

Original Article

SCREENING ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE MENTAL WELLBEING OF STUDENTS AND STAFF AT UNISHAMS, KEDAH

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ABSTRACT

The study determines the level of anxiety, depression and stress among students and staff of UniSHAMS during COVID-19. It is based on their mental wellbeing during COVID-19 and distress that affect people based on few events. The study design is cross sectional, analytical study and prospective descriptive. The respondents are anonymous but focusing on age group, gender as well as education level only. For inclusion, respondents from UniSHAMS and for exclusion, respondents from non-Malaysian studying at UniSHAMS. The questionnaire's developed with the help of expert and Cronbach's Alpha (.898). Results have revealed that there is significant relationship between depression and gender (1, N = 383) = 21.127, p = .000. Besides that, there is significant relationship between depression level and age group (4, N = 383) = 32.068, p = .000. Next, there is significant relationship between anxiety level and gender (1, N = 383) = 9.558, p = .002. There is also a significant relationship between anxiety level and age group (4, N = 383) = 29.026, p = .000. For stress level, there is a significant relationship between stress level and gender (1, N = 383) = 8.941, p = .003. Finally, there is a significant relationship between stress level and age group (4, N = 383) = 48.473, p = .000. This clearly showed that students and staff of UniSHAMS are having some issues with their mental wellbeing during COVID-19, thus screening and preventive measures should be taken to help defeat these. Generally, students and staff of UniSHAMS have poor mental wellbeing and a collaborative effort between authorities/the government and other stakeholders is necessary to effectively provide help to these groups.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's mental health landscape is concerning, with nearly 30% of adults experiencing some form of mental health problem. Factors like workplace stress and student mental health contribute to this trend. The government and healthcare professionals are working towards improving access to care and reducing stigma. Openly discussing mental health challenges can break down stigma and encourage individuals to seek help. Building a supportive network and providing access to resources can empower individuals to manage their mental health. Creating a culture of understanding and acceptance is essential for promoting mental well-being for all. Untreated mental disorders can significantly affect quality of life and overall wellbeing, contributing to a substantial burden of disability and health loss in Malaysia.

The rise in mental illness calls for immediate attention and comprehensive action to support individuals and communities. Investing in mental healthcare is crucial for building a healthier and more resilient society where everyone can thrive. Statistics show that mental

health has emerged as a major public health issue in Malaysia, impacting nearly one in three adults within the last five years. A Ministry of Health report highlights the concerning rise of mental health risks, affecting roughly one-third of Malaysian adults over the past five years [1]. Mental health conditions are projected to significantly impact public health in the coming years, comparable to the burden of heart disease. The prevalence of mental health challenges is expected to continue rising, demanding proactive measures to ensure comprehensive healthcare and support [2]. Data from the 2015 National Health and Morbidity Survey in Malaysia revealed that conditions like depression, anxiety, and stress are common experiences, emphasizing the need for accessible mental health support [3].

Data suggests that mental health concerns are rising in Malaysia, affecting nearly 30% of adults aged 16 and above. Investing in workplace mental health initiatives is critical, as data shows a growing connection between working conditions and mental well-being, according to the Health Ministry. Student

mental health is another growing concern, with research indicating a consistent increase in challenges faced by young people [4-5]. The past ten years have seen a rise in the awareness and understanding of mental health challenges in Malaysia [6]. This study mainly focus on screening the depression, stress and anxiety level among students and staff of Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Sultan Abdul Halim Mua'dzam Shah (UniSHAMS), Kedah.

METHODOLOGY

For inclusion, the study have included respondents from UniSHAMS aged 18 years old and above. Study have excluded respondents who are non-Malaysians studying in UniSHAMS, Kedah. Questionnaires are developed with the help of an expert in Psychiatry and used Cronbach's Alpha (.898) to test for reliability and validity of the questions used. The questionnaire has been randomly spread and each respondents will remain anonymous. The data mostly focused on their age group, gender, staff or student and education level. The sample size has been calculated by using formulas and Raosoft® sample size calculator. The sample size is 383 and the responses that have been recorded are divided into groups for further analyses.

