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Publication details, including author guidelines

URL: <https://ach.idcounselor.com/index.php/ach/about/submissions>

Editor : Augusto da Costa

Article History

Submitted: 9/14/2020

Accepted: 12/19/2020

Published: 2/17/2021

How to cite this article (APA)

Tambol, Z., Abu Bakar, A. Y., & Suranata, K. (2021). Psychosocial Support System Post Movement control order (MCO) during Covid-19 Pandemic in Malaysia. *Acta Counseling and Humanities*, 1(2), 97–98. <https://doi.org/10.46637/ach.v1i2.15>

The readers can link to article via <https://doi.org/10.46637/ach.v1i2.15>

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Acta Counseling and Humanities

ISSN 2746-4407 (Print) | ISSN 2746-4415 (Electronic)

Psychosocial Support System Post Movement control order (MCO) during Covid-19 Pandemic in Malaysia



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Dear Editor,

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is affecting people's social connectedness, their trust in people and institutions, their jobs and incomes, as well as imposing a huge toll in terms of individuals' level of anxiety and worry (World Health Organization, 2020). In line with the increasing number of patients affected by the virus, we must be aware of the psychological or mental health impact from this pandemic, which is not only a state of medical crisis but also has a great impact on the nation's economy and people's holistic well-being.

Since the widespread of the virus in March 2020, the Malaysian government has declared a state of national insurgency and gazetted three phases of Movement Control Order (MCO) which were only put at a halt recently. All the three MCO phases – whereby the enforcement was guided by the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 and the Police Act 1967 – were staged in order to flatten the local epidemiological curve of the COVID-19 pandemic. The continuous period of MCO enforcement has had a huge impact on all levels of Malaysian community, in all aspects of their daily lives (Nesen & Bakar, 2021; Bakar & Ramli, 2020).

A long continuous total lockdown during MCO period was found to trigger the increasing needs among Malaysian public for emotional support, psychological aid, and counselling services by 34.90% (Ismail, Hussin & Bakar, 2021). The provision of psychological and social resources to a person intended for the benefit of the receiver's ability to cope with problems faced in time of crisis (Chan, Cardoso & Chronister, 2009) is really vital at the time of health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, several independent local practitioners such as counsellors, psychologists, and social workers have developed their initiatives to help with psychological first aid (PFA) in order to improve the general psychological state of the community during MCO in Malaysia (Bakar, 2020). Such interventions are done through virtual counselling helpline, distribution of online posters, short movies, and discussions pertaining to the necessity of preventing the widespread of the virus in the community.

To assist the people to cope with the side effects of such a distressful pandemic, several government agencies are also continuously providing psychosocial support activities during the lockdown period. Some of the activities including the online psychosocial first aid kit and such as the *Talian Sokongan Psikososial COVID-19* (provided by the Ministry of Health & MERCY Malaysia), *Talian Kasih* (administered by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development), *KSK Care Centre* (managed by Keluarga, Sosial dan Komuniti

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(KSK) JAKIM), as well as the virtual counselling services delivered via social media platforms facilitated by the Institute of Higher Education and Mental Illness Support and Awareness Association (MOH, 2020).

All in all, the psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, activated from a long and continuous duration of MCO has greatly affected the psychological well-being and mental health of the Malaysian general public. However, Malaysia is lucky because the integrated collaboration between the government agencies, non-governmental organisation (NGOs), and independent helping professionals has formed a formidable psychosocial support system to cater for the community needs, and God willing, the system will continuously be improved as time goes by.

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