

HARMONI: A Personality-Based Interpersonal Communication Psychoeducation Model to Strengthen Social Well-Being in Malaysia's Plural Society

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ABSTRAK

Masyarakat Malaysia yang bersifat plural dengan keberagaman etnis, agama, budaya, dan bahasa menghadapi tantangan dalam membangun komunikasi interpersonal yang efektif antar kelompok. Perbedaan karakteristik kepribadian turut memengaruhi pola komunikasi, sehingga dapat berdampak pada kualitas hubungan sosial dan tingkat social well-being masyarakat. HARMONI adalah nama dari program psikoedukasi. Pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk penerapan psikoedukasi komunikasi interpersonal berbasis kepribadian dalam meningkatkan social well-being pada masyarakat plural Malaysia. Partisipan merupakan masyarakat dewasa yang berasal dari berbagai latar belakang etnis di Malaysia. Program psikoedukasi mencakup pengenalan karakteristik kepribadian, komunikasi interpersonal yang efektif, serta pemahaman mengenai social well-being. Temuan ini diharapkan memberikan kontribusi bagi pengembangan program intervensi psikologis berbasis komunitas dalam memperkuat keharmonisan sosial, toleransi, dan integrasi masyarakat multikultural di Malaysia.

ABSTRACT

Malaysia's plural society, characterized by considerable ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity, faces persistent challenges in establishing effective interpersonal communication across groups. Differences in personality characteristics further shape communication patterns, which in turn can affect the quality of social relationships and the level of social well-being within the community. HARMONI is the name of a psychoeducation program designed to address this challenge. This community service initiative aimed to implement personality-based interpersonal communication psychoeducation to enhance social well-being among Malaysia's plural society. Participants were adult community members from diverse ethnic backgrounds across Malaysia. The psychoeducation program covered an introduction to personality characteristics, effective interpersonal communication, and an understanding of social well-being. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of community-based psychological intervention programs that strengthen social harmony, tolerance, and integration within Malaysia's multicultural society.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is characterized by a plural society with substantial ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity. This diversity constitutes an important form of social capital for national development, yet it also presents challenges in building harmonious social relationships. Interaction between groups with differing cultural backgrounds and values requires effective interpersonal communication skills to minimize misunderstanding, prejudice, and social conflict. Interpersonal communication is therefore a key factor in realizing an inclusive and prosperous society (Harun, N. 2026).

Interpersonal communication is the process of exchanging information, feelings, and meaning between two or more people, whether directly or indirectly. Sound interpersonal communication skills enable individuals to build relationships grounded in mutual trust, empathy, openness, and respect for difference. In a multicultural society such as Malaysia, these skills are increasingly vital, as each individual brings a distinct cultural background and personality profile that shapes how they think, interact, and resolve conflict (Syaroh Iwanda Lubis, 2025).

Personality is one of the factors that influences the effectiveness of interpersonal communication. Differences in personality characteristics lead individuals to adopt distinct communication styles, emotion-management strategies, and problem-solving approaches. Individuals who understand their own personality characteristics, as well as those of others, tend to be better able to adapt their communication patterns, allowing interpersonal relationships to develop more effectively. Accordingly, the development of interpersonal communication skills should take personality into account as a foundation for building effective social interaction (Irwansyah Rezeki, S. R. 2025).

The theoretical basis of this program draws on the Big Five Personality Model, one of the most widely accepted frameworks for explaining individual differences in personality (McCrae & Costa, 2008). The model comprises five core personality dimensions: Openness to Experience, reflecting curiosity and openness to new ideas; Conscientiousness, referring to self-discipline, responsibility, and goal-directed behavior; Extraversion, characterized by sociability, assertiveness, and positive emotion; Agreeableness, representing empathy, trust, cooperation, and concern for others; and Neuroticism, reflecting emotional instability, anxiety, and vulnerability to stress. These relatively stable personality traits shape how individuals perceive social situations, regulate emotion, and interact with others.

