

WHAT DOES SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING MEAN TO SELETAR ORANG ASLI YOUTH? A CASE STUDY IN JOHOR, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The economy remains the primary element used to measure Malaysians' well-being index. Consequently, the concept of subjective well-being among Orang Asli youth remains unclear due to limited research on the subject. This study offers a holistic perspective on the subjective well-being of youth within the Orang Asli community. An individual's values and perspectives, shaped through their experiences, are vital in determining their subjective well-being, considering other aspects of life such as culture, language, belief systems, and lifestyle. Therefore, this study aims to (i) explain the concept of subjective well-being among the Orang Seletar youth; and (ii) explore the indicators and domains of subjective well-being among these youths. A case study research design was employed in this qualitative study. Twenty (20) informants, aged 18 to 40 years, residing in Johor Bahru, participated in Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis of the findings identified seven (7) main themes related to the concept of subjective well-being among Orang Seletar youth: (i) tranquility; (ii) happiness; (iii) comfort; (iv) sufficiency; (v) preferences; (vi) awareness; and (vii) satisfaction. Regarding indicators and domains, the study identified eight (8) indicators of subjective well-being among these youths: (i) Sea and Environment; (ii) Spirituality; (iii) Family and Community Attachments; (iv) Cultural Preservation; (v) Basic Needs and Physical Infrastructure; (vi) Mental and Physical Health; (vii) Education; and (viii) Employment. Based on these indicators, five (5) domains of subjective well-being were found: (i) Spiritual Subjective Well-being; (ii) Social Subjective Well-being; (iii) Economic Subjective Well-being; (iv) Cultural Subjective Well-being; and (v) Health and Psychological Well-being. In conclusion, this study provides a basis for understanding the subjective well-being of the youth within the Seletar Orang Asli community. From the perspective of mainstream society, their lifestyle may appear modest and inadequate, but this does not accurately reflect their true experience, as objective well-being should not be the sole measure of a community's development. Greater emphasis on subjective well-being is essential to support the community's thriving.

Keywords: subjective wellbeing, Orang Asli, Seletar, youth, community development

1. Introduction

Well-being is a multifaceted concept that is open to various interpretations, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. Scholars often distinguish between objective well-being, which focuses on external indicators such as income, health and education (New Economic Foundation, 2013) and subjective well-being, which refers to individuals' internal evaluations of their own lives (Sulaiman et al., 2015; Vivien, Saiful Farisan & Mohd Rusydi, 2019). A comprehensive understanding of well-being should integrate both dimensions in order to reflect the full complexity of human experiences. Subjective well-being provides valuable insights into how individuals perceive and evaluate their quality of life, considering their unique circumstances. It includes assessments of emotional states, life satisfaction, perceived sufficiency of resources, personal preferences, and overall psychological well-being. According to Sulaiman et al. (2015), subjective well-being is best understood through individuals' reflections on the different dimensions that shape their everyday lives.

The Orang Seletar is the tribe of the aboriginal people community residing along the coast of the Johor Straits. They are still trapped in severe socioeconomic issues and continue their customary practice of gathering seafood on a limited basis in the Johor Straits area (Hasan et al., 2009; Ku, 2010). Johor is a state experiencing rapid development. Development in the coastal

region of Johor is facilitated by its close proximity to Singapore. The development aims to improve the living standards of nearby communities, including the Orang Asli Seletar. However, the development has intruded into the Orang Seletar community and the surrounding sea (Nobaya et al., 2012). The destruction not only impacts their source of income but also threatens their identity and culture (Hasan et al., 2009). The rapid development in the surrounding area of their village has made this minority group vulnerable to societal changes and compelled them to adapt to the advancements in their social and cultural environment. These interactions impacted their lifestyle and influenced their interpretation of subjective well-being.

