

# A Comparison across Ranks of Well-being among Police Officers in Malaysia

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## Abstract

**Objective:** This paper aimed to determine the level of well-being of Police officers and to assess and compare the well-being levels among police officers of low, middle and high ranks. **Methods:** Data were obtained using a context specific questionnaire that was distributed across the five geographic zones of Malaysia. **Results:** The results indicate that overall police officers' well-being is in need of improvement. Low rank officers faced poor work environment, deficient financial security and economic well-being, lack of opportunity for continuing education and career, poor overall physical health and negative political and spiritual well-being. The finding of this study provides the necessary information to develop and implement measures to enhance the current well-being of police officers.

**Keywords:** objective well-being, subjective well-being, police officer

## 1. Introduction

Well-being is a holistic concept in which individuals are understood as biopsychosocial beings and their welfare centers on the efficiency of their body, mind, and spirit (Bowling 1997). Well-being is conceptualized as 'feeling good and functioning well' (Sen, 1982); and it comprises people's experience of their life and a comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values. It can be assessed in terms of two major dimensions, the Objective and Subjective dimensions (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976). The objective dimension of well-being might include socio-economic indicators (Diener & Suh, 1997), while the subjective dimension comprises individual's cognitive evaluation of their (a) life satisfaction, (b) sense of happiness (c) level of anxiety and pessimism, etc. (Veenhoven, 2007; Diener 1995).

Generally objective well-being refers to a list of requirements that need to be fulfilled in order for people to have 'a good life'. These requirements are based on the normative Theory of Human Need (Doyal & Gough, 1991) and are assumed to be universal and static regardless the contextual and cultural background of societies and/or organizations. Thus measures of objective well-being include a list of indicators of for example availability and type of housing, socioeconomic status, net income, financial security, education level, physical and mental health symptomatology (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). On the other hand, subjective well-being refers to how individuals appraise their own satisfaction with life as a whole (Cummins, 1997; Diener, 2009; Rees, Bradshaw, Goswami, & Keung, 2010; Rees et al., 2012). Thus, subjective well-being is the individuals' multidimensional evaluation of their lives; that includes both cognitive judgments of life satisfaction and affective evaluations of moods and emotions (Eid & Diener 2003). Therefore, measures of subjective well-being consist of self-reported thoughts and feelings about various aspects of life such as life satisfaction, happiness, work, relationships, as well as the individuals' assessment of their emotions, happiness, and meaningfulness of life in reference to discrete life domains like home life, friendships, work, school, material wealth, etc. (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Diener, 2009).

In developing societies it is only recently that the notion of well-being has become of interest both in academic research and policy-oriented analysis. In Malaysia, there are very few studies that have focused on well-being (Noor, Gandhi, Ishak, & Wok, 2014; Hussin, 2014; Mokhtar et al., 2015; Yassin et al., 2015). One of those studies was conducted by Noor and colleagues (2014) it focused on family well-being in Malaysia (Noor, Gandhi, Ishak, & Wok, 2014). Wok (2014) and developing a family well-being index using five dimensions: family relationships, economic situation, health and safety, community relationship and religion or spirituality.

The findings from Noor and colleagues' (2014) study indicated that in Malaysia family well-being was relatively high at 7.95 (the scale ranged from on a 0-10 scale); and the findings reported by Hussin (2014) showed that high work-family conflict was significant associated with negative well-being among working Malaysian women. Mokhtar and colleagues (2015) examined financial well-being among public employees in Malaysia and their results indicated that overall, public sector employees in Malaysia had moderate levels of well-being. The most recent study on well-being in Malaysia was conducted by Yassin. S. M. and colleagues (2015); they examined the objective and subjective dimensions of well-being. Their study results showed that sociodemographic factor (e.g. geographic location, age, income, and gender) and work-life balance are important determinants of the well-being.

The police force in Malaysia is interested in addressing the factors that impact negatively officer's well-being. Therefore the research team at the Institute for Social Science at UPM was commissioned to assess the level of Well-being of police personnel across Malaysia. Working for the police has been described as highly hazardous occupation in the literature on occupational health and occupational stress (He, Zhao, & Archbold, 2002, Anshel, 2000). Police officers deal with violent, antisocial and untrustworthy individuals of society, and as a law enforcement occupation, police personnel are expected to employ discretion under difficult and often critical circumstances and remain detached from their emotions. In addition, police officers face increasing demands on police personnel from politicians and members of the public and perform their work tasks despite the lack of resource and understaffing. Therefore, uniformed personnel are at high work related risks which can have negative impact on their well-being and as result their engagement and job outcomes might be in jeopardy (Wright et al., 2006; Hoque et al., 2004). Furthermore, poor well-being among police officers is associated with either early retirement and/or poor quality of life after retirement (Anshel, 2000). The long-term effects of diminished well-being of police personnel not only increases their risk of individual health problems, but it also can increase the organizational loses in terms of health care cost, absenteeism, understaffing, poor personnel retention, and potential risks of disgruntled employees (Cartwright & Cooper, 2014; Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001).

