained three items, making a total of 18 items. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from *1 (strongly disagree)* to *7 (strongly agree)*. Items 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 14, 15, and 16 were negatively worded and thus reverse-coded during analysis.

Reliability

According to Drost (2011), a Cronbach's alpha value of .70 or higher is generally considered acceptable, indicating a reasonable level of internal consistency. In this study, reliability testing was conducted for each instrument to assess internal consistency through Cronbach's alpha. The 63-item Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) demonstrated excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .972, indicating a high level of internal consistency across all items. Lastly, the Scale of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB) proved to be reliable as well, with a Cronbach's alpha of .764 confirming the consistency of responses for this measure.

Validity

According to Westen and Rosenthal (2003), there is no single formula to definitively confirm an instrument's validity. Instead, correlation analysis is commonly used to assess construct validity. In this study, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between individual item scores and the total scale score. The resulting correlation values (*r*) represent the construct validity of the instruments used.

The correlation magnitude (the value of *r*) between the subscales and overall score for ECI is between 0.907 and 0.973 with the $p<.05$. The strongest relationship is shown by subscale Social Skills with the value of *r*, .973. Then followed by Self-management with the value of *r*, .956. Next is the subscale Social Awareness with the value of *r*, .914. Lastly, the subscale Self-awareness with the value of *r*, .907.

The correlation magnitude (the value of *r*), between the subscales and overall score for SPWB is between 0.574 and 0.823 with the $p<.05$. The strongest relationship is shown by subscale self-acceptance followed by personal growth and environmental mastery.

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3.RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

The data presented are based on demographic factor of NGO volunteers in Sabah. The data are collected from 377 volunteers that involved in this research. The factor includes their age, gender, level of education and ethnicity.

Table 1: Demographic information of NGO Volunteers in Sabah

Demographic Information	Category	N
Gender	Male	99
	Female	278
Age	16-20 years old	165
	21-25 years old	190
	26-30 years old	17
	31-35 years old	5
Level of Education	SPM	36
	Pre-university	136
	Diploma	38
	A/O Level	4
	Bachelor's degree	157
	Master's degree	5
	PhD	1
Ethnicity	Malay	88
	Chinese	3
	Indian	1
	Kadazandusun	30
	Bajau	96
	Bugis	93
	Others	66
Religion	Islam	364
	Christian	13
Marital Status	Married	9
	Single	368

The table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of volunteers based on various demographic factors. In terms of gender, the data shows that out of the total sample, 278 volunteers (73.7%) were female, while 99 (26.3%) were male, indicating a higher participation rate among female volunteers.

The age distribution reveals that the majority of volunteers were between 21 and 25 years old, totaling 190 individuals (50.4%). This is followed by 165 volunteers (43.8%) aged between 16 and 20. A smaller number of volunteers were aged between 26 and 30 (17 individuals, 4.5%) and between 31 and 35 (5 individuals, 1.3%). On the other hand, in this research, only volunteers from two religions were involved.

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The education level of the volunteers also varied. Most held a bachelor's degree (157 individuals, 41.6%), followed by those with pre-university qualifications such as STPM, foundation, or matriculation (136 individuals, 36.1%). Other qualifications included diploma holders (38 or 10.1%), SPM holders (36 or 9.5%), master's degree holders (5 or 1.3%), A-level or O-level (4 or 1.1%), and one volunteer with a doctorate (0.3%). This indicates that bachelor's degree holders made up the largest portion of the sample.

For more, the data on ethnicity shows that the largest group of volunteers were from the Bajau ethnic group (96 or 25.5%), followed closely by Buginese (93 or 24.7%) and Malay (88 or 23.3%). Volunteers from other ethnic backgrounds made up 66 individuals (17.5%), while those from the Kadazandusun group accounted for 30 individuals (8.0%). Smaller numbers were recorded for Chinese (3 or 0.8%) and Indian (1 or 0.3%) ethnicities. Overall, the Bajau group represented the largest ethnic segment among the volunteers in this study.

