



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF B40 FEMALE STUDENTS
IN UNIMAS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Fazlin Liyana Binti Hanapi

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Final Year Project Report

Masters

PhD

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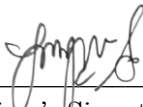
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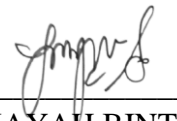
FAZLIN LIYANA BINTI HANAPI

This project is submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
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The project entitled '**The Psychological Wellbeing of B40 Female Students in UNIMAS during COVID-19 Pandemic**' was prepared by **Fazlin Liyana Binti Hanapi (64743)** and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Psychology with Honours.

Received for examination by:



(DR. JAMAYAH BINTI SAILI)

Date:

20/08/2022

Gred

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ABSTRACT

Following the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, online learning method has been implemented as the new pedagogy by the Ministry of Education (MOE) for all educational institutions in Malaysia. This study aims to explore the psychological wellbeing of B40 university students in UNIMAS during COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the PERMA model approach was utilized based on the students' experiences through the integration of five main components such as positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and achievement. This research also explores the challenges and struggles in B40 household groups faced by eight female students in UNIMAS throughout COVID-19 pandemic. Besides that, this research aims to identify the effective coping strategies in B40 households for maintaining their psychological wellbeing. The findings showed that there are various challenges and struggles faced by the students, for instance financial issues, academic struggles, family problems, personal issues, and social interaction struggles. Other than that, the findings also presented several coping strategies used by the students in facing those challenges such as problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. To conclude, this research can be made as a source of reference while bringing significant impacts towards the psychological wellbeing of university students from B40 household groups in accordance with the new pedagogical norm in higher educational institutions.

Keywords: psychological wellbeing, coping strategies, B40 households, challenges, COVID-19 pandemic

ABSTRAK

Susulan penularan wabak COVID-19, kaedah pembelajaran dalam talian telah dilaksanakan sebagai pedagogi baharu oleh Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia (KPM) bagi seluruh institusi pendidikan di Malaysia. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan kesejahteraan psikologi pelajar universiti B40 di UNIMAS semasa pandemik COVID-19. Dalam pada itu, pendekatan model PERMA telah digunakan dengan berpandukan pengalaman pelajar sepanjang pembelajaran dalam talian melalui integrasi lima komponen utama iaitu emosi positif, penglibatan, hubungan, makna, dan pencapaian. Kajian ini juga meneroka cabaran dan halangan dalam kalangan isi rumah B40 yang dihadapi oleh lapan pelajar perempuan di UNIMAS sepanjang pandemik COVID-19. Selain itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti strategi daya tindak efektif dalam kalangan isi rumah B40 untuk mengekalkan kesejahteraan psikologi mereka. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat pelbagai cabaran dan halangan yang dihadapi oleh pelajar misalnya isu kewangan, cabaran akademik, masalah keluarga, isu peribadi, dan cabaran interaksi sosial. Seterusnya, dapatan yang diperoleh turut menunjukkan beberapa strategi daya tindak pelajar dalam mendepani cabaran tersebut seperti daya tindak fokus-masalah dan daya tindak fokus-emosi. Secara tuntasnya, kajian ini boleh dijadikan sebagai sumber rujukan sambil membawa impak yang signifikan terhadap kesejahteraan psikologi pelajar universiti dari kelompok isi rumah B40 selaras dengan pedagogi norma baharu di peringkat pengajian tinggi.

Kata kunci: kesejahteraan psikologi, strategi daya tindak, isi rumah B40, cabaran, pandemik COVID-19

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter will thoroughly explain the background of study, problem statement, objectives and research questions, research framework, definition of terms, significance of the study and limitations of the study.

1.1 Background of Study

COVID-19 is an abbreviation of a disease called coronavirus disease 2019 and alternatively known as a disease caused by coronavirus (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). The disease is said to be the fifth pandemic after the flu pandemic that happened in 1918 which affected the entire population on a larger scale worldwide (Liu, Kuo & Shih, 2020). It is highly contagious and has been causing over 5,127,696 deaths globally according to statistics provided by the World Health Organization (2021). The first COVID-19 outbreak occurred in Wuhan, China in December 2019 whereas in Malaysia the first outbreak was documented on 25th January 2020 involving 3 nationals from China reported to be a close contact of an infected 66-years-old man from Wuhan, China who was treated in Singapore (“3 coronavirus cases confirmed in Johor Baru”, 2020).

