

Chapter #9

THREATENING VIEW OF ILLNESS, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS, AND WELL-BEING AMONG MALAYSIANS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Chua Bee Seok¹, Ching Sin Siau², Low Wah Yun³, Mimi Fitriana⁴, & Jasmine Adela Mutang¹

¹*Faculty of Psychology and Education, University Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia*

²*Faculty of Health Sciences, Center for Community Health Studies, University Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia*

³*Asia Europe Institute, University Malaya, Malaysia*

⁴*Faculty of Arts and Science, School of Science and Psychology, International University of Malaya-Wales Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 Pandemic affects the well-being and psychological distress of Malaysian due to the perception of the COVID-19 as a health threat. This study aimed to examine the degree to which the COVID-19 is perceived as threatening or benign and the psychological distress among Malaysian during the pandemic and the predictive factors of Malaysian well-being. The Brief Illness Perception Questionnaire), the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21, and the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale were disseminated through an online survey – google form to the participants using a snowball sampling technique. The finding revealed that 36.5% of the participants reported COVID-19 pandemic had severely affected their life, the participants reported they were absolutely no personal control over the COVID-19 situation (>50%) and 90.5% reported they were not understanding the COVID-19 situation in Malaysia on the first phase of MCO. However, they were very concerned about the COVID-19 outbreak situation in Malaysia. More than 85% reported the pandemic extremely and moderately affected their emotion. They (46.8% of participants) perceived that the existing treatments were not helpful on the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also found that the participants (N=560) perceived significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress during MCO compared to before MCO.

Keywords: threatening view of illness, psychological distress, well-being, COVID-19 pandemic.

1. INTRODUCTION

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) China Country Office was informed of cases of pneumonia unknown aetiology (unknown cause) detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China, now known as Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). From 31st December 2019 through 3rd January 2020, a total of 44 case patients with pneumonia of unknown aetiology were reported to WHO by the national authorities in China. As of 20 January 2020, 282 confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV have been reported from four countries including China (278 cases), Thailand (2 cases), Japan (1 case) and the Republic of Korea (1 case). As of 27 March 2020, the total global number of COVID-19 cases has surpassed 500,000 (WHO, 2020). As reported on 15 April 2020, there are 210 Countries and Territories around the world that have a total of 2,015,569 confirmed cases of the coronavirus COVID-19 and a death toll of 127,635 deaths (Worldometer, 2020). One year and five months later, as reported on 13 September 2021, there have been 224,511,226

confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 4,627,540 deaths, reported to WHO. The global increasing rate of the COVID-19 cases was more than 11 thousand per cent and the COVID-19 deaths cases increased more than three thousand per cent.

2. BACKGROUND

On 16 March 2020, the Prime Minister of Malaysia announced the first phase of Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia due to the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating the closure of places of worship, work, and education. Families are encouraged to self-isolate and to “stay at home” to curb the spread of the virus (Jabatan Perdana Menteri, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic MCO has been drastic changes at the individual and family level in the lives of Malaysians. They are forced to adapt to various “new norms”, such as working from home for working adults, and a transition to learning online for those who are going to school and university (Chua et al., 2021). Apart from that, parents experience the difficulty of having to work and take care of children at the same time from the same sphere of their homes (Spinelli, Lionetti, Setti, & Fasolo, 2020). As the sequelae of the stress experienced in the family and spousal unit, studies have also indicated increased family conflicts and lower levels of quality in the relationship between spouses and family members (Luetke, Hensel, Herbenick, & Rosenberg, 2020; Pieh, O’ Rourke, Budimir, & Probst, 2020). This is a serious issue as the couple or spousal unit of the family constitutes the core of the family’s well-being and the children’s physical and psychosocial development (Härkönen, Bernardi, & Boertien, 2017).

During the pandemic, levels of anxiety, loneliness, and boredom could impact individual well-being. Based on a meta-analysis of 43 studies focusing on anxiety during COVID-19, an estimated 25% of the population has reported anxiety symptoms, and anxiety has increased threefold since the beginning of the pandemic (Pieh et al., 2020). A study in Ghana showed an increase in boredom and a corresponding decrease in well-being (Santabárbara et al., 2021). Interestingly, however, a longitudinal study in the UK indicated that the level of positive well-being had increased, and the level of loneliness did not change (Boateng et al. 2021). Low et al., (2020), found increased anxiety and depression and lower well-being among the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is still unclear which aspects of relationship quality have been affected by this pandemic and whether the relationship quality affects the well-being of the couple.

3. OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to examine the perceived psychological distress and relationship quality among couples before and during MCO in Malaysia and factors that affect participants' well-being.

4. METHODS

4.1. Participants

A total of 560 participants who were 18 years old and above, had married or cohabiting couples and citizens of Malaysia were involved in the current study. The sample was selected randomly using a convenience sampling method. A self-administered online survey questionnaire was distributed on WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Email, etc. to the

targeted couples. There were 246 (or 43.9%) males and 314 females who participated. Their age ranged from 21 to 67 years old (mean = 40.38, s.d = 11.43). In terms of current relationship status, most of the respondents were married (92%), there were 32 (5.7%) adults in a committed relationship and living together, 12 (2.1%) of them had engaged and living together with a partner. Their average year of married was 14.8 years (s.d = 10.71).

4.2. Instruments

The instrument used contained four parts: the demographic data consisted of age, gender, current relationship status, and duration of a relationship. Part 2, The Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) designed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). DASS consisted of 21 items, seven items for each subscale. The item response format was on a 4-point scale (0 = did not apply to me at all to 3 = applied to me very much or most of the time). The reliability for DASS-21 showed very good reliability in the current study. The Alpha Cronbach = .94 (data during MCO) and .92 (data before MCO) for depression scale, the Alpha Cronbach = .93 and .89 during and before MCO for anxiety scale and Alpha Cronbach = .93 (during MCO) and .89 (before MCO) for stress scale.

Part 3 was the brief illness perception questionnaire (IPQ-B) developed by Broadbent, Petrie, Main, and Weinman (2006). IPQ-B was an eight-item short version measure developed from the longer 80-item IPQ-R. It was used to measure cognitive perceptions of illness, such as consequences, timeline, personal control, treatment control, identity for describing the condition, coherence, concern, and emotions. The items were rated on an ordinal scale range from 0 to 10. In this study, only six relevant items were used. In previous studies, the psychometric properties of the IPQ-B have been examined in a wide variety of illnesses. Van Oort, Schröder, and French (2011) and French, Cooke, McLean, Williams, and Sutton (2007) have undergone intensive discussion about the content validity and construct validity of the IPQ-B. IPQ-B showed only a moderate level of reliability for the current study with a Cronbach's Alpha = .54. However, in this study, IPQ-B was analysed based on the individual item. The response on the items was then recategorized into three-level: low (score range from 0 to 3), moderate (score range from 4 to 7) and high (score range from 8 to 10).

Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), contained 14 items that measured positive aspects of mental health within two weeks (Tennant, Fishwick, Platt, Joseph, & Stewart-Brown, 2006). It covered both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = None of the time to 5 = All of the time, and a global score is obtained adding all the items. Higher scores indicating higher levels of mental well-being. WEMWBS showed very good reliability for the current study with a Cronbach's Alpha = .96.

4.3. Data analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using Program IBM SPSS Statistic version 25.0. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were used to report demographic information of participants, Pair Samples t-test was used to analyse the difference in perceiving psychological distress and relationship quality during and before COVID-19 pandemic MCO among couples in Malaysia. The multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of relationship quality on participants' well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Threatening view of COVID-19 pandemic

The data were collected in March 2020, on the first phase of Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Six questions that measured the degree to which the COVID-19 is perceived as threatening or benign have been asked to the participants. Table 1 showed the summary of Malaysians' perceptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The finding revealed that 36.5% of the participants reported COVID-19 pandemic had severely affected their life and 43.7 reported being moderately affected. More than 50% of the participants perceived they were absolutely no personal control over the COVID-19 situation (e.g., not getting infected or getting over it), 38.7% indicated moderate personal control and only 10.2% perceived they had an extreme amount of personal control over the pandemic. When the participants were asked how well they understand the COVID-19 situation, 90.5% reported they were not understanding the COVID-19 situation in Malaysia on the first phase of MCO.