On the other hand, in this research, only volunteers from two religions were involved. The majority of volunteers are Muslim with 364 (96.6%) and 13 (3.4%) are Christian. Finally, most of the volunteers are still single 368 (97.4%) and the rest are married 9 (2.4%).

Independent Sample t-test

Table 2: Independent Sample t-test on Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. 2 tailed
PWB	Male	99	86.72	14.25	-1.135	.881
	Female	278	88.65	14.66		

p<.05

Table 2 displays Independent Sample t-test was used to compare the effect of gender on psychological well-being (PWB) scores. The mean PWB score for male volunteers was 86.72 (SD = 14.25) and for female volunteers was 88.65 (SD = 14.66). The analysis revealed that the effect of gender on PWB scores was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level (t = -1.135, p = .881).

Table 2: Independent Sample t-test on Religion

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. 2 tailed
PWB	Islam	364	88.26	14.50	.792	.841
	Christian	13	85.00	16.32		

p<.05

Table 2 displays Independent Sample t-test was used to compare the effect of religion on psychological well-being (PWB) scores. The mean PWB score for Muslim volunteers was 88.26 (SD = 14.50) and for Christian volunteers was 85.00 (SD = 16.32). The analysis revealed that the effect of religion on PWB scores was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level (t = .792, p = .841).

Table 3: Independent Sample t-test on Marital Status

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. 2 tailed
PWB	Single	368	87.95	14.48	-1.619	.399
	Married	9	95.89	16.64		

p<.05

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Table 3 displays the Independent Sample t-test was used to compare the effect of marital status on psychological well-being (PWB) scores. The mean PWB score for single volunteers was 87.95 (SD = 14.48) and for married volunteers was 95.89 (SD = 16.64). The analysis revealed that the effect of marital status on PWB scores was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level (t = -1.619, p = .399).

ANOVA

Table 4: ANOVA Table for Age Groups

PWB	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. 2 tailed
Between groups	1912.22	3	637.41	3.056	0.028
Within groups	77790.04	373	208.55		
Total	79702.27	376			

Note: F (3,373) = 3.056, p = 0.028

Table 4 displays that one-way ANOVA was used to compare the effect of age on psychological well-being (PWB) scores. The mean PWB score for volunteers from 16 to 20 years old was 87.29 (SD = 14.53), for volunteers aged 21-25 years it is 87.85 (SD = 14.49), for volunteers aged 26 to 30 years old was 97.53 (SD = 13.71) and for volunteers aged 31 to 35 years old was 95.60 (SD = 10.92). The analysis revealed that the effect of age on WLD scores was statistically significant at the 0.05 level, F (3,373) = 3.056, p = 0.028.

Table 5: ANOVA Table for Level of Education

PWB	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. 2 tailed
Between groups	1648.51	6	274.79	1.303	0.255
Within groups	78053.52	370	210.95		
Total	79702..27	376			

Note: F (6,370) = 1.303, p = 0.255

Table 5 results are to compare the effect of the level of education on psychological well-being (PWB) scores. The mean PWB score for volunteers from SPM level was 89.03 (SD = 15.31), for volunteers from pre-university level it is 89.32 (SD = 13.72), for volunteers from diploma level was 85.87 (SD = 15.07), for volunteers from A/O Level was 77.00 (SD = 13.44), for bachelor's degree level was 87.49 (SD = 14.85), for master's degree level was 91.40 (SD = 16.38) and for volunteers from doctorate's degree level was 113.00. The analysis revealed that the effect of the level of education on PWB scores was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, F (6,370) = 1.303, p = 0.255.

Table 6: ANOVA Table for Ethnicities

PWB	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. 2 tailed
Between groups	1349.20	6	224.87	1.062	0.385
Within groups	78353.07	370	211.77		
Total	79702.27	376			

Note: F (6,370) = 1.062, p = 0.385

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The results of Table 6 aim to compare the effect of the level of ethnicities on psychological well-being (PWB) scores. The mean PWB score for Malay volunteers was 87.85 (SD = 14.20), for Chinese volunteers it is 69.00 (SD = 16.09), for Indian volunteers was 82.00, for Kadazandusun volunteers was 88.20 (SD = 13.36), for Bajau volunteers was 87.68 (SD = 15.25), for Bugis volunteers was 89.95 (SD = 14.36) and for other ethnicities was 88.17 (SD = 14.71). The analysis revealed that the effect of the level of education on PWB scores was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, F (6,370) = 1.062, p = 0.385.

