



Adolescents' Anxiety during COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia

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Adolescents' Anxiety during COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia



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Dear Editor,

Many nations have taken crucial step to enforce the Movement Control Order (MCO) as a strategy to flatten the spreading curve of active Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). In Malaysia, the MCO enforcement has led to the temporary shutdown of major public sectors in order to restrain social activities and encourage the people to stay at home. Unintentionally, the execution of MCO raised psychosocial concerns among community members due to the fact that daily routine activities had been restricted (by the enforcement of strict standard operating procedures) for uncertain period of time. If these concerns were not properly addressed, the MCO could disrupt emotional and mental well-being for a long period of time (Ismail, Hussin & Bakar, 2021; Bakar & Ramli, 2020; UNICEF, 2020) of all community members, especially the young adolescents who are still going through extensive developmental stages of their lives.

Stay-at-home adolescents may acquire self-conflicts because they need to adapt to the repetitive daily routines and maximize their time for learning and social activities, which may contribute to the increase in stress and depression among them. The underlying reason to this phenomenon is that these adolescents do not have the support and adequate emotional references which lead to fear and worry since they do not feel safe during COVID-19 pandemic (Bakar, 2020; Ruzki & Parzi, 2020). In addition, MCO has raised the reported cases of family conflicts due to the facts that parents were struggling with financial stress and managing children at home. The struggle may cause the parents to lash out on their children which in return may disrupt the children's emotional state (Nesen & Bakar, 2021; Azuddin, 2020a). This initial report explored Malaysian adolescents' anxiety during the execution period of MCO. A total of 15 young adolescents – who stayed at home during MCO due to the closing down of schools – were gathered in a focus group discussion. Table 1 summarizes three main themes highlighted by the participant as their psychosocial concerns during MCO.

Table 1. Participants' Anxiety during MCO

Theme	Number of Participants with Negative Responses (%)	
Academic	15	100
COVID-19 Case	13	87
Family	7	46

All participants were concerned about their academic progress. This is particularly due to the total shut down of schools during the MCO period. All of them are candidates for national examinations which play big roles in determining their future prospects; thus, the

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cancellation of two major examinations and the delay of another one due to COVID-19 pandemic (as announced by the Ministry of Education), had sparked their negative responses in the focus group session. A total of 13 out of 15 participants were negatively responded to questions asked with regards to the increasing cases of COVID-19. As they were extensively exposed to the daily reports of the pandemic during MCO, they were disturbed by the increasing number of cases locally or abroad. On the other hand, almost half of them reported that they were concern about their families if the MCO is prolonged for an uncertain period of time. As all participants come from the B40 category (family with low household income of less than MYR 3855 per month), this concern was understandable because the aftermaths of COVID-19 and the enforcement of MCO would also affect their families' economic status (Azuddin, 2020b). Their low-income parents who worked as drivers, labours, and street vendors were in danger of losing the jobs and couldn't afford to financially support them as usual, and this possibility worries them as reflected in their negative responses during the focus group session. In a nutshell, the prolonged MCO period may result in psychosocial and emotional disruptions among Malaysian adolescents. Thus, the awareness among them on the necessity to break the 'chain' of COVID-19 pandemic must be enhanced so that their emotional well-being and mental health well-being can be sustained.

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