Almost all the participants (90.2%) indicated they were very concerned about the COVID-19 outbreak situation in Malaysia. The pandemic was also affected their emotion (e.g., the situation makes them angry, scared, upset, and depressed). More than 85% reported the pandemic moderately and extremely affected their emotion. The responses to the question related to whether the existing treatments in Malaysia can help COVID-19 patients, 46.8% of the participants claimed that the existing treatments were not helpful and only 17.1% of the participants said the treatments were very helpful.

Table 1.
Brief Illness Perception of COVID-19 Pandemic.

Brief Illness Perception	Level of threatening	Frequency	Per cent (%)
How much has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your life?	Less affect my life	116	18.7
	Moderately affect my life	271	43.7
	Severely affect my life	226	36.5
How much control do you feel you have over the COVID-19 pandemic?	Absolutely no control	312	50.3
	Moderate control	240	38.7
	Extreme amount of control	63	10.2
How well do you feel you understand the COVID-19 situation?	Not understand	561	90.5
	Moderately understand	53	8.5
	Clearly understand	4	.6
How concerned are you about the COVID-19 pandemic?	Not concern	8	1.3
	Moderately concern	53	8.5
	Very concern	559	90.2
How much does the COVID-19 pandemic affect you emotionally?	Less affected emotionally	85	13.7
	Moderately affected emotionally	253	40.8
	Extremely affected emotionally	279	45.0
How much do you think existing treatments can help COVID-19 patients?	Not helpful	290	46.8
	Moderately helpful	220	35.5
	Very helpful	106	17.1

5.2. Psychological distress level before and during COVID-19 pandemic

Paired samples t-test was used to analyse perceive psychological distress and relationship quality among couples before and during MCO in Malaysia. The result revealed that the depression ($t = 11.33, p < .05$), anxiety ($t = 11.50, p < .05$), and stress ($t = 11.89, p < .05$) perceived by respondents different significantly before and during MCO in Malaysia due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We found that the couples perceived a significantly higher level of depression, anxiety, and stress during the COVID-19 pandemic MCO as compared to before MCO (refer to Table 2).

Table 2.
The Pair Samples t-test of the Psychological Distress among Couples Before and During COVID-19 Pandemic MCO in Malaysia.

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Depression During MCO	557	2.96	3.79	11.33	.001
Depression Before MCO	557	1.73	2.93		
Anxiety During MCO	557	3.34	3.75	11.50	.001
Anxiety Before MCO	557	2.11	3.05		
Stress During MCO	555	4.37	4.22	11.89	.001
Stress Before MCO	555	2.95	3.44		

5.3. The predictive factors of Malaysians' well-being during COVID-19 pandemic

The Multiple Regression analysis with model 'Enter' was used to analyse the effect of psychological distress factors and threatening view of COVID-19 Pandemic on Malaysians' well-being during the pandemic. The result indicated that the model of threatening view of COVID-19 explained a total of 3.6% of the total variance in well-being among the Malaysians ($F_{(1, 509)} = 18.88, p < .05$). The total of this threatening perception ($\text{Beta} = -.19, p < .05$) negatively affected the participants' well-being. While, the model that consisted of the six dimensions significantly explained only a total of 7.1% variance in well-being among the Malaysians ($F_{(6, 504)} = 6.42, p < .05$). The result further reported that only the dimension of understanding the COVID-19 situation was a significant predictor of the participants' well-being. This variable predicted their well-being negatively during the pandemic, which explained that the participants who were not understanding the COVID-19 pandemic situation tended to have lower well-being, or were in reverse (refer to Table 3).

Table 3.
Multiple Regression Analysis on the Effect of the Dimension of Illness Perception on Well-Being among Malaysians During COVID-19 Pandemic.

