

The Impact of Psychological Distress Among Kitchen Staff During the Covid-19 Pandemic in KLANG Valley

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers in Klang Valley during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study focuses on three independent variables to better understand the relationship with kitchen workers: finances, stress, and depression. This empirical study was carried out in Klang Valley, and 150 kitchen staff members were surveyed using Google Forms and a convenient sampling method. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software to obtain means, frequencies, and percentages. Based on the multiple regression analysis, it is found that all factors contribute significantly toward the psychological distress faced by kitchen workers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Kitchen Staff Workers, Financial, Stress, Depression

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared a global pandemic due to the novel coronavirus infection (COVID-19) caused by SARSCoV2 (World Health Organization, 2019). The Covid-19 outbreak originated in Wuhan and spread rapidly throughout China (Lipstichh, 2020). Covid-19 was introduced into Malaysia by Chinese tourists and Malaysians visiting countries with high infection rates, such as Italy and Indonesia, via Singapore.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a tremendous effect on various aspects of society which has resulted in many deaths, extraordinary monetary destruction, and a near-immediate shutdown of the country's economy (UNWTO, 2020). The government has deployed various means to stop the spread and transmission of the disease. The citizen has been ordered to stay at home to restrict unnecessary outside movement, social isolation and temporary closure of business enterprises especially within the hospitality industry, which have all been used to try and halt the spread of the virus (Bartik et al., 2020).

Besides, many employees have a high degree of psychological distress due to the pandemic. Psychological distress is an emotional state characterized by depressive symptoms such as loss of interest, sadness, despair, and anxiety (Mirowsky & Ross, 2002). It could be originated from the inappropriate coping mechanism and inability to effectively mitigate stressful situations that affect physical or mental health (Horwitz, 2007, Ridner, 2004).

The hospitality industry has been particularly hard hit. Most restaurants need to reduce indoor dining, and the mandated travel restrictions have resulted in sharp declines in international and domestic tourists and hotel occupancy rates (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). Two in three restaurant workers have lost their jobs, resulting in 8 million restaurant workers being terminated or laid off (National Restaurant Association, 2020). With this extreme scenario in mind, it is time to figure out how restaurant staff deal with stressful situations, especially regarding mental health, and more specifically, about its cause and consequences.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had the biggest impact on the tourism, accommodation, and restaurant industry. This study aims to investigate the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers during the Covid-19 pandemic in Klang Valley. The kitchen staff members conducted the survey during the Covid-19 pandemic to investigate the underlying framework. The investigation found that financial stress and depression played an important role in influencing psychological distress among the kitchen staff.

Literature Review

Kitchen Staff Workers

The hospitality sector is stressful (Kim et al., 2007; Wildes, 2007). This is directly related to the nature of the work, which is labour-intensive and includes frequent shifts, overload and antisocial working hours (Anderson et al., 2002; Chiang et al., 2010). Additionally, working in the hospitality industry requires close collaboration between departments and individuals, time constraints and demand elasticity. As a result, working as a kitchen staff in the hotel business can be tedious. Kitchen workers must deal with dynamic work environments, complex routines and intense interpersonal relationships at all times of the day (Birdir & Tepeci, 2003).

In a modern context, chefs can be viewed as food designers today (Kudrowitz et al., 2014). Innovating and altering ingredients for small-scale production, their professional kitchens double as design studios and manufacturing plants. The result is an edible consumer product requiring a design to elicit intricate, simple, elegant menus to satisfy hunger. To accomplish the task, the chef must carefully think about their target market to create appropriate and enticing products. To ensure their product's long-term viability, they must constantly adapt to new trends, and consumer wants (Aguilera, 2017).

As a result of the Covid-19 outbreak, the chefs cook using whatever ingredients they can get their hands on, as delivery services are suddenly scarce. The kitchen crew is meticulous in their search for significant ingredients and motivational values to incorporate into their work. Nonetheless, creating good-tasting dishes is very hard without the proper ingredients. Therefore, Dewakan, the groundbreaking Modern Malaysian restaurant, elected to close its doors and use the opportunity to hone its talents (Choo, 2020). Dewakan used the MCO extension as an opportunity to improve the R&D abilities of the team by experimenting with

juice pairings on chocolate items. As a result, Teoh and his team were supposedly willing to accept certain "losses" and wisely use the MCO extension to improve their menu and foster team creativity rather than to be or stay on par.

