

Psychological Well-being Levels of Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Selangor

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Abstract

The unprecedented COVID-19 crisis created novel stressful situations for many people worldwide. Lockdowns and restricted conditions brought about by the pandemic also affected families in many ways. It is important to understand how families coped with the pandemic-induced stress as it will have either positive or negative impacts on the overall family unit. Therefore, this quantitative study investigates the psychological well-being levels of families during the COVID-19 pandemic in Selangor, Malaysia. A total of 147 respondents from Selangor participated, with data collected through 68 open-ended and closed-ended items distributed via WhatsApp using snowball sampling methodology. The research explores various aspects of psychological well-being, including stress, anxiety, and coping mechanisms, within the familial context amidst the pandemic. Among the notable findings of the study was that the overall level of family psychological well-being was at moderate to moderately high level. There were also slight differences reported in psychological well-being according to status, occupation and location. Interestingly, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the majority of respondents reported they were satisfied with their current life. Understanding the psychological impact on families during the pandemic is crucial for informing support services and interventions. Future studies could be undertaken to investigate the role of support services provided during the pandemic and its impact on families. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the psychological effects of COVID-19 and highlights the importance of addressing family well-being in public health responses.

Keywords: Psychological Well-being, COVID-19 Pandemic, Families, Selangor, Qualitative Research

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted lives worldwide, plunging individuals and families into a realm of unprecedented turmoil and uncertainty. This global crisis has left no

corner untouched, with families in Malaysia, including those in Selangor, grappling with profound challenges across economic, social, educational, and mental health domains. The pandemic has unleashed risks such as job losses, income reductions, profound alterations in social dynamics, and formidable hurdles in formal education. Consequently, many families find themselves wrestling with psychological distress symptoms, enduring prolonged stressors that manifest in various forms, including loss of motivation, sleep disturbances, feelings of despair, uncertainty, boredom, diminished interest, and even contemplations of suicide (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Against this backdrop of unprecedented global upheaval, families in Selangor, Malaysia, confront multifaceted challenges that have left an indelible mark on their psychological well-being. Positioned as one of Malaysia's most populous and economically vibrant states, Selangor's diverse population faces unique stressors stemming from the pandemic's disruptive influence on daily life, economic stability, and social interactions. The primary objective of this paper is to delve into the psychological well-being levels of families in Selangor during the COVID-19 pandemic, aiming to illuminate the myriad factors shaping their mental health. Through an in-depth exploration of families' experiences within this specific geographical context, we aspire to offer valuable insights into the adversities they have encountered and the resilience they have displayed in navigating these tumultuous times.

Acknowledging the critical role of family resilience in managing pandemic-induced stress, this study explores the psychological well-being of families in Selangor.

Research Question

What is the level of psychological well-being of families during the COVID-19 pandemic in Selangor?

Literature Review

Effects of the Pandemic on Psychological Well-being

Numerous studies have extensively documented the detrimental impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological well-being of individuals and families. Brooks et al. (2020) underscored heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among the general population, with families bearing an additional burden due to social isolation and increased caregiving responsibilities. Similarly, Xiong et al. (2020) observed a significant prevalence of psychological distress among families, particularly among parents with young children, attributed to concerns such as infection risk, financial strain, and the challenges of homeschooling. Additionally, the pandemic has indiscriminately affected various demographic groups, including men, women, and pregnant women, as highlighted by Mohd Ariffin & Hassan (2020). Furthermore, the pandemic-induced stressors have led to observable shifts in behavior, with some individuals developing obsessive-compulsive tendencies, as noted by (Hemavathi et al., 2020).

Resilience and Coping Mechanisms

Despite the formidable challenges brought about by the pandemic, numerous families have exhibited resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms to uphold their psychological well-being. Masten and Motti-Stefanidi (2020) underscored the significance of family resilience, characterized by the ability to endure and rebound from adversity, in alleviating the adverse impacts of the pandemic on mental health. Additionally, research has accentuated the pivotal

role of social support networks, effective communication, and problem-solving skills in assisting families in managing the stressors associated with COVID-19 (Prime et al., 2020).

Impact of Socioeconomic Factors

Socioeconomic factors have significantly influenced the psychological well-being of families amid the pandemic. Power's (2020) research revealed that families grappling with financial insecurity or job loss were prone to heightened levels of psychological distress, emphasizing the unequal burden borne by vulnerable populations. Likewise, studies have illuminated disparities in accessing mental health services and resources, with marginalized communities encountering amplified barriers to care (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020).

Parental and Child Well-being

Research during the pandemic has extensively examined the psychological well-being of parents and children within families. Spinelli et al (2020) found that parental stress and anxiety correlate with changes in parenting practices, manifesting in increased use of punitive discipline and reduced emotional support. Additionally, concerns have arisen regarding the impact of school closures and remote learning on children's mental health, with studies highlighting issues related to academic performance, socialization, and emotional well-being (Golberstein et al., 2020). Parents face considerable challenges in ensuring their children's education at home amidst financial constraints and time limitations Su-Qing Chen et al (2020); Ibrahim et al (2020), exacerbating parental stress and psychological burden, particularly for children with special needs (Su-Qing Chen et al., 2020).

