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Research Paper

Mental Health and Covid-19: The Malaysian Students' Perspective

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Abstract

This study is a preliminary study of factors affecting the mental health of Malaysian students during the Covid19 pandemic. Mental health can be a major public health issue for students worldwide, with up to 20% of the population suffering from some form of mental illness. Malaysia accounts for about 30% of global suicides, and other mental disorders are much more common than in other countries. Many students said the lockdown made them emotionally distressed. Symptoms of stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression intensified after the COVID-19 crisis and confirmed that a lack of friendship could lead to depression, anxiety, and stress. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to supplement the existing literature by examining the psychological stress experienced by Malaysian university students during the Covid19 lockdown. This study focuses on the economic problem, quarantine, change in sleep patterns, the impact of social media, and fear and anxiety for personal and family as independent variables gauge them as the influencing factors for the University students' mental health in Malaysia. With a total of 200 respondents, the data was analysed through a cross-sectional convenience sampling using SPSS concluded that only change in sleep pattern and the fear and anxiety for personal and family health were significant factors in influencing students' mental health during Covid-19. This study is expected to help policymakers and practitioners design appropriate and effective "mental health care" to help reduce anxiety levels in affected students. The results will help understand how to provide appropriate intervention and counseling services to reduce the risk of psychological conditions in Malaysian students during and after the Covid19 pandemic. However, there were several limitations, including the inability to get an equal distribution of demographic profiles and a lack of commitment to participate in the research.

Keywords: *Mental health, Covid -19, University Students*

INTRODUCTION

The psychological responses of the populace during an infectious disease pandemic have a significant impact on the spread of the disease as well as the prevalence of emotional distress and social disorder both during and after the epidemic. The unique coronavirus (COVID-19) has spread to every corner of the globe after the viral pandemic in China in 2019, placing billions of people under strict lockdown and adversely harming their financial, physical, and emotional well-being (Atkins et al., 2021). The only practical defenses against the virus are vaccination, physical separation, home quarantine, isolation, lockdown, and banning large gatherings and celebrations (Johara et al., 2021). All Malaysian schools and higher education institutions ceased operations for nearly a year during the crisis in order to ensure minimum contact and the transmission of the contagious sickness. This study is a preliminary study of factors affecting the mental health of Malaysian students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's probable that certain communities are more vulnerable to the psychological effects of pandemics than others. Since they are in a critical developmental period, children and adolescents require special attention to protect and promote their mental health. This pandemic's history has seen unprecedented changes in recent world history. The drastic reorganisation of children's timetables is one of them. They stopped the school's teachings and sent the children's activities home. Classes have frequently been outlawed or taught via television or other distance learning methods (G. Wang et al., 2020).

Uncertain diagnosis, a severe shortage of testing and treatment resources, infection prevention for survey participants and medical professionals, the imposition of anonymous public

health regulations that violate human rights, and huge and growing financial losses. One of the most significant stressors causing widespread emotional stress and an elevated risk of mental illness is probably conflicting messages from authorities. As part of the epidemic response, health practitioners play a crucial role in addressing these emotional side effects.

Mental health can be a major public health issue for students worldwide, with up to 20% of the population suffering from some form of mental illness. Malaysia accounts for about 30% of global suicides, and other mental disorders are much more common than in other countries. Synchronous (real-time online learning and communication with students) and asynchronous components (recording lectures or semester papers advertised on the Internet) added complexity, especially for students with limited Internet access. Although welcomed by their families, many students said the lockdown made them more emotionally distressed. Symptoms of stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression in high school students intensified after the COVID-19 crisis confirmed that a lack of friendship can lead to depression, anxiety, and stress.

