ROLE OF POST-COVID-19 MENTAL HEALTH IN SUSTAINABLE TALENT DEVELOPMENT: A MALAYSIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract. The era following the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced enduring mental health issues for private university students. This research explores the connection between various mental health issues, specifically depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and anxiety which affecting the overall well-being in sustainable talent development among private university students in Malaysia. By examining these psychological factors as independent variables, the study aims to uncover their effects on students' emotional, academic, and social functioning. A quantitative approach was adopted, employing surveys to gather data from 160 private university students drawn from various academic programmes. Standardized assessment tools were utilized to evaluate the severity of depression, OCD, and anxiety, as well as their impact on students' well-being. The survey findings are analysed to reveal patterns and correlations between mental health disorders and overall well-being. The findings show strong positive links between depression and anxiety and their impact on students' well-being, especially in areas like academic success, social interactions, and emotional health. In contrast, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) does not significantly influence overall well-being. The research highlights the necessity for private universities to tackle these challenges by enhancing mental health initiatives. This study aims to educate policymakers and institutional leaders about the vital importance of mental health in fostering sustainable talent development, as well as advocating improved support systems to cultivate resilience and adaptability among students in the post-pandemic environment to ensure long term workforce resilience.
Keywords: *Covid-19, mental health, sustainable, talent development, university students*

Introduction

The pandemic of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was declared a public health emergency by the World Health Organization on January 30, 2020 (Chen et al., 2020). Quarantine was declared by the French government from March 17 to May 11, 2020, after the example of other countries like China and Italy. Citizens were banned from unnecessary travel, and they were asked to stay indoors. Some recent review of the literature noted that quarantine could have psychological adverse effects such as posttraumatic stress, tension, anxiety, and depression drawn from lockdown situations described in reactions of previous outbreaks. Among the population in China, during early days of COVID-19 outbreak, the students were at an increased risk of experiencing worry, anxiety and depression due to the outbreak compared to other adults (Chang et al., 2020). The conditions for mental diseases in Malaysia have significantly increased within the last ten years. Malaysia is moving into the high-income nation group, experiencing massive cultural and lifestyle shifts due to increased urbanization and globalization levels, an increased sense of being stressed. Moreover, with increased public and clinician knowledge of mental health issues this has probably

led to better reporting and identification of mental disorders (Zhang et al., 2020). Mental health challenges among students at tertiary institutions in Malaysia are undeniably an alarming phenomenon (Hassan et al., 2022) which needs urgent attention and collaborative efforts of a diverse group of stakeholders. This phenomenon was termed as silent crisis in a recent study. Students experienced such challenges when they transition to tertiary education. This was mainly attributable to increased academic expectations, financial stress, difficulties adjusting to a new environment and poor physical health (Congsheng et al., 2022). These problems were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, not only did more Malaysian tertiary students experience symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress (Ali, 2022), but the severity of the condition also increased substantially compared to pre-pandemic period.

A study published in the Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences reports that university students in Malaysia have experienced increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress since the start of the pandemic. (Hassan et al., 2022). Based DASS-21, this study assessed the mental health of students by observing their symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress during this period. Results from a survey of university students in Malaysia revealed that more than 40% of respondents felt depressed and around the same number had little interest. Besides, about 33.8% of people felt anxiety close to panic and 31.5% had a dry mouth. Additionally, 40.3% of students felt agitated and 40.8% found it hard to relax (Arifin et al., 2023). This information implies that we need to pay more attention to how students manage during the pandemic and start creating measures that assist the mental health of university students. University life has been reintroduced to these students after the pandemic and they are still dealing with the psychological issues they faced during it. Addressing mental health issues among tertiary students is crucial as prolonged mental distress can jeopardize students' overall well-being, hinder cognitive function, impair concentration and consequently lead to academic underperformance even during post covid pandemic and the risk of dropout (Kumaran et al., 2022). If such phenomenon is left unattended, it will further disrupt a nation's economic growth and development as it lacks a sustainable pool of skilled and mentally resilient talent to support the business activities. It is insufficient to understand causes of mental health issues among students. Parents and tertiary institutions have to undertake various initiatives to alleviate these issues even after post covid-19 pandemic.