The Importance of Family Resilience

In navigating these difficulties, family resilience emerges as pivotal, referring to the family's ability to withstand stress, maintain positivity, and problem-solve collectively (Wagnild & Young, 1993; Curtis & Cicchetti, 2007). Resilient families, as shown by Ramadhana (2020), exhibit better coping and stronger family bonds, underlining its importance in safeguarding individual well-being within the family (Tso et al., 2020).

Research Methodology

The study used a quantitative method through a questionnaire to answer the research question that has been set. The study population consists of parents and caretakers residing in the state of Selangor. The research instrument is a questionnaire distributed via the digital platform Google Forms. A simple random sampling method was used, known as snowball sampling. This method is aligned with the data collection approach used, which is online. A total of 147 respondents answered the questionnaire.

The research instrument contains 68 items consisting of closed and open-ended items. For closed items, a 4-point Likert scale was used ranging from 1 (Statement does not suit my situation at all) to 4 (Statement suits my situation very well). Three constructs were explored in this instrument, namely (1) Resilience, (2) Coping Strategies, and (3) Family Psychological Well-being. Several questionnaires were also used as guides to measure the three established constructs, such as the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale Connor & Davidson (2003), Brief-COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced) Carver (1997) and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

The overall reliability of the instrument was found to be high at $\alpha=.912$. Of the total number of items, 19 measured families' psychological well-being. Eighteen were 4-point

Likert scale items as explained previously while the last item required participants to select a binary response (Yes/No) to the question: 'Are you satisfied with your current life?'

The quantitative data collected were analyzed using the SPSS v.21 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) to analyze data descriptively and inferentially to answer the research questions and hypotheses.

Findings

The overall mean response for the 18 items using 4-point Likert scale measuring families' psychological well-being was $m=2.92$, $SD=0.31$. It can be inferred from Table 1 that the level of family psychological well-being of respondents in this study was moderately high (Alico & Guimba, 2015 as cited in Abu Bakar & Ismail 2020).

Table 1

Interpretation of 4-point Likert scale by four levels

Mean score	Interpretation of Mean
1.00 – 1.74	Low
1.75 – 2.49	Moderate Low
2.50 – 3.24	Moderate High
3.25 – 4.00	High

The study also investigated status, occupation and location as factors that may yield differing levels of psychological well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic among respondents.

Table 2

Level of psychological well-being by status

Status	Mean	N	SD
Mother	2.93	113	.293
Father	2.88	27	.324
Caretaker	2.91	7	.462
Total	2.92	147	.305

In terms of the status of respondents, Table 2 shows that the majority who responded were mothers ($n=113$), followed by fathers ($n=27$) and caretakers ($n=7$). From this, mothers seemed to have a higher level of psychological well-being compared ($m=2.93$, $SD=.293$) to fathers and caretakers.

Table 3

Level of psychological well-being by occupation

Occupation	Mean	N	SD
Professional	2.91	110	.302
Non-professional	2.93	37	.321
Total	2.92	147	.306

There were a higher number of professionals ($n=110$) among respondents than non-professionals ($n=37$). Interestingly, non-professionals were found to have a slightly higher

level of psychological well-being ($m=2.93$, $SD=.321$) than those working in the professional sector, as shown in Table 3. Nevertheless, the difference appears to be minimal.

Table 4

Level of psychological well-being by location

Location	Mean	N	SD
Urban	2.94	100	.278
Sub-urban	2.83	36	.365
Rural	3.06	11	.289
Total	2.92	147	.306

Table 4 shows that most of the respondents resided in urban areas ($n=100$), followed by sub-urban areas ($n=36$) and rural areas ($n=11$). From this, those living in rural areas reported higher levels of psychological well-being ($m=3.06$, $SD=.289$) compared to those residing in urban and sub-urban areas.

Table 5

Satisfaction with current life

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	131	89.1	89.1	89.1
No	16	10.9	10.9	100.0
Total	147	100.0	100.0	

Table 6

Satisfaction with current life by location

Response	Urban	Sub-urban	Rural	Total
Yes	89	32	10	131
No	11	4	1	16
Total	100	36	11	147

Overall, the majority of respondents reported that they were satisfied with their current life (89.1%), as seen in Table 5. Additional cross-tabs analysis against location as shown in Table 6 found that those residing in rural areas were the most satisfied, followed by sub-urban residents and finally urban residents.

Discussion

The findings revealed that overall, the level of family well-being among respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic was moderately high. This corroborates another finding of this study that despite the pandemic, most respondents reported feeling satisfied with their life. There may be several reasons for this. First, limited knowledge of COVID-19 has been found to increase anxiety and stress which affect family psychological well-being (Ading et al., 2021). However, there is a need to manage the information regarding the virus as the viral spreading of misinformation via social media and news overload can have detrimental effects on the mental health of citizens (Amundsen et al., 2021). Hence, the Malaysian government had advised citizens to be wary and abstain from unverified information Aziz et al (2021) and

entrusted several government agencies such as the Ministry of Health, National Security Council and the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia to transmit timely, accessible, up-to-date and accurate information of the virus to citizens (Fitriah & Norain, 2022).