The Big Five Personality Model is highly relevant to interpersonal communication, as each personality dimension is associated with a distinctive pattern of communication and social behavior. Individuals high in Extraversion generally communicate with greater confidence and actively initiate social interaction, whereas individuals high in Agreeableness tend to display empathy, active listening, and cooperative conflict resolution. Individuals high in Conscientiousness typically communicate in a structured and responsible manner, while those high in Openness are more receptive to diverse perspectives and cultural differences. Conversely, high levels of Neuroticism can hinder effective communication owing to heightened emotional reactivity and sensitivity during interpersonal interaction. Integrating the Big Five Personality Model into the HARMONI psychoeducation program therefore enables participants to recognize their own communication tendencies, understand the communication styles of others, and develop adaptive interpersonal skills that foster social harmony and social well-being within Malaysia's plural society.

Psychoeducation is one form of intervention that can be used to enhance interpersonal communication skills, as it aims to improve individuals' knowledge, awareness, and skills in addressing psychological and social challenges. In a study of migrant communities, Safarina et al. (2024) found that psychoeducation on personality-type differences improved participants' interpersonal relationships and quality of life. These findings suggest that understanding personality characteristics can help individuals build more effective and adaptive communication in diverse social environments.

Improved interpersonal communication is expected to have a positive effect on social well-being. The concept of social well-being describes an individual's capacity to function optimally in social life through acceptance of others, a sense of belonging to society, social contribution, confidence in societal development, and understanding of the social environment. Individuals with high social well-being tend to have healthier social relationships, adapt more readily to diversity, and participate more actively in community life.

A study conducted by Altira, Safarina, and Musni (2025) found a significant positive relationship between social support and social well-being. Their results indicated that greater social support received by an individual corresponds with higher levels of social well-being. This finding suggests that the quality of social interaction is an important determinant of social well-being, such that strengthening interpersonal communication skills may serve as an effective strategy.

In addition, Safarina et al. (2023) noted that the psychological well-being of migrant communities is influenced by multiple factors, including social support, social networks, religiosity, emotion regulation, and personality characteristics. This finding underscores the important role personality plays in individuals' adaptation to new social environments. Accordingly, a psychoeducation approach that integrates interpersonal communication with an understanding of personality is well suited to application within plural societies.

Another study involving Safarina also found that interpersonal relationships positively influence school well-being among students. This finding further reinforces the evidence that the quality of interpersonal relationships is an important factor in enhancing various forms of well-being, both within educational settings and in social life more broadly. Effective interpersonal communication is therefore expected to contribute to improved social well-being within the community.

Although various studies have examined the relationships among interpersonal communication, personality, and well-being separately, research integrating personality-based interpersonal communication psychoeducation as an intervention to enhance social well-being within Malaysia's plural society remains very limited. Most prior studies have focused on university students, school students, or specific communities, leaving the effectiveness of such interventions within multicultural society insufficiently understood. This research gap provides an important basis for developing a psychoeducation model that not only strengthens interpersonal communication skills but also enhances social well-being within the context of Malaysia's plural society.

Based on the foregoing, this community service initiative aimed to analyze the effectiveness of personality-based interpersonal communication psychoeducation in enhancing social well-being within Malaysia's plural society. The outcomes of this initiative are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of social and cross-cultural psychology, while also

providing a foundation for designing community-based intervention programs that can strengthen tolerance, social cohesion, and harmony within multicultural society.

METHOD

This community service initiative employed a Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) approach, which emphasizes participants' active involvement in the learning and problem-solving process. This approach was selected because it enables participants not only to receive information but also to take part in identifying the interpersonal communication challenges they face and in formulating solutions based on their individual personality characteristics.

The initiative was conducted among a plural community in Malaysia comprising participants of diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. The target participants were adult community members actively engaged in community social life. Participants were selected on the basis of willingness to take part in the entire series of activities and a demonstrated need to improve interpersonal communication skills within a multicultural environment.

