

The Relationship Between Lifestyle and Social Support on the Psychological Well-Being of Guidance and Counselling Students

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to ascertain the levels of lifestyle and perceived social support and to investigate their associations with the psychological well-being of guidance and counseling students at university east of Malaysia. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, the study involved 120 respondents selected through simple random sampling. Measurement instruments comprised a lifestyle questionnaire adapted from the Adolescent Lifestyle Questionnaire (ALQ), a perceived social support scale grounded in the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and a psychological well-being measure derived from Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. Data were analyzed using Jamovi version 2.6.26, incorporating descriptive statistical procedures and Pearson product-moment correlation analysis. Findings indicated that respondents exhibited moderate levels across all three constructs lifestyle, social support, and psychological well-being. Notwithstanding these moderate levels, correlation analyses demonstrated no statistically significant relationships between lifestyle and psychological well-being ($r = 0.050$, $p = 0.587$) or between social support and psychological well-being ($r = 0.067$, $p = 0.468$). These results suggest that, within this cohort, lifestyle practices and perceived social support may not function as primary determinants of psychological well-being. The study underscores the need for higher education institutions to implement multidimensional interventions that extend beyond lifestyle modification and social support enhancement to address students' psychological health more holistically. The findings contribute to the empirical discourse on student mental health and may inform the formulation of evidence-based policies and comprehensive intervention frameworks in university contexts.

Keywords—Lifestyle, Social Support, Psychological Well-Being; University Students, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating prevalence of mental health difficulties among students in the twenty-first century constitutes a pressing global public health challenge. Contemporary epidemiological evidence suggests that approximately one in five university students worldwide meets criteria for a diagnosable mental disorder each year (U. F. A. Rahman & Asmad, 2023). This burden has been further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2019, which precipitated profound disruptions to educational continuity, social interaction, and psychosocial stability across populations. The World Health Organization (WHO) identified declines in student mental health as among the most consequential secondary effects of the pandemic (WHO Team, 2021). In Malaysia, data from the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) indicate a substantial escalation in mental health problems among students, increasing from 7.6% in 2019 to 16.5% in 2023 (Institute for Public Health, 2023), thereby highlighting the imperative for targeted and contextually responsive interventions.

This pattern reflects growing recognition of the complex constellation of psychological stressors embedded within contemporary higher education contexts (Pasic et al., 2020). Rising rates of stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and related disturbances have generated considerable concern among educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Such concerns are especially pronounced among students enrolled in high-intensity professional programs, including guidance and counseling, where demanding academic expectations converge with emotionally laden training processes, producing distinctive and cumulative stress exposures

(Ch'ng et al., 2023).

Global scholarship consistently documents the detrimental effects of academic strain and lifestyle-related risk factors on student mental health. Evidence from North America and Europe demonstrates that students in highly competitive academic disciplines are disproportionately susceptible to psychological distress and psychiatric morbidity (Pascoe et al., 2020). Guidance and counseling students must simultaneously manage theoretical learning and experiential training requirements, including supervised counseling practice, reflective work, and continuous assessment. The cumulative impact of these demands heightens vulnerability to sustained stress. Empirical studies by Ramli and Sheikh Dawood (2020) and Ahmad and Abdul Latif (2023) reported significant positive relationships between academic stress and anxiety among university students, indicating that intensified academic demands are associated with elevated anxiety and depressive symptomatology.

As future mental health practitioners, guidance and counseling students occupy a uniquely paradoxical position: they are required to develop advanced empathic sensitivity and emotional attunement to support others while concurrently safeguarding their own psychological stability. This dual burden may increase susceptibility to emotional exhaustion, compassion fatigue, and early-stage burnout in the absence of adequate coping resources. Menengah et al. (2020) found that practicing counselors exposed to chronic emotional and physical strain due to excessive workload face heightened burnout risk, suggesting that trainees undergoing intensive professional preparation may experience analogous vulnerabilities.

Another salient challenge involves the adequacy of social support systems available to these students. In some instances, students report insufficient emotional and instrumental support from peers, family members, or institutional structures. Research by Asalal and Abd Wahab (2020) indicates that limited social support is associated with adverse mental health outcomes, including increased vulnerability to anxiety and depression. Moreover, students often struggle to maintain balance between academic obligations and personal life demands. The cumulative pressures of coursework, practicum requirements, and personal responsibilities may result in neglect of essential self-care behaviors, including adequate rest, nutrition, and physical activity. Ade (2019) documented high levels of academic stress among guidance and counseling students, suggesting that sustained academic pressure may compromise personal health maintenance and well-being.

Within the Malaysian sociocultural milieu, social support—particularly from family, peers, and the wider community—serves as a critical protective buffer against psychological distress. A robust body of evidence demonstrates that strong support networks mitigate stress, enhance adaptive coping capacities, and foster psychological resilience. Empirical findings consistently reveal significant positive associations between perceived social support and psychological well-being among university students. Support from family, friends, and significant others facilitates effective coping with academic and personal stressors, thereby promoting healthier psychological functioning (Sosial et al., 2024; Mohd Farhan et al., 2021). In turn, positive psychological well-being contributes to more adaptive developmental trajectories and greater life satisfaction (Zainuddin & Mydin Kutty, 2022). Consequently, interactions within familial, peer, and community systems play a central role in sustaining students' mental health amid complex developmental transitions and academic demands.