The research findings will make students aware of how the pandemic may have changed mental health and the importance of accessing support for their mental well-being. It emphasizes how necessary mental health support is following the pandemic. Research on post-pandemic mental health issues among university students will allow future researchers to understand whether initiatives to boost mental health and well-being are effective. This knowledge can help guide practices for improving student well-being during and after the pandemic. In the end, studying the post-pandemic mental health of Malaysian university students can add to our understanding of mental health and well-being, handle the increased mental health issues caused by the pandemic globally and influence research on mental health in different parts of the world. Due to the pronounced psychological impact and the "future employment" effects of COVID-19 pandemic on student, it is proposed that mental health will likely be associated with sustainable talent development among university students in Malaysia. Through identifying the critical challenges and institutional responses, the research seeks to develop evidence-based strategies that strengthen student support

structures which serve to stabilize mental health and workforce readiness in the wake of the pandemic.

Literature review

The entire world has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic quite significantly, causing, among other things, unforeseen consequences and perhaps changing the way we live on earth. This disaster has been declared as one of the deadliest in the history of mankind, as it not only infected people's health but also affected the social and economic order of the society. In essence, COVID-19 is a respiratory disease with fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath and fatigue being commonly reported symptoms, and it is both air and highly infectious. In order to reduce the transmission of the virus, various public health measures were taken, such as the Movement Control Order (MCO) which mandated the cessation of all social, religious, and educational activities, and also limited the opening of businesses and healthcare institutions to the essentials only (Ibrahim and Khasanah, 2024). Studies have suggested that quarantine measures have had a negative impact on the mental health of the affected individuals, which has been observed to persist even after the end of the lockdown (Rusli et al., 2023). The persistence of the quarantine effects during the SARS epidemic points to the possibility of the occurrence of such negative impacts for extended periods of time (Cao et al., 2020). Psychological distress is suggested to be more common in young adults than adults among university students during health emergencies. Findings from the research suggested that during COVID-19 pandemic, some 36%–73% of this population had symptoms of anxiety and depressive-like behavior (Grubic et al., 2020). It is in line with similar surveys in France and Britain as well the U.S. done with university students during lockdown. A recent study within Northern Italy investigated the impact of social isolation and confinement on lifestyle habits and behavioral risk factors of university students a dire social messenger especially this aspect affects psychosomatic well-being (Holmes et al., 2020). Exposure to prolonged isolation was associated with increased headache, GI symptoms, sadness, depression, and fear of COVID-19 health risks. The risky health effects were especially apparent in females and included things like sleep disturbance, memory problems, diminished capacity both light phone use. A study with participants from 20 countries showed a significant relation between COVID-19 induced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and levels of depression and anxiety which consists of 69% of participants presented depressive and 57% anxiety (Gao et al., 2020). Within the short two weeks of COVID-19 quarantine a survey showed that among students 45% of 530 feel very disconnected emotionally from anyone special with one-quarter complaining of depression (Nelson et al., 2020). Along with the other pressures fuelling existing stressors such as intense academic responsibilities, social comparisons and future uncertainties these students have been simultaneously managing social-distancing and personal safety protocols plus a million other things. They also reported a lack of commitment to make relevant activities indispensable to activate any form of self-reward in their studies.

An investigation carried out by Rogers et al. (2020) found that people who were infected with COVID-19 and had to be hospitalized are at risk of delirium that is quite common during the acute phase of the sickness. The mental consequences that this group may have after a long period of time are not yet fully understood, but they can be similar to the ones identified in earlier coronavirus breakouts like SARS and MERS, and which had been characterized by the presence of higher rates of anxiety, depression,