Thus, this study focuses specifically on subjective well-being among the Orang Seletar youth, an aboriginal people community in Johor, Malaysia. Understanding their well-being requires sensitivity to their worldview, cultural values and lived experiences, which are deeply rooted in their relationship with the natural environment, their traditions and their social networks. Their interpretation of well-being may differ from mainstream development frameworks. Therefore, it is essential to explore how they define, express and prioritise well-being in their own terms. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of how they respond to, negotiate with, and make sense of the forms of development introduced to their community. Recognising this culturally grounded worldview is a crucial entry point for understanding the meanings they attach to well-being and how these meanings inform their identity, behaviour and aspirations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Orang Asli Seletar

The Orang Asli community in Malaysia consists of 18 tribes categorised into three groups: Senoi, Negrito, and Proto-Malay. The Orang Seletar tribe belongs to the Proto-Malay group. Meanwhile, Orang Seletar is considered part of the Malay community in Singapore (Ali, 2002). They are also known as "*Orang Laut*" and are a coastal community that is the only Orang Asli group in Malaysia that resides by the sea (Nobaya et al., 2012). Western researchers refer to them as the Sea Gypsies (Hasan et al., 2009). There are currently 2,110 Orang Seletar in Malaysia (Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli, 2024). Traditionally, they reside in a boat called *Pau Kajang*, which is made from *meranti* or *seraya* trees and has thatched roofs crafted from *mengkuang* leaves (Thompson, 1847). They slept, cooked, played, and travelled with the boat (Hasan et al., 2009). They reside nomadically in mangrove forests and waterways bordering the Straits of Johor, which separate Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore. They freely roamed between the shores of Singapore and Malaysia before a border was established (Ali, 2002). They rely on the environment for their survival. They harvest fish, crabs, shrimps, and mussels for sustenance (Hasan et al., 2009). They have extensive knowledge of the wildlife and plants in mangrove forests and riverine areas (Ali, 2002). Ariffin (1979) stated that Orang Seletar also hunted wild pigs and gathered tubers and yams.

Following Singapore's secession from Malaysia, the Orang Seletar could no longer travel freely on their *Pau Kajang* across the Johor Strait (Ali, 2002). Singapore's government enforces stringent regulations to prevent smuggling beyond its borders. Feeling fearful of being apprehended, the Orang Seletar chose to migrate to Johor. They can cross the Johor Straits without passing through immigration because of their enduring patron-client connection with the Sultan of Johor. They can also gather forest and mangrove resources in Johor without authorisation. Currently, they no longer reside in the boat as they did previously. They resided on land and settled on the Johor Straits coast through the Resettlement Program introduced by the Malaysian Government (Hasan et al., 2009). They are mostly located in eight villages in Johor, which are Kampung Simpang Arang, Kampung Bakar Batu Perling, Kampung Sungai Temon, Kampung Teluk Jawa, Kampung Pasir Putih, Kampung Kuala Masai, Kampung Teluk Kabung, and Kampung Pasir Salam (Nobaya et al., 2012). Socioeconomic changes have changed the Orang Seletar's way of life. They have begun utilising contemporary equipment for seafood collection, with some individuals being employed in the industrial field. They have opted to practise Islam and Christianity as their belief system, but some still follow animism.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach, utilising an exploratory case study design to investigate the subjective well-being of Orang Seletar youth in Peninsular Malaysia. This study was conducted at Kampung Bakar Batu Perling, Johor. The location was chosen due to the large number of Orang Seletar youth and suggested by the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA).

3.1 Participants

Generally, the youth were those aged 15 to 40 years old. However, the informants in this study were individuals from the Orang Seletar tribe, aged 18 to 40 years old, who were able to speak, sane, and not deaf. The number of informants involved is based on the data saturation point. Therefore, 20 informants participated in this study.

3.2 Data collection

The data collection technique used is a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and an in-depth interview. This flexible interview method allows the informants to express what is relevant to the researcher's questions. This interview was conducted in accordance with interview guidelines prepared by the researchers. The questions asked were also presented in the order of the informant's storytelling. Discussions and meetings with informants were conducted multiple times until data saturation was achieved.

3.3 Sampling

The sampling technique used in this study was a snowball sampling technique. This sampling technique involves using the first informant to recruit the second informant. Then, the researcher used the second informant to get the next informant. This process continued until the data reached the saturation point.

3.4 Ethics considerations

At the beginning of this study, the purpose and research methods were clearly explained to all participants and their written consent was obtained. Each participant was informed of their rights and the ethical principles related to the protection of human subjects. They were assured that all information provided would be kept confidential. To ensure anonymity, aliases were used when recording and presenting the data.