The present study aimed to assess and compare the level of well-being of Police officers. More specifically the objectives of this study were to (a) assess the Objective and Subjective well-being of police officers and (b) compare police officers' objective and subjective well-being based on their rank.

## 2. Method

The data used in this paper was obtained from a larger cross-sectional study carried out to assess the overall well-being of police officers in Malaysia. Data was obtained using a context specific questionnaire that was distributed across the five geographic zones of Malaysia. Prior to data collection the questionnaire's validity and reliability were assessed through a pilot study, the scale validity and reliability were evaluated using Cronbach Alpha (Table 1).

### 2.1 Sample

The sample consisted of 1201 serving police officers from all 5 geographical regions of Malaysia. The mean age of the participants was 42.08 (11.03) years old, the average time in service as officers was 20.76 (11.72) years; and 82.5% of the sample were male police officer (Table 2).

### 2.2 Measurements

For the purpose of this study, the dimensions of police well-being used were the following

1. Objective Well-being (OWB) measures consisted of officers' monthly income in Malaysian Ringgits, financial well-being and life style:
  - Financial well-being was measured in terms of officers' monthly expenses, savings and housing.
  - Lifestyle consisted of officer's fitness level, number of medical checkup per year; body mass index (BMI), number of cigarettes smoked daily, number of alcoholic beverages consumed daily, and number of hours of sleep daily.
2. Subjective Well-being (SWB), comprised the following subjective measures
  - Communication well-being: officer's perception and satisfaction with the overall communication process at individual and organizational level
  - Economic well-being officer's satisfaction with the remuneration, financial benefits and incentives they received

- Employee well-being: officer's perception of their work related demands and tasks
- Environmental well-being: officers' satisfaction with availability of green areas and natural resources; level of water and noise pollution, and management of garbage and waste disposal in their place of residence
- Education well-being: officers' perception of and satisfaction with the available continuing education and career development opportunities
- General physical well-being : overall satisfaction of officers with their physical working condition
- Political well-being : officer's satisfaction with the government and its politics
- Public safety: officers' perception of their family safety in their residential areas
- Social well-being : officers' perception of and satisfaction with their interpersonal relationship at work and in their community
- Spiritual Well-Being: officers' level of self-awareness and personal identity.

All items in the subjective measurements were assessed using a 5-likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree. High scores indicate positive well-being and low scores indicate negative well-being. Their reliability and validity were assessed using Cronbach Alpha coefficient; the results from the validity and reliability test are summarized in Table 1.

### 2.3 Analysis

The assessment and comparison of well-being among police officers were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics package 21.0. Frequency analysis and One-Way Anova were used to assess the differences across rank in terms of objective and subjective well-being.

### 3. Results

Table 1 surmises the reliability and validity test for subjective measurements of well-being; and Table 2 contains the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Reliability and validity test for subjective measurements of well-being

Subjective Well-being dimensions	No of Items	Cronbach Alpha coefficient
Communication well-being	7	.890
Economic well-being	6	.866
Education well-being	6	.727
Employee well-being	11	.908
Environmental well-being	7	.745
Political well-being	7	.876
General physical well-being	7	.815
Social well-being	11	.932
Spiritual Well-Being	7	.920
Public safety	5	.660

For the purpose of this study, participants were grouped into 3 categories according to their rank; these categories were Low, Middle and High rank officers. Low rank consisted of Lance Corporal; Constable and Corporal police officers; Middle rank included Sergeant, Sergeant Major and Sub Inspector; High Rank consisted of, Inspector, ASP, DSP and Superintendent

Table 2, shows that 64.2% of the sample had completed secondary education, and only 5.3% completed tertiary education. Overall more than half of the participants (59.7%) were low rank or subordinated officers; and 37.2% of the total sample have a monthly income below RM 1,500.00 (about USD 381.64) in other words they do not earn enough to make ends meet.