Simple Linear Regression

Table 7: Simple Linear Regression Measuring the Effect of Emotional Intelligence on Psychological Well-being

	Psychological Well-being				
	R^2	F	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Emotional Intelligence	.052	20.59	.228	4.54	<.001

R^2 = .052, F = 20.59

Table 7 shows that Simple Linear Regression was used to measure the effect of emotional intelligence on the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers in Sabah. The analysis shows that emotional intelligence can explain 5.2% of the variance in psychological well-being ($F_{(1,375)}$ = 20.59, P<.05). The result indicate that emotional intelligence can effect significantly on psychological well-being with the value β= 0.228, t= 4.54, p<.05.

4.DISCUSSION

Gender and Psychological Well-being

The findings indicate that gender does not have a significant influence on the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers. This is consistent with Matud et al. (2019) research, which concluded that gender differences do not meaningfully affect psychological well-being and proposed that other variables may play a more crucial role. Similarly, Yang et al. (2022) also found no significant disparities in psychological well-being between male and female volunteers. The notable gender differences observed may be attributed to the nature of volunteer activities themselves. One possible explanation is that volunteering often takes place in environments that promote inclusivity and support, helping individuals feel valued regardless of gender. This perspective is supported by Pascoe and Smart Richman (2009) who highlights that creating inclusive and appreciative spaces can significantly lessen the negative impact of discrimination and enhance mental health. This is particularly relevant in volunteer settings, where teamwork and shared purpose tend to nurture a strong sense of connection and belonging among participants.

Marital Status and Psychological Well-being

The results indicate that marital status does not significantly influence the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers. In other words, both single and married individuals appear to gain similar psychological benefits from their involvement in volunteering. Interestingly, studies have shown that single individuals tend to participate in volunteer activities more frequently than their married counterparts, likely due to having fewer family responsibilities and greater availability (Leghu et al., 2023). This higher level of engagement in volunteering may, in turn, contribute positively to their psychological well-being (Windsor et al.,2008). Moreover, the motivation to volunteer often differs between single and married individuals. Single individuals may be more driven to volunteer as a

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way to build social connections, whereas married individuals often participate in volunteer work as part of a family unit, which may reduce the individual psychological benefits they gain from the experience (Leghu et al., 2023). This idea is reinforced by Soulsby and Bennett (2015), who found that individuals who have never married or are in cohabiting relationships report similar levels of psychological well-being as those who are married, largely due to the presence of strong social support networks. Volunteering itself is an activity rich in social support, which can help volunteers experience positive psychological outcomes regardless of their marital status.

Age and Psychological Well-being

The results revealed a significant difference in psychological well-being across age groups among NGO volunteers. Volunteers aged 26 to 30 and 31 to 34 reported higher mean levels of psychological well-being compared to their younger counterparts. These findings align with Matthews and Nazroo (2021), who noted that older individuals engaging in volunteer work tend to experience improvements in psychological well-being, particularly in areas such as self-acceptance and a sense of purpose. Similarly, Pai and Kim (2021) found that volunteering positively impacts mental health, with older adults experiencing greater psychological benefits from such activities. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with research by Ho et al. (2012), which highlights that the link between volunteering motives and psychological well-being is moderated by age indicating that older volunteers may gain benefits from volunteering in ways that differ from their younger counterparts. Similarly, Jiang et al. (2019) pointed out that younger volunteers might not experience the same level of psychological improvement as older individuals. These variations across age groups could be attributed to differences in life experience and social roles at different stages of life, as noted by Müller et al. (2014) and Thoits & Hewitt (2001)**.**