3.5 Data analysis

The data analysis in this study followed two main procedures. The first phase, preliminary analysis, was conducted during data collection immediately after each interview. This involved repeatedly reading the transcribed interviews to identify emerging themes. This ongoing process enhanced the quality of the data and helped refine subsequent interview questions to better capture the participants' lived experiences. The second phase, thematic analysis, was conducted after all data had been collected. This phase involved organising the data into manageable categories, themes and sub-themes. Using the constant comparative method, the researchers compared responses to similar questions to identify recurring patterns, similarities, and differences across interviews.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 The Concept of Subjective Financial Well-Being of Youth Orang Seletar

Based on FGD and in-depth interviews conducted with the Orang Seletar youth, the study identified seven core concepts that shape their understanding of subjective well-being. There are (i) tranquillity; (ii) happiness; (iii) comfort; (iv) sufficiency; (v) preference; (vi) awareness; and (vii) satisfaction. These concepts reflect how youth define a meaningful life, grounded not in wealth or individual success but in emotional stability, strong social ties, cultural expression and connection to their environment. Each concept is rooted in the daily experiences of youth and reflects their priorities as they navigate the transition to adulthood within a dynamic social and environmental context. Understanding these perspectives is essential to recognising how indigenous youth interpret well-being in their own terms and how they strive to maintain their identity while adapting to modern challenges.

4.1.1 Tranquillity

Tranquillity emerges as a central dimension of subjective well-being for the Orang Seletar youth. The informants define tranquillity as a state of inner calm shaped by the interplay between their environment, spirituality, culture and mental health. The majority of them described feeling emotionally secure and mentally balanced when immersed in familiar natural surroundings such as the sea, mangroves and rivers. These natural elements are not only sources of aesthetic comfort but also powerful markers of identity. As a maritime Aboriginal community, the Orang Seletar maintain a deep cultural connection with aquatic landscapes, which they view as integral to their heritage and pride. Mohd Roslan and Asnarulkhadi (2018) argue that the Orang Asli generally prefer rural and isolated environments due to their strong ecological ties and cultural attachment to the natural environment.

Spirituality is another key component that contributes to their sense of tranquillity. Informants described engaging in prayer, traditional rituals, and moments of personal reflection as ways to cultivate clarity and inner peace. These practices are not merely religious routines, but are deeply embedded in their emotional lives, which offer a sense of coherence between inner feelings and their relationship with God. They described that tranquillity is not only found in physical surroundings but also in the alignment of spiritual beliefs and emotional well-being. Furthermore, the ability to live undisturbed in their traditional territories contributes significantly to this experience of calm. The quiet, safety and familiarity of their environment foster a sense of control and protection. However, ongoing rapid development near their village has disrupted this harmony which causing anxiety and concern. Informants expressed fear that their ancestral lands may be taken and the surrounding waters polluted. Such threats not only endanger their physical environment but also undermine their mental well-being. In the face of these changes, they strive to maintain a positive mindset in order to preserve their inner peace.

This emphasis on tranquillity is consistent with findings by Chan, Mak and Yu (2023) and Julie et al. (2022), who stated the role of tranquillity in sustaining mental well-being. Boo (2018) further reinforces the idea that peace of mind is often valued above material wealth among Aboriginal people communities. In the context of the Orang Seletar youth, tranquillity represents more than a passive emotional state. It is an active pursuit grounded in environmental harmony, cultural continuity, spiritual fulfilment and mental calmness.

4.1.2 Comfort

Comfort is another important concept of subjective well-being for Orang Seletar youth. According to Raphael et al. (1996), comfort is a state in which individuals feel capable, supported and free to carry out their lives without excessive stress. The informants describe that their feelings of comfort are shaped by multiple factors, including the natural environment, relationships with family and community, fulfilment of basic needs, access to physical infrastructure, digital connectivity, opportunities for employment and education.