Predictor	Beta	t	Sig. t
Consequences on life	-.04	-.75	.45
Concern about pandemic	.05	1.10	.27
Emotional representation	-.09	-1.76	.08
Personal control	-.09	-1.92	.06
Treatment control	-.10	-1.93	.06
Understanding situation	-.13	-2.60	.01
R ²	.071		
F	6.42		
Sig. F	.001		

The analysis of the psychological distress on well-being showed that the model explained a total of 14.2% of the total variance in well-being among the participants. The results reported that the depression (Beta = -.16) and stress (Beta = -.20) predicted significantly and negatively participants' well-being during pandemic ($F_{(3, 511)} = , p < .05$). The result explained that during the pandemic, those who perceived high depression and stress tended to have lower well-being, or the reverse (refer to Table 4).

Table 4.
Multiple Regression Analysis on The Effect of Psychological Distress on Well-Being among Malaysians During COVID-19 Pandemic.

Predictor	Beta	t	Sig. t
Depression During MCO	-.16	-2.20	.028
Anxiety During MCO	-.05	-.56	.579
Stress During MCO	-.20	-2.42	.016
R ²	.142		
F	28.28		
Sig. F	.001		

6. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The Finding of this study has significance in informing public health interventions for mental health. First of all, amidst worsening well-being and psychological distress, there is a need for interventions that target every individual. This is because during the movement control order during the pandemic, the individual may spend a longer time with each other within the same living quarters. The interventions may teach the individual to understand and support one another's mental well-being through this crisis in the long run. Family interventions may be especially relevant in Malaysia as the influence of collectivistic culture, religion, and the government emphasis on the family unit may enable these interventions to be culture-appropriate and widely accepted (Sumari, Baharudin, Khalid, Ibrahim, & Ahmed Tharbe, 2020).

7. CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION

In this study, we found that the Malaysians reported a higher level of depression, anxiety, and stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia as compared to before pandemic. We also found that depression and stress contributed to decreasing participants' well-being. However, these variables only explained 14.2% of the variance in the participants' well-being. This finding also indicated that the decrease in well-being could be due to other variables that do not measure in this study. Part of the finding of this study was consistent with Xiong et al. (2020) findings that indicated a high level of depression, anxiety and stress in the general population in China, Spain, Italy, Iran, the US, Turkey, Nepal, and Denmark during the COVID-19 pandemic. A systematic review by Krishnamoorthy and colleagues (2020) revealed that more than half of the general population were adversely affected psychologically during the COVID-19 pandemic (Krishnamoorthy, Nagarajan, Saya, & Menon, 2020). Günther-Bel and colleagues (2020) found that participants suffered from higher levels of psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that the participants especially those with children

reported higher levels of psychological distress during the lockdown in Spain, thus contributing to lower levels of well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created uncertainty to the public globally and posed a significant impact and challenge to the economy, health systems and society (Walker et al., 2020) especially when there were no vaccines or cures were available at the early stage of the pandemic in 2020. Confidence in the healthcare system is crucial during the unprecedented pandemic. A study was done by Fai et al. (2020) to assess how confidence in health care systems affects mobility and compliance during the COVID-19 pandemic across 38 European countries and 621 regions. The findings revealed that regions with low levels of healthcare confidence exhibit compliance behaviour concerning minimizing social contact by staying at home. The rising number of cases globally has impacted the health systems all over the world including Malaysia. Malaysia has taken a drastic measure by imposing the first MCO in March 2020 when an increasing number of positive cases were recorded to prevent the spreading of new infections (Bunyan, 2020). The limited understanding of the COVID-19 virus during the early stage when it was first discovered has created more uncertainty for the public. Therefore, it is understandable that almost half of the participants in this study feel lack of confidence that the existing treatments did not help treat COVID-19 especially when the knowledge about the pandemic and the suitable treatment is partial, unavailable specific vaccine and the nation has never faced a pandemic such as COVID-19 before

This study also suggested that participants who lack understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic situation tended to have lower mental well-being. The overwhelming information from social media or other resources has caused an 'infodemic' and consequently affected the public mental health as much of the information or news are not necessarily true (Zarocostas, 2020). Conspiracy theories, unreliable information and fake news circulated played a role in affecting the mental health of the population which may cause psychological distress such as anxiety, depression and stress due to the influence of what they read and see from unreliable sources (Pedrosa et al., 2020). A study was done by Wang et al. (2019) in China reported that accurate health-related to COVID-19 information and carrying out precautionary measures such as hand washing/sanitizing, wearing masks and social distancing are associated with the lower level of psychological well-being.