Aside from the stress of illness, large-scale domestic detention orders such as residence, quarantine, and quarantine are not uncommon for Americans and raise concerns about people's personal and collective response. Recent studies on the psychological effects of isolated individuals and healthcare providers have included a variety of stigmas associated with stress, depression, irritability, insomnia, anxiety, confusion, anger, frustration, boredom, and isolation. Revealed emotional effects. The rest of the quarantine will be canceled. Specific stressors included long-term imprisonment, inadequate care, medical and medication difficulties, and the resulting financial loss. In today's pandemic era, the majority of the people will remain confined permanently, and conflicting information from the government and public health authorities will almost surely make their anguish worse. A study conducted in SARS-affected communities in the early 2000s found that community members, affected individuals, and healthcare professionals reduced the risk of contracting with others and improved the health of community protection. There was an incentive to comply with the quarantine order in order to do so. Due to emotional stress, some violated their orders.

Malaysian students constantly face anxiety and stress before exams which are exemplified at specific times while studying. The variety of responsibilities at school and extracurricular activities such as assignments, practice, and ongoing assessments make it difficult to find balance. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to supplement the existing literature by examining the psychological stress experienced by Malaysian university students during the COVID-19lockdown. The findings of this research are also expected to help policymakers and practitioners design appropriate and effective "mental health care" to help reduce anxiety levels in affected students. Studying this factor will help understand how to provide appropriate intervention and counseling services to reduce the risk of psychological conditions in Malaysian students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Uncertain diagnosis, a severe shortage of testing and treatment resources, infection prevention for survey participants and medical professionals, the imposition of anonymous public health regulations that violate human rights, and huge and growing financial losses. One of the most significant stressors causing widespread emotional stress and an elevated risk of mental illness is probably conflicting messages from authorities.

Infectious diseases pose a global threat that requires coordinated response due to globalization, urbanization, and changes in the environment. The majority of industrialised nations, particularly those in Europe and North America, have effective real-time monitoring and medical systems in place to restrict the spread of infectious illnesses, but the state of public health in low-

income, high-risk nations is improving. More often than not, national resources must be added to by donor monies from outside in order to improve labs' resources. Accelerating the study and development of novel viruses that might become pandemic has been encouraged through international cooperation between governments, non-governmental organizations, and commercial businesses. Such collaboration is crucial for COVID-19, particularly for the creation and manufacture of vaccines. Following international efforts in the development of the COVID-19 vaccine, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), a worldwide collaboration founded in 2017, is effective in ensuring that vaccines are manufactured in adequate quantities following development and provide fair access. On worldwide collaboration, we are working. Now accessible in all nations, irrespective of solvency. In addition, sharing contact tracking solutions with other impacted nations will help them control epidemics more successfully. There are, however, significant data protection issues to take into account. In China, for example, the February production index fell by more than 54% compared to the previous month. In addition to their impact on productive economic activity, consumer spending habits have tended to change due to lower incomes and households and the fear and panic associated with epidemics. Tourism, hospitality, and transportation suffered significant losses due to reduced travel.

Aside from the stress of illness, large-scale domestic detention orders such as residence, quarantine, and quarantine are not uncommon for Americans and raise concerns about people's personal and collective response. Recent studies on the psychological effects of isolated individuals and healthcare providers have included a variety of stigmas associated with stress, depression, irritability, insomnia, anxiety, confusion, anger, frustration, boredom, and isolation. Revealed emotional effects. -The rest of the quarantine will be cancelled. Specific stressors included long-term imprisonment, inadequate care, medical and medication difficulties, and the resulting financial loss.

According to (Pan et al., 2021), mental health extends beyond just being free of sickness or instability and encompasses both a person's physical and psychological well-being. Numerous studies have found a link between depression and mental health (Kim et al., 2022). A study by (Xiong et al., 2020) found that exposure to frequent COVID-19 news and ongoing job anxiety seriously harm mental health and contribute to depression. The physical symptom and the perceived need for health-related information, according to a recent study by (C. Wang et al., 2021) on 4612 participants from participating 8 nations and three distinct continents, ignited depressive sentiments that had a serious impact on mental health.