Health-promoting lifestyle practices constitute another critical determinant of psychological well-being. Accumulating evidence indicates that behaviors such as balanced nutrition, regular physical activity, sufficient sleep, and effective stress regulation are strongly associated with favorable mental health outcomes. Studies by Salihan et al. (2023), Syahrul and Hanim (2018), and Bin Mat Wajar and Hamzah (2020) collectively demonstrate that adherence to healthy lifestyle practices is positively associated with increased happiness and enhanced psychological well-being among students.

Despite the implementation of general mental health initiatives within higher education institutions, a substantial gap remains in research specifically addressing guidance and counseling students as a distinct at-risk population. The present study seeks to address this deficiency by systematically examining the interrelationships among lifestyle practices, perceived social support, and psychological well-being within this cohort, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of protective and risk factors shaping trainee counselors' mental health.

LITERATURE

Lifestyle is typically conceptualized as an integrated pattern of everyday behaviors through which individuals organize and enact their lives. It encompasses health-relevant practices such as dietary choices, physical activity, social engagement, and the regulation of time and energy (Firth et al., 2020). Importantly, lifestyle is not reducible to discrete behaviors; rather, it is embedded in broader value systems, belief structures, and sociocultural norms that guide decision-making and shape routine behavioral repertoires.

Accumulating evidence suggests that health-promoting lifestyle behaviors particularly balanced nutrition, regular exercise, and adequate sleep are associated with more adaptive psychological functioning. Rika and Widianita (2023) highlight the salutogenic role of such practices in sustaining psychological well-being. Lifestyle adoption also appears to vary systematically across sociodemographic strata. Basry and Mohamed (2023) reported that age and income are associated with engagement in healthier lifestyle patterns, with younger and higher-income individuals demonstrating greater likelihood of adopting health-supportive behaviors. These patterns are consequential, as healthier lifestyles are consistently linked to lower perceived stress and more favorable mental health outcomes.

In higher education settings, lifestyle is increasingly recognized as both a health determinant and a correlate of academic functioning. Ahmad and Abdul Latif (2023) found that students who maintain active lifestyles exhibit stronger capacity for managing academic stress compared with peers who endorse more sedentary patterns. Collectively, this literature supports a holistic interpretation of lifestyle as a multidimensional construct, wherein physical, emotional, and social processes mutually reinforce or undermine students' functioning and quality of life.

A healthy lifestyle refers to an enduring pattern of behaviors that maintains and optimizes physical functioning and supports effective daily living. Within this view, health literacy and knowledge of health-supportive practices are central to prevention and well-being promotion (Fitriyah Binti Mirojono & Nurul Hana binti Ab Nasir, 2021). Consistent with the World Health Organization's characterization of health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being rather than merely the absence of disease (WHO Team, 2021), healthy lifestyle practices are framed as universally relevant yielding benefits for individuals and extending to families and communities.

Prior scholarship emphasizes that healthy living underpins the development of active and productive societies across age and socioeconomic strata (Manap et al., 2023). Conceptual discussions often delineate several interrelated components: (i) mental functioning (accurate appraisal of reality and effective problem-solving), (ii) social functioning (quality of relationships across family, peers, and significant others), (iii) emotional functioning (regulation and appropriate expression of affect), (iv) physical functioning (bodily capacity and avoidance of harmful substances), (v) environmental health (hygiene, safety, and supportive surroundings), and (vi) spirituality (meaning, purpose, and inner harmony). Ethical principles, values, and moral commitments are frequently positioned as the normative foundations that sustain these health-oriented choices over time.

Three models are commonly mobilized to conceptualize lifestyle. First, Kern and Cummins' (1996) typology differentiates lifestyle orientations reflecting control, perfectionism, appreciation/affiliation, self-importance (self-confidence), and expectations/achievement striving. These orientations can be interpreted as dispositional tendencies shaping behavioral preferences and interpersonal functioning. Second, Adler's Individual Psychology framework posits that lifestyle emerges early in development (approximately ages 4–6) and crystallizes as a characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting that guides goal pursuit and coping (Adler, 2013). The model foregrounds striving toward superiority, compensation for inferiority, social interest, and the "creative self" as a formative agency that assigns meaning and direction (Aprilyaningtiyas et al., 2023; Watts & Richard, 2015). Third, the framework proposed by Nahas et al. (2000) conceptualizes lifestyle as a set of choices and actions reflecting values and beliefs, situated within sociocultural and environmental contexts that shape quality of life. This approach supported in subsequent work often operationalizes lifestyle across domains including physical activity, healthy nutrition, stress management, social support, and spiritual/emotional balance (Nahas et al., 2000; Aceijas et al., 2016; Hernandez et al., 2007). Historically, nutrition, physical activity, and stress management have been treated as a core analytic triad in lifestyle

research (Martins et al., 2020).

Social support denotes the emotional, instrumental, informational, and evaluative resources accessible through interpersonal relationships and social networks (e.g., family, peers, and communities). Social networks function as relational infrastructures that facilitate access to tangible assistance, psychosocial resources, and opportunities for connectedness (Hajar et al., 2020). Shahirah et al. (2023) classify social support into four forms: emotional support (empathy and care), instrumental support (tangible or financial assistance), informational support (guidance and advice), and appraisal support (affirmation and recognition). Beyond individual-level processes, social support is frequently conceptualized through a social capital lens as a community asset that strengthens cohesion, reciprocity, and collective capacity, thereby conferring benefits for both individuals and broader social systems.

