

A STUDY OF MENTAL HEALTH AMONG STUDENTS DURING MOVEMENT CONTROL ORDER (MCO)

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ABSTRACT

The need for mental health support is critical in today's world, which is leading to more research into its causes. Mental health is important because it shows how well a person is feeling emotionally, mentally and socially. There are many reasons why someone might feel sad or anxious, but a few main reasons have been discovered. Several studies have shown that things as different as age, the way we act and the way we learn can affect our mental health. Things like living environment, surrounding community and financial factors make a big difference in mental health. The pressure to succeed, along with the desire to fit in, can make them feel depressed and sad. Therefore, this study explores how this affects people, especially students in college. The aim of this study is to identify the factors and the relationship between the factors identified in affecting the level of depression among students. The results of this study reveal that gender and campus location do not exert a significant influence on depression scores or the severity of depression levels.

Keywords: *depression, mental health, movement control order, tertiary level*

Introduction

In the modern era, the emphasis on mental well-being has become the main focus. Mental health acts as a guardian of emotions, thoughts, and a sense of belonging in society. It is a complex aspect that shadows the landscape of emotions and human existence, with depression being one of its indicators. Cultivating mental health includes practicing self-care, cultivating healthy relationships, seeking help when needed, managing stress, and engaging in activities that bring joy and satisfaction.

Exploration into factors influencing internal emotional states has grown, and an important dimension of this understanding revolves around the study of depression. However, it is important to acknowledge that mental health challenges are universal and can affect individuals regardless of age, gender, background or socioeconomic status. Researchers investigate the causes of depression and the complex interplay of components such as emotions, behaviors, and external conditions that contribute to the emergence of feelings of depression (Benny et al., 2022; Bogardus et al., 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2020; Niu et al., 2022; Rahmandani & Amaranggani, 2023). Just like physical health, getting support for mental health concerns is very important. Just like seeking help for physical conditions, it is important to extend the same level of attention and care to our mental health.

For young people especially as students in higher education, are not exempt from this problem. Depression and anxiety are big issues for them. College or university is an exciting time for them

because going to university signifies a transition to adulthood and greater independence. They get to make their own decisions about their academics and daily life. At the university, students learn about themselves and develop life skills such as communication and problem solving. Yet, it is important to note that while university life can be exciting, it also comes with challenges and responsibilities, and they might experience academic pressures, social adjustments, and financial concern. While trying to cope with the new changes and challenges, some students struggle with depression. This issue is pertinent that it has drawn particular attention in recent years as depression among university students are multifactorial that require further investigation. Apart from that, some college students, especially those in their early years, can feel really sad and left out. They really want to be liked and have friends, so when they feel excluded, it makes them feel even worse. Not having a good way to check and help students during these tough times shows that we really need good plans to help them.

Thus, the study aims to investigate the mental health status of UiTM students in its two campuses; UiTM Permatang Pauh and UiTM Negeri Sembilan. The objective of this study is:

- i. To compare the level of depression between genders;
- ii. To compare the level of depression between campuses and;
- iii. To obtain a relationship between the level of depression and gender.

In the next section, this paper explores a review of the related work on the depression issues that arise among students followed by a section containing a detailed explanation of the research methodology. Then, the paper presents the analysis and result of the study as well as the discussion of the findings. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for future research are drawn in the final section.

Literature Review

Mental health refers to the condition of individual mental well-being that includes the emotional, psychological, and social well-being that facilitates individuals in managing challenges in life and controlling their capabilities (WHO, 2022). It directly affects how an individual think, feel and act; it is also determining how an individual handle the stress, make decisions and establish interpersonal communications. However, an individual mental health can change over time based on various factors. If the mental health is not being well managed, it could lead to poor mental health such as depression, anxiety, and stress.

Our exploration will lead us into the realm of university life, where students are navigating the pursuit of academic excellence. The pursuit of success often ushers in a cloud of stress and unhappy. In today's dynamic and interconnected world, the flow of social interactions can also wield a substantial influence over our emotional well-being. The disruption wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic added another layer of complexity. The shift to remote learning disrupted established routines and instigated feelings of isolation. This transformation gave rise to a medley of emotions, including anxiety, stress, and loneliness. These sentiments did not merely dissipate; rather, they persisted, affecting our vitality, concentration, and daily functionality. The context of the pandemic has exacerbated the prominence of depression and intense anxiety among students. The absence of definitive strategies to assist students during these challenging times underscores the urgency of formulating effective plans to bolster their mental health.