and post-traumatic stress disorder. The process of recovery from critical illness is usually accompanied by some persistent psychiatric disorders like significant anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, even a year following the intervention. Moreover, significant neurocognitive issues, such as attention, concentration, memory, mental processing speed, were all detected in the patients who were diagnosed with a severe form of acute respiratory distress syndrome at the end of one year after discharge. Patients who were down with severe acute respiratory syndrome and those on prolonged mechanical ventilation registered the significant lowering of their quality of life compared to the disease of other medical reasons (Rogers et al., 2020). The World Bank has projected the COVID-19 pandemic to cause a profound and long-lasting global economic recession which is expected to substantially harm the mental health of the most vulnerable groups. Economic downturns have been shown to be associated with increased psychological distress, anxiety, depression, substance use disorders, suicidal thoughts, and other harmful behaviors. Issues such as job loss, job insecurity, worsened income status, and previous mental health conditions are considered as factors contributing to the increase in mental health problems after an economic recession (Nasir and Hameed, 2021).

In the past ten years, Malaysia has seen a rise in mental health issues (Maung Maung et al., 2023). This increase is partly due to changes in the education system, especially in teaching methods, which have led to more students dealing with depression, anxiety, and other types of mental health issues, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. It's important to look into what affects the mental health of university students so we can find the right ways to help those who are struggling. In many Asian cultures, showing emotions or admitting to feeling vulnerable is not common, which can push students to unhealthy ways of coping with stress and anxiety (Gibbons, 2022). This often doesn't fix the underlying problems and can make things worse over time. A study done in Malaysia found that private university students feeling frustrated due to changes in their daily routines and classes, along with those who already had medical issues like depression, obsessive compulsive disorder and anxiety, showed more signs of depression (Zahit et al., 2022). As lockdowns lift and travel gets easier, many university students are expected to get back to studying but this shift might be tough for those dealing with depression, as they try to readjust to normal life (Abd Aziz et al., 2021). Many studies have shown that during the Covid-19 pandemic, university students faced more depression, anxiety, and stress due to worries about their futures, changes to their daily routines, and financial troubles (Khaira and Sari, 2022; Ng et al., 2020).

Mental health problems can really affect how well students do in school and their overall productivity. Some research has shown that medical students with higher rates of psychological issues tend to have lower GPAs (Jamil et al., 2022). This makes it clear that having good mental health is important for doing well academically, and it's crucial to provide mental health support in schools. Another study found that both types of state & trait anxiety can impact how motivated students feel about their studies, which can indirectly affect their performance (Macher et al., 2012). In fact, a survey of over 400 university students in Malaysia showed that many were dealing with significant stress, anxiety, and depression (Rusli et al., 2023). So, while anxiety might not directly lower grades, it can lower motivation, which can lead to poorer academic results. The universities should not only aim to lessen anxiety but also find ways to boost motivation through supportive counseling and encouraging strategies. A study conducted by Roslan (2021) examined the psychological impact of the pandemic on Malaysian students

enrolled in private universities. The findings showed that students generally experienced mild anxiety, depression, and stress, with female students reporting higher levels of stress and anxiety than male students. Additionally, research by Bujang et al. (2021) explored the pandemic-related challenges faced by these students, revealing issues such as financial difficulties, social isolation, and academic pressure. The study highlighted that student employing coping strategies, such as physical exercise and relaxation techniques, were less affected by the negative mental health consequences of the pandemic. Furthermore, a separate investigation focused on engineering students at a private university in Malaysia, which found that these students also reported mild anxiety and depression levels during the pandemic, particularly those with pre-existing mental health issues. The research concluded that students with access to social support and who engaged in self-care practices demonstrated greater resilience against the adverse effects of the pandemic on their mental well-being (Alam and Parvin, 2021). Research shows that mental health plays a big role in how motivated students are to achieve academically, which in turn impacts their performance. As a result, when mental health worsens, it can reduce motivation, leading to procrastination and less engagement with studies. Furthermore, addressing mental health concerns has the potential to enhance students' motivation and engagement in their studies, thereby improving their academic performance. The school setting presents genuine challenges that can influence students' emotional well-being and cognitive abilities. Transitioning to university often entails confronting more rigorous academic demands and social pressures, which may prove overwhelming; particularly for individuals grappling with pre-existing mental health conditions (Ayaz et al., 2020). Despite of certain research underscores a positive correlation between mental well-being and academic achievement; other studies suggest that this relationship may be nuanced or even adverse. It has been stated that factors such as lifestyle habits, physical activity levels, and sleep quality significantly contribute to both mental health and scholastic outcomes.