There are a few limitations to this study. First of all, as a cross-sectional survey, we are not able to infer causality in the association between the variables. Secondly, as this is an online survey, we were only able to reach the population segment that has access to the internet. Finally, this study employed a series of a questionnaire from a larger study with more measures, which may give rise to response fatigue. As a result, some participants may not have completed the survey. Future studies should focus on a smaller number of questions to be surveyed to an online population. In terms of community interventions, there is a need for further research to explore community-based interventions which focus on the couple sub-system, taking into account its risk and protective factors in the new normal. A longitudinal study design would be better able to track the changes in the participants' psychological distress, relationship quality and well-being concerning the development of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysians are facing increased stress. Thus, this study aimed to examine the perceived psychological distress and threatening view of the pandemic among Malaysians during the pandemic. As expected, the participants perceived significantly higher levels of psychological distress during the pandemic compared to before. In terms of threatening views of the pandemic, the participants who were not understanding the COVID-19 pandemic situation tended to have lower well-being. We also

found that depression and stress influenced participants' well-being negatively. Therefore, this study will inform healthcare professionals to develop psychological interventions post-COVID-19 which help to cope with possible mental health problems and to potentially increase Malaysian's resilience as we face the pandemic together in the long term. This includes cognitive behavioural therapy and systemic interventions for couples.

REFERENCES

- Boateng, G. O., Doku, D. T., Enyan, N. I., Owusu, S. A., Aboh, I. K., Kodom, R. V., Ekumah, B., Quansah, R., Boamah, S. A., Obiri-Yeboah, D., Nsabimana, E., Jansen, S., & Armah, F. A. (2021). Prevalence and changes in boredom, anxiety and well-being among Ghanaians during the COVID-19 pandemic: a population-based study. *BMC public health*, *21*(1), 1-13.
- Broadbent, E., Petrie, K. J., Main, J., & Weinman, J. (2006). The brief illness perception questionnaire. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, *60*(6), 631–637.
- Bunyan, J. (2020, March 16). *PM: Malaysia under movement control order from Wed until March 31, all shops closed except for essential services*. The Malay Mail. Retrieved from <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/03/16/pm-malaysia-in-lockdown-from-wed-until-march-31-all-shops-closed-except-for/1847204>
- Chua, B. S., Siau, C. S., Fitriana, M., Wah-Yun Low, W. Y., & Khan, R. K. A. W. (2021). Psychological distress, relationship quality, and well-being among Malaysian couples during COVID-19 pandemic. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health*, 1-3.
- Chan HF, Brumpton M, Macintyre A, Arapoc J, Savage DA, Skali A, et al. (2020) How confidence in health care systems affects mobility and compliance during the COVID-19 pandemic. *PLoS ONE* *15*(10): e0240644 French, D. P., Cooke, R., McLean, N., Williams, M., Sutton, S. (2007). What do people think about when they answer Theory of Planned Behavior Questionnaires? A 'think aloud' study. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *12*(4), 672–687.
- Günther-Bel, C., Vilaregut, A., Carratala, E., Torras-Garat, S., & Pérez-Testor, C. (2020). A Mixed-method Study of Individual, Couple, and Parental Functioning During the State-regulated COVID-19 Lockdown in Spain. *Family Process*, *59*(3), 1060-1079.
- Härkönen, J., Bernardi, F., Boertien, D., (2017). Family Dynamics and Child Outcomes: An Overview. *European Journal of Population*, *33*(2), 163-184. doi: 10.1007/s10680-017-9424-6
- Jabatan Perdana Menteri (2020, March 17). Soalan Lazim (FAQ's) Mengenai Perintah Kawalan Pergerakan [Movement Control Order] – Dikemaskini. Retrieved April 9, 2020 from <https://www.pmo.gov.my/2020/03/soalan-lazim-faqs-mengenai-perintah-kawalan-pergerakan-movement-control-order/>
- Krishnamoorthy, Y., Nagarajan, R., Saya, G. K., & Menon, V. (2020). Prevalence of psychological morbidities among general population, healthcare workers and COVID-19 patients amidst the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychiatry Research*, *293*, 113382.
- Lovibond, P. F., & Lovibond, S. H. (1995). The structure of negative emotional states: Comparison of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) with the Beck Depression and Anxiety Inventories. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, *33*(3), 335-343.
- Low, W.Y., Chua, B.S., Bono, S., Samy, A.L., Fitriana, M., Siau, C.S., Cheah, W.L., Law, L.S., Vighnarajah, S. (2020). Mental Health and The Covid-19 Pandemic: The Malaysian Scenario. APACPH 2020: Public Health the New Normal. Paper presented at the conference of APACHP 2020. Colombo, Sri Langka.
- Luetke, M., Hensel, D., Herbenick, D., & Rosenberg, M. (2020). Romantic relationship conflict due to the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in intimate and sexual behaviors in a nationally representative sample of American adults. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, *46*(8), 747-762.