The natural environment plays a central role in their sense of comfort. Living near clean and unpolluted seawaters provides emotional reassurance to the Orang Seletar youth. The sea offers a sense of calm and it represents continuity, belonging and cultural identity. Next, relationships within the family and community also contribute strongly to comfort. Most informants stated that being close to family members and maintaining strong bonds within the community brought a sense of emotional stability. This reflects the cultural values of togetherness and cooperation among the Orang Seletar, where mutual support and shared responsibilities are highly valued. In addition, comfort is closely related to the fulfilment of basic needs. Haryati and Sharifah Meryam (2010) explained that comfort is based on stability and the fulfilment of basic needs. The majority of informants stated that having enough food, suitable clothing and a safe place to live were described as essential conditions. Informants also highlighted the importance of infrastructure such as electricity, clean water and roads, which contribute to comfort. Digital access has also become a significant part of their overall comfort experience. The majority of informants mentioned the usefulness of smartphones and internet access in helping them communicate, learn and stay informed. Although they may not own high-quality devices or have fast internet connections, they still feel comfortable as long as they can use these tools.

Physical ability is another aspect of comfort. The majority of informants stated they still feel comfortable with their health as long as they can carry out daily tasks and support their families.

Employment and education opportunities also play a significant role in shaping their comfort. Access to education enables them to enhance their knowledge, develop skills, and gain confidence in navigating the world beyond their community. At the same time, having a job gives them the ability to contribute to their household economy and plan for the future. Having access to education and a job helps people feel comfortable, more confident and more satisfied with their lives (Nik Shahrizan, Marzudi & Muhammad Shamsinor, 2021). For Orang Seletar youth, comfort is more than material satisfaction. It involves emotional support, cultural security, physical functioning, education and employment access and the ability to live meaningfully in both traditional and modern spaces.

4.1.3 Happiness

Happiness is a key element of subjective well-being and is often experienced as an emotional response to life events. Happiness reflects immediate reactions to both positive and negative experiences (Keyes, 2006; Shafii & Miskam, 2011). It is shaped by present circumstances, in contrast to life satisfaction, which is a long-term cognitive evaluation of one's overall life. Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) describe happiness as a subjective and individualised experience that varies across people and contexts. For Orang Seletar youth, feeling happy is closely tied to attachment to family and community, efforts to preserve cultural identity, and the maintenance of positive mental health.

The majority of Informants described happiness as emerging from their daily interactions with family and peers. Simple activities, such as eating together, taking part in fishing trips, and participating in village feasts, were cited as moments that generate joy, emotional warmth, and a sense of belonging. Happiness for them is not based on material gain or personal achievement but on shared experiences and emotional connection. Open communication, guidance from elders and the feeling of being accepted and respected within their community further reinforce their sense of happiness. This form of collective happiness reflects the Orang Seletar's cultural emphasis on togetherness and mutual care. Informants expressed happiness in being able to express and affirm their Aboriginal identity. Cultural preservation was seen not only as a form of pride but also as a source of emotional fulfilment. In the face of ongoing development and the intrusion of modern values, the majority of informants consciously try to maintain a positive mindset in order to sustain their happiness. Despite challenges such as environmental degradation, economic uncertainty and social marginalisation, they find happiness in cultural continuity and community strength.

This perspective aligns with Renwick et al. (2006) who define well-being through the presence of joy and a sense of personal meaning. For Orang Seletar youth, happiness is not an isolated emotional state. It is a socially embedded experience that grows from being part of a supportive, culturally grounded, and emotionally safe community. Their understanding of happiness suggests that emotional well-being can flourish even in the midst of adversity, provided strong social bonds and a sense of cultural identity are maintained.

4.1.4 Sufficiency

Sufficiency is another important concept of subjective well-being among Orang Seletar youth. It is closely tied to the fulfilment of basic needs, access to physical infrastructure, financial stability and employment opportunities. Most informants described feeling sufficient not in terms of material excess but as the ability to live a meaningful and dignified life with limited resources. Orang Seletar youth interpret sufficiency as having enough to meet essential daily needs, including food, clothing and shelter. According to Mohd Roslan (2010) and Mohd Fariz, Mohd Roslan, and Sarjit (2021), sufficiency for the Orang Asli is not about accumulating wealth, but about survival, stability, and the continuity of life rooted in cultural values. The majority of informants mentioned that although their families earn modest incomes, they rarely feel deprived. Their daily lives are grounded in simplicity, where basic necessities are prioritised and shared within the household. Being able to provide food, support daily expenses and uphold household routines is a source of pride. The majority of Informants expressed a strong sense of responsibility and dignity in fulfilling their familial roles even with limited resources. This expression of sufficiency is reflected in the ability to maintain clean living spaces, participate in community life and avoid excessive financial stress. Access to basic infrastructure, such as

electricity, clean water, and roads, also plays a vital role in supporting this sense of sufficiency. This infrastructure supports their ability to participate in economic activities, education and social life, which contributes to a stable and self-reliant lifestyle.