Stress and coping theory

In the theory of stress and coping, people experience stress when they perceive a situation as either tough or dangerous. It indicates that there are two ways people try to handle this stress: by managing the problem or by managing their emotions. This theory points out that people deal with stress mainly by thinking and feeling. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest that we feel tension when we identify a task as too difficult for us to cope with. Due to COVID-19, many people are dealing with more stress caused by isolation, unpredictable finances and worries about their health. They try to manage stress by using various coping strategies. According to the stress and coping theory, people generally use problem-focused coping or emotion-focused coping. When using this type of coping, people respond by seeking information on COVID-19 and following rules from health officials or working or studying from home. In comparison, emotion-focused coping deals with the emotions linked to stress by inviting others' help, using relaxation methods or seeing the situation in a positive light. These methods will be effective depending on the individual stresses involved and the resources and talents each person possesses (Leary, 2007). The last suggestion is that addressing the causes of stress will often be important for things that individuals can manage, whereas coping with feelings may be more helpful for problems that are beyond an individual's reach. As a result, this study was performed to explore the signs of depression, anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) among Malaysian private university students

during post COVID-19 pandemic. It is necessary to find out who is coping with these issues, as this helps the private universities prevent the students 'condition from getting worse and choosing the best support for talent development.

Hypothesis development

More recent research has uncovered the intricate connection between depression and overall well-being, suggesting that depressive symptoms may coexist with resilient psychological traits. According to Arslan et al. (2025), depression can be managed by experiencing hope and life satisfaction, suggesting that individuals may maintain their well-being even when emotionally troubled. Conversely, psychological flexibility was also emphasized during the COVID-19 epidemic by Cuijpers et al. (2025), who demonstrated that depression can indirectly enhance well-being through stress or adaptive coping strategies. The evidence supports the notion that mental illness can have a significant impact on overall health under certain psychological circumstances.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between depression and overall wellbeing

Recent research has shed light on an intriguing perspective: anxiety, which is usually seen as a negative emotional state, can actually have a beneficial role in one's overall well-being, particularly when individuals employ stress coping strategies. For instance, a study conducted by Öztekin et al. (2025) discovered that moderate levels of anxiety among university students in the post-pandemic era were associated with greater tendencies to seek help and engage in self-regulation. This, in turn, contributed to improved psychological health. In a similar vein, Wąsowicz et al. (2021) highlighted that psychological flexibility during the pandemic enabled people to navigate their anxiety more effectively and maintain emotional equilibrium. These studies bolster the notion that, in the wake of COVID-19, anxiety might serve as a catalyst for resilience and personal development, thereby strengthening its positive connection with overall well-being.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between anxiety and overall wellbeing

Recent research sheds lighter regarding the interaction between obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and global well-being, especially in specific situations. For example, Mısırlı and Kaynak's (2023) research found that relationship OCD symptoms significantly correlated with problems encountered in emotion regulation, which therefore had a negative effect on psychological well-being. But their study also indicated that, for some with OCD, they do adapt at least emotionally, such that in some contexts, OCD symptoms would be indirectly related to domains of well-being. Parkin et al. (2022) also found obsessional desires and hoarding behaviors more robustly negatively related to impaired well-being compared to compulsions in treatment patients on clozapine. These results indicate that although OCD in general is related to lesser well-being, specific patterns of symptoms and coping skills can mediate this relationship, revealing in what contexts specific individuals may possess a positive association.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between obsessive - compulsive disorder and overall wellbeing

