

The Public's Perceptions toward Theme Parks as A Recreational Activity

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Abstract

A theme park is an attraction that the public enjoys. A theme park provides amusement and creates a leisure time for the public to spend time with family, friends and other relatives. Therefore, it is critical to determine the public's expectations and perceptions of theme park recreation. The purpose of this study is to determine the level of public participation in a theme park recreational activity. The theme parks selected are Sunway Lagoon Water Park, iCity Water World, and Wet World Water Park. All of the selected theme parks are located in the state of Selangor. The objective of the study is to investigate the influence factor of public perception on theme park attendance based on social demographics. Due to the Covid-19 situation, the survey was conducted through an online form using a Google form. A total of 437 people from the selected theme parks were surveyed. The study found that most theme park visitors are students and are between 18 and 30 years old. The result shows that public participation in theme park recreational activities is significant. It was found that people who do their leisure activities in amusement parks have higher expectations. On the other hand, the influence factor of public perception of participation in theme park leisure activities was significant. The iCity Water World has the highest influence. The influence factor of public perception of participation is statistically significant in theme parks. Nevertheless, the management should cooperate and communicate with the government and private organizations to improve the country's economy due to the Covid-19 situation.

Keywords: Covid-19, Fun, Involvement, Selangor, Theme Park

Introduction

High quality of life is the ultimate goal of every human being. One of the most important aspects of this goal is the ability to unwind and enjoy oneself at a popular tourist destination. You may experience a life that is constantly changing in a manner that is distinct from your typical job life by going to a theme park. Malaysia is ideal for establishing theme parks due to its facilities, environment, and weather (Ali et al., 2018). The theme park is an attraction in the city to the local community, residents, and tourists abroad. The theme park also contributed to the economic growth of the tourism industry and the overall Malaysian economy as a tourism product (Rosyidah et al., 2015). This industry attracts tourists from various parts of the country and globally. Therefore, it has a significant contribution to the tourism industry of Malaysia.

The visitors of a theme park are made happy. For visitors, this means more time to relax and bond with loved ones (Rosyidah et al., 2015). The theme park receives a large influx of guests during school vacation times. Indoor theme parks, outdoor theme parks, and combination parks are all available in Malaysia. Malaysia is home to several well-established theme parks, such as Genting Highlands, Sunway Lagoon, and A'Famosa Water World. The Berjaya Times Square Theme Park is another indoor theme park. The rides, games, and virtual entertainment at Berjaya Times Square Theme Park make it a fun place to take the whole family. If you want to visit Malaysia's biggest indoor theme park, go as far as Kuala Lumpur, where you'll find Berjaya Times Square Theme Park, which is reportedly recognized as the largest in the country by the Malaysian Book of Records (*Berjaya Times Square Theme Park - Indoor Theme Park in Kuala Lumpur*, 2019). This is evidence of the increasing relevance of the theme park sector and the continuous success of theme parks.

Tourists or visitors are widely recognised as the backbone of theme park expansion (Stylidis et al., 2020) hence visitor satisfaction is essential in regards to the amusement park. A loyal tourist will return to a particular location regularly, which helps boost the performance of the tourism business, which is one of the top industries. Important in marketing is creating high quality for the visitor, resulting in a loyal and delighted visitor (Ali et al., 2016). Visitor pleasure is critical for gaining customer loyalty in recreational usage. In the sector, theme parks have a very devoted clientele. The loyalty of visitors impacts theme park marketing and service providers. According to particular research, there is a positive relationship between theme park enjoyment and loyalty. For example, in the North American theme-park visitor sector (Ali et al., 2016) discovered a positive effect of pleasure on loyalty (likely to return). According to the research, theme park happiness positively impacts loyalty regarding behavioural intentions of word-of-mouth, readiness to pay price premiums, and desire to return. A high degree of visitor happiness, perceived interest, and relationship management strengthen the tourist's bond with the theme park (Avinash & Vidyavathi, 2017). Client loyalty is a prominent aspect of the service marketing literature and has been examined in various industries (Ghorbanzade et al., 2019).

