

# Subjective Well-Being Index for Person with Visual Impairment across Five Regions in Malaysia

Nur Fatihah Abdullah Bandar\*<sup>1</sup>, Zaiton Hassan<sup>1</sup>, Rekaya Vincent Balang<sup>1</sup>, Ahmad Shamsuri Muhamad<sup>3</sup>, Nor Wahiza Abdul Wahat<sup>2</sup>, Nurfitri Nadzirah Sarkawi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia, <sup>2</sup>Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400, Selangor, Malaysia, <sup>3</sup>Faculty of Education, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Corresponding Author Email: abnfatihah@unimas.my

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## Abstract

This study creates a Subjective Well-Being (SWB) Index specifically for person with visual impairments (PVI) in Malaysia, a group that has not been studied much in terms of well-being. While SWB encompasses life satisfaction, emotional responses, and psychological well-being, existing research has primarily focused on the general population, with limited measures specifically for PVI. This study fills that gap by evaluating SWB across eight key domains (independence, social relationships, psychological health, physical health, environment, religiosity, self-belief, and culture) based on survey data from 145 visually impaired individuals across five Malaysian regions (Northern, Southern, Eastern, Central, and Borneo). The results show that religiosity ( $M = 9.27, SD = 1.12$ ) and self-belief ( $M = 7.83, SD = 1.47$ ) are the most highly rated areas, while culture ( $M = 6.04, SD = 1.98$ ) and environment ( $M = 6.32, SD = 1.87$ ) are the least highly rated. The Southern region had the highest overall SWB, which could mean that local policies or community support systems are helping people feel better. The findings emphasise the need for targeted interventions to improve cultural inclusion and environmental accessibility for PVI in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Subjective Well-Being, Visual Impairment, Quality of Life, SWB Index, Malaysia, Demographic Factors

## Introduction

Subjective Well-Being (SWB) is a critical psychological construct that reflects individuals' overall assessment of their quality of life, incorporating life satisfaction, emotional experiences, and psychological functioning (Diener, 2000). Over the past few decades,

extensive research has examined the factors influencing SWB, including socioeconomic status, health, employment, and social relationships (Diener et al., 2018; Helliwell et al., 2020). However, there remains a significant research gap in understanding SWB among individuals with disabilities particularly individuals with visual impairment (PVI).

Visual impairment is one of the most prevalent disabilities worldwide, affecting approximately 43 million people (World Health Organization, 2019). Ministry of Health Malaysia and institute-based eye health data indicate that the prevalence of blindness in Malaysia among adults aged 50 years and above was approximately 1.2% in the 2014 National Eye Survey, with a substantial burden of visual impairment driven by treatable causes such as cataract and diabetic retinopathy (Ophthalmology Service & Institute for Public Health, Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2014). Recent regional assessments continue to demonstrate persistent patterns of visual impairment among older adults, underscoring the need for enhanced early detection and intervention services to address age-related eye diseases (Salowi et al., 2024).

Studies have shown that PVI experience reduced independence, lower life satisfaction, and a higher prevalence of depression and anxiety compared to the general population (Brunes et al., 2019; Choi et al., 2018). Furthermore, accessibility issues, social stigma, and environmental barriers exacerbate disparities in quality of life and well-being for PVI (Golledge, 2019).

Despite growing recognition of quality of life issues among PVI, Malaysia lacks a standardised SWB measure that captures the population's unique challenges and experiences. Existing SWB measures, such as the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) and the World Happiness Index (Helliwell et al., 2020) are primarily designed for the general population and may not fully capture disability specific well-being factors such as independence, self-belief, and accessibility-related stressors (Verdugo et al., 2012).

This study seeks to bridge this gap by developing a Subjective Well-Being Index (SWB Index) specifically for visually impaired individuals in Malaysia. The study assesses eight well-being domains:

1. Independence
  - The ability to perform daily activities without excessive reliance on others.
2. Social Relationships
  - The strength and quality of personal and community connections.
3. Psychological Health
  - Emotional resilience, stress levels, and coping mechanisms.
4. Physical Health
  - Perceived overall physical well-being.
5. Environment
  - Accessibility and physical surroundings affecting daily life.
6. Religiosity
  - The role of faith, spirituality, and religious practices in well-being.
7. Self-Belief
  - Self-confidence and perceived ability to overcome challenges.
8. Culture