Second, local and international studies have reported economic-related factors including loss of job, loss of income and lack of job security had a huge impact on family psychological well-being during the pandemic (Ading et al., 2021; Gassman-Pines et al., 2020; Fikri & Hafizah, 2023; Zainudeen et al., 2021). In this regard, the government had rolled out several financial aid packages to Malaysians throughout the pandemic such as *Bantuan Khas Covid-19* (BKC) which made payouts to households of the hardcore poor (*miskin tegar*), B40 and M40 Said (2021) and PEMULIH (*Pakej Perlindungan Rakyat dan Pemulihan Ekonomi*) that benefitted all levels of society from B40, M40 and T20 (Sanusi, 2021). Moreover, in Selangor, the state government held its own initiatives, namely the *Pakej Rangsangan Selangor Prihatin COVID-19* Che Noh (2020) and *Pakej Kita Selangor 2.0* (Hasnan, 2021). This may explain the minimal difference in the levels of psychological well-being among professionals and non-professionals in this study. However, the governments' financial initiatives and policies during the pandemic have not escaped criticism. Zainudeen et al (2021) opined that the stimulus packages consisting of one-off financial assistance and cash payouts would have been better replaced by more long-term measures addressing unemployment and retrenchments. Nevertheless, the World Bank noted that while there is room for improvement in the future, Malaysia demonstrated notable resilience and had dealt with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic much better than six other countries in the region in terms of managing decreased company sales (sales shock) and loss of household income (Abdul Aziz & Zainuddin, 2023; Malaysia was resilient, 2023).

Third, psychological well-being during the pandemic had also been found to be greatly influenced by the increased burden of childcare resulting in parental stress, anxiety and burnout as restrictions placed during lockdown made it difficult or not possible to access childcare facilities such as nurseries and schools and limited access to extended family which would normally be a source of support for parents in childcare (Guedria et al., 2023; Huebener et al., 2021). In fact, parents of younger children reported larger decrease in both life and family satisfaction compared to parents with older children most likely due to some of the circumstances mentioned above (Huebener et al., 2021). This is indeed worrying as children's psychological well-being has been shown to be influenced by that of their parents' Guedria et al (2023), thus it is important to manage parents' psychological well-being in order to ensure that the psychological well-being of the entire family is at a good level.

There were some also differences in level of psychological well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic according to status, occupation (already discussed in the second paragraph of this section) and location of respondents. In terms of status, mothers had a higher level of psychological well-being compared to fathers and caretakers. This is indeed interesting as several studies in Malaysia and in other countries have shown that mothers actually faced higher levels of anxiety due to being confined during the pandemic Guedria et al (2023), reported higher rates of worsening mental health Patrick et al (2020) and experienced higher decline in well-being as they had to bear most of the additional responsibilities, namely childcare and housework (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). Women also found it more difficult to focus while working from home as they needed to manage the household at the same time Afzan (2020) while those who could leave for work faced difficulties in managing their children as most nurseries and kindergartens were closed during the lockdown (Ismail, 2021). However, studies have also found that women's psychological well-being and ability to

manage work-life conflicts were related to their level of autonomy which includes among others; their sense of self-determination, independence from others and resilience to social pressures in their way of thinking and believing (Othman, 2022). Kapoor et al (2021) found resilience to be a significant moderating variable in the relationship between teleworking and psychological well-being among working mothers. In their study, Salleh and Yunus (2023) highlighted that having resilience was important in helping working mothers achieve work-life balance. They described resilience as having a positive and optimistic outlook when faced with challenges and this is influenced by their beliefs, social background, education level and support they receive from their family and surroundings. Thus, resilience appears to be a salient factor in understanding the psychological well-being of women and particularly among working mothers.

Finally, with regards to location, respondents residing in rural areas had a higher level of psychological well-being. It could be that family dynamics in rural areas differ from urban and sub-urban areas. Previous studies have reported on the close relationships of families and community in rural areas (Glendinning et al., 2008). Ismail et al (2021) in their study of rural communities in Malaysia during the Movement Control Order (MCO) found that healthy family relationships had a great influence on well-being. McIntyre and Roy (2023) reported that the close-knit nature of the rural community in Scotland supported the vulnerable members of their community by volunteering support in various ways.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the psychological well-being of families, with increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression reported across various populations. However, amidst these challenges, families have demonstrated resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms to navigate the uncertainties of the pandemic. Moving forward, it is essential for policymakers, healthcare professionals, and community organizations to prioritize the mental health needs of families and ensure equitable access to support services and resources. Further research is needed to better understand the long-term effects of the pandemic on family dynamics and psychological well-being, as well as to inform targeted interventions aimed at promoting resilience and recovery in the post-pandemic era.

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