RESULT

The result has been analyzed using IBM SPSS V27 and the frequency for each variable is noted as such socio-demographic characteristics i.e. age group, gender, highest education, staff or students of UniSHAMS as well as the distribution of the mental health status of the sample for each socio-demographic characteristic.

Results have revealed that there is a significant relationship between depression and gender (1, N = 383) = 21.127, $p = .000$. This shows female participants (72.1%) are more likely to have abnormal mental wellbeing in comparison to male (27.9%). Besides that, there is a significant relationship between depression level and age group (4, N = 383) = 32.068, $p = .000$. The age group between 18-25 is more likely to have abnormal depression level (78.8%) in comparison to other age groups.

Next, there is a significant relationship between anxiety level and gender (1, N = 383) = 9.558, $p = .002$. Females are more likely to have abnormal anxiety level (69.8%) in comparison to male (30.2%). There is also a significant relationship between anxiety level and age group (4, N = 383) = 29.026, $p = .000$. The age group between 18-25 is more likely to have abnormal anxiety level (77.9%) in comparison to other age groups. For stress level, there is a significant relationship between stress level and gender (1, N = 383) = 8.941, $p = .003$. Females are more likely to have abnormal stress level (71.2%) in comparison to male (28.8%). Finally, there is a significant relationship between stress level and age group (4, N = 383) = 48.473, $p = .000$ as age group between 18-25 is more likely to have abnormal anxiety level (80.4%) in comparison to other age groups.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to identify the mental health issues among students and staff of UniSHAMS during COVID-19. Thus, it mainly targets all UniSHAMS residents including staff and students. The study findings reveal that students and staff of UniSHAMS are facing some mental health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. The result has assessed them based on their stress, anxiety, and depression level.

Generally, students and staff of UniSHAMS were experiencing some mental health issues in all three aspects i.e. depression, anxiety, and stress, but students tend to have the worst result in all those aspects while staff review a better result in those aspects. For example, in depression, only 27.84% of the staff has a severe level of depression, 38.14% have a normal level of depression, 11.34% have a mild level of depression while 22.68 % of them have a moderate level of depression. In contrast, more than half of students are 68.53% facing a severe level of depression, 11.89% reportedly do not have depression, the other 6.99% and 12.59% of students experienced a mild and moderate level of depression respectively. For anxiety, most staff have a severe level of anxiety with about 41.24% of them while normal, mild, and moderate groups are about the same with 30.93%, 15.46%, and 12.37% respectively. Despite the percentage of staff, having a severe level of anxiety is quite high, the percentage of students facing them can't be ignore too as 77.27% of them are struggling with a severe level of anxiety. While the normal, mild, and moderate groups are almost the same with 7.69%, 6.99%, and 8.04% respectively. Lastly for stress, merely half of the staff has a normal level of stress with 49.48 % of them while mild, moderate, and severe groups are about the same with 14.43%, 24.74%, and 11.34% respectively. Unfortunately, the number of students having severe levels of stress contradicts with the number of staff having severe levels of stress which is about 46.85% but for normal, mild, and moderate are about the same with 18.88%, 7.69%, is and 26.57% respectively.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are ways for prevention to be taken as such exercise regularly, study as well as practice relaxation techniques and keep healthy relationship with others. Some other recommendation is to measure the mental health wellbeing among students and staff in a better platform such as collecting data using the official DASS questionnaire which will include more factors that will contribute to data accuracy hence, a better preventive measure can be taken. Most importantly, the need for further and larger trials to obtain an accurate conclusion is critical as larger sample sizes are needed to obtain reliable results that can be compared to smaller studies like this. Based on the results obtained, the data may have a bias and limitation that cause the data to show students in UniSHAMS are more prone to have abnormal mental health as compared to the staff.

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