Foundational definitions conceptualize social support as resources exchanged within relationships that enable individuals to cope with stress and sustain well-being (Cohen, 1985). House (1981) similarly distinguishes emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support, and subsequent work emphasizes its role in reducing stress exposure and strengthening self-efficacy and adaptive coping (Taylor, 2011). Zimet et al. (1988) further highlight perceived support from family, friends, and significant others as core sources of support appraisal. Contemporary definitions extend these formulations by framing social support as psychological or material resources exchanged within social relationships that are consequential for well-being and performance in applied contexts (Bell et al., 2024).

Mechanistic accounts are clarified by several theoretical models. Weiss' social provisions framework posits that adequate support requires access to multiple relational provisions (e.g., attachment, social integration, reassurance of worth, guidance, and reliable alliance), with different relationship types supplying distinct provisions across developmental periods (Drageset, 2021; Hommadova Lu & Mejova, 2024). Bowlby's attachment theory underscores the foundational role of early caregiver relationships in shaping later relational security and socioemotional functioning (Bowlby, 1988), a proposition supported by contemporary findings linking secure attachment with healthier relationships and better mental health outcomes (Yasmine, 2024; Delsaux, 2024). Cohen and Wills' (1985) buffering model proposes that social support attenuates the adverse effects of stress through reassurance, positive reappraisal resources, and stable social reinforcement; however, emerging evidence suggests that buffering effects may vary as a function of stressor type, support source, and contextual constraints (Acoba, 2024; Chen & Kühner, 2025).

Psychological well-being is generally conceptualized as optimal functioning across emotional, social, and psychological domains. It extends beyond the absence of mental disorder to include effective coping, positive relational engagement, and meaningful contribution to one's community (World Health Organization, 2022). In Malaysia, national conceptualizations similarly integrate hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives, incorporating affect balance, life satisfaction, psychological functioning, and social well-being scale.

Ryff's model remains a central eudaimonic framework and operationalizes psychological well-being across six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989; Kafka & Kozma, 2002; Fitriana et al., 2023). These dimensions are particularly salient for university populations because they capture adaptive functioning, goal pursuit, and relational dynamics alongside emotional experience. Complementary frameworks broaden this conceptual terrain. Subjective Well-Being (SWB) emphasizes life satisfaction and affective experience (Diener et al., 2019), while Seligman's PERMA model foregrounds positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment as core elements of flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Recent scholarship further characterizes psychological well-being as inherently multidimensional, reflecting the interplay of positive affect, adaptive psychological functioning, and meaningful social relationships (Dhanabhakym & Sarath, 2023).

Lifestyle studies generally indicate that health-promoting behaviors are associated with improved academic and psychosocial outcomes. Malaysian evidence from UTHM suggests significant associations between healthy lifestyle practices and learning performance, with adequate sleep and hydration identified as salient contributors (Kirin et al., 2024). However, a recurring pattern is a knowledge–practice discrepancy: students may endorse high awareness of healthy lifestyle principles while demonstrating lower adherence, particularly

in dietary behavior (Rosli & Muda, 2018). International studies similarly identify lifestyle risks (e.g., insufficient sleep, unhealthy eating, sedentary patterns) linked to depressive vulnerability and reduced well-being, including within research on food addiction and pandemic-era behavioral changes (Romero Blanco et al., 2021; Goncalves et al., 2021). Work on Malaysian Gen Z reports moderate-to-high engagement in healthy lifestyle practices, with health literacy and parental education as key correlates, yet higher internet use appears negatively associated with physical activity and health screening behaviors (Manap et al., 2023).

Social support studies consistently frame support as protective for student functioning. Recent findings link social support to academic self-efficacy and resilience (Green et al., 2024), and to emotion regulation patterns that are consequential for mental health (Lopez et al., 2024). Nonetheless, the literature also reports heterogeneity in the extent to which social support links stress to life satisfaction, suggesting moderation by contextual and sample characteristics (Yildirim & Green, 2024). During the COVID-19 period, studies documented gender-differentiated patterns of perceived support and distress, with female students in some settings reporting higher perceived support and lower distress compared with male peers (Chen et al., 2024). Research on depressive symptoms and suicidality generally indicates an inverse relationship between social support and risk indicators (Onyekachi et al., 2024). In professional student groups, such as nursing, perceived social support is positively associated with resilience and negatively associated with stress (Hamaideh et al., 2024). Malaysian studies further report significant relationships between self-motivation and social support with psychological well-being (Zainuddin & Kutty, 2022), and associations between self-efficacy and psychological well-being among postgraduate education students (Hashim & Kutty, 2023).

Psychological well-being studies highlight a constellation of psychosocial correlates, including emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, motivation, resilience, mindfulness, and self-compassion. For instance, emotional intelligence is positively associated with psychological well-being and academic achievement among higher education students (Shengyao et al., 2024). Online positive psychology interventions have demonstrated efficacy in improving well-being among undergraduates (Yurayat & Seechalio, 2021). Social support repeatedly emerges as a robust correlate of well-being in undergraduate samples (Silva et al., 2021). In Vietnam, self-compassion is positively associated with psychological well-being, with well-being and positive emotions operating as plausible mediators within broader psychosocial pathways (Tran et al., 2024). Malaysian pandemic-era research reports mixed patterns, including low mental health but high motivation among master's students in online learning contexts (Muhammed Ganasan & Azman, 2021), and evidence that academic stress is a direct predictor of psychological well-being among undergraduates (Ajmain et al., 2023). In TVET contexts, students may report high knowledge and awareness of well-being, yet knowledge does not necessarily translate into higher psychological well-being outcomes (Norkhairilizah Hamzah et al., 2023).