A few years ago, we learned that most theme parks in underdeveloped countries, including Malaysia, had ceased operations due to coronavirus (Covid-19). The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant economic challenges for state and local governments, which were frequently faced with increased spending in certain areas (e.g., public health, education) to adapt to the pandemic and decreased tax revenues, resulting in funding cuts for many government services (Sager, 2021). Changes in consumer spending and behaviour linked to lower income, particularly from the tourist and hospitality sectors (e.g., restaurants, hotels), and so states and local governments more dependent on these businesses often had more negative

economic repercussions (Sager, 2021; Sheiner & Campbell, 2020). According to Tan Sri Richard Koh, president of Society Theme Park and Malaysian Families Entertainment Centre (MAATFA), estimates that tourist absenteeism costs up to RM40 million in January and February (Zainuddin, 2020). In keeping with this, a few theme parks could not function normally under the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) (The Star, 2020). Additionally, visitors to the theme park must adhere to the government's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), which involve ongoing social distancing. There is also a visitation restriction depending on the carrying capacity and the size of the theme park's grounds.

According to Jimmy Choo, Vice President of Inbound and Domestic, the number of visitors to theme parks is increasing. From January to September of the previous year, around 28.7% of tourists went to theme parks, with Klang Valley and Johor being the top attractions in the nation. This might be because the public's worries about physical, mental, and overall well-being have altered throughout the pandemic, reflecting increased public health and quality of life difficulties. According to studies, there is a decrease in physical activity, an increase in anxiety, and a decrease in depression, all of which are known to have a detrimental influence on overall health (Bernos & Vindegaard, 2020; Tison et al., 2020). Notwithstanding prior research on visitors' perceptions of theme park services, the COVID-19 outbreak has profoundly affected the public's everyday life. In such an instance, determining visitor involvement in theme parks and the variables affecting the public's choice to participate in a leisure activity after the pandemic is critical.

Objective

Thus, the main objectives of this study are to understand public perceptions of theme parks as a choice of place for leisure. The specific objectives of this study are: i) to measure the level of public participation in recreational activity in selected theme parks and ii) to investigate the factor of influence of public perception on participation in selected theme parks.

Moreover, this study aims to understand the demographic composition of the public in the three selected theme parks chosen as a place to engage in recreational activities. It also examines the extent to which the public participates in theme parks and the factors influencing people to participate in recreational activities. The benefit of this study is that theme park management can create more activities for the public to visit theme parks, especially during school holidays. This research will help the stakeholders or the future developers to improve the theme park based on the socio-demographic level and expectations of the public. The policy implications of assuming that some miracle cure for theme park management in a business will help achieve the goals outlined to attract more visitors.

Methods

Study Area

The research was carried out at Malaysian theme parks in Selangor. The theme parks were open at iCity Water World, Wet World Water Park Shah Alam, and Sunway Lagoon Water Park. The poll was done between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. on school vacations and weekends. The three theme parks are both outdoor and inside. Each theme park offers its unique set of attractions for both children and adults. The theme parks also provide gift stores, raft rentals, locker sales, and food stalls.