Conceptual framework

Depression, anxiety and OCD often influence how well students at private universities feel emotionally, do at school and interact with their peers. Due to these mental health issues, students encounter challenges in schoolwork and self-development. Well-being at private universities is promoted by offering counseling, involving peers and running mental health programs which help students become stronger and cope well with different situations. While sustainable talent development is not a central point here, thus students with greater mental well-being tend to keep up with and develop their skills, aim for suitable careers and add value to the world (Yulia et al., 2021). Notably, weak mental health holds them back from getting involved in important leadership posts, from learning new skills and from advancing in their jobs. A major focus on mental health services at universities can benefit students and help create a setting that supports the development and preservation of their skills for future growth. During the COVID-19 pandemic, students who felt lonely and alone were more likely to experience depression. The researchers found that isolation from the virus, increased anxiety and fear of getting the infection could increase the chance of experiencing depressive symptoms. Having one or more family members with a chronic illness increases the chances of facing depressive symptoms. According to additional research, during the COVID-19 pandemic, students dealt with losing academic ground (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021).

The increased levels of student depression were largely caused by a drop in student satisfaction. Another reason for the increase in depressive symptoms was the feeling among students that there is too much work at school. Those taking part in the studies stated that there were too many online activities to keep up with. Lack of motivation in students may result in their missing classes, exams or assignments which lowers their marks. Fawaz et al. (2021) noted that a fast change to online classes caused student workload to increase which was also linked to developing depression symptoms. Everyone has felt anxiety, a concern and an uneasy sensation. Still, severe, chronic and repeated anxiety can result in an anxiety disorder, causing symptoms like trembling, abrupt breathing, headaches, trouble thinking, being irritable and sometimes suffering from a heart attack (Taly and Paramasivam, 2020). Hamaideh et al. (2022) state that students also experience anxiety connected to how their grades may not always remain the same and the struggles of graduation. Frequently, students feel anxious because of their tasks at school, but Covid-19-related worries and fears may have made their mental health problems even worse. OCD involves unwelcome and stressful thoughts that make a person anxious, leading them to engage in the same actions repeatedly. Still, these urges and habits are closely linked and have specific causes and they may even help solve the problem in the short term, so there is a serious danger if they go unnoticed (Wang et al., 2020). Since OCD is most likely to develop and reach its highest point in late adolescence, students in dental school, including university students, are a main focus for the research. Due to the strict cleanliness rules needed during the pandemic, dental students have become more prone to OCD. This may result in some dental students showing OCD symptoms while undergoing training which can slow their development as clinicians and simultaneously increase their emotional stress, leading to depression and anxiety. According to previous studies, COVID-19 has

affected students with OCD negatively which might reduce their school performance (*Figure 1*).

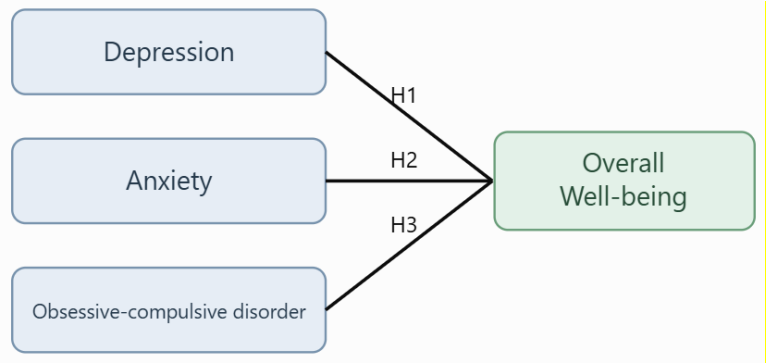


Figure 1. *Mental health and overall well being among private university students in a Malaysian case study.*
Source: Zarowski et al. (2024); Wong et al. (2023).

Materials and Methods

This study used a quantitative analysis by using a survey. Data collection for this research was through an online survey with students enrolled at selected private university in Malaysia. The survey was opened online from December 2024 to March 2025 to students who attended an institution of higher learning that is classified as a private university. Prior to circulating the questionnaire, researchers had to first establish the population frame as a means to determine our sample size. The population for the study was students in their early years of study between first to third years in private university. Stratified sampling was used and divided students into strata based on the six faculties. Each stratum will be randomly sampled which will ensure that all faculties are represented. Effectively, researchers can have a much better understanding of the trends affecting different types of fields and faculties, by including students from all faculties. The researchers generated the research questionnaire in 3 sections with the first section collecting the profile of the respondent/participant, the second section made up of series of items adopted from the University Personality Inventory, whereas the third section adopted items from Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, K10. Respondent profiles provide descriptions of academic year, age, gender, nationality, education, family members, current living, and hours of sleep.