Next, employment is another significant component of how Orang Seletar youth understand and experience sufficiency. The majority of informants mentioned that while traditional livelihoods such as fishing remain culturally and economically relevant, there is a growing trend among Orang Seletar youth to pursue work in nearby factories and industrial sectors. This transition is driven by both necessity and aspiration. Engaging in wage-based employment allows them to earn a steady income and meet their daily needs without relying entirely on uncertain traditional sources. Although the work may be physically demanding or low-paying, it is still viewed as meaningful because it contributes directly to household survival. Informants describe feeling that sufficiency means being able to work, adapt to modern opportunities and remain rooted in their identity and values. This understanding is consistent with the findings of Muhamad Luqman et al. (2023), who argue that Orang Asli communities often do not view poverty as a burden but as a condition they navigate with resilience and cultural strength. For Orang Seletar youth, sufficiency is not about excess or modern affluence. It is about living with enough, grounded in modesty, contribution and the ability to function with pride and dignity in both traditional and contemporary contexts.

4.1.5 Awareness

Awareness plays a vital role in shaping the subjective well-being of Orang Seletar youth. Multiple factors, including the importance of education, the need for cultural preservation, and the development of personal resilience, shape feelings of awareness. The majority of informants demonstrated recognition that formal education is not merely a pathway to employment, but a means of asserting self-determination and securing long-term well-being for themselves, their families, and their community. According to Mohd Roslan, Mansor, and Mohamad Naquiuddin (2021), education is viewed as a symbol of empowerment, allowing individuals to navigate a rapidly changing socio-economic environment while maintaining dignity and aspirations.

At the same time, the majority of informants exhibit a strong awareness of the importance of preserving their cultural identity in the face of modernisation. Ironside et al. (2020) noted that the preservation of tradition fosters a sense of stability and connection to heritage, which is crucial for both emotional and psychological well-being. As development projects expand around their traditional settlements, the majority of informants recognise the risk of cultural erosion and the loss of intergenerational knowledge. However, rather than rejecting modern influences outright, they consciously seek to integrate aspects of both tradition and modernity, striving to maintain cultural continuity. This act of cultural safeguarding serves as a source of emotional strength and a sense of rootedness (Hatala et al., 2019).

Lastly, awareness among Orang Seletar youth also manifests in their ability to cultivate personal resilience. They are aware of external pressures such as consumerism and hedonism, which may conflict with their communal and spiritual values. Rather than succumbing to these influences, they express a determination to remain grounded in their cultural ethics and to face challenges with adaptability and inner strength. This conscious resilience is not passive endurance but an active, self-reflective process that reinforces their sense of identity and well-being.

4.1.6 Satisfaction

Satisfaction among Orang Seletar youth is shaped by their relationship with the environment, their participation in spiritual practices and the availability of educational opportunities. The majority of informants stated that satisfaction does not depend solely on material wealth. It reflects emotional stability, a sense of identity, and gratitude for what they have. Living close to the sea is a core part of their cultural and ancestral identity, providing a strong sense of comfort and belonging. They expressed deep satisfaction in being able to remain in their traditional villages where they are surrounded by a familiar environment. Daily activities, such as fishing and navigating the sea, continue to be meaningful as they represent their identity as a seafaring people. According to Christiansen et al. (2019), when Aboriginal people's communities are separated from their natural environment, they often experience anxiety,

emotional distress and a sense of loss. In contrast, maintaining a connection with the natural surroundings helps Orang Seletar youth to feel secure and grounded. Gall et al. (2021) explain that a strong bond with the environment promotes feelings of calm, self-worth and a protective attitude toward nature. These youth not only live near the sea. They also see themselves as protectors of the ecosystem and as part of a larger environmental rhythm.