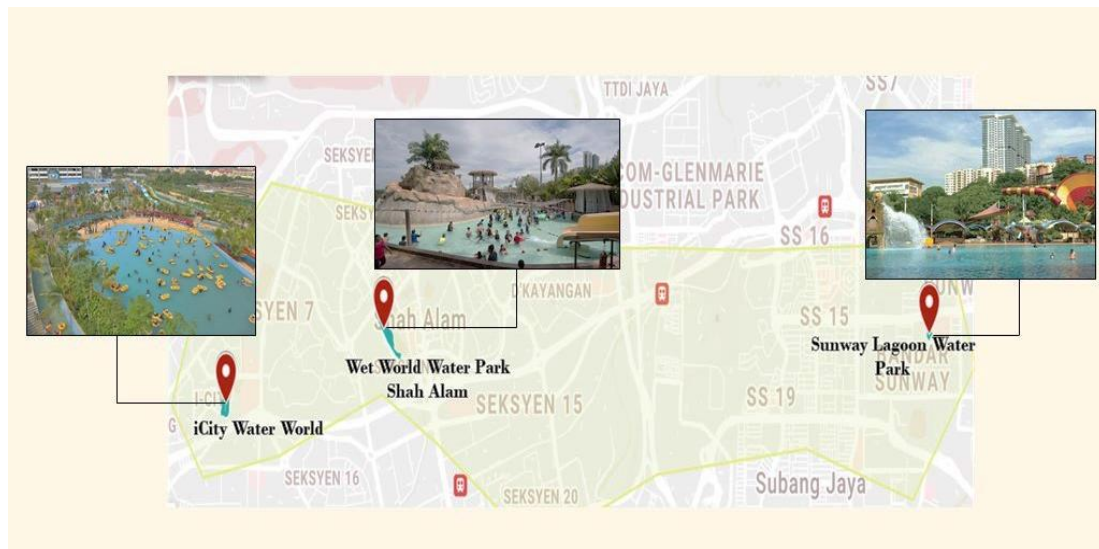


Figure 1: The location of Sunway Lagoon Water Park, iCity Water World and Wet World Water Park

Study Sample

The data for this research were collected as part of a broader attempt to analyse theme park usage, perception, and expectations in Selangor during the COVID-19 pandemic. This cross-sectional research used a Google Form to administer a 10-minute online survey to 437 adults (18+) in Selangor. Data was collected between May 22nd and June 6th, 2020, to coincide with the start of the school break and festival season. Selangor had an average of 276 new COVID-19 cases throughout the data-collecting period.

In this study, research constructs were assessed using a five-point Likert scale and many questions; results ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (strongly agree). The Likert scale assessed an individual's contentment, loyalty, and opinion. Besides, they determine the degree of agreement with the specific assertion. The questionnaire was developed in a bilingual format (English and Bahasa Melayu) in Google form to make it easier for respondents to reply. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Findings

Visiting Times

The Table 1 shows that nearly half of the respondents, 40.3% (76), visited this theme park for the first time. Most guests will return to this theme park for the second or third occasion. Another 24.5%, or 107 people, are returning to this theme park for the second time. With 19.0% of responders, the fourth or more visit is the lowest. The third time is the lowest, with just 16.2% of responders.

This demonstrates that the theme park is well-known and a popular tourist attraction in Selangor. As theme parks were created to produce money by developing activities, services, and facilities, they have won the hearts of the people who come and return to them (Jamal et al., 2017).

Table 1

Frequency of Visiting Times of Respondents at Theme Park

	iCity Water World		Wet World Water Park		Sunway Lagoon Water Park	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Visiting times						
<i>First</i>	61	42.1	64	44.8	51	34.2
<i>Second</i>	32	22.1	38	26.6	37	24.8
<i>Third</i>	22	15.2	20	14.0	29	19.5
<i>Fourth and above</i>	30	20.7	21	14.7	32	21.5

The Level of Public Participation in Recreational Activities in the Theme Park

As indicated in Table 2, the crucial links between the three chosen theme parks and the public include theme parks as an option for leisure activities. The chart illustrates that with the selected theme parks in all states, the degree of public engagement in theme parks as a site for leisure activities was substantial. The most significant degree of public attention in theme parks as a leisure activity is "I enjoy our involvement in theme park as a leisure activity" among the three theme parks had higher significance namely $[F(2,434) = 16.498, p < 0.01]$. A p -value of less than 0.05 implies that the result is statistically significant.

The lowest degree of public commitment to theme parks was "I am really motivated to cooperate with others in theme park recreational activities" which had the least significant among the three theme parks $[F(2,434) = 10.876, p < 0.01]$. A p -value less than 0.05 indicates that the outcome is significant. However, the post hoc comparison using the Turkey HSD test revealed that the mean scores for Sunway Lagoon Water Park and the other two theme parks were substantially different. Moreover, the post hoc comparison using the Turkey HSD test revealed that the mean for iCity Water World and Wet World Water Park was substantially different. There was no discernible difference between these two theme parks. This signifies that the iCity Water World with Wet World Water Park is much more significant than the significance threshold.