The second component, UPI, accounts for the extent to which the respondents felt occasionally or experienced in the past year, etc. Part 3 accounts for self-report measurements focusing on depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). The research made use of a Google Form link for data collection to reach out to almost160 respondents and as a result, with 160 valid responses collected, the response rate is approximately 100%. The researchers are satisfied with 100% utilization of all target respondents, and it was done so effectively. The researchers effectively utilized distribution, as the Google Form was distributed to university programs, faculty groups, through direct messages, and even social media to get close to all of the target respondents. Therefore, this is an adequate and valid response rate for a cross-sectional study, as supported by Sekaran (2003). SPSS is used in the methodology section for statistical analyses which covers both descriptive statistics and methods for making

inferences from the study's data. Hence, the dataset is organized and some key statistics like mean, median, standard deviation and frequency are used for description. As a result, the researcher is able to see trends and characteristics in the data which helps to interpret the results. When we use inferential analysis, we go deeper than the current data set by applying methods like testing correlations, ANOVA tests, regression methods and conducting hypothesis tests. It allows researchers to study connections among different variables, forecast outcomes and judge how important their findings to the research.

Results and Discussion

Demographic profile

According to demographic data (*Table 1*) for Academic Years, second-year students constitute the biggest group at 60.6% of the student body. Among the participants, 1st-Year students were not far ahead of 3rd-Year students, who together make up 39.4% of the survey. It demonstrates that many students are focused on their academic studies. Most of the respondents in Age (50.0%) are from the 20-21 group. The smallest group surveyed was those aged 24-25 at only 1.3%, clearly suggesting that most participants are students. There is a total of 53.8% respondents consists women. Very few participants, just 0.6%, chose the option "Neither." The majority chose either "Male" or "Female," while a small percentage chose not to reveal their gender. Based on the results, everyone (100.0%) participating in the survey is a Malaysian national. It means the survey targeted only Malaysian students. A Diploma is the most popular level of education, with 63.1% of the respondents having this qualification. Meanwhile, only 3.8% of Foundations are present which is a much lower percentage. This shows that most of the people who took the survey have diplomas. The most common family size, with 64.4% of respondents, is 4-5 members. Out of all the participants, families with more than 5 Members make up less than 16% of the group. It means that most of the respondents have mid-sized families. More than half (55.0%) of the students stated that they live in a hostel near their campus which is the most common option. Only 0.6% of students responded "both," showing that the majority of students choose one option or the other. Furthermore, sleeping hours clearly show that the majority of people (66.3%) sleep for less than 7 hours overall. By contrast, those who sleep over 8 hours stand at 5.6%, meaning that students typically do not get much extra sleep.

Table 1. *Demographic profile of respondents (N=160).*

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Academic Years		
1st Year	33	20.6
2nd Year	97	60.6
3rd Year	30	18.8
Age		
18–19	57	35.6
20–21	80	50.0
22–23	21	13.1
24–25	2	1.3
Gender		
Male	71	44.4
Female	86	53.8
Neither	1	0.6
I do not want to answer	2	1.3
Faculty		
Centre of Pre-University Studies	1	0.6

Faculty of Accountancy and Finance and Business	73	45.6
Faculty of Built Environment	12	7.5
Faculty of Communication and Creative Industries	20	12.5
Faculty of Computing and Information Technology	44	27.5
Faculty of Engineering and Technology	10	6.3
Nationality		
Malaysian	160	100.0
Education		
Bachelor's Degree	53	33.1
Diploma	101	63.1
Foundation	6	3.8
Family Members		
2–3 Members	32	20.0
4–5 Members	103	64.4
More than 5 Members	25	15.6
Current Living		
Living with my family	71	44.4
Living in a hostel near campus	88	55.0
Both	1	0.6
Sleeping Hours		
Less than 7 hours	106	66.3
7–8 hours	45	28.1
More than 8 hours	9	5.6