This review conceptualizes lifestyle and social support as theoretically grounded determinants of psychological well-being. Adler's lifestyle theory (Adler, 1927) frames lifestyle as an early-formed configuration of cognition, affect, and behavior that shapes daily choices and coping orientations. In student contexts, lifestyle manifests in domains such as physical activity, diet, sleep, technology use, and time management (Manap et al., 2023), each of which may influence adaptive functioning and well-being. House's social support framework (House, 1981) delineates emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support as mechanisms that reduce stress exposure, strengthen coping resources, and enhance well-being, including among university populations (Anque & Ceballo, 2023). Ryff's psychological well-being model provides a comprehensive measurement framework for eudaimonic functioning across six dimensions.

Overall, extant scholarship supports the proposition that healthier lifestyle patterns and stronger social support networks are associated with better psychological functioning among university students. However, the evidence base also reveals substantive inconsistencies, including knowledge-behavior gaps in lifestyle practice and variability in the buffering capacity of social support across contexts and stressor types. Critically, integrative studies that examine lifestyle and social support within a unified explanatory framework remain limited, particularly in Malaysian higher education settings. Moreover, research focusing specifically on guidance and counseling students who may experience distinctive academic, relational, and emotional demands as trainee helping professionals remains comparatively scarce. Accordingly, further context-sensitive, integrative research is warranted to clarify how lifestyle practices and social support jointly relate to psychological well-being, with particular attention to counseling-related student populations and culturally

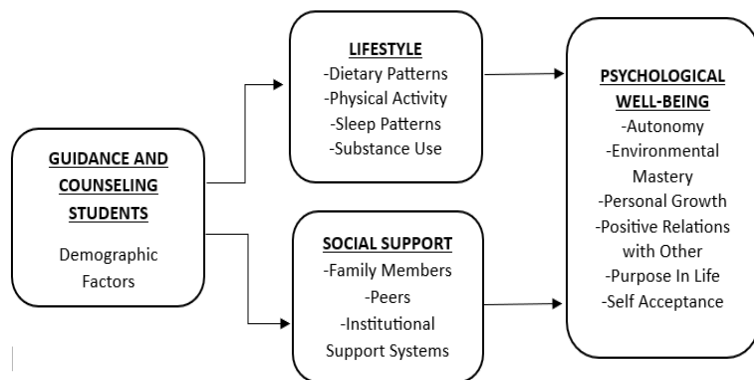
grounded mechanisms of risk and protection.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To assess the level of lifestyle practices among guidance and counseling students
2. To assess the level of perceived social support among guidance and counseling students
3. To evaluate the level of psychological well-being among guidance and counseling students
4. To examine the relationship between lifestyle practices and psychological well-being among guidance and counseling students
5. To examine the relationship between perceived social support and psychological well-being among guidance and counseling students

The conceptual framework of this study explicates the structural relationships among the key variables, grounded in established theoretical models and empirical literature. The principal independent variables under investigation are lifestyle and social support, while psychological well-being constitutes the dependent variable. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how variations in lifestyle practices and perceived social support are associated with the psychological well-being of guidance and counseling students. The framework further incorporates antecedent factors influencing lifestyle and social support within this population, as well as demographic characteristics that may shape students’ self-regulatory capacities in managing these domains. A systematic examination of these interrelationships is essential for understanding the determinants of student well-being, as illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study



An integrated analysis of lifestyle, social support, and psychological well-being offers a comprehensive perspective on the mechanisms through which behavioral and relational factors influence mental health outcomes among university students. Lifestyle is conceptualized as a constellation of habitual behaviors, including dietary patterns, physical activity, sleep quality, and substance use. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that health-promoting lifestyle practices particularly balanced nutrition and regular exercise are positively associated with psychological functioning and overall well-being (Firth et al., 2020). Conversely, maladaptive lifestyle patterns may elevate vulnerability to mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression, which are prevalent within university populations. Accordingly, lifestyle is operationalized as a core independent variable exerting direct influence on psychological well-being.

Social support is defined as the perceived availability of emotional, informational, and instrumental resources derived from interpersonal networks, including family members, peers, and institutional agents. Substantial empirical evidence indicates that robust social support enhances psychological well-being by fostering a sense of belonging, strengthening coping resources, and mitigating perceived stress. For guidance and counseling students, sources of support typically include classmates, lecturers, supervisors, and family members, all of

whom contribute to shaping academic experiences and emotional adjustment (Wilson et al., 2020). Consequently, social support is conceptualized as a second independent variable with a potentially protective role in promoting psychological well-being.

Psychological well-being, the dependent variable, is defined as a multidimensional construct reflecting optimal psychological functioning, encompassing life satisfaction, emotional regulation, personal growth, and resilience. Prior research suggests that individuals who maintain health-promoting lifestyles and possess strong social support networks tend to report higher levels of well-being (Nagy-Pénzes et al., 2020). In the present study, psychological well-being is operationalized using six dimensions derived from Ryff's eudaimonic framework: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

In summary, the conceptual framework posits that lifestyle and social support function as primary explanatory variables influencing psychological well-being among guidance and counseling students. By elucidating these relationships, the study aims to generate a more nuanced understanding of the behavioral and interpersonal determinants of well-being within this specific academic cohort.

This study is anchored in a theoretically integrated framework that explicates the structural and functional relationships among lifestyle, social support, and psychological well-being. The conceptual model is informed by three complementary perspectives: Adler's Lifestyle Theory, House's Social Support Theory, and Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-Being. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional explanatory base for understanding how intrapersonal orientations and interpersonal resources interact to shape psychological functioning among students in guidance and counseling programs.