Pandemics throughout the world have both immediate and long-term financial effects. As part of the attempt to stop the pandemic, a quarantine is established, medical facilities are erected, sick persons are quarantined, and contacts are recorded. These interventions need the availability of public health resources, manpower, and implementation expenses. Planning for consumables like pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, and personal protective equipment is just one aspect of this process; another is accounting for the expenditures the health system incurs in providing infected people with access to medical facilities. The pandemic also led to fewer tax revenues and increased expenditure, which strains the budget, especially in lower-middle-income nations that face more severe financial restrictions and have the potential for tax system improvement. When the market's cash flow is weak, and the economy's revenue growth is sluggish, economic concerns arise. Millions of workers have lost their jobs as industries have shut down (Shang et al., 2021).

According to (Hashim et al., 2021), quarantine is when a person is being trapped, loses control, and separated from their family. The act of isolating and limiting the mobility of anyone who may have come into contact with an infectious disease is known as quarantine. Quarantine is primarily used to stop the spread of infectious agents from persons who may be capable of incubating them. People are often isolated at home, although they may also be quarantined in

institutions located in the community (MOHFW, 2020). Although Venice, Italy, first used the term "quarantine" in relation to leprosy in 1127, the United Kingdom was the first country to use it scientifically in reaction to the Plague (Newman, 2012). In 2019, quarantine has most recently been widely used globally to combat the spread of the coronavirus infection (COVID-19).

Regarding movement restrictions, all secondary occupations, commercial enterprises, and services were closed; the entire population was restricted to their homes and could only leave to perform official duties, providing the necessary conditions again. Services, purchase, supply, or delivery of food or necessities, medical or medical service requests, or any other special purpose. All religious services, wedding receptions, sporting events, conferences, cinemas, and community gatherings were banned during the MCO. A Malaysian returning from abroad first self-quarantined at home and then made mandatory quarantine in a state-controlled quarantine station for 14 days. Upon arrival, you will be tested for COVID-19 and will be tested again on the 13th day of quarantine. If the second test is negative, quarantine will be lifted.

As a result of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, many people have changed their lifestyles. These modifications were mostly limited in terms of social interactions, creativity, opportunities, and positive relationships. Physical activity, mobility, and access to nutritious food were difficult. As a result, the temporal biological rhythms affected by light as well as other Zeitgebers, such as food, social interaction, and physical activity, were disrupted. As a result of many internal and external factors, a structured routine can help improve the length and quality of sleep. According to the Indian Journal of Psychiatry (2020), there is a change to a later bedtime and waking time, with a decrease in night-time sleep and an increase in daytime napping compared to the pre-lockdown period. Based on a survey of 1310 Italian adults, during the lockdown, people increased their use of digital media towards bedtime, and sleep timing varied significantly, with people going to bed and waking up later and reporting worse sleep quality (Cellini et al., 2020).

The majority of people never leave their homes. These restrictions are stressful in themselves, as people live for long periods of time in tight spaces with little or no close contact. They also experience a lack of new incentives, disruption of daily activities, especially women's increased parenting responsibilities, and shifting performance expectations for telecommuters. As COVID-19 spreads across the country, along with the constant fear of infection, there is also uncertainty about jobs, the economy, and the health and safety of loved ones. The epidemic is also referred to as the information epidemic because most people continue to access news about negative outcomes, primarily through electronic media, and consequently, increase viewing time. In short, isolation is home-bound during periods of extreme anxiety, and positive incentives are diminished. Stress is usually inversely related to sleep, but not always. The effect of stress on the quality, duration, and duration of sleep depends on the responsiveness of sleep. Consequently, home confinement through isolation increases the risk of sleep disturbances and stress-related insomnia.

Social media platforms are regarded as the most significant sources of information as well as false information (Gupta et al., 2020), making them both our greatest all y and greatest adversary. Social media allows for the quicker global dissemination of knowledge than the pandemic ferocity itself (Merchant & Lurie, 2020). Every healthcare system and provider can use the alternative it offers. To address urgent concerns connected to the SARS-COV2 outbreak with clarity and speed across time zones and geographic boundaries. (Fuentes & Peterson, 2021) mentioned that social media has influenced our daily lives in terms of beliefs and perceptions. It may alter how we see what we think and how the public health system responds for whatever reason. It is not unexpected that the huge quantity of information we receive via these platforms influences how we view and deal with the present COVID-19 epidemic, given that there are more than 3.8 billion social media users worldwide (Jurkowitz & Mitchell, 2020; Social Media Users DataReportal, 2020).

