

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Psychological Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Mental Health Among Medical Students in Malaysia

Md Mizanur Rahman, Ai Ling Ang, Nithiya Lakshmi, Kishwani Hiram Chakraverty, Dyg Shafiqah, Krithiga Selvarajoo

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), 94300, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The Coronavirus disease-2019 impacted the governments and public health systems worldwide, with the psychological impact including an increase in the level of stress, anxiety and depression. We determine the prevalence of depression, anxiety and stress using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21), and to determine the psychological impact of COVID-19 pandemic amongst medical students in Sarawak, Malaysia using the revised Impact of Event Scale (IES-R). **Methods:** We analysed 355 medical student's data obtained from an online survey. All the undergraduate medical students were the sample population. IBM SPSS version 22.0 was used for data analysis. A p-value of $\leq .05$ was considered statistically significant. **Results:** Analysis indicated that three-fourths of the students had no mental health issues. More than one-tenth of the students were moderately depressed (12.4%) and 4.3% severely depressed. A similar pattern of prevalence of anxiety was noted with 10% reported moderate anxiety, and 6.8% had severe anxiety. 15.8% of the students had mild stress, 4.2% moderately stressed, and 2% severely stressed. A hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis showed that hyperarousal appeared to be a predictor of depression ($\beta = .466$, $p < .001$), anxiety ($\beta = .481$, $p < .001$) and stress ($\beta = .508$, $p < .001$). Along with hyperarousal, intrusion ($\beta = .148$, $p < .05$) predicts stress among the students. **Conclusion:** Our analysis revealed that hyperarousal symptoms related to the global pandemic of COVID-19 led to significant mental health issues among students. Therefore, urgent strategies to support the students' psychosocial wellbeing and self-care and to strengthen their coping skills and resilience need to be implemented.

Keywords: Anxiety, COVID-19, Depression, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Psychological impact, Stress

Corresponding Author:

Md Mizanur Rahman, PhD

Email: rmmizanur@unimas.my; rmizanur1958@gmail.com

Tel: +60109745920

INTRODUCTION

Fear of the unknown and uncertainty about a possible future threat can induce anxiety (1) and increase the level of anxiety in people with or without underlying mental health conditions (2). The emergence of the novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), first isolated in a group of patients with pneumonia of unknown origin in late December 2019 in Wuhan, China (3), had subsequently spread to several nations as the newly termed Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), some of which have reported further transmission in the community (4). On 30th January 2020, the outbreak of coronavirus has been announced by the World Health Organization as a Global Public Health Emergency (5,6). Besides the potential risk of mortality related to the infection, the impact of this pandemic includes a significant psychological burden (7). The consequences of this

evolving pandemic were predicted to include emotional responses like extreme fear and anxiety, social isolation and mental health problems including posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders and depression, and health risk behaviours such as tobacco and alcohol use. Public fear has been reported to manifest in alienation and discrimination (2).

In Malaysia, the Restricted Movement Order (RMO), also known as the Movement Control Order (MCO), has been mandated by the government since March 18, 2020, and has been extended twice. The RMO impose prohibition of mass gatherings, closure of business premises except for essential stores, closure of educational sectors, and a travel ban (7).

In addition to the psychological impact of COVID-19 that affects society as a whole, the student population faces greater challenges. The closure of universities and the potential extension of studies would likely cause disruption to the students' daily activities and future plans. The imposed restrictions would likely add to the psychological pressure of the university students whose academic sessions were postponed until further notice.