A total of 40 participants took part in this community service program, recruited through purposive sampling. Participants were adults aged 20-55 years representing the diversity of ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds in Malaysia. The demographic composition comprised 22 women (55%) and 18 men (45%). The sample size was determined based on the number of community members who met the inclusion criteria and voluntarily agreed to participate in the entire psychoeducation program.

The implementation method consisted of three stages: preparation, implementation, and mentoring. The preparation stage began with coordination with community partners to identify participants' needs through observation, discussion, and brief interviews concerning common interpersonal communication challenges encountered in daily life.

The implementation stage was carried out through psychoeducation activities employing interactive lectures, group discussions, case studies, and self-reflection. The material covered the concept of interpersonal communication, an introduction to personality characteristics through the Big Five Personality approach, the relationship between personality and communication style, empathic communication within multicultural society, conflict-resolution strategies, and the application of interpersonal communication to enhance social well-being.

The mentoring stage was conducted after the delivery of the material through small-group discussions facilitated by the community service team. During this stage, participants had the opportunity to reflect on their past communication experiences, identify the strengths and weaknesses of their respective communication styles, and receive feedback from both facilitators and fellow participants. This mentoring stage aimed to reinforce participants' understanding so that they could sustainably apply interpersonal communication skills in daily life.

Program success was assessed based on several indicators: (1) increased participant knowledge of personality-based interpersonal communication; (2) improved participant ability to apply effective, empathic, and adaptive communication; (3) increased understanding of the importance of respecting cultural diversity in social interaction; (4) increased active participant engagement throughout the psychoeducation process; and (5) improved participant perceptions of the dimensions of social well-being, namely social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social coherence, and social actualization.

This implementation method was expected to enhance participants' capacity to build effective interpersonal communication based on personality characteristics, thereby strengthening social relationships, increasing tolerance, and supporting the development of social well-being within Malaysia's plural society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This community service program was implemented through personality-based interpersonal communication psychoeducation activities involving community members of diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds in Malaysia. The activities were conducted participatively, combining the delivery of material with interactive discussion.

Throughout the psychoeducation activities, participants demonstrated high enthusiasm. Group discussions were highly active, as participants shared experiences regarding communication challenges encountered in daily life, within family, workplace, and multicultural community settings alike. Personality-based communication simulations helped participants understand that each individual thinks, expresses opinions, and responds to conflict differently, in accordance with their personality characteristics.

The improvement in participants' interpersonal communication skills can be explained through the Big Five Personality framework. During the psychoeducation sessions, participants were encouraged to recognize how their dominant personality traits shaped their respective communication styles. Individuals with higher levels of Extraversion became more confident in expressing their opinions, while those with higher Agreeableness demonstrated greater empathy and willingness to understand differing viewpoints. Participants with stronger Conscientiousness displayed more structured and responsible communication behavior, while those with high Openness became more receptive to cultural diversity. At the same time, participants who tended toward higher Neuroticism learned emotion-regulation strategies that helped them respond more constructively during interpersonal interaction. These findings indicate that heightened personality awareness enables individuals to adapt their communication behavior more effectively within a multicultural environment.

CONCLUSION

This community service program demonstrates that the HARMONI personality-based interpersonal communication psychoeducation model effectively improved participants' understanding of interpersonal communication, awareness of personality differences, and ability to communicate empathically within Malaysia's multicultural society. Participants also showed positive change across several dimensions of social well-being, particularly social acceptance, social integration, and willingness to cooperate with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. These findings suggest that integrating personality characteristics into interpersonal communication training can strengthen harmonious social relationships within a plural society.

Future community service programs should involve a larger and more diverse group of participants, employ a more rigorous evaluation design, and examine the sustainability of behavioral change over time. The HARMONI model has the potential to be adapted and applied to other multicultural communities to foster social cohesion and enhance community well-being.

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