Level of Education and Psychological Well-being

The findings reveal that educational level does not significantly affect the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers. While previous studies have often suggested that higher education is linked to better psychological well-being, the current study indicates otherwise. Among this sample of NGO volunteers, psychological well-being appears consistent across different levels of education, suggesting that factors beyond formal education, such as the nature of volunteering itself, may play a more influential role in their overall mental well-being. The findings of this study are consistent with Jongenelis et al. (2021), who emphasized that a volunteer's psychological well-being is influenced more by factors beyond educational attainment, which may be more crucial in predicting well-being. This aligns with the study by Elias et al. (2016), which highlighted that long-term involvement in volunteer work can enhance psychological health, regardless of educational background. These studies suggest that volunteer engagement itself plays a key role in fostering psychological well-being among volunteers. Furthermore, volunteers who are actively engaged in their roles often experience a deeper sense of connection to their organization's mission, derive fulfillment from their contributions, and build meaningful relationships with others. This is supported by Burbeck et al. (2014), who emphasized the importance of informal social connections in volunteer settings, warning that overly rigid or structured environments may weaken these valuable relationships. Qualitative findings from such studies highlight that social bonds formed through volunteering not only enhance personal satisfaction but also create a supportive network that encourages sustained involvement and promotes psychological well-being.

Ethnicity and Psychological Well-being

The results indicate that there are no significant differences in psychological well-being based on the volunteers' ethnicity. This suggests that ethnic background does not play a determining role in

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the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers. These findings are in line with the meta-analysis by Smith & Silva (2011), which concluded that factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and gender do not significantly impact personal well-being. This reinforces the idea that psychological well-being in volunteer settings may be influenced more by shared experiences and engagement than by demographic factors like ethnicity. In addition**,** Adams et al. (2015) noted that while ethnic identity may influence psychological well-being in unique ways, it does not necessarily lead to significant differences among volunteers from various ethnic backgrounds. This is echoed by Pozzi et al. (2014)**,** who found that volunteers with a strong sense of community tend to report higher levels of psychological well-being, regardless of their ethnicity. Similarly, Nakamura et al. (2025) observed that although minor variations in commitment levels were found across ethnic groups, these differences did not result in significant disparities in psychological well-being. Collectively, these findings highlight that volunteering acts as a unifying experience, fostering shared purpose and connection among individuals from diverse backgrounds. This corresponds with the nature of volunteerism, which fosters social connectedness an essential element for psychological well-being (Piliavin & Siegl, 2007). Similarly, Sabah, one of Malaysia's most multicultural states, is often recognized for its harmonious coexistence and collaboration among people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds further reinforcing the inclusive and unifying nature of volunteerism.

Religion and Psychological Well-being

The results indicate that there are no significant differences in psychological well-being based on the volunteers' religion. In this study, the religions affiliated by the volunteers are Islam and Christianity. Both share almost the same mean in the level of psychological well-being. This shows that these two religions have almost the same level of psychological well-being. Religions in the world mostly promote the importance of good deeds and helping other people.

Schnable (2015) supports this view, noting that religion positively influences psychological well-being by positioning religious congregations as key hubs for volunteer mobilization. These congregations play a vital role in establishing NGOs, promoting a culture of volunteerism, and linking volunteers to broader communities. Huang (2022) further explains that shared religious values can strengthen social capital, thereby encouraging volunteer engagement and providing psychological support. Similarly, Stroope (2011) associates religious affiliation with a stronger sense of belonging, which offers emotional and psychological support that contributes to overall well-being.

Furthermore, Gautam (2014) further demonstrated that religiosity can enhance mental health and serve as an effective coping mechanism against depression. Similarly, Lutjen et al. (2011) found that religious participation is associated with lower levels of depression and higher life satisfaction. Sobhanian et al. (2016) also observed that individuals with stronger religious beliefs tend to experience better mental health and reduced psychological distress. These findings align with Klangrit et al. (2021), who reported that religious teachings are linked to improved mental health, suggesting that faith-based principles can act as a protective buffer against life's challenges.