Financial

Government actions, such as movement control orders (MCOs), not only limit the ability to go out and participate in social activities but also threaten an individual's freedom of movement. Due to the lack of customers dining out, several restaurants were forcibly closed during the MCO (Aziz, 2022). Soon financial problems arise, and many people, especially those in the B40 and M40 age groups, have already lost or will lose a source of income. Despite the government's stimulus packages designed to alleviate the financial hardships many Malaysians face, many small and medium-sized restaurants in the country have been forced to cut wages (Zulkafli, 2021). Losing a job causes instability and uncertainty, leading to psychological discomfort (Ruengorn et al., 2021).

Psychological distress was predicted to be responsible for 8.6% of total disability-adjusted life years (DALY) in Malaysia in 2016, according to Malaysian Mental Healthcare Performance. With the current COVID-19 pandemic, these numbers are only expected to skyrocket. Individuals may cope by consuming alcohol or using illicit substances, leading to several additional problems, such as alcohol use disorder. When it comes to the financial strains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has provided financial assistance to the most vulnerable people, such as self-employed people, kitchen employees, and those with lesser income. It is also critical to have a financial plan before, during, and after the quarantine to alleviate anxiety about the unknown future (Gunnell et al., 2020).

Stress

During this epidemic, one of the key assessed subjects, stress, has been significantly increasing in society (Huang & Zhao, 2020). Quarantine has been shown to cause psychological suffering, with research suggesting that kitchen employees who were quarantined during influenza, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), middle east respiratory syndrome (MERS), and Ebola epidemics experienced stress (Brooks, 2020). During the quarantine, the stressors noted were the length of the quarantine, fear of contagion, insufficient resources, insufficient information, boredom, frustration, and isolation (Brooks, 2020).

During the epidemic, different coping mechanisms may have distinct emotional consequences. Individuals use methods including mind or action to cope with pressures (Tahara et al., 2021). They're divided into three categories based on their intended purpose: resolving the stressful situation, reducing stress associated with the stressful event, or avoiding or approaching the cause of stress. Extreme stress, according to studies, can cause individuals' mental and physical systems to fail to function, affecting their physiology, psychology, and behaviour (Sharma, 2020)

Depression

During the covid-19, kitchen staff workers appear to be depressed to a serious degree. Depression is a mental health condition that affects kitchen staff workers' moods. This mood disturbance is accompanied by physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms and behavioural changes (Tahara et al., 2021). Approximately one-third of Malaysians were mild to seriously

depressed during the MCO for the COVID-19 pandemic. Being in a younger age group, not having a partner, residing in the red zone during the MCO, having an income categorized as B40, and having avoidant coping techniques all increase kitchen staff workers to being depression. During the Covid-19 pandemic, religious coping and having a partner were linked to less depression (Thomas & Barbato, 2020).

Fear, stress, and anxiety can lead to depression and, in the instance of a 62-year-old patient who committed suicide in Serdang Hospital in Selangor, to suicidal thoughts. In May, a jockey and a hawker in Penang committed suicide due to financial difficulties brought on by the economic downturn. A Malaysian pilot who had been fired from Air Asia committed suicide earlier this month, probably due to the stress of losing his job (Jayamanogaran, 2020).

Since the partial lockdown, the country's National Fire and Rescue Department have been dealing with incidents of people threatening suicide. On the 24th of March, the Health Ministry's Situation Preparedness and Response Centre and Mercy Malaysia opened a support hotline for those affected by the current crisis. Not surprisingly, 46.8% of the calls were about psychiatric issues. The MCO-related losses and the distribution of Covid-19 have accelerated the increase and severity of mental health concerns. The Covid-19 issue is not only harmful to one's physical health but also kills in various ways (Hassan, 2021).

Figure 1 illustrates the research framework of the study in the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers during the covid-19 pandemic in Klang Valley. This study focuses on the antecedent of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers that were adapted from previous studies namely financial, stress and, depression.