For young adults, the transition to college or university marks an exhilarating phase, symbolizing the transition to adulthood and increased autonomy. This period offers opportunities for self-discovery and the development of essential life skills like effective communication and problem-solving. Nevertheless, the excitement of university life is accompanied by a set of trials and responsibilities, including academic pressures, acclimatization to new social dynamics, and financial concerns. Amid the endeavour to navigate these adjustments and challenges, some students grapple with the weight of depression. This issue has garnered significant attention in recent times, as depression among university students arises from multifaceted sources that necessitate further exploration.

Depression among college students is a significant and concerning issue that has received a growing amount of attention over the years. Numerous stressors and challenges associated with the adjustment to university life could trigger or exacerbate depression. Many aspects of college life increase the risk of developing depression as such some students are unprepared for university life since they must leave home and adjust to a new way of living. Depression could cause a negative impact to the students academically and to their interpersonal communication. Earlier study that was conducted by Naushad et al. in 2014 indicated that 41.2 % pre university college students suffering from moderate depression due to poor socio-economic background and lack of social activities in the campus. Similarly, a study conducted by Islam in 2016 shows that approximately 30% of their respondents from one of the university in the central region of Malaysia suffering from depression and almost 5% of them suffering from severe depression. Meanwhile, a study by Liu, Ping and Gao (2019) demonstrated that between 20 to 43% of undergraduate's students in China suffered from depression, anxiety and stress.

The prevalence of anxiety and depression among college students has increased dramatically since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and several studies have shown that the COVID-19 had a negative psychological impact on university college students. The quarantine order, which affects people's activities and routines, is one of the causes of the rise in depression (WHO,2021). Specifically, in Malaysia context, the movement control order (MCO) has been implemented in September 2021 that designed to control the spread of COVID19 virus by restricting movement and social interaction. The restrictions on travel, the shifting of work arrangements to the home, and the shift of learning mode to online learning have reduced face-to-face contact, resulting in an increase in mental illness. Students are experiencing technology fatigue due to their excessive reliance on devices for learning, socialising, and leisure activities, which leads to feelings of burnout and exacerbate mental health. A recent study by Wong et al (2023), has demonstrated that 21.4% university students in one of the universities located in central region of Malaysia suffering with severe depression and the depression is likely to occur if the students was diagnosed with depression earlier.

Looking ahead, our journey into the realm of depression will continue its descent into deeper understanding. By comprehending the interplay of internal and external factors, we aspire to illuminate this crucial subject and identify avenues for improving the circumstances of those grappling with it. The promotion of mental well-being involves the cultivation of self-care practices, nurturing healthy relationships, seeking aid when needed, managing stress, and engaging in activities that cultivate joy and contentment. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that mental health challenges are widespread and can affect individuals irrespective of age, gender, background, or socioeconomic status. Analogous to physical health, seeking support for mental health challenges is of paramount importance.

Methodology

The research was conducted in MARA University of Technology during covid-19 pandemic when all universities in Malaysia were closed and teaching mode were transformed into an e-learning environment based using several online platforms preferred by lecturers. In order to assess the level of depression, anxiety and stress among tertiary level students, a questionnaire with a psychometric characteristics of the 21-item version (DASS-21) was administered to 286 students joining the online seminar conducted by Counseling Department of the university. Of the 286 students who took part in the study, several data were omitted resulting in a dataset with a total of 276 entries. Demographic information was collected regarding campus, faculty and gender. In completing the questionnaire, the individual is required to indicate the presence symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress in the past week. Each item was assessed using a four-point likert scale from 0 to 3, where 0 represent ‘Did not apply to me at all (never)’ ; 1 represent ‘Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time(sometimes)’ ; 2 represent ‘Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time(often)’; and 3 represent ‘Applied to me very much, or most of the time(almost always)’. According to Ramli et al. (2017), the process of factor analysis led to the identification of seven questions from the DASS 21 that can be categorized under the domain of depression as listed in table 1.

Table 1:Dass 21 items for Depression

Item	Question
D3	I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all
D5	I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things
D10	I felt that I had nothing to look forward to
D13	I felt down-hearted and blue
D16	I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything
D17	I felt I wasn't worth much as a person
D21	I felt that life was meaningless

The total score for seven items mentioned in table 1 needs to be multiplied by two before determining the level of depression because the DASS 21 is a short form version of the DASS 42. DASS severity ratings for depression as shown in table 2 were used to classify the level of depression of respondents.