Table 2

Public Participation in the Theme Parks

Dependent variables	Mean			F	p-value
	iCity Water World	Wet World Water Park	Sunway Lagoon Water Park		
<i>I am really motivated to participate in the recreational activities at the amusement park</i>	3.90	4.01	4.35	11.769	.000
<i>I am really motivated to cooperate with others in the recreational activities at the amusement park</i>	3.85	3.98	4.30	10.876	.000
<i>I really liked the theme park activities</i>	3.87	3.90	4.30	10.974	.000
<i>I have fun with our leisure activities in the amusement park</i>	4.17	4.24	4.61	16.498	.000
<i>I am really motivated to participate in recreational activities at the theme park to build relationships, have fun and enjoy myself</i>	4.09	4.12	4.50	12.387	.000
<i>I enjoy participating in outdoor or indoor activities at the theme park as a recreational activity</i>	4.04	3.95	4.45	15.674	.000

Factor Influencing Public Perception in the Theme Parks***iCity Water World***

Table 3 shows that the iCity Water World from this model was 0.627, indicating that the independent variables in the model explained about 62.7% of the variation in factors influencing public opinion of theme park involvement. The adjusted value for predictors is 0.596, which is the lowest value. The outcome demonstrates that the value is compatible with the model. Unfortunately, this research did not consider another 37.3% of the unexplained variables impacting public opinion of theme park attendance.

Table 3

Regression Model Summary on Factor Influence the Public Perception to Participate and Independent Variables

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
2	0.792 ^a	0.627	0.596	0.37313

Multiple regression was performed to predict the factors influencing public perception of participation from the independent variables. As shown in Table 4, the overall regression model was significant, $F(11,133) = 20.334$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.627$. The regression model was a good fit for the data. The p-value showed that three independent variables significantly predicted the overall factor affecting public perception. In the regression analysis, the t-value was used to explain the relative importance of the independent variables (sociodemographic factors and level of public engagement with amusement parks) contributing to the variance in factors influencing public perception of amusement park attendance. A general linear model was used for the final model of this study.

Of the three independent variables, the variable I enjoy our recreational activities at the recreational park had the highest t-value ($t=3.281$, $p=0.001$), followed by the motivation to enjoy participating in outdoor or indoor activities at the recreational park as a leisure activity ($t=2.904$, $p=0.004$), and finally, the t-value ($t=2.605$, $p=0.010$) for preference to participate in outdoor or indoor activities at the amusement park as a leisure activity was determined by the motivation to participate in amusement park leisure activities to build relationships, have fun, and enjoy oneself. This value is statistically significant and related to the overall factor influencing the public's perception of participation. Beta coefficients indicate the strength of the comparative effect between the independent variables and the dependent variables.

Table 4

The Multiple Regression Analysis of iCity Water World

Independent variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		t- value	p- value
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	1.504	.232	6.483	.000
<i>I am really motivated to participate in the recreational activities at the amusement park</i>	.100	.053	1.885	.062
<i>I am really motivated to cooperate with others in the recreational activities at the amusement park</i>	.004	.051	.073	.942
<i>I really liked the theme park activities</i>	.005	.063	.087	.931
<i>I have fun with our leisure activities in the amusement park</i>	.192	.058	3.281	.001
<i>I am really motivated to participate in recreational activities at the theme park to build relationships, have fun and enjoy myself</i>	.179	.069	2.605	.010
<i>I enjoy participating in outdoor or indoor activities at the theme park as a recreational activity</i>	.148	.051	2.904	.004
Gender	-.146	.072	-2.024	.045
Age	.069	.048	1.442	.152
Ethnicity	-.043	.040	-1.087	.279
Profession	-.045	.022	-2.023	.045
Visiting Times	.026	.028	.924	.357

Wet World Water Park

Table 5 shows that the result of this model for Wet World Water Park is 0.484. This means that the independent variables in the model account for only about 48.4% of the variance in the factors that influence public perception of participation in the theme park. The adjusted value for the predictors which is 0.441 indicates the lowest value. The result shows that the model still fits. Another 51.6% of the unexplained factors affecting public perception of participation in theme park are not considered in this study.