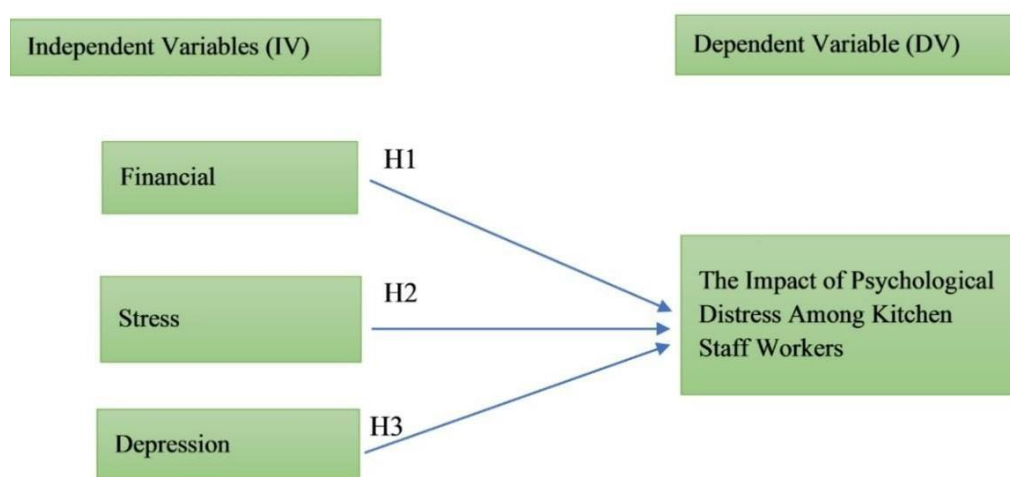


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers during the covid-19 pandemic in Klang Valley

Methodology

Sampling Technique

Convenient sampling is used in this study since it is intended to collect data that describes the features of a person and circumstance. This study only focuses on kitchen staff in Klang Valley.

Most kitchen staff works there. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), this study selected 150 kitchen staff from the population, and the questionnaire was distributed to 150 samples. This study successfully collected 150 samples.

Development of Instrument

Second, a personal-administered questionnaire was used as an appropriate data collection method. The researcher used an online questionnaire by Google Forms as the platform for respondents to answer the questionnaire. Researchers have posted a survey link to social media platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram Group. Every worker has a social media group to serve as a medium for disseminating information to kitchen staff.

Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study is a Google Forms questionnaire that allows respondents more time to complete the questionnaire and makes it easier and more convenient for them to respond. The instrument of this study consists of three parts of items. Section A contains five items concerning the demographics of the respondents. Section B also contains five items that touch on the financial, it is impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff in Klang Valley. While section C contains five items on the overall stress that the kitchen staff workers faced. Section D also contains five items towards depression. The questionnaire section will collect data using the Likert scale by selecting the amount of agreement to a statement supplied. Respondents will indicate the importance rating of the attribute in the statement by selecting the most relevant answer on a scale of 1 – Strongly Agree, 2– Agree, 3 – Unsure, 4 – Disagree, and 5 – Strongly Disagree.

Findings

Descriptive Analysis

Section A of the questionnaire was designed to capture some essential demographic characteristics of the kitchen staff workers involved in this study. The results of the respondents' demographic details are presented in Table 1. More responses were received from females (59.3%) than males (40.7%).

Table 1

Respondent's gender, age group, type of positions, years of being staff and salary (n = 150).

| Category | Items | Frequency | Percent % |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Gender | Male | 61 | 40.7 |
| | Female | 89 | 59.3 |
| Age | 18 - 21 years old | 15 | 10 |
| | 22 – 24 years old | 65 | 43.3 |
| | 25-year-old and above | 70 | 46.7 |
| Positions | Executive Chef | 46 | 30.7 |
| | Head Chef | 67 | 44.7 |
| | Sous Chef | 21 | 14 |
| | Station Chef | 11 | 7.3 |
| | Pastry Chef | 3 | 2 |
| | Commis Chef | 2 | 1.3 |
| Years being staff | 1-3 Years | 50 | 33.4 |
| | 3-5 Years | 30 | 20 |
| | 5-8 Years | 38 | 25.3 |
| | 8-10 Years | 32 | 21.3 |
| Salary | RM800-RM1000 | 50 | 33.3 |
| | RM1100-RM1500 | 80 | 53.4 |
| | RM1600 and above | 20 | 13.3 |