The frequency analysis, presented on Table 3, indicated that the overall well-being mean score among police

officers was 34.69 (4.41). According to the results of the Analysis of variance there was a significant difference in terms of rank in officers' overall score in well-being [ $F(2) = 62.51$ ; C.I. = 34.44-34.94;  $p < 0.001$ ]. The post-hoc analysis indicate that officers of lower rank scored significantly lower than middle and high rank officers ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 2. Socio demographic characteristic of the sample

	n	%
<b>Age Group</b>		
Under 30	260	21.6
31-40	308	25.6
41-50	242	20.1
51-60	391	32.6
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	991	82.5
Female	210	17.5
<b>Education</b>		
Primary education (PMR/SRP/LCE)	145	12.1
Secondary education (SPM / MCE / PMV)	771	64.2
Certificate of Proficiency / Vocational / Technical	37	3.1
Post-secondary education (STPM / Diploma)	184	15.3
Tertiary education (Bachelor degree/ Master / PhD)	64	5.3
<b>Rank</b>		
Low Rank officers	716	59.71
Middle Rank officers	360	30.03
High Rank officers	123	10.26
<b>Years of Service</b>		
Less than 5 years of service	129	10.7
6-10 years of service	203	16.9
11-20 years of service	278	23.1
21-30 years of service	226	18.8
31 or more years of service	365	30.4
<b>Net monthly Income</b>		
< RM1,500	447	37.2
RM1,501-RM3,000	379	31.6
RM3,001-RM4,500	214	17.8
RM4,501-RM6,000	94	7.8
>RM6,000	67	5.6

Furthermore in terms of objective well-being [ $F(2) = 60.79$ ; C.I. = 30.84-31.33;  $p < 0.001$ ] and subjective well-being [ $F(2) = 15.89$ ; C.I. = 50.17-50.71;  $p < 0.001$ ] similar differences were observed (Table 3). Low rank officers exhibited lower levels of objective well-being and subjective well-being than middle and higher rank officers ( $p < 0.05$ ). Interestingly, middle rank officers reported significantly higher levels of subjective well-being in comparison to higher rank officers ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 3. Objective and subjective well-being by rank

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>Overall well-being</b>	Low Rank Officers	716	33.65	4.32	33.34	33.97
	Middle Rank Officers	360	35.75	3.99	35.33	36.16
	High Rank Officers	125	37.57	4.15	36.84	38.31
<b>Objective well-being</b>	Low Rank Officers	716	30.10	4.24	29.78	30.41
	Middle Rank Officers	360	32.07	3.90	31.66	32.47
	High Rank Officers	125	33.94	4.02	30.84	31.33
<b>Subjective well-being</b>	Low Rank Officers	716	49.82	4.76	49.4716	50.1706
	Middle Rank Officers	360	51.50	4.58	51.03	51.98
	High Rank Officers	125	50.92	4.86	50.06	51.78

### 3.1 Objective Well-being

In terms of objective well-being, officers reported low scores in house ownership, lifestyle, and financial well-being. The frequency analysis results showed that a significant proportion of officers (31%) do not own a house (Table 4). More specifically among the officers who reported that they do not own a home, 44.6% of the lower rank officers; 8.3% of the middle rank and 18.4% of the higher rank officers currently do not have house ownership [ $\chi^2(2) = 157.31$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ].

Table 4. Housing by rank

Rank	Do you own a house?	
	Yes	No
Low Rank Officers	397 (55.4%)	319 (44.6%)
Middle Rank Officers	330 (91.7%)	30 (8.3%)
High Rank Officers	102 (81.6%)	23 (18.4%)
Total	829 (69%)	372 (31%)

$\chi^2(2) = 157.31$ ;  $p < 0.001$

The analysis of variance results also showed significant differences among police officers in terms of their Lifestyle [F (2) = 4.75; C.I. = 22.27-22.66;  $p = 0.009$ ]; Income [F (2) = 61.58; CI=2279.88-2495.08;  $p < 0.001$ ] and Financial Safety [F (2) = 25.01; C.I. = 11328.27-14471.14;  $p < 0.001$ ] (Table 5).

Furthermore, the post-hoc test results indicated that middle rank officers (e.g. Sergeant and Sub Inspectors) exhibited healthier life style than both higher and lower rank officers ( $p < 0.05$ ). On the other hand, high rank officers (e.g. Inspectors, Superintendents) had better income and financial security than both middle and lower rank officers ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 5. Objective well-being dimensions by rank

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>Lifestyle</b>	Low Rank Officers	716	22.34	3.49	22.08	22.59
	Middle Rank Officers	360	22.89	3.23	22.56	23.23
	High Rank Officers	125	21.98	3.15	21.42	22.53
<b>Income</b>	Low Rank Officers	716	1923.09	1538.04	1810.25	2035.94
	Middle Rank Officers	360	2948.21	2117.40	2728.74	3167.67
	High Rank Officers	125	3432.57	2254.07	3033.53	3831.61
<b>Financial Safety</b>	Low Rank Officers	716	9116.18	20515.69	7610.91	10621.45
	Middle Rank Officers	360	15594.59	31917.33	12286.41	18902.78
	High Rank Officers	125	26810.45	42204.60	19338.88	34282.02