It is commonly accepted that social media can and should be utilised to effectively distribute public health information, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, because of its significance, extensive use, frequency, and general public accessibility. There is proof that during the COVID-19 epidemic, international leaders used social media, particularly Twitter, in an essential and effective manner. "Twitter can be a powerful tool for world leaders to quickly spread public health information to their citizens," said Rufai and Bunce. But they like "Twitter for health information" and "Tweets with official government sources." "Use common sense when using."

The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the increasing number of cases of fear, anxiety, stress, and depression. And this led to the risk of suicide (Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al., 2020). For some people, the 2019 coronavirus illness epidemic may be worrisome. The worry and anxiety brought on by the disease's potential spread can be quite severe. Dealing with stress effectively will strengthen the patient, the patient's family, and the community as a whole. The Covid-19 epidemic has raised worry levels among expectant women. Older relatives are first on the list of concerns for women, followed by their children and, finally, their unborn child. Despite the fact that patients are least concerned about their own health, over half of the women nonetheless experience substantial health anxiety. Government guidelines on social distancing have caused significant behavioural changes in patients, especially pregnant women (Corbett et al., 2020).

In technical literature, the connection between stress, anxiety, and depression has long been recognised. Scientifically verified theoretical theories link inner biological mechanisms that support the etiology of depression with socio-ecological stress. Stress is a predictor of depression in adolescents, according to longitudinal research. In very stressful conditions, anxiety and depression are known to be closely related. Additionally, recognised to be positively correlated, anxiety and sadness may both be utilised to predict one another.

RESEARCH METHOD

A cross-sectional study was conducted using a convenience sampling method to involved 200 University students' mental health in Malaysia. The collected data were analyzed using multivariate linear regression in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Multivariate linear regression analysis is a strategic tool for exploring the relationship between dependent and independent variables.
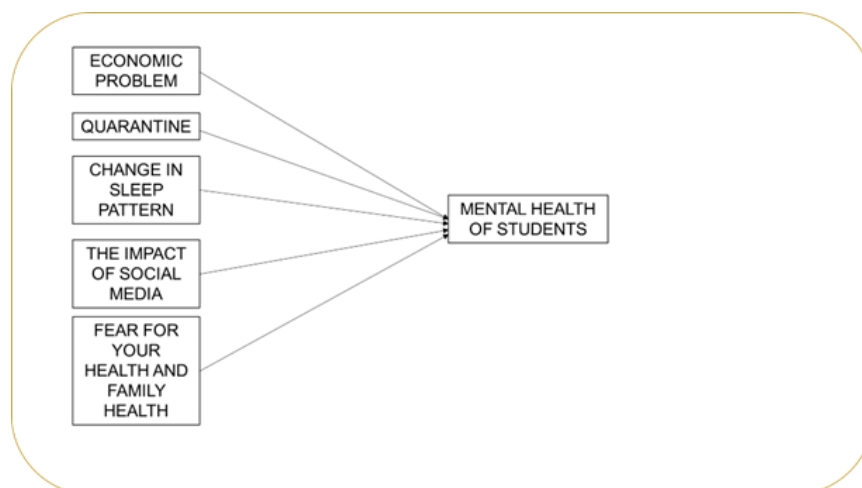

Figure 1. Research Framework

Figure 1 shows Research Framework developed for this study. The independent variables are economic problems, quarantine, change in sleep pattern, the impact of social media, and fear for your health and family's health. Meanwhile, the dependent variable is the mental health of students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
The demographic data acquired for this study, which comprised 200 students from higher education institutions, are summarised in Table 1. Tables 2, 3, and 4 present the reliability analysis results, coefficients, and a synopsis of the five hypotheses.