Malaysian Government had to take extra measures to curb the pandemic by enforcing Movement Control Order (MCO) which was implemented on 18th March 2020 (Ain Umaira Md Shah, Syafiqah Nur Azrie Safri, Thevadas, Nor Kamariah Noordin, Azmawani Abd

Rahman, Zamberi Sekawi, Aini Ideris, & Mohamed Thariq Hameed Sultan, 2020). Due to this law enforcement, it was reported by “Education minister: School learning sessions to be held online for two weeks after Aidilfitri holidays” (2021) that the Ministry of Education urged the implementation of online learning academic sessions for 14 days after Aidilfitri holidays by imposing home-based teaching and learning method (PdPR). As stated by Browning, Larson, Sharaievska, Rigolon, McAnirlin, Mullenbach, Cloutier, Vu, Thomsen, Reigner, Metcalf, D’Antonio, Helbich, Bratman and Alvarez (2021), university students are progressively identified as a vulnerable community, subjected to anxiety, depression, eating disorder, and substance abuse on a deeper scale when compared to the entire populace.

As the educational systems start to make a drastic shift such as staying at home amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, this intensifies the weight on the students’ psychological wellbeing (Browning et al., 2021). Various different factors affecting their mental health during COVID-19 pandemic need to be thoroughly analyzed. Some students may undergo the quarantine phase, family issues, financial issues, and health issues throughout the pandemic which affect their psychological wellbeing as a whole. People are becoming more anxious, in addition to less physical contact with peers have a significant impact on this issue. Another major haphazard during this pandemic with movement restriction are domestic violence, mental health issues and child abuse. Students with existing mental health issues or any sort of struggles at home are facing difficulties trying to perform academically while also juggling house chores.

In this context, the scarcity in assessing the psychological wellbeing of students from B40 households is significant. Those coming from poorer backgrounds may be heavily impacted during this pandemic. This environment shapes their possible stressors and challenges

differently. On the other hand, more studies are required to be done in this area to assess female undergraduates' psychological wellbeing while juggling house chores and commitments. Some students may have found their own coping strategies to survive online learning and these helpful approaches should be taken into consideration when assessing the participants' perspectives. Hence, this study will strive to contribute to the society by exploring the psychological wellbeing of university students in UNIMAS during COVID-19 pandemic, while also identifying the role of B40 environments. The researcher is conducting a study that aims to explore their psychological wellbeing based on different points of view while utilizing different methods from past studies.

Furthermore, the main goal of this study is to look into the psychological wellbeing of university students and how it can be influenced by living in B40 households during the pandemic. The researcher puts her prime focus on female university students in University of Malaysia, Sarawak (UNIMAS) to further understand women's perspectives on possible challenges and struggles during the outbreak. Later, their applied coping mechanisms will be assessed to observe to what extent these strategies are effective for psychological wellbeing maintenance.

1.2 Problem Statement

In brief, COVID-19 is a recent disease affecting the whole population on a global scale. Due to this global crisis, the educational institutions are lacking research that predominantly focuses on psychological wellbeing of UNIMAS students in B40 households during COVID-19 pandemic. First, past studies that looked into the psychological wellbeing of university students has been made abundantly using a quantitative approach, particularly surveys to

obtain the required data from the participants (e.g. Ahmed Suparno Bahar Moni, Shalimar Abdullah, Mohammad Farris Iman Leong Bin Abdullah, Mohammed Shahjahan Kabir, Sheikh M. Alif, Farhana Sultana, Masudus Salehin, Sheikh Mohammed Shariful Islam, Cross & Muhammad Aziz Rahman, 2021; Shahira, Hanisshya, Lukman, Normala, Azlini & Kamal, 2018; Freire, Ferradás, Valle, Núñez & Vallejo, 2016). The usage of questionnaires and surveys when obtaining the data may be able to generalize a certain population. However, this particular method will not be able to look deeper into the issue as the outcomes from the data obtained are not in-depth. Therefore, the researcher in this study has taken a different approach from the past research. This study is done qualitatively by using a semi-structured interview to obtain the data from participants. This is because, to the researcher's knowledge there are less to none studies that look into this particular area by utilizing a qualitative approach. On the other hand, it allows the researcher to obtain an in-depth data to further understand the undergraduates' psychological wellbeing.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher decided to conduct an interview session via virtual methods. This approach seems to be particularly different from any other qualitative research that had been conducted in the past. To my knowledge, past researchers obtained the required data through face-to-face interaction which differs from what the researcher for this study is planning to explore (e.g. Freire et al., 2016). Hence, the researcher will only gather the data by virtual means from the participants involved who are currently staying at their respective place of residence. Third, there has been a surge of studies in relation to the students' psychological wellbeing ever since the outbreak. However, the studies done in regard to this matter are done in a Western context but less to none in the Malaysian context that the researcher knows of.