The percentage of responses from three age groups are 25 years old and above at (46.7%), followed by the 22-24 years old at (43.3%) where the remaining (10%) were between 18-21-year-old. Most of the respondents are Head Chef at (44.7%). The least are Commis Chef (1.3%) only. As shown in the table, (33.4%) of surveyed respondents 1-3 Years being staff, (25.3%) 5-8 Years being staff, (21.3%) of respondents 8-10 Years being staff and (20%) 3-5 Years being staff. (53.4%) respondents reported that their salary was in range RM1100-RM1500 and (33.3%) salary between RM800-RM1000 and (13.3%) of respondents' salaries about RM1600 and above.

Mean Analysis

This section reports the mean score of the dimension of the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers in terms of financial, stress and depression. In this study, the descriptive statistic was obtained from SPSS to determine the highest mean score for items in this study. The means of scores of respondents of different research variables were computed.

Table 2

Results of overall mean analysis

| Variable | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----------------------|--------|----------------|
| Financial | 3.3736 | .79790 |
| Stress | 3.7736 | .79670 |
| Depression | 3.4949 | .80227 |
| Overall satisfaction | 3.6979 | .73925 |

Financial

Table 4.2 demonstrates the overall mean financial score ($M=3.37$) with a standard deviation of .79790. 'I had trouble paying bills' scores the highest ($M=3.16$) and the lowest mean in this variable are 'I gotten food from a food bank/organization ($M=3.00$) with a standard deviation of .923.

Stress

The overall mean score of this dimension is 3.7736. Looking at the mean score, most workers feel bad when thinking about working in a pandemic ($M=3.15$) with a standard deviation of .907. The workers feel uneasy when having no job but must pay rent and feel their heart racing when losing jobs during covid-19 ($M=3.14$) with a standard deviation of .960. Male kitchen staff workers mostly faced stress as the head of families and thought that they had to overwork and protect their families from covid-19 at the same time making their stress levels high.

Depression

The overall mean score of this dimension is 3.4949. For the depression dimension, a high percentage of kitchen staff cannot enjoy things ($M=3.15$), with a standard deviation of .874. In contrast, the lowest score for this sub-dimension is ($M=3.06$), whereas they feel slow down. It might be some workers, most of its females, that diagnose with depression as in this section, many females workers claim that they faced depression after covid-19.

Kitchen Staff Workers Satisfaction

This section reports on the descriptive analysis of the overall satisfaction variables. The highest mean score in this dimension would be 'Overall, I agree to build family relationship' ($M=3.13$) with a standard deviation of .896. The overall mean score of this dimension is 3.6979.

Multiple Regression Analysis

This section provides the findings from the hypothesis that was created to achieve the research objective. Multiple regression analyses were run to determine the relationship between all variables.

Table 3

Model summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | d. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | .938 ^a | .881 | .878 | .29583 |

The R-squared (R^2) values show how much variance is within the dependent variable. As seen in the results table show that the R^2 value is .881. This means that 88.1% of variations within all three independent variables are significantly related to kitchen staff workers' satisfaction towards the impact of psychological distress during the covid-19 pandemic in Klang Valley. Other predictor variables account for the remaining 11.9%.