Table 1. Demographic Information

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	88	44.0
	Female	112	56.0
Age	18 - 20 years old	12	6.0
	21 - 25 years old	154	77.0
	26 - 39 years old	34	17.0
Race	Malay	94	47.0
	Chinese	58	29.0
	Indian	48	24.0
Type of University	Public	116	58.0
	Private	84	42.0
Level of Studies	Pre - University	8	4.0
	Diploma/Certificate	72	36.0
	Degree	114	57.0
	Postgraduate	6	3.0
Current Accommodation	Outside Campus	36	18.0
	In Campus	60	30.0
	Family Home	104	52.0

Reliability Analysis assesses the dependability of study variables by estimating significance using Cronbach's Alpha values. The values for dependent and independent variables are shown in Table 2. The variables in the preceding table range from 0.882 to 0.942. Overall, a Cronbach's Alpha score of more than 0.7 is considered acceptable, while a value greater than 0.8 is considered good. As a result, all variables in this study are acceptable because their Cronbach Alpha values are more than 0.7.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis

Styles	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Dependent Variable		
Mental Health	5	0.942
Independent Variables		
Economic Problem	5	0.919
Quarantine	4	0.889
Change In Sleep Pattern	5	0.913
The Impact of Social Media	5	0.892
Fear for your Health and Family Health	5	0.882

The independent variable that has the highest reliability among other variables is mental health which Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.942 with 5 items. The second highest reliability of the independent variables is the economic problem which Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.919 with 5 items. Another independent variable is a change in sleep pattern with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.913 with 5 items. Other two independent variables, which are the impact of social media and quarantine, Cronbach's values of these variables are 0.892 and 0.889 with 5 and 4 items, respectively. Fear and anxiety for your health and the health of your family have Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.882 with 5 items.

Table 3. Coefficients

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	**Std Error**	**Beta**		
Economic	0.078	0.157	0.054	0.497	0.620
Quarantine	0.181	0.163	0.113	1.105	0.270
Sleep Pattern	0.464	0.164	0.280	2.827	0.005
Social Media	-0.262	0.157	-0.144	-1.667	0.097
Fear	0.260	0.093	0.209	2.797	0.006

Table 3 shows the results of a multivariate linear regression analysis showing the link between dependent and independent variables. If the p-value (significance threshold) does not exceed 0.05, the hypothesis is supported. Five independent factors are investigated in this study, and two of them—changes in sleep patterns and anxiety about your own and your family's health—show significant results (p values of 0.005 and 0.006, respectively).

Table 4. Hypotheses Summary

Hypotheses	Description	P-Value	Result
H1	There is a significant effect of economic problems and mental health of students during the COVID-19 pandemic.	0.620	Not Supported
H2	There is a significant effect of the quarantine and the mental health of students during the COVID-19 pandemic.	0.270	Not Supported
H3	There is a significant effect of change in sleep patterns and mental health of students during the COVID-19 pandemic.	0.005	Supported
H4	There is a significant effect of impact of social media and the mental health of students during the COVID-19 pandemic.	0.097	Not Supported
H5	There are significant effects of fear for your health and family health and the mental health of students during the COVID-19 pandemic.	0.006	Supported

CONCLUSIONS

The study's findings emphasise the value of putting into practice various coping mechanisms that can protect students' mental health and keep them upbeat throughout a crisis. The pandemic will eventually end, but it may leave behind many people who are at greater risk of contracting a more serious infection. Therefore, practical measures are needed to enable people to readily accept and adapt to the "new normal" way of life.