### 3.2 Subjective Well-being

In terms of subjective well-being office there were significant differences based on rank in environmental well-being [F (2) =4.04; C.I.= 3.34-3.42; p=.02]; employee well-being [F (2)=10.12; C.I.= 2.72-2.80; p<.001]; spiritual well-being [F (2)= 6.06; C.I.= 3.37-3.64; p =.002]; education well-being [F (2)= 14.07; C.I.= 3.47-3.53; p<.001]; political well-being [F (2)=9.80; C.I.= 3.59-3.67; p<.001]; general physical well-being [F (2)= 8.00; C.I.= 3.78-3.84; p<.001]; economic well-being [F (2)= 23.73; C.I.= 3.28-3.36; p<.001]; and public safety [F (2)= 14.96; C.I.= 3.35-3.42; p<.001] (Table 6). The post hoc analysis indicated that lower rank officers were less satisfied with public safety (p<0.5) at their place of residence; and had less access to continuing education and career development opportunities (p<0.05) in comparison to middle and high rank officers.

On the other hand, middle rank officers scored more positively than lower rank officer (p<0.05) in spiritual well-being. Also middle rank officers exhibited higher employee well-being (p<0.05), positive political well-being (p<0.05) and social well-being (p<0.05) than their lower and higher rank colleagues (p<0.05). Higher rank officers exhibited better physical health (p<0.05) and economic well-being (p<0.05), than both middle and lower rank officers (p<0.05). The post hoc analysis indicated that lower rank officers were less satisfied with the physical environmental (p<0.05) surrounding their work and home and with public safety (p<0.5) at their place of residence; and had less access to continuing education and career development opportunities (p<0.05) in comparison to middle and high rank officers.

Table 6. Subjective well-being by rank

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>Economic well-being</b>	Low Rank	716	3.21	0.69	3.16	3.26
	Middle Rank	360	3.47	0.62	3.41	3.54
	High Rank	125	3.52	0.74	3.39	3.65
<b>Employee well-being</b>	Low Rank	716	2.71	0.67	2.66	2.76
	Middle Rank	360	2.89	0.67	2.82	2.96
	High Rank	125	2.65	0.70	2.53	2.78
<b>Environmental well-being</b>	Low Rank	716	3.34	0.68	3.29	3.39
	Middle Rank	360	3.42	0.66	3.35	3.48
	High Rank	125	3.51	0.74	3.37	3.64
<b>Education well-being</b>	Low Rank	716	3.43	0.58	3.39	3.47
	Middle Rank	360	3.60	0.55	3.54	3.66
	High Rank	125	3.62	0.50	3.53	3.71
<b>General physical well-being</b>	Low Rank	716	3.82	0.52	3.78	3.86
	Middle Rank	360	3.73	0.50	3.68	3.79
	High Rank	125	3.94	0.43	3.86	4.01
<b>Political well-being</b>	Low Rank	716	3.57	0.71	3.52	3.62
	Middle Rank	360	3.77	0.64	3.70	3.83
	High Rank	125	3.58	0.80	3.44	3.72
<b>Public safety</b>	Low Rank	716	3.31	0.56	3.27	3.35
	Middle Rank	360	3.50	0.56	3.45	3.56
	High Rank	125	3.47	0.67	3.35	3.59
<b>Spiritual well-being</b>	Low Rank	716	3.62	0.63	3.58	3.67
	Middle Rank	360	3.76	0.61	3.69	3.82
	High Rank	125	3.75	0.70	3.62	3.87

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that in general Police officers obtain a mean score of 34.69 (SD=4.41) in the overall well-being assessment and their scores were associated with their ranks. That is, those in higher ranks exhibited significantly more positive well-being than those in lower ranks.

Most of low rank officers do not own their homes, perhaps because low rank officers received a very low income and unsatisfactory financial incentives and have no financial security. Thus, low rank officers and their families live in precarious conditions; have poor life style and low financial security in comparison to both middle and high rank officers.

Furthermore, in terms of the subjective well-being, in comparison to middle and high rank officers, low rank officers have less opportunities for continuing education and career development; more negative general physical well-being, lower level of self-awareness and a more negative personal identity; and are less satisfied with the government and its politics and with their family safety in their families. The results also indicated that middle and low rank officers faced poor work environment, deficient financial and economic security, lack of opportunity for continuing education and career, poor overall physical health, negative political and spiritual well-being.

In Malaysia, police officers not only are exposed to an array of work related risks; but they also live under constant apprehension of physical danger, work long and irregular hours, and faced family-work conflict due to demanding expectations at work. Thus, the health of the police officers is jeopardized and can potentially impair their work performance and the well-being of the community they served. Therefore, government and police organization must join efforts to support police officer and address those factors that impact negatively upon officers' well-being. These efforts should focus on providing better housing schemes and healthcare services and monitoring; and improving the salary and financial incentives for police officers.

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