Table 2: DASS severity ratings (Depression)

Score	Severity
0-9	Normal
10-13	Mild
14-20	Moderate
21-27	Severe
28-42	Extremely severe

Source: Gomez, F. (2016)

A basic descriptive analyses was conducted using SPSS version 25. The mean, frequency and percentage for each item and severity of depression was recorded. For comparative analyses, the sample was grouped according to gender and their level of depression. Besides gender, an analysis was also done to compare the level of depression in UiTM Penang campus with other campuses. For further analyses, gender based mean differences in depression among respondents were determined by applying

the two independent sample t-tests. Results were considered significant at $p \leq 0.05$. In addition, the chi-squared test was used to discover if there is a relationship between the two categorical variables gender and level of depression.

Reliability Analysis

Based on the output of reliability statistics obtained (Table 3), Cronbach's Alpha value resulted greater than 0.6, therefore this research instrument is reliable. Having tested the validity and reliability of the proven results of the questionnaire is valid and reliable performance.

Table 3 : Cronbach's Alpha For Each Area

Area	Value
Depression	0.905

Result and Discussion

The data analysis was done descriptively, and then the results were presented in tables and figures. The inferential statistics of the T-test were used to examine the difference between gender and DASS scores on depression. This test is used to explore whether both genders show differences in DASS scores. Next, a chi-square test was used to discover if there was any association between depression level of the score with gender and campus location.

The survey was distributed via online Facebook live on 19 March 2021. Students need to fill up the questionnaires in the google form and 286 responses were received. After separating some of the duplicate and missing data, only 276 responses were analysed. Table 4 shows among them, only 206 are female students and 70 students are male. There were students from UiTM campus and also other campuses of UiTM. Of overall respondents, 217 (78.6%) were from UiTM Penang campus while 59 (21.4%) were from other campuses of UiTM.

Table 4: Percentage of Respondents by Characteristics

Characteristic	N	Percentage (%)	
Gender	Male	70	25.4
	Female	206	74.6
Campus	UiTM Penang	217	78.6
	Others	59	21.4

Table 5 shows the total score for depression. The mean score for depression for all respondents is 2.46. Noted that a scale of 2 for depression already falls to a mild level. Meanwhile, the median value for depression is 2 which means that more than 50% of the respondents are still in the normal to mild level of depression.

Table 5: Total Score of Depression

Mean	2.46
Standard Deviation	1.349
Median (Min, Max)	2 (1, 5)

Thereafter, the scores were recorded into five levels of severity. The results showed that more than 50% of the respondents have a normal to a mild level of depression (Table 6). On the other hand, the depression level for severe and extremely severe in this study, 22.9%.

Table 6: Result of Severity

Type		N	Percentage (%)
Depression Level	Normal	104	37.7
	Mild	37	13.4
	Moderate	72	26.1
	Severe	30	10.9
	Extremely Severe	33	12.0

Inferential statistics of T-tests (Table 7) revealed all variables, such as gender and campus, were not found to be significant. However, we can see from the result in depression, the average score for female was higher than that for males. Another interesting finding was that, even though there were no statistically significant differences, respondents whose campus was located other than UiTM Penang recorded slightly lower score in depression criteria.

Table 7: Inferential Statistics of T-test

	Depression	N	Mean (sd)	P value
Gender	Male	70	2.20 (1.42)	0.071
	Female	206	2.55 (1.38)	
Campus	UiTM Penang	217	2.50 (1.43)	0.392
	Others	59	2.32 (1.25)	

To determine if any factor is associated with the level of depression, a Chi-square test has been conducted. From the result (Table 8), gender and campus showed statistically not significant at 95% confidence level for depression level. From the finding, females tend to have depression score severely to extremely severe.

Table 8: Result of Chi Square Test

Depression		Normal		Mild		Moderate		Severe		Extreme		p-value
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
Gender	Male	35	50	7	10	15	21.4	5	7.1	8	11.4	0.159
	Female	69	33.5	30	14.6	57	27.7	25	12.1	25	12.1	
Campus	UiTM Penang	82	37.8	28	12.9	53	24.4	25	11.5	29	13.4	0.501
	Others	22	37.3	9	15.3	19	32.2	5	8.5	4	6.8	

Conclusion

More than 50 percent of students had a normal to mild level for score in depression. However, gender and campus were not found to be significant. However, we can see from the result in depression, the average score for female was higher than males. This study also indicated that there was no association of different genders and different campuses with depression levels.

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