The outcome of the research indicates that Change in Sleep Pattern(H3) and Fear for your Health and Family Health (H5) has a significant relationship with the mental health of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings from this research are highly beneficial and valuable for future researchers, private sectors, relevant authorities, and the government as they can create a pathway for further understanding and development of platforms for students with mental health issues. Furthermore, the findings show that people with a high level of awareness of COVID-19 strive to follow rigorous measures such as social isolation, self-quarantine, and so on, which increases their loneliness and despair. This understanding validates H5's concern for their own and their family's health. Authorities should also take steps to limit the circulation of false information on social media sites. The dissemination of trustworthy information regarding the virus should be screened on a regular basis. The findings also suggest that students' sleep quality may have

deteriorated significantly during the epidemic as a result of late-night social media surfing, talking, and monitoring online news via mobile devices, as well as increasing usage of screens for educational purposes.

Therefore, the research will not only bring extra advantages to the student, but it will also help the authority, government sector, and private organisation to execute a plan on how to reduce mental illness cases. This research can be a guide to them in developing a program or incentive for the affected student during the pandemic to help them to overcome their illness. In addition, the authorities can expedite the assistance needed by students involved in mental health cases, after taking into account the factors that affect the mental health of students during a pandemic. Furthermore, with the efforts of the relevant parties, cases involving mental health among students can be curbed and give new breath and hope to the students involved to continue living and education, and learning when the pandemic occurs.

Mental illness, which is the main factor of illness that occur during the pandemic nowadays, can be described as a sensation issue among Malaysian student while facing challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic phase. This factor that affected the mental health issue among Malaysian students during the COVID-19 pandemic are varied is very worrying. The government, authorities, parents, and educational institutions have to take it serious in this matter and need some improvement and exit plans to curb mental health illness among students in Malaysia before it becomes more prevalent and alarming.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

There are several limitations in this research. First and foremost, just 200 people were surveyed for this study. The sample size is insufficient to support the perceptions of university students about their mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results were unsatisfactory due to the limited sample size. Next, the constraint reduces to not being able to attain equal distribution in demographic profile. There is a significant difference in age and racial groups. Third, the study was conducted during the MCO period. Malaysia had implemented mobility controls in reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic, forcing individuals to stay at home, which had a direct impact on the authenticity and reliability of respondents' replies. Aside from that, the data was gathered via a Google form so this caused some unreliable responses. For example, respondents may believe that the survey is a waste of time and hence complete the poll without reading all of the remarks, and other respondents may be uninterested in the issue. These behaviours will have a direct impact on the data's accuracy.

Following the limitations of this study, there are a few recommendations for further research. In order to overcome the first limitation, future researchers should expand the sample size of respondents. This will ensure that the data is accurate and dependable. Researchers can distribute questionnaires more evenly depending on race or age group.

For the second limitation, the future researcher should add more independent variables such as in order to find out the variables that affect students' mental during the Covid-19 pandemic. Different independent variables that are investigated in a new study or research may yield fresh information.

Lastly, the third limitation is that, now that the world has begun to cohabit with the coronavirus, future researchers may choose to distribute the questionnaire in physical form. As a result, future researchers will be able to clarify concepts and statements face-to-face while collecting data. This is to ensure that respondents do not misunderstand the statement and pick an incorrect answer, affecting the data's accuracy.

There are a few recommendations for future research also after the limitation of this research. Firstly, the research can be more in providing questionnaires evenly depending on employment sector, number of family members, ethnic group, and household income level.

Besides, the researchers can concentrate on other independent variables, for example, social disadvantages, drug and alcohol misuse, trauma, discrimination, and social isolation. Different independent variables may result in different outcomes in performing new case studies or research, and this may provide new information on the effect affected mental illness among Malaysian students. In addition, this research barely focuses on the factor that affected mental health issues among Malaysian students during the COVID-19 pandemic in future studies or research on the working status of student parents and housewives and related to the student's mental illness.

In the mean time, re-checking the independent variable that is not relevant to the research may also be one of the guidelines for future research or study. Lastly, researchers can target more respondents to become more reliable and consistent data in future research or studies. However, future research proposals are to conduct long-term research or studies to target more respondents in the research or study, as researchers will have more time to collect their data and examine it more carefully. This can also be a way to prepare for any illness that may be a factor in mental health in the future.

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