Adler's Lifestyle Theory (Adler, 1927) offers a foundational lens for examining the internal coherence of personality development. Central to Adlerian psychology is the proposition that individuals construct a distinctive lifestyle a dynamic pattern of beliefs, goals, meanings, and behavioral strategies formed through early relational experiences and subjective interpretations of social reality. Lifestyle, in this sense, is not merely a set of habits but an organizing principle that directs perception, motivation, and action. It reflects the individual's implicit convictions about self, others, and the world, thereby shaping patterns of decision-making, interpersonal engagement, and coping.

Adler emphasized that early familial constellations, including parental relationships, sibling dynamics, and broader socio-environmental influences, exert enduring effects on lifestyle formation. Experiences of affirmation, belonging, and encouragement may cultivate adaptive striving, resilience, and social interest, whereas chronic experiences of rejection, neglect, or criticism may engender maladaptive compensatory patterns characterized by insecurity, defensiveness, or overcompensation. Importantly, Adler posited that human behavior is teleological; individuals are guided by consciously or unconsciously constructed life goals that orient their striving toward significance, belonging, and contribution. For students in guidance and counseling, these purposive orientations are especially salient, as professional identity formation is intimately tied to personal meaning-making, relational competence, and ethical commitment to the welfare of others.

Within the academic context, lifestyle manifests in concrete patterns such as time management practices, health behaviors, stress regulation strategies, and relational engagement. Empirical evidence suggests that adaptive lifestyle behaviors including balanced nutrition, regular physical activity, and effective stress management are positively associated with psychological well-being (Manap et al., 2023). These behavioral configurations influence how students negotiate academic demands, sustain supportive peer networks, and respond to personal and professional challenges. From an Adlerian perspective, facilitating students' insight into their lifestyle patterns may enhance self-awareness and foster intentional realignment of goals and behaviors toward greater psychological integration and professional congruence.

Complementing this intrapersonal focus, House's Social Support Theory (House, 1981) foregrounds the relational matrix within which psychological well-being is embedded. The theory conceptualizes social support as a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, informational, and instrumental forms of assistance. Emotional support refers to expressions of empathy, care, validation, and reassurance; informational support

involves the provision of guidance, advice, or feedback; and instrumental support comprises tangible aid, such as financial assistance or practical help with daily tasks. These support functions operate both as direct contributors to well-being and as buffering mechanisms that mitigate the deleterious effects of stress.

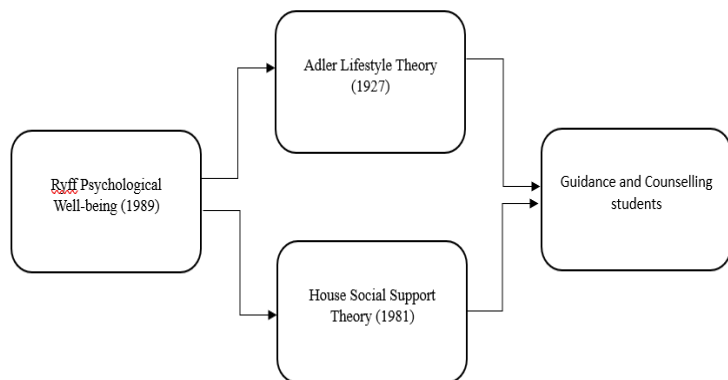
For guidance and counseling students, who frequently encounter intensive academic, practicum, and emotional demands, the availability and quality of social support networks may significantly influence stress appraisal, coping efficacy, and overall mental health. Supportive relational contexts can enhance perceived competence, reinforce professional identity, and promote adaptive coping during transitional or high-pressure periods. Conversely, deficits in social support may exacerbate vulnerability to psychological strain. Thus, social support operates not merely as an external resource but as a critical relational determinant of psychological resilience and functioning.

Ryff’s Model of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989) provides the outcome-oriented framework through which well-being is operationalized in this study. Drawing upon humanistic, existential, and developmental traditions, Ryff conceptualizes psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct comprising six interrelated domains: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. This eudaimonic perspective transcends hedonic notions of happiness by emphasizing optimal psychological functioning and self-realization.

In the present study, Ryff’s model serves as the integrative criterion variable through which the influences of lifestyle and social support are examined. By adopting this multidimensional framework, the study captures both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of well-being, thereby aligning conceptually with Adler’s emphasis on purposive striving and social interest, as well as House’s relational model of supportive exchange.

The theoretical integration of Adler’s Lifestyle Theory, House’s Social Support Theory, and Ryff’s Model of Psychological Well-Being yields a coherent explanatory structure. Lifestyle represents the internalized pattern of meaning and striving; social support constitutes the relational context that sustains or constrains adaptation; and psychological well-being reflects the resultant state of optimal functioning across self-related and relational domains. Through this integrated framework, the study advances a nuanced understanding of how personal orientations and social resources converge to influence the psychological well-being of guidance and counseling students. Moreover, it provides a theoretically grounded basis for the development of targeted interventions aimed at strengthening adaptive lifestyle configurations, enhancing supportive relational networks, and promoting sustainable psychological flourishing within counselor education contexts. Theoretical integration as illustrated in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study



METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among lifestyle practices, perceived social support, and psychological well-being. A quantitative paradigm was

deemed appropriate because it facilitates the systematic collection of standardized, measurable data and enables the application of statistical procedures to evaluate the strength and direction of associations among variables. Data were obtained through a structured, self-administered questionnaire comprising psychometrically validated instruments presented in Likert-type response formats.