This study will further explore the psychological wellbeing of Malaysian students, particularly in University of Malaysia, Sarawak (UNIMAS). Additionally, it enables the researcher to look into Southeast Asian perspectives thus giving meaningful results in regard to the context. A local study has looked into the rural context in Sabah in which the participants involved are university students of University of Malaysia, Sabah (Balan Rathakrishnan, Melissa Edora Sanu, Azizi Yahaya & Soon Singh Bikar Singh, 2019) and from various local universities (Rafizah Kechil, Nor Hanim Abd Rahman & Noor' Aina Abdul Razak, 2021). Therefore, by carrying out this research it enables us to have different perspectives on how university students in Malaysia improve or maintain their psychological wellbeing. The differences in the outcomes from distinct contexts may assist future researchers to study the psychological wellbeing among university students during COVID-19 pandemic.

Fourth, past studies focus on the students' psychological wellbeing on a basis of university challenges, particularly online delivery learning alone. However, apart from the university challenges, this study wants to explore the experience and challenges faced by specifically female undergraduates who are also university students. The participants should have siblings and does not include female undergraduates who are the only child of the family. By exploring their personal challenges and experience in their respective families, participants may give the researcher a different perspective and outcomes. It is undeniably true that the research on women's psychological wellbeing has been made abundantly (e.g. Thibaut & Wijngaarden-Cremers, 2020; Punetha, D., Maral, P. & Subba, U. K., 2021; Blasi, Albano, Bassi, Mancinelli, Giordano, Mazzeschi, Pazzagli, Salcuni, Coco, Gelo, Lagetto, Freda, Esposito, Caci, Merenda & Salerno, 2021). However, most studies look into **gender differences** in general and not an in-depth study on females' psychological issues (e.g.

Akhter, 2015; Fenollar-Cortés, Jiménez, Ruiz-García & Resurrección, 2021). To my knowledge, no studies have been made that further explores specifically the psychological wellbeing among the female students that the researcher knows of.

Fifth, most past studies had looked into the psychological wellbeing of university students during the pandemic by exploring the impacts of online delivery learning (Browning et al., 2021; Rafizah Kechil et al., 2021). Some of these past studies chose low-income population (B40) in Malaysia but not specifically exploring the wellbeing and issues of university students (Rozmi Ismail & Nurfatina Akila Jeli, 2020; Suzana Shahar, Huijin, Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh, Sofia Amara & Norizan Abdul Razak, 2019). However, less to none had taken the influence of family background financially into consideration when assessing the psychological wellbeing of university students (except Naffisah Mohd Hassan, Erne Suzila Kassim, Noorain Mohamad Yunus and Syukrina Alini Mat Ali, 2020). Due to the differences in income classes in Malaysia, the challenges, stressors and coping mechanisms may vary for students from different income groups and households. In this research, the researcher mainly focuses on B40 households and assesses the students' psychological wellbeing from this particular income group. The studies on B40 households are rather scarce and the need to study their psychological wellbeing and struggles is very much necessitated as this particular low-income group holds 40% of the whole population.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

This research aims to examine the psychological wellbeing of B40 university students in UNIMAS during COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To explore possible challenges and struggles faced by the B40 female undergraduates during COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To identify the university students' effective coping strategies in B40 households.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How would the B40 UNIMAS students describe their psychological wellbeing during COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the possible challenges and struggles faced by the female undergraduates during COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How do the B40 of UNIMAS students cope during COVID-19 pandemic?