Emotional Intelligence Effect on Psychological Well-being

The result revealed that emotional intelligence significantly affects on psychological well-being of NGO volunteers in Sabah. Emotional intelligence plays a vital role in shaping the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers, as supported by a wide body of research. Emotional intelligence encompasses skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, all of which influence how volunteers manage their emotional experiences while engaging in altruistic activities (Goleman, 2005). Studies have shown that short-term humanitarian volunteering tends to improve well-being across various demographics, with the greatest benefits

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seen among those exhibiting strong emotional intelligence traits like adaptability and motivation (Clark, 2023).

On the other hand, low decisiveness is linked to poorer mental health outcomes. Key aspects of emotional intelligence, including recognizing and managing both personal and others' emotions, as well as effectively using emotional information, have been found to predict volunteer behavior and its benefits (Clark, 2023). Individuals with high EI typically display greater self-confidence and drive, which support ongoing volunteer involvement and contribute positively to mental well-being.

Beyond emotional regulation, volunteering itself provides numerous psychological rewards such as social connection, a sense of achievement, and improved self-esteem which help lower stress and enhance overall happiness (Nichol et al., 2024; Tabassum et al., 2016).

5.IMPLICATION AND LIMITATION OF STUDY

Based on the research findings, both emotional intelligence was found to have a significant impact on the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers. These results highlight the importance of internal emotional skills in enhancing mental well-being within volunteer populations. Consequently, these findings can serve as a valuable reference point for future studies aiming to explore similar variables, offering a foundation for deeper investigation into the psychological factors that support volunteer engagement and resilience. This aligns with the ongoing importance of studying emotional intelligence and psychological well-being, especially in light of inconsistent findings reported by previous researchers. Continued exploration of these variables is essential, as suggested by many scholars. In fact, integrating insights from past, present, and future studies can contribute to the advancement of this field, fostering a more comprehensive understanding and encouraging greater scholarly attention and development.

Moreover, the findings of this study can serve as a benchmark for future research, particularly in refining and improving frameworks related to NGO volunteers. To date, much of the psychological research on volunteers has primarily centered around topics such as volunteer motivation**,** retention rates, and the general effects of volunteering. However, the exploration of emotional intelligence and psychological well-being among volunteers, especially within the NGO context remains relatively underexplored. Additionally, there is a limited representation of NGO volunteers in studies examining these psychological factors. Therefore, this research offers a valuable starting point and reference for future scholars, encouraging deeper investigation and the enhancement of existing models in volunteer psychology.

6.RECOMMENDATION

Several recommendations can be made to guide future research improvements in this area. In the post-COVID-19 era, many NGOs have adapted by introducing digital volunteering, where volunteers perform tasks remotely such as designing posters, editing videos, conducting webinars, and managing administrative duties. This shift emerged in response to physical restrictions during the pandemic that limited on-ground involvement.

Future studies could explore the psychological impact of digital volunteering, particularly how digital engagement affects mental health and psychological well-being. Researchers may also consider comparing the psychological well-being of digital volunteers with those involved in on-ground activities, offering valuable insights into how different modes of volunteering influence emotional outcomes. Such comparisons would contribute significantly to the development of the literature in this field.

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In addition, while this current research adopts a quantitative approach**,** future research could benefit from a mixed-method design. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups with volunteers, would offer a richer and more nuanced understanding of their experiences. This would also address the limitations of relying solely on standardized instruments, enhancing the depth and validity of the findings.

7.CONCLUSION

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that among the demographic factors examined, only age significantly predicts the psychological well-being of NGO volunteers in Sabah. Other factors such as gender, marital status, education level, and ethnicity did not show a meaningful impact. This suggests that the psychological well-being of volunteers may be influenced more by their volunteering environment and level of involvement than by demographic characteristics alone. Additionally, emotional intelligence was found to have a significant positive effect on psychological well-being, aligning with previous research. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen efforts in cultivating emotional intelligence among volunteers. NGO leaders and management should take proactive steps to implement interventions targeting these two areas to enhance volunteers' psychological well-being, which in turn could lead to improved volunteer retention.

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