Descriptive statistical procedures were employed to characterize the demographic profile of respondents and to determine the distributional levels of lifestyle, social support, and psychological well-being. Inferential analyses were conducted using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient to assess the magnitude and directionality of relationships among the principal study variables. All statistical analyses were performed using Jamovi version 2.6.26.

The target population consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate guidance and counseling students enrolled at university, a public higher education institution located in east Malaysia. Simple random sampling was utilized to ensure that each member of the population had an equal probability of selection, thereby minimizing sampling bias and enhancing representativeness. Based on the sample size determination guidelines proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a total of 181 participants was selected from a finite population of 372 students. Data were collected via an online questionnaire comprising four sections.

Section A: Demographic Characteristics

This section gathered background information, including gender, age, level of study, year of study, and socioeconomic status.

Section B: Lifestyle

Lifestyle behaviors were assessed using a modified version of the Adolescent Lifestyle Questionnaire (ALQ). The adapted instrument contained 24 items specifically targeting dietary patterns, sleep habits, physical activity, and substance use. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

Section C: Social Support

Perceived social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), which evaluates support from family, friends, and significant others. The instrument consists of 12 items rated on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree).

Section D: Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being was assessed using the 18-item Psychological Well-Being Scale derived from Ryff's multidimensional model. The scale measures six domains: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale. Reverse scoring was applied to relevant items to ensure that higher composite scores consistently reflected higher levels of psychological well-being.

Content validity was established through expert evaluation by a senior counseling scholar, who reviewed the instruments for conceptual relevance, clarity of wording, and cultural appropriateness within the Malaysian context. A pilot study involving 35 guidance and counseling students was conducted to assess internal consistency reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients demonstrated excellent reliability for the lifestyle scale ($\alpha = .944$) and social support scale ($\alpha = .978$), and very good reliability for the psychological well-being scale ($\alpha = .875$), indicating strong internal consistency across all measures.

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance and institutional approval were obtained from the relevant authorities. The questionnaire was disseminated electronically to eligible participants through the counseling program administration. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were provided with clear instructions and assurances regarding confidentiality. Follow-up reminders were issued periodically to enhance response rates and reduce nonresponse bias.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondent characteristics and to determine the levels of the study variables. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between lifestyle, perceived social support, and psychological well-being. The strength and direction of correlations were interpreted in accordance with established statistical conventions.

The study adhered strictly to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Key ethical principles included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, protection of privacy, equitable selection of participants, and a careful assessment of potential risks and benefits. Participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous and that all data would be used exclusively for research purposes.

In summary, the study employed a methodologically rigorous quantitative survey design incorporating probability sampling, validated measurement instruments, and appropriate statistical analyses to investigate the relationships among lifestyle, social support, and psychological well-being among guidance and counseling students in a Malaysian higher education context.

DISCUSSION

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design to examine the structural relationships among lifestyle, social support, and psychological well-being within a defined student population. A quantitative paradigm was selected to enable objective measurement of latent constructs and to facilitate statistical estimation of the magnitude and direction of associations among variables (Hassim & Kutty, 2023). The correlational approach is methodologically appropriate where the purpose is to investigate naturally occurring covariation without experimental manipulation, thereby preserving ecological validity while allowing inferential analysis.

A cross-sectional survey strategy was employed to systematically collect standardized data from a specified population at a single point in time (Leong & Hamid, 2023). Survey methodology remains a robust and efficient approach in behavioral research, particularly when assessing psychological constructs across relatively large samples. Data were obtained through structured self-administered questionnaires comprising validated measures of lifestyle, social support, and psychological well-being. All constructs were operationalized using Likert-type response formats, enabling the quantification of subjective evaluations and supporting parametric statistical procedures. The scaling format enhances measurement sensitivity and permits the computation of composite scores suitable for correlational analysis (Muner & Rosli, 2023).

An internal consistency reliability assessment was conducted to determine the psychometric robustness of the three instruments utilized in this study: the Lifestyle Questionnaire, the Social Support Questionnaire, and the Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α), a coefficient that estimates the extent to which items within a scale are interrelated and collectively measure a coherent latent construct. Conceptually, Cronbach's alpha reflects the average inter-item covariance relative to the overall scale variance, with values ranging from 0 to 1. Higher coefficients indicate greater homogeneity among items and stronger reliability of the composite score.

The findings revealed that the Lifestyle Questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .944$), indicating a high degree of item intercorrelation and scale coherence. The Social Support Questionnaire produced an exceptionally high reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .978$), suggesting near-perfect internal consistency. While such a coefficient reflects strong measurement stability, it may also imply potential item redundancy, warranting cautious interpretation in terms of scale parsimony. The Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire yielded a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .875$, which is indicative of strong internal consistency and acceptable scale precision within behavioral research standards.

Collectively, the alpha coefficients for all three instruments exceed conventional benchmarks for research adequacy (e.g., $\alpha \geq .70$), thereby supporting the reliability of the measures for subsequent statistical analyses. The Lifestyle and Social Support scales may be classified as demonstrating excellent reliability, whereas the

Psychological Well-Being scale falls within the very good range. These results substantiate the internal consistency of the instruments and affirm their suitability for examining the structural relationships among lifestyle, social support, and psychological well-being within the study sample.