1.5 Research Framework

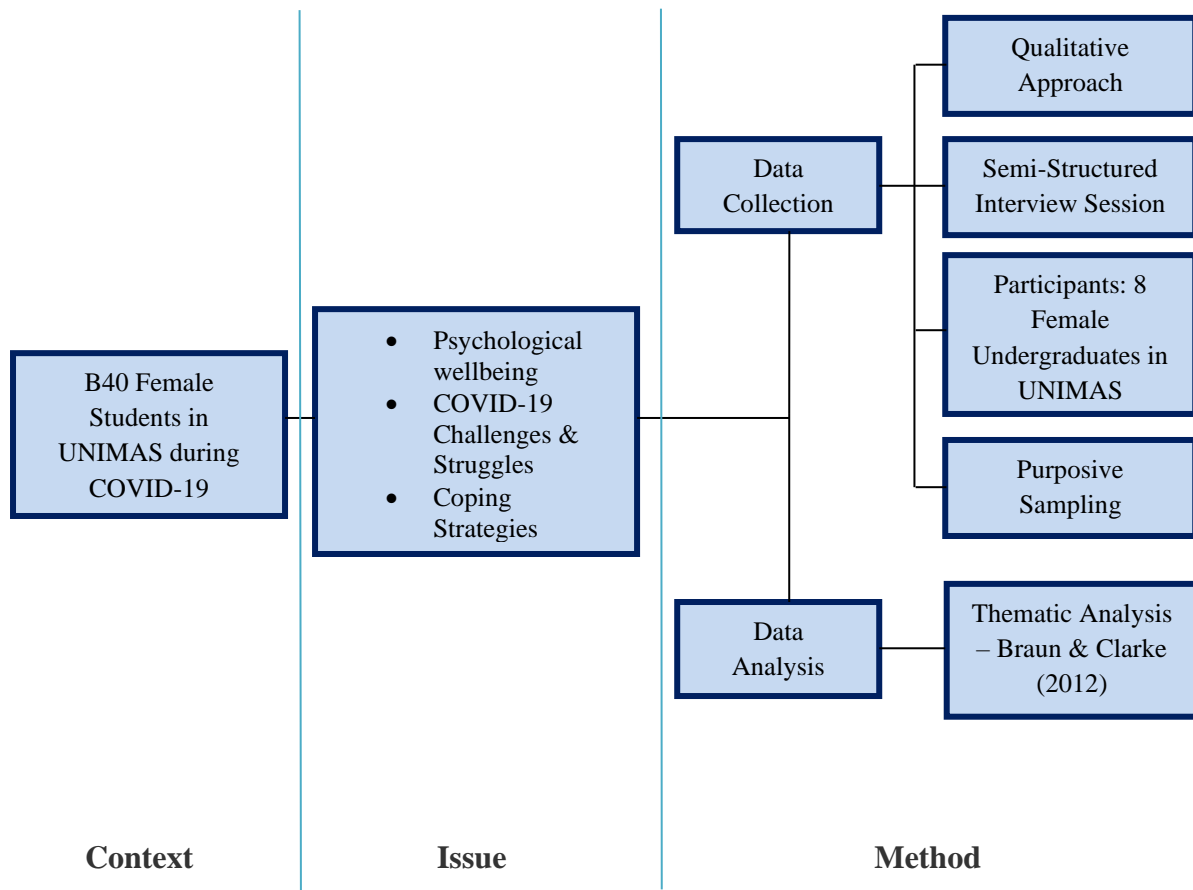


Figure 1.5 Research Framework

1.6 Significance of Study

The study of The Psychological Wellbeing of B40 students in UNIMAS during COVID-19 pandemic may bring significant impact on students of B40 households, their parents and family, local universities particularly UNIMAS, Malaysian community and the government of Malaysia. First, this study allows us to alleviate the struggles and challenges faced by female students to accommodate their needs during COVID-19 pandemic, including the B40 families in Malaysia. Second, this study is capable of spreading mental health awareness of

the undergraduates particularly those coming from B40 households which may be heavily impacted during COVID-19 pandemic. This awareness may also encourage the government to take extra measures in helping the undergraduates by improving the access and care for the youths' mental health. Third, this study would be able to change the mental health stigma in Malaysian communities to create a mentally healthy society. Mental health stigma is one of the major hindrances in creating such a society. Therefore, the researcher believes that by conducting this study, the society will show a significant reduction in mental health stigma and discrimination.

1.7 Definition of Terms

In this study, the definition of terms will be defined in two different areas which are conceptual and operational.

1.7.1 Psychological Wellbeing

Conceptual Definition:

The conceptual definition of psychological wellbeing is defined as “Inter- and intraindividual levels of positive functioning that can include one’s relatedness with others and self-referent attitudes that include one’s sense of mastery and personal growth” (Burns, 2016). According to Seligman (2011), good psychological wellbeing also known as the PERMA model comprises five components which are P-Positive Emotions, E-Engagement, R-Relationships, M-Meaning, and A-Accomplishment.

Operational Definition:

In this research, the operational definition of psychological wellbeing can be defined as exploring the mental health of female students coming from B40 households by understanding the measures taken into consideration when maintaining and improving their mental state at their respective place of residence. The researcher comes up with a list of questions for the participants to respond to further evaluate their wellbeing during the outbreak.

1.7.2 B40 Households

Conceptual Definition:

The conceptual definition of B40 households can be defined according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020), whereas the B40 household income groups earn less than RM4,850.00 every month with a median income of RM3,166.00 and RM3,152 earnings on average and further classified into 4 different categories which are B1, B2, B3 and B4.

Operational Definition:

In this study, the conceptual definition of B40 households can be defined as the researcher opted approach on examining how the B40 environments shape and influence their possible stressors, struggles and coping strategies to maintain their psychological wellbeing, particularly among female undergraduates in UNIMAS.