Spiritual practices also play a significant role in shaping their feelings of satisfaction. The majority of informants mentioned that they gain emotional strength through prayer and religious rituals. They pray for good health and for daily sustenance. These practices teach them to appreciate what they already have while continuing to strive for a better life. Gratitude becomes a central part of their mindset, contributing to a lasting sense of satisfaction. Access to education also contributes to their satisfaction. While they acknowledge challenges in the education system, they attend school and value the chance to learn. They believe that education opens the door to a better future for themselves and their families. It is also seen as a sign of progress and self-worth. According to Stone and Mackie (2018), satisfaction involves a steady evaluation of one's life. For Orang Seletar youth, this steady view is supported by harmony between their environment, their spiritual beliefs and their aspirations for the future.

4.1.7 Preference

Preference among Orang Seletar youth reflects their desire for a lifestyle that aligns with their cultural roots and natural environment. The majority of informants expressed a clear preference for clean and peaceful surroundings where both environmental harmony and residential comfort are preserved. The youth described their preference for activities closely connected to the sea, such as fishing and collecting marine resources. These are not simply leisure activities but are deeply embedded in their cultural identity and everyday livelihood. Moreover, the sea represents more than just a place to work. It is viewed as a sacred space that offers a sense of identity, peace and spiritual balance. This connection exists because the identity of Indigenous peoples is strongly tied to the natural landscape and the daily practices that shape their cultural experience (Nobaya et al., 2012). According to Sulaiman et al. (2015), personal preferences play a vital role in shaping individual well-being. When individuals are able to engage in meaningful activities, they experience a sense of fulfilment and happiness. Among Orang Seletar youth, preference is not merely about choosing what they enjoy. It reflects personal values, cultural meaning, and emotional satisfaction. Living a life that remains true to their roots contributes significantly to their overall sense of subjective well-being.

4.2 Indicators and Domains of Subjective Well-Being among Seletar Orang Asli Youth

In examining subjective well-being, multiple interpretations and measurement approaches are used to capture the lived quality of life. This study finds that among Seletar Orang Asli youth, subjective well-being indicators are highly interrelated and deeply rooted in their sociocultural background, diverging from mainstream frameworks in two principal ways. First, they align closely with foundational Indigenous well-being constructs more commonly highlighted in contexts such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, reflecting how interactions across lived experiences shape a felt sense of well-being. Second, they are inseparable from values, worldview, and relationships to the environment (sea, land, place), culture, spirituality, community, and family. These dimensions receive limited emphasis in conventional well-being metrics, yet they exert a substantial influence on Seletar youth. Data were gathered through Focus Group Discussions to generate an initial picture of potential indicators, followed by in-depth interviews to probe and elaborate on them. Analysis identified eight interlinked indicators (1) Sea and Environment; (2) Spirituality; (3) Family and Community Attachments; (4) Cultural Preservation; (5) Basic Needs and Physical Infrastructure; (6) Mental and Physical Health; (7) Education; and (8) Employment which cluster into five overarching domains of subjective well-being: (i) Spiritual; (ii) Social; (iii) Economic; (iv) Cultural; and (v) Psychological and Health. Together, these domains represent the overall subjective well-being profile of Seletar Orang Asli youth; Table 1 maps the eight indicators to their corresponding domains.

Table 1: Indicators and Domains of Subjective Well-Being among Seletar Orang Asli Youth.

Domain	Indicator	Elements
Spiritual Subjective Well-being	Sea and Environment	• Perceived Environmental Tranquility and Comfort • Settlement Comfort • Preference for and Satisfaction with Sea-Based Activities
	Spirituality	• Spiritual Practice-Related Tranquility and Satisfaction • Tranquility in Relationship with the God
Social Subjective Well-being	Family and Community Attachments	• Happiness and Comfort in Social Relationships • Happiness and Comfort in Collective Togetherness • Comfort in Positive Communication
	Basic Needs and Physical Infrastructure	• Perceived Food Sufficiency • Comfort and Sufficiency of Clothing • Comfort of Housing Conditions • Sufficiency and Comfort of Infrastructure, Social Amenities, and ICT Access
	Education	• Awareness of the Importance of Education • Satisfaction with Educational Attainment and Opportunities
Economic Subjective Well-being	Employment	• Perceived Financial Sufficiency • Comfort and Sufficiency in Employment Opportunities
Cultural Subjective Well-being	Cultural Preservation	• Tranquility and Happiness in Expressing Cultural Identity • Awareness of Cultural Continuity and Preservation
Health and Psychological Subjective Well-being	Mental and Physical Health	• Awareness of Personal Resilience / Adaptive Capacity • Positive Emotional State: Tranquility and Happiness • Comfort with Physical Functioning / Bodily Capability • Post-Trauma Recovery: Regained Tranquility and Happiness