Data analysis was conducted using Jamovi version 2.6.26. Preliminary analyses involved descriptive statistics to characterize the demographic profile of respondents and to estimate central tendencies and dispersion indices for each principal variable. Prior to inferential testing, assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were examined to ensure the appropriateness of parametric procedures. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was subsequently employed to determine the strength and direction of the relationships among lifestyle, social support, and psychological well-being (Beruin, 2023). This analytic strategy enables estimation of effect size and statistical significance, thereby providing empirical clarification of the interrelations among the constructs under investigation. The results are intended to inform theoretically grounded and evidence-based recommendations for enhancing psychological well-being among counseling students (Hassim & Kutty, 2023).

In methodological terms, a population comprises the totality of elements that meet predefined criteria relevant to the research objectives, bounded by contextual, temporal, and definitional parameters (Reyes Narváez et al., 2023). A sample represents a subset of that population selected to approximate its characteristics and permit generalizable inference (Mohapatra, 2020). The target population for this investigation consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in the Guidance and Counseling programme at university located east of Malaysia.

Simple random sampling was utilized to ensure that each eligible member of the population possessed an equal probability of selection (Rahim & Nadira, 2022). This probability-based technique minimizes systematic sampling bias and strengthens external validity. The sampling frame was derived from official enrollment records obtained from the Centre for Postgraduate Management and the Academic Development and Management Centre, following formal institutional authorization. The procedural transparency and statistical defensibility of simple random sampling render it particularly suitable for quantitative correlational research (Mohapatra, 2020).

Sample size determination was guided by the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) framework, which specifies recommended sample sizes relative to known population parameters to ensure adequate statistical power and precision. The formula underlying the calculation is:

$$S = (X^2NP(1 - P)) / (d^2(N - 1) + X^2P(1 - P))$$

Where:

S = required sample size
 X^2 = chi-square value corresponding to the desired confidence level
N = total population size
P = estimated population proportion (commonly set at 0.50 to maximize sample size)
 d^2 = degree of precision (0.05)

Application of this formula ensures sufficient sampling adequacy to detect statistically meaningful relationships while maintaining a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Collectively, these methodological procedures enhance the internal coherence, statistical rigor, and generalizability of the study findings to the broader population of Guidance and Counseling students at UMT.

Descriptive analyses were conducted to delineate the demographic profile of the respondents. Of the 120 guidance and counseling students surveyed, the sample was predominantly female ($n = 101, 84.2\%$), with males comprising a substantially smaller proportion ($n = 19, 15.8\%$). The age distribution was heavily skewed toward younger adults, with the majority aged 20–30 years ($n = 108, 90.0\%$), followed by those aged above 40 years ($n = 7, 5.8\%$) and 31–40 years ($n = 5, 4.2\%$).

With respect to academic level, most participants were enrolled in undergraduate programs ($n = 98, 81.7\%$), while smaller proportions were pursuing master's degrees ($n = 20, 16.7\%$) and doctoral studies ($n = 2, 1.7\%$). In terms of year of study, Year 2 students constituted the largest subgroup ($n = 42, 35.0\%$), followed by Year 1

($n = 29$, 24.2%), Year 3 ($n = 26$, 21.7%), and Year 4 ($n = 23$, 19.2%). Socioeconomic status was predominantly represented by the B40 income category ($n = 73$, 60.8%), followed by M40 ($n = 39$, 32.5%), T20 ($n = 5$, 4.2%), and other classifications ($n = 3$, 2.5%). Collectively, these data indicate that the sample primarily comprised young, undergraduate female students from lower- to middle-income households.

The overall level of lifestyle practices among respondents was classified as moderate ($M = 83.7$, $SD = 14.7$). Among the lifestyle dimensions assessed, dietary practices recorded the highest mean score ($M = 30.4$, $SD = 7.10$), followed by substance use ($M = 26.7$, $SD = 4.63$), physical activity ($M = 15.2$, $SD = 5.00$), and sleep patterns ($M = 11.0$, $SD = 3.42$), which represented the lowest scoring domain. Notably, the substance-use dimension was categorized at a high level, whereas the remaining lifestyle domains fell within the moderate range.

Perceived social support was likewise moderate overall, with a total mean score of 58.9 ($SD = 17.7$). When standardized to a mean per item ($M = 4.91$), the score approached the upper boundary of the moderate range, indicating moderate-to-high perceived support. Among the three sources of support, perceived support from significant others was highest ($M = 17.5$, $SD = 5.73$), followed by family support ($M = 17.2$, $SD = 5.73$) and peer support ($M = 17.0$, $SD = 5.54$), although differences between domains were minimal.

Psychological well-being was also reported at a moderate level overall ($M = 83.6$, $SD = 19.9$). Examination of Ryff's six dimensions revealed that personal growth exhibited the highest mean score ($M = 15.4$, $SD = 5.63$), followed by self-acceptance ($M = 14.7$, $SD = 4.85$), environmental mastery ($M = 14.0$, $SD = 3.90$), positive relations with others ($M = 13.6$, $SD = 3.83$), and autonomy ($M = 13.3$, $SD = 3.98$). Purpose in life recorded the lowest mean ($M = 12.6$, $SD = 2.88$). All dimensions were situated within the moderate category, indicating a generally balanced but not optimal level of psychological functioning among the students.

Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the associations between lifestyle, social support, and psychological well-being. The results indicated that lifestyle was not significantly associated with psychological well-being ($r = 0.050$, $p = 0.587$), reflecting a negligible positive relationship that failed to reach statistical significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis positing no relationship between lifestyle and psychological well-being was retained.

Similarly, perceived social support demonstrated no statistically significant association with psychological well-being ($r = 0.067$, $p = 0.468$). Although the direction of the relationship was positive, the magnitude was trivial and non-significant. Accordingly, the null hypothesis concerning the relationship between social support and psychological well-being was also retained.