Table 4

Results of the Multiple Regression of the Impact of psychological distress on Kitchen staff workers

| Model | | nstandardized Coefficient | | Standardized Coefficient | t | Sig |
|---|-----------------|---------------------------|------------|--------------------------|-------|------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | .024 | .097 | | .242 | .000 |
| | Mean_Financial | .089 | .064 | .085 | 1.401 | .000 |
| | Mean_Stress | .221 | .059 | .226 | 3.745 | .000 |
| | Mean_Depression | .682 | .071 | .658 | 9.571 | .000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Mean_kitchenstaffworkerssatisfaction | | | | | | |

Table 3 shows that the beta loading for depression is .658, which is the highest among independent variables. The score reflects that 65.8% of kitchen staff workers faced depression during the covid-19 pandemic in Klang Valley. The lowest beta score was obtained from Financial, with a score of .085. The score reflects that only 8.5% of the kitchen staff workers faced financial problems during the covid-19 pandemic in Klang Valley. Another score is .226 for stress, reflecting that 22.6% of the kitchen staff workers had stress during the covid-19 pandemic in Klang Valley. The p-value of the t-test ($P=.000$) was less than 1% significant for the impact of psychological distress, indicating that this sub-dimension was significant, supported the research objective, and satisfied the hypothesis.

Table 5

Summary of the Hypotheses Testing Result from Multiple Regressions.

| Indicator | Statement of hypothesis | Remarks |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| H1 | There is a relationship between financial and the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers. | Supported |
| H2 | There is a relationship between stress and the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers. | Supported |
| H3 | There is a relationship between depression and the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers. | Supported |

Discussion

The discussion section in this paper is organized based on the hypothesis stated earlier.

Hypothesis 1: To determine the relationship between finances and the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers.

The result reveals that the financial sub-beta dimension's score is slightly low. The third factor that substantially impacts psychological discomfort among kitchen staff members is money. After several months of confinement aggravated by unnecessary uncertainty, financial hardship is related to anxiety and susceptibility to depression, according to the situation that occurred in Klang Valley (Jurblum et al., 2020). Khanna and Cao found that poor economic position and difficulties meeting living expenditures during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the degree of psychological distress in the general population of (Klang Valley, 2020). Similarly, studies found a link between greater psychological discomfort and increasing financial troubles during the SARS and MERS epidemics. This could be explained by the pandemic's establishment of a sense of insecurity and lack of security (Brooks, 2020). As a result, our findings add to the evidence that there is a link between financial stress and psychological suffering among kitchen workers.

Hypothesis 2: To determine the relationship between stress and the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers.

The stress beta score is slightly high as a result of the results. The findings revealed that kitchen workers had a significant impact on the impact of psychological distress. Because of the dread of mortality or morbidity associated with a disease, being infected with COVID-19 or anticipating the prospect of becoming ill was likely to be more stressful for kitchen staff members (Jurblum et al., 2020). Compared to individuals who were not infected, those who were infected with COVID-19 exhibited higher levels of sadness, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms. People previously infected with COVID-19 had expressed unresolved fear, remorse, and powerlessness. They were likely to be affected by the stigma of being labelled as diseased and the uncertainties surrounding their prognosis and future, according to (Guo, 2020). As a result, our findings add to the growing body of evidence supporting the link between stress and the impact of psychological distress among kitchen employees.

Hypothesis 3: To determine the relationship between depression and the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff workers.

Depression, in particular, emerged as the most significant factor in the subdimension impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff members. According to the survey's conclusions, most respondents are depressed. Male or males, as well as having a higher level of resilience, were indicated as protective factors against psychological discomfort in this study. Several studies on the psychological impact of COVID-19 on the general population found that females or women were more likely to be predisposed to depression and anxiety, according to (Wang, 2020).

Conclusion

During the covid-19 pandemic in Klang Valley, this study discovered a link between psychological discomfort (i.e., financial, stress, and depression) among kitchen staff members. The findings revealed that stress had the greatest influence on kitchen employees, followed by depression and financial concerns. As a result, accepting the presented hypothesis is reasonable. The independent variable Impact of psychological anguish, has the strongest link with the dependent variable, which is the impact of psychological distress among kitchen staff members. The findings of this study would be useful in determining measures to promote their mental health during the pandemic and beyond. Specific therapies based on developing data from Malaysian and global studies can be evaluated to decrease psychological discomfort among Malaysians.

Limitations and Future Research

The study results may benefit people facing psychological distress, with the necessary data for improvements to ensure kitchen staff worker satisfaction. Hence, this study would be beneficial to students, so they understand the realities of kitchen staff workers and covid-19 pandemic.

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