Table 5

Summary of the Regression Model on Factors Influencing Public Perception of Participation and Independent Variables

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error of the Estimate
3	0.696 ^a	0.484	0.441	0.39063

Note: R² value < 0.5

Multiple regression was performed to predict the factors influencing public perception of participation from the independent variables. As shown in Table 6, the overall regression model was significant, $F(11,131) = 11.178$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.484$. The regression model was a good fit for the data. The p -value obtained shows an independent variable is a significant predictor of the overall factor affecting public perception of participation. The t -value in the regression analysis was used to explain the significance of the independent variables (socio-demographic variables and the extent to which the public chooses a theme park as a recreational activity) that contribute to the variance in the factors that influence the public's perception of visiting a theme park. A general linear model was used for the final model of this study.

Among the independent variables, the t -value ($t=4.512$, $p < 0.05$) was determined for motivation to participate in theme park recreational activities for relationship, fun, and enjoyment reasons. It is statistically significant and related to the overall factor influencing the public's perception to participate. The beta coefficients indicate the strength of the comparative effect between the independent variables and the dependent variables.

Table 6

Wet World Water Park's Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		t- value	p- value
	B	Std. Error		
<i>(Constant)</i>	1.597	0.288	5.555	0.000
<i>I am really motivated to participate in the recreational activities at the amusement park</i>	0.077	0.055	1.392	0.166
<i>I am really motivated to cooperate with others in the recreational activities at the amusement park</i>	0.077	0.057	1.356	0.178
<i>I really liked the theme park activities</i>	-0.029	0.055	-0.524	0.601
<i>I have fun with our leisure activities in the amusement park</i>	0.094	0.068	1.374	0.172
<i>I am really motivated to participate in recreational activities at the theme park to build relationships, have fun and enjoy myself</i>	0.252	0.056	4.512	0.000
<i>I enjoy participating in outdoor or indoor activities at the theme park as a recreational activity</i>	0.066	0.053	1.244	0.216
<i>Gender</i>	-0.005	0.079	-0.067	0.947
<i>Age</i>	-0.020	0.045	-0.447	0.656
<i>Ethnicity</i>	-0.003	0.045	-0.060	0.952
<i>Profession</i>	-0.013	0.026	-0.503	0.616
<i>Visiting Times</i>	-0.003	0.033	-0.092	0.927

Note: Significant at t-value > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05 (5% level)

Sunway Lagoon Water Park

Table 7 shows that the result for Sunway Lagoon Water Park in this model is 0.283. This means that the independent variables in the model account for about 28.3% of the variance in the factors affecting public perception of participation in the theme park. The adjusted value for the predictors, which was 0.225, showed minor differences from the value obtained. Thus, another 71.7% of the unexplained number of factors influence public perception to attend theme park that were not considered in this study.

Table 7

Summary of the Regression Model on Factors Influencing Public Perception of Participation and Independent Variables

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.532 ^a	0.283	0.225	0.40948

Note: R² value < 0.5

Table 8 shows the influence of factors on public perceptions of participation using multiple regression analysis. Multiple regression was conducted to predict the overall factor influencing public perception of participation from the independent variables. As the table shows, the overall regression model was significant, $F(11,137) = 4.907$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.283$. The regression model was a good fit to the data. The p -value obtained shows that there is an independent variable that is a significant predictor of the overall factor affecting public perception of participation. The t -value in the regression analysis was used to explain the significance of the independent variables (socio-demographic variables and the extent to which the public chooses a theme park as a recreational activity) contributing to the variance in the factors that influence the public's perception of attending a theme park. A general linear model was used for the final model of this study.

The most significant of the independent variables is I like to participate in the outdoor or indoor activities at the amusement park and carries the t value ($t = 2.189$, $p = 0.030$). This value is statistically significant and is related to the general factor that influences the public's perception to participate. The beta coefficients indicated the strength of the comparative effect between the independent variables and the dependent variables.