The findings indicate that guidance and counseling students at university reported overall lifestyle practices at a moderate level ($M = 83.7$). Across domains, dietary practices and indicators reflecting lower engagement in substance misuse yielded comparatively higher scores, whereas physical activity and sleep patterns were lower, suggesting potential constraints in sustaining consistent health-promoting routines. This pattern is broadly congruent with prior evidence documenting moderate lifestyle profiles among Malaysian youth and university students, which are frequently shaped by academic workload, environmental affordances, and contemporaneous social norms. At the same time, the divergence from studies reporting higher levels of healthy lifestyle engagement underscores the likelihood that institutional ecology, program expectations, and the presence or absence of structured health-promotion initiatives may meaningfully contour student behavior. Accordingly, the present findings support the case for integrated, campus-level interventions that are responsive to the distinctive academic and emotional demands of counseling programme.

Perceived social support was similarly situated within a moderate to moderately high range ($M = 4.91$ per item), with support from significant others emerging as the most salient source, followed by family and peers. This configuration is consistent with the broader literature suggesting that proximal, emotionally meaningful ties serve as primary anchors for students' perceived support. Nevertheless, existing studies report variability in both level and source of support particularly the relative prominence of family support within collectivist contexts implying that demographic composition, institutional culture, and local sociocultural expectations may shape how support is accessed, interpreted, and mobilized. From a practice standpoint, these results point

to the value of strengthening multi-tiered support infrastructures in higher education that encompass peer networks, family engagement where appropriate, and institutionally mediated support mechanisms.

Psychological well-being was reported at a moderate level overall ($M = 83.6$), with comparatively stronger endorsement of personal growth, self-acceptance, and environmental mastery relative to autonomy, positive relations with others, and purpose in life. This profile suggests adequate psychological functioning alongside potential developmental vulnerabilities in relational connectedness, independent decision-making, and the articulation of long-term meaning and direction. Similar patterns have been observed in post-pandemic higher education contexts, where persistent academic pressures and adjustment demands continue to shape student well-being. Conversely, studies reporting higher well-being frequently foreground protective factors such as robust coping repertoires, resilience processes, and supportive institutional climates. In this regard, the present findings underscore the importance of developmentally targeted programming particularly those that cultivate interpersonal competence, meaning-making, and autonomous functioning among counseling students.

In contrast to many theoretical formulations and empirical findings, lifestyle was not significantly associated with psychological well-being ($r = 0.050$, $p = 0.587$). Although a substantial body of evidence links health behaviors to well-being, null findings are not unprecedented, particularly in contexts where the effects of lifestyle on well-being are attenuated by stronger proximal determinants (e.g., academic stress, role strain, or psychological resources). One plausible interpretation is that counseling students may possess compensatory intrapersonal resources such as adaptive coping strategies, emotional regulation skills, or a developing professional identity that mitigate the extent to which lifestyle variations translate into measurable differences in well-being.

Similarly, perceived social support was not significantly related to psychological well-being ($r = 0.067$, $p = 0.468$), despite extensive literature positioning social support as a protective factor. This pattern suggests that, within this sample, social support may function more indirectly (e.g., by buffering stress or strengthening coping) rather than exerting a direct linear association with well-being. The finding also raises the possibility that the salience of support is contingent on the type of stressor, the source and quality of support, and individual differences in support utilization. Collectively, these results indicate that external resources, while important, may be insufficient as stand-alone explanatory variables for counseling students' psychological well-being, and that intrapersonal processes may occupy a more central role.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings invite a more differentiated account of how lifestyle and social support relate to psychological well-being among counseling students. Rather than assuming direct effects, future conceptual models may need to incorporate mediation (e.g., coping, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence) and moderation (e.g., stress exposure, academic stage, living arrangements) pathways. Practically, higher education institutions should consider multi-component well-being strategies that extend beyond health education and social connectedness to include skills-based interventions targeting stress regulation, self-management, and reflective self-development. For counselor educators and student support professionals, the findings further highlight the importance of cultivating internal resources alongside facilitating supportive relational environments.

Interpretation of the findings should be tempered by several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference and may not capture dynamic changes in lifestyle, support, and well-being over time. Second, reliance on self-report measures introduces risks of shared method variance, social desirability bias, and differential item interpretation, particularly in online survey administration. Third, the sampling frame was restricted to a single public university and one academic discipline, which limits the generalizability of conclusions to other institutional contexts or student populations. Finally, the primary reliance on bivariate correlations may obscure non-linear patterns and multivariate interdependencies.

Future studies should consider longitudinal designs to examine temporal ordering and change trajectories, as well as multivariate analytic approaches (e.g., regression modeling, structural equation modeling) to test mediation and moderation mechanisms. It would also be theoretically and practically valuable to incorporate additional constructs salient to counseling students' development, such as self-esteem, emotional intelligence, coping styles, psychological flexibility, spirituality, and academic stress. Mixed-method designs may further

enrich understanding by elucidating how students interpret lifestyle practices and support experiences, and how these intersect with their professional formation and training demands.

In summary, guidance and counseling students at university east of Malaysia reported moderate levels of lifestyle practices, perceived social support, and psychological well-being. Contrary to predominant theoretical expectations, neither lifestyle nor social support demonstrated a statistically significant direct association with psychological well-being, and both relationships were negligible in magnitude. These findings underscore the likelihood that student well-being in counseling programmes is shaped by a more complex constellation of intrapersonal and contextual factors, thereby reinforcing the need for comprehensive, context-sensitive interventions in higher education.

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