Threatening View of Illness, Psychological Distress, and Well-Being among Malaysians during COVID-19 Pandemic

- Pedrosa, A.L., Bitencourt, L., Fróes, A.C.F., Cazumbá, M.L.B., Campos, R.G.B., Soares de Brito, S.B.C., & Silva, A.C.S. (2020). Emotional, Behavioral, and Psychological Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Front Psychology*, 11, 566212. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.566212
- Pieh, C., O' Rourke, T., Budimir, S., & Probst, T. (2020). Relationship quality and mental health during COVID-19 lockdown. *Plos One*, 15(9), e0238906.
- Xiong, J., Lipsitz, O., Nasri, F., Lui, L. M., Gill, H., Phan, L., ... & McIntyre, R. S. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health in the general population: A systematic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 277, 55-64.
- Santabábara, J., Lasheras, I., Lipnicki, D. M., Bueno-Notivol, J., Pérez-Moreno, M., López-Antón, R., De la Cámara, C., Lobo, A., Gracia-García, P. (2021). Prevalence of anxiety in the COVID-19 pandemic: An updated meta-analysis of community-based studies. *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology & Biological Psychiatry*, 109,110207.
- Spinelli, M., Lionetti, F., Setti, A., & Fasolo, M. (2020). Parenting Stress During the COVID-19 Outbreak: Socioeconomic and Environmental Risk Factors and Implications for Children Emotion Regulation. *Family Process*, 60(2), 639-653. <https://doi:10.1111/famp.12601>
- Sumari, M., Baharudin, D. F., Khalid, N. M., Ibrahim N. H., & Ahmed Tharbe, I. H. (2020). Family Functioning in a Collectivist Culture of Malaysia: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Family Violence*, 28(4), 396-402.
- Tennant, R., Fishwick, R, Platt, S, Joseph, S., & Stewart-Brown, S. (2006). *Monitoring positive mental health in Scotland: Validating the Affectometer 2 scale and developing the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale for UK*. Glasgow: NHS Health Scotland.
- Walker, P. G. T., Whittaker, C., Watson, O., Baguelin, M., Ainslie, K. E. C., Bhatia, S., Boonyasiri, A., Boyd, O., Cattarino, L., Cucunubá, Z., & Cuomo-dannenburg, G. (2020). *The Global Impact of COVID-19 and Strategies for Mitigation and Suppression*. Retrieved May 8, 2021. <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/mrc-global-infectious-disease-analysis/covid-19/report-12-global-impact-covid-19/>
- Wang, C., Pan, R., Wan, X., Tan, Y., Xu, L., Ho, C. S., & Ho, R. C. (2019). Immediate Psychological Responses and Associated Factors during the Initial Stage of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Epidemic among the General Population in China International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17(5), 1729. Retrieved May 8, 2021. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Immediate-Psychological-Responses-and-Associated-of-Wang-Pan/cb2f7b692a3a6fde784aca19531e5df97d25fbfd>
- van Oort, L., Schröder, C.I., French, D.P. (2011). What do people think about when they answer the Brief Illness Perception Questionnaire? A 'think-aloud' study. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 16(2), 231–45.
- Worldometer (2020, April 15). Covid-19 Coronavirus / Death Toll. Retrieved May 8, 2021. <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/coronavirus-death-toll/?fbclid=IwAR3ct-OjVs6SY1ZqHGMP53akUSGsP8Nkv-p7xJ32BrqA0sMXo3IvBzu6I3E>
- Zarocostas, J. (2020). How to fight an infodemic. *The Lancet*, 395(10225), 676. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30461-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30461-X)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this study could not have been possible without the participation and assistance of so many people whose names may not all be enumerated. Their contributions are sincerely appreciated and gratefully acknowledged. However, we would like to express our deep appreciation to Universiti Malaysia Sabah for funding this research (ref: SDK189-2020).