Table 8

Sunway Lagoon Water Park's Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		t- value	p- value
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	2.444	0.379	6.443	0.000
<i>I am really motivated to participate in the recreational activities at the amusement park</i>	-0.034	0.081	-0.424	0.673
<i>I am really motivated to cooperate with others in the recreational activities at the amusement park</i>	-0.008	0.073	-0.109	0.913
<i>I really liked the theme park activities</i>	0.092	0.082	1.131	0.260
<i>I have fun with our leisure activities in the amusement park</i>	0.014	0.075	0.185	0.853
<i>I am really motivated to participate in recreational activities at the theme park to build relationships, have fun and enjoy myself</i>	0.161	0.083	1.935	0.055
<i>I enjoy participating in outdoor or indoor activities at the theme park as a recreational activity</i>	0.172	0.079	2.189	0.030
<i>Gender</i>	-0.119	0.080	-1.482	0.141
<i>Age</i>	0.109	0.072	1.517	0.132
<i>Ethnicity</i>	-0.052	0.060	-0.867	0.387
<i>Profession</i>	-0.046	0.024	-1.879	0.062
<i>Visiting Times</i>	0.026	0.032	0.802	0.424

Note: Significant at t-value > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05 (5% level)

Conclusion

The public knows the theme park, which was chosen even among the non-native peoples. It is a theme park that is frequently visited and revisited by the public. The selected theme park is very famous in the state of Selangor. Moreover, visitors tend to visit it during school holidays and weekends to spend their leisure time with their family and friends.

The objective of this study was to determine the factors that influence the perception of the public to use the theme park as a leisure activity. It can be noted that the selected audience in theme parks are all Malaysians and most of them are in the age range of 18 to 30 years. There is no denying the fact that theme park visitors have a variety of attractions and unique activities. The results show that 67.3% of the respondents are students who spend time in

theme parks. Moreover, almost half of the respondents were visiting the parks for the first time and this is their first experience with the activities in these theme parks.

Two dependent variables are statistically significant and contribute to the factors that influence the public's perception to participate in theme parks. The two significant factors are: I am motivated to participate in theme park recreational activities to socialize, have fun, and enjoy myself, and I like to participate in outdoor or indoor theme park activities. A previous study found that theme park competitiveness and success depend on characteristics related to atmosphere, staff, ability to evoke emotions, theme, price, attractions, advertising, restaurants, technology, shops, safety, accommodation, and innovation (Bernardino & Carneiro, 2014).

Overall, the public perception of theme parks has reached the desired level of engagement and the factors influence the public perception to participate in theme parks. The critical factors that influence the public perception of theme park are the overall theme park experiences and values (Cheng et al., 2016). Thus, visiting and participating in physical activities also promote social interaction among the public (Zainol & Au-Yong, 2016). Theme parks provide various attractions and values by offering entertainment, aesthetic amenities and experiences to the public for their leisure activities.

Limitation of the Study

This study has several limitations that researchers should consider when evaluating the results. First, this study only focuses on respondents who visited the three theme parks in the state of Selangor: Sunway Lagoon Water Park, iCity Water World, and Wet World Water Park. The scope of theme parks can be expanded to include other theme parks in a future study. Also, there is a lack of respondents as this study was conducted online due to Covid-19. The researcher could not interview directly on site to get more details about the visitors' visitation pattern. The data collection was slow as the respondents could not respond immediately as most of them took their own time to respond.

Recommendation for Future Research

The perception of the public shows that they partially agree to participate in recreational activities in selected theme parks. This research should focus on the public's perception and satisfaction during leisure activities as most visitors have high expectations from the selected theme parks. In addition, further research could be conducted in the selected theme parks such as safety and essential services in the theme parks.

Overall, theme parks provide a variety of attractions and value by providing entertainment, aesthetic amenities, and recreational experiences for the public. Therefore, theme parks play an important role in understanding the important role of emotional value in the factors that influence the public's perception of visiting a theme park as a recreational activity. In the future, biodiversity and sustainable development awareness and education should be integrated into theme parks to ensure high visitation probability for visitors/tourists. Thus, indirectly supporting SDG14, SDG15 and SDG17.

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Contributions

The authors confirm their contribution to the paper as follows: study conception and design: Nor Akmar Abdul Aziz, Thivya Laxshmy Raman, data collection: Siti Nisrina Mohd Radi, analysis and interpretation of results: Siti Nisrina Mohd Radi, Fiffy Hanisdah Saikim, draft manuscript preparation: Siti Nisrina Mohd Radi, Thivya Laxshmy Raman, Norhuda Salleh, Nordiana Mohd Nordina Mohd Nordin. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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