5. Conclusion

The concept of subjective well-being among Orang Seletar youth reflects a complex and dynamic interplay between cultural identity, environmental attachment, emotional experiences and personal aspirations. This study identified seven interrelated dimensions that shape their understanding of well-being: (i) tranquillity; (ii) happiness; (iii) comfort; (iv) sufficiency; (v) preferences; (vi) awareness; and (vii) satisfaction. These dimensions do not operate in isolation but instead form a holistic framework through which the Orang Seletar youth interpret what it

means to live a meaningful and balanced life. Among these, tranquillity emerged as the most significant indicator of subjective well-being. It reflects not only emotional calmness but also a deep sense of harmony derived from spiritual beliefs, cultural practices and uninterrupted connection to their ancestral environment. The centrality of tranquillity over other dimensions, such as sufficiency, marks a critical shift in the value orientation of Orang Seletar youth. Earlier generations of the Orang Asli community prioritised material sufficiency, such as access to food, shelter, and clothing, as the foundation of well-being (Mohd Tap, 2005; Mohd Fauzi & Nor Aini, 2012). However, the youth today place greater emphasis on psychological stability, cultural identity and spiritual alignment. This shift may be explained by their increasing exposure to formal education, digital media and social mobility, which have broadened their awareness of well-being beyond physical survival to include mental, emotional and cultural dimensions.

Moreover, the prominence of tranquillity illustrates how subjective well-being among indigenous youth is deeply embedded in their relationship with the natural world. The sea, mangroves, and rivers are not merely physical spaces, but serve as symbols of identity, continuity, and emotional security. The youth express a strong sense of satisfaction and peace when they are able to remain in their ancestral settlements and participate in cultural practices that reaffirm their belonging. This connection to place forms the emotional foundation upon which other well-being dimensions, such as happiness, comfort, and preference, are constructed. Equally important is the role of values in shaping this understanding of well-being. Values are not static beliefs but active forces that influence how individuals respond to their environment and make sense of their experiences. Davidov et al. (2008) argue that values are mental formations developed through lived behaviour and experience, and they shape attitudes, priorities and worldviews. Among Orang Seletar youth, values such as gratitude, humility, environmental respect and cultural pride play a defining role in how well-being is experienced and sustained. These values do not merely influence preferences. They frame the entire structure of what it means to feel well and to live well.

The youth's preference for a peaceful environment, spiritual activity and meaningful relationships indicates that subjective well-being is interpreted through a relational and ecological lens. Well-being is not seen as an individual achievement or material outcome but as a collective process sustained through relationships with family, nature and tradition. This aligns with the perspective of Verplanken and Holland (2002), who suggest that values only shape attitudes when they are actively expressed in behaviour. The youth's strong desire to preserve cultural practices, remain close to family and protect natural spaces demonstrates that these values are embodied and enacted in daily life. Furthermore, the youth's perception of well-being must be understood within the context of age and generational change. As a younger group, they occupy a transitional space between tradition and modernity. They are exposed to formal education, digital technology and industrial employment. Yet, they continue to hold tightly to cultural norms and community values. This duality presents both challenges and opportunities. It enables them to adapt to changing socio-economic conditions while also preserving the cultural distinctiveness that underpins their identity. Their ability to integrate tradition with change suggests that subjective well-being is not a fixed condition but a flexible and evolving process.

In conclusion, the concept of subjective well-being among Orang Seletar youth should be seen as a culturally grounded and value-laden process that evolves through experience, reflection and interaction with the world around them. It is not simply a response to material conditions but a holistic expression of emotional, cultural, spiritual and social life. Development efforts aimed at improving the well-being of Aboriginal people communities must engage with these internal frameworks and support initiatives that sustain cultural identity, protect environmental spaces and recognise youth voices. Only by aligning development with the lived realities and values of the Orang Seletar youth can well-being be meaningfully enhanced in ways that are both context-sensitive and future-oriented (Muhamad Luqman et al., 2023).

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