AUTHORS' INFORMATION

Full name: Chua Bee Seok

Institutional affiliation: Universiti Malaysia Sabah

Institutional address: Faculty of Psychology and Education, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Jln UMS, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

Short biographical sketch: Chua Bee Seok, is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Psychology and Education, Universiti Malaysia Sabah. She is specializing in Industrial and Organizational Psychology and had 21-year of teaching experience. She has been involved in more than 40 research projects. Her research interests are neurofeedback training, work stress, organizational behaviour and Personnel, and Psychometric study. Her current research projects include "Neurofeedback training: An innovative technique to self-regulate stress and promote better life in the workplace", "Neurofeedback Training on Children with Learning Difficulty", "Peak Performance of Athletes through Innovative Neurofeedback Training"; "Nurses' Preparedness and Readiness in Managing A Disaster During and After COVID-19"; "COVID-19: The impact of psychological distress on the relationship among Malaysian couples". She had published 109 articles in the journal, 83 articles in the conference proceedings, 19 books, 26 chapters in the book, and 17 abstracts in the book of abstract.

Full name: Siau Ching Sin

Institutional affiliation: Centre for Community Health Studies, Faculty of Health Sciences, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Institutional address: Jalan Raja Muda Abdul Aziz, 50300 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Short biographical sketch: Dr. Siau Ching Sin is a senior lecturer in the Centre for Community Health Studies in the Faculty of Health Sciences, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Her research interest is in suicidal thoughts and behaviors among healthcare workers and youth.

Full name: Low Wah Yun

Institutional affiliation: Asia Europe Institute, Universiti Malaya (Malaysia)

Institutional address: Jln Profesor Diraja Ungku Aziz, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Short biographical sketch: Low Wah-Yun, is a professor of Psychology at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya. She is also the Deputy Executive Director (Research and Internationalization) at the Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya, the Chair for the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC). Her research interest revolves around behavioral medicine, health promotion, sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, men's health and aging. Currently, She is involve in few international research projects on COVID-19, namely vaccine acceptability; impact of global stressor on the psychological wellbeing and relationships among couples; personal and family coping with COVID-19 in the Global South; lived experiences of sexual gender minority individuals during the pandemic; International Sexual Health and Reproductive Health during COVID-19; and the development and feasibility of a post-COVID intervention program for resilient families. She is also the President of the Asia Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health (APACPH), as well as the President of the Malaysian Association for Scientific Research in Psychiatry and Behavioural Medicine (MARSP).

Full name: Mimi Fitriana

Institutional affiliation: International University of Malaya-Wales

Institutional address: Jalan Tun Ismail 50480 Kuala Lumpur

Short biographical sketch: Dr Mimi is a senior lecturer at the Department of Psychology, IUMW, a clinical psychologist, providing the professionals, students and the community with psychosocial support and treatment, training and development, involving in the growth and development of the academia with research interest covers family functioning, cyber psychology, mental health, trauma recovery, resiliency, autism, and quality education.

Threatening View of Illness, Psychological Distress, and Well-Being among Malaysians during
COVID-19 Pandemic

Full name: Jasmine Adela Mutang

Institutional affiliation: Universiti Malaysia Sabah

Institutional address: Faculty of Psychology and Education, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Jln UMS,
88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

Short biographical sketch: Jasmine Adela Mutang is a lecturer in the Faculty of Psychology and Education, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Malaysia. She is also attached with the Psychology and Social Health Research Unit, UMS. She has involved in various research teams and lead three Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) funded by The Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia and a few internal grants by University Malaysia Sabah since her employment in 2009. Her research interest is positive psychology and indigenous psychology. Jasmine is currently pursuing her PhD in psychology.