

CHAPTER

3

STRESS AND WELL-BEING

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 was one of the most challenging and threatening situations in the world, and it puts tremendous psychological pressure on the daily lives of almost everyone worldwide. Anxiety and stress because of the pandemic were already public health concerns. They prompted 90% of countries worldwide to consider mental health and psychosocial support as essential components in their pandemic plans, but significant gaps and problems remain. Yet, as the world moves towards the endemic, in general, more people tend to suffer from psychological disorders and feel worn out. In early 2021, nearly one-third, or up to 22% of people in 22 countries, reported feeling exhausted and too tired after work to do other daily activities (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021). Feelings of loneliness and being separated and disconnected from society also grew in the past two years. It was revealed that the decrease in mental health conditions (high stress, anxiety, and depression) associated with the pandemic is now included in the educational environment, which is important in terms of the psychological well-being of the person (Durbas et al., 2021).

Stress is one of the critical issues in society, and it has been studied since the earliest times. Whether we are dealing with significant life

decisions, rigorous academic demands, a challenging relationship, a medical issue, or any difficulties in life, it will result in stress at some point (Thiswayup, 2023). While a certain amount of stress is expected and might be temporary, excessive and prolonged stress can seriously affect well-being, which includes quality of health, safety, satisfaction, and a sense of belonging in the community. Furthermore, ongoing stress can harm physical and mental health, impair cognition, and disturb interpersonal and social connections. Due to the complexity of stress outcomes, the notion of stress is still used extensively in social science research, and it has been developed by concentrating on how stress affects human lives.

It was believed that stress is an unavoidable biological and psychological response to a circumstance that an individual perceives as challenging or threatening. These situations might include doing multiple tasks or assignments simultaneously, dealing with debt, having a demanding job position, having a high workload, having various roles and responsibilities, arguing with significant other, or encountering new and spontaneous life events. To face the potentially challenging or threatening circumstance, the body will release substances (hormones and neurotransmitters) that encourage an individual to concentrate and focus on managing the situation (Cherry, 2022). Therefore, a reasonable amount of stress can be beneficial and healthy to individuals. However, persistent or extreme stress can negatively affect physical and mental well-being. Prolonged stress can negatively affect mood, sleep, emotions, digestive systems, and intellectual functioning (Linberg, 2019). It can also lead to sickness, tension, and exhaustion. Stress has numerous negative consequences on human health, especially during the post-COVID-19. One significant area that is frequently affected by stress is well-being.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2023) has conceptualized well-being as the absence of illness or tension and complete bodily, emotional, social, and spiritual health. Well-being has been conceptualized as the combination of positive feelings such as happiness and cheerfulness and having some control or a sense of purpose over

one's life. It is a condition that allows a person to develop positive mental health, which refers to an awareness of one's ability to resist and cope with challenging situations, have good resilience, and work productively and efficiently without relying on others. This conceptualization of well-being expands the fundamental knowledge that covers the absence of mental health issues but branded that.

In occupational contexts, well-being has been associated with individual success in the workplace. Those with high well-being exhibit more significant achievement in the workplace, have positive relationships with others, are effective learners in the classroom, and tend to have prosocial behaviors (Diener, 2012). Although it can be challenging to understand the nature of well-being due to individual differences, a person can naturally tell the difference between high and low well-being. High well-being is usually characterized by feeling relaxed, protected, satisfied, connected to others, in touch with their ideologies, and as if their existence has an actual purpose (Thiswayup, 2023).

Good well-being is linked to various life outcomes, such as good physical health, better work performance, longevity, and higher life satisfaction. However, poor well-being may lead to multiple detrimental consequences, such as poor mental and physical health, chronic diseases, lack of resilience, harmful or counterproductive behaviors, and numerous psychological disorders. Therefore, it was believed that exploring the factors that may influence well-being is the most crucial step to promoting better well-being. One significant step toward improving an individual's well-being and others around them is knowing how to properly deal with the predictors of well-being.

Based on literature, perceived stress is one of the most important variables associated with well-being, especially among students and workers (O'Neill & Davis, 2011). Numerous works have been done to explore the mechanism of stress. However, due to extensive research focusing on the immediate response to stress events, only some currently investigate the influence of stress on well-being, particularly among workers pursuing education in university or part-time students.