Descriptive statistics

The distribution of the data (*Table 2*) on the DP, AX, OCD, and OWB was analyzed with parametric statistics. Thus, the data from a sample of 160 cases to determine the properties. All the scales ranged from 1.00 to 5.00, namely, the very same lower and higher boundaries. DP, AX, and OCD have approximately similar means of 2.6 as well as SDs around 1.6, denoting that the central tendencies and spreads are similar across the scales. The data on these variables seem to be close to normal. Skewness ranges from -0.5 and +0.5, these values are typical for platykurtic distributions experienced by all three. However, negative kurtosis is strongly significant in all three cases, demonstrating a platykurtic distribution with fewer tails. The OWB stands unique from others, with a mean of a 2.1135 and an SD of 1.29280. The result of the positive skewness (0.726) for OWB is noteworthy, although it lies slightly higher than 0.5 but less than 1.0, meaning moderate positively skewed data skewness (Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, the reason that his distribution of kurtosis is significantly negative is trying to force a mild push. Therefore, on the whole, DP, AX, and OBS share a similar distribution, spat-skewed, and negatively kurtic, while OWB has a low average, less squared kurtic, and a noticeable positive skew.

***Table 2**. Descriptive data.*

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness Statistic	Kurtosis Statistic
DP	2.615	1.60354	0.193	-1.683
AX	2.6675	1.60532	0.067	-1.818
OCD	2.6138	1.59561	0.155	-1.735
OWB	2.1135	1.2928	0.726	-0.842

Reliability analysis

The "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted" column (*Table 3*) provides a valuable perspective on the contribution of each individual item to the overall reliability of the scale. The highest value recorded is .979 for OWB, implying that if OWB was the sole item remaining, or if the scale comprised items with this level of uniformity, it would reflect an extraordinarily high degree of internal consistency, approaching near-perfect reliability (Kline, 2013). On the contrary, the lower bound for the Cronbach's Alpha

with an item excluded for AX is .899.Although this value is lower than that of OWB, an alpha coefficient of .899 nonetheless signifies exceptional internal consistency, significantly exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of .70 for satisfactory reliability in scholarly research (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). This indicates that all items, when appraised individually regarding their potential impact, contribute to a thoroughly reliable overall scale.

Table 3*. Cronbach Alpha.*

Item	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
DP	7.3948	17.4	0.913	0.914
AX	7.3423	16.945	0.958	0.899
OCD	7.396	17.225	0.937	0.906
OWB	7.8963	22.156	0.686	0.979

Multiple regression model fit

An R value of 0.722 signifies a pronounced positive correlation between the independent variables (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Depression, Anxiety) and the dependent variable. Based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines for effect sizes, an R value equal to or exceeding 0.5 is classified as a "large" effect, indicative of a significant relationship. Consequently, an R of 0.722 denotes a very strong correlation, transcending a mere moderate connection and entering the realm of a robust association, a classification often regarded as quite compelling within social science disciplines (Field, 2018). An R^2 value of 0.521 indicates that the model accounts for 52.1% of the variance in the dependent variable. This reflects a moderate to commendable level of explanatory power, implying that the selected predictors (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Depression, Anxiety) are fairly effective at forecasting the outcome. In numerous social science investigations, an R^2 of 0.521 is typically deemed satisfactory, even considerable (Hair et al., 2010), since values ranging from 0.4 to 0.6 are generally observed as indicative of sound explanatory capacity. This degree of explained variance suggests that the model holds practical utility in comprehending and forecasting the dependent variable, leaving less than half of the variance unexplained by the incorporated independent variables.

Hypothesis result

Based on the "Coefficients" *Table 4* provided, we will focus on analyzing the meaningful predictors and their corresponding t-values. For Depression (DP), the p-value is 0.011, which is below the typical significance threshold of 0.05. This signifies that DP is a statistically significant predictor of the dependent variable. The associated t-value of -2.571 indicates that the unique influence of depression on the dependent variable is distinguishably different from zero (Field, 2018). The negative sign of the t-value corresponds with the negative unstandardized coefficient (B = -0.368), which points to an inverse relationship: as depression increases, the dependent variable tends to decrease. Anxiety (AX), on the other hand, emerges as a highly significant predictor, with a p-value of less than 0.001. This strong statistical significance enables us to confidently assert that anxiety has a noteworthy effect on the dependent variable. The large positive t-value of 4.230 further underscores the strength and reliability of this relationship (Hair et al., 2010). The positive t-value and unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.719) suggest a direct relationship: as anxiety increases, the dependent variable tends to

increase. Conversely, OCD's p-value of 0.155 exceeds the threshold of 0.05, making it statistically non-significant in this model. Its corresponding t-value of 1.430 is not sufficiently large to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that OCD's unique contribution in explaining the variance in the dependent variable is not statistically significant (Pallant, 2020).

Table 4. *Coefficient result.*

Item	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.609	0.14		4.359	<.001
DP	-0.368	0.143	-0.457	-2.571	0.011
AX	0.719	0.17	0.893	4.23	<.001
OCD	0.21	0.147	0.259	1.43	0.155

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, this research highlights how mental health factors impact overall well-being and, consequently, the sustainable growth of talent in private universities. The positive link between depression and anxiety with overall well-being presents an intriguing yet significant dynamic, suggesting that recognizing and managing these psychological issues may trigger adaptive strategies that enhance resilience. This aligns with the Stress and Coping Theory. On the other hand, the lack of a significant link between obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and well-being indicates that not all mental health conditions equally contribute to coping mechanisms or developmental outcomes in academic settings. Theoretically, these findings refine the Stress and Coping framework by emphasizing specific pathways through which mental health affects well-being. Practically, they highlight the importance for institutions to create nuanced and responsive mental health support systems, particularly targeting depression and anxiety, to foster a more resilient, engaged, and sustainably developed student community.

Conclusion

In light of the post-COVID-19 pandemic milieu, the mental health and sustainable talent development of Malaysian university students have garnered considerable attention. The salient findings derived from the regression analysis are pivotal for formulating targeted interventions. The model elucidates a substantial fraction of the variance in overall well-being, underscoring that the examined mental health parameters are consequential. Notably, depression (DP) is identified as having a markedly detrimental impact on overall well-being. This observation concurs with global patterns revealing exacerbated mental health issues post-pandemic. Interestingly, and rather paradoxically, anxiety (AX) was found to exert a significant positive influence on overall well-being in this context. Although this result is counter-intuitive and necessitates further inquiry into its complexities within the Malaysian university student setting, perhaps anxiety is manifesting as a proactive coping mechanism and its important cannot be dismissed. Meanwhile, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) failed to demonstrate a noteworthy relationship. In light of these insights, it is imperative that Malaysian universities embark on establishing comprehensive and multifarious mental health support frameworks, with a central emphasis on mitigating depression among the student body. This entails instituting proactive and systematic mental health screening initiatives to proficiently identify students predisposed to depression at an embryonic stage, ensuring expeditious intervention.

Moreover, it is essential to provide easily accessible, culturally attuned counseling and psychological support services, facilitated by adept professionals. These provisions should ideally encompass individualized therapy, collective support sessions, and pedagogical workshops on strategies for coping with depression, tailored to address the distinctive stressors encountered by university students in the post-pandemic era. Additionally, considering the significant, albeit counter-intuitive, positive correlation with anxiety, further comprehensive qualitative and mixed-methods research is imperative to elucidate the specific nature of this association within the post-pandemic Malaysian private university student context. This could entail investigating adaptive coping mechanisms linked to anxiety or cultural interpretations of "anxiety" that may diverge from Western constructs. Such inquiries would pave the way for a more nuanced comprehension of how anxiety might be harnessed or managed to positively contribute to student development and overall well-being, as opposed to being perceived solely as a detrimental factor. By proactively and strategically engaging with these pivotal mental health dimensions, universities can foster a more supportive, resilient, and thriving milieu, thereby promoting the sustainable talent development of their students for the future Malaysian workforce.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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