

WAYS OF PERCEIVING

COVID-19 INFLUENCES MENTAL HEALTH

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As we all know, the covid-19 outbreak has been happening for close to 2 years now and has been escalating ever since. World Health Organization was informed on 31 December 2019, in Wuhan City, China about the unknown pneumonia. On January 7, 2020, Chinese authorities identified a novel coronavirus as a cause and temporarily called it “2019-nCoV”. The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic led to the cancellation of mass scientific conferences, travel restrictions, social distancing and other preventive measures that people all around the world needed to adopt. For the most part, this global crisis has taken an enormous leap in many people's mental health because they can't socialize with family and friends in order to guarantee security for everyone. From my personal view, covid 19 is definitely playing a impact in my life as an university student.

Here in Malaysia, people have been under lockdown for almost two years now, but the cases do not seem to really diminish, instead, they have steadily been increasing every day. Although numerous people are being vaccinated, there is also a group of people who do not want to get vaccinated because of the concern of social media in all minds. As I mentioned earlier, this global pandemic causes fears in all aspects such as, work, school, health and more that have influenced many people's mental health. There are a few ways on how individuals can cope with Covid-19 especially if it has something to do with mental health that I personally executed during this tough time. First and foremost, make a list of what you can and cannot control. Fear and anxiety are instinctive responses to the unknown. Keep a journal of your thoughts and determine what you can and cannot change. We can't, for example, confront everyone who doesn't cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze, but we can walk away from them and maintain a safe distance. Very recently in Malaysia, there was a case where the Miss Universe Malaysia refused to wear a mask because she finds it very unnecessary and also claimed that if there were no Covid tests taken, there will not be covid. These kinds of statements are very irrelevant and unnecessary which makes it harder to explain about the situation to people like her. Next, limit your media exposure, which does include muting family chat groups that spread well-intended but fear-mongering fake news. Get your information from reliable sources, stay up to date once or twice a day, and then fill the rest of your time with meaningful activities. With social media now playing such an important role in everyone's lives, there is a lot of fake news floating around about the Covid-19 outbreak. Aside from that,

having a group video call with your friends and family can help you maintain good communication with others; try not to be alone all of the time as this can lead to major depression. To elaborate on my point, family and friends can be helpful in de-stressing because when one has a conversation with someone with whom they are comfortable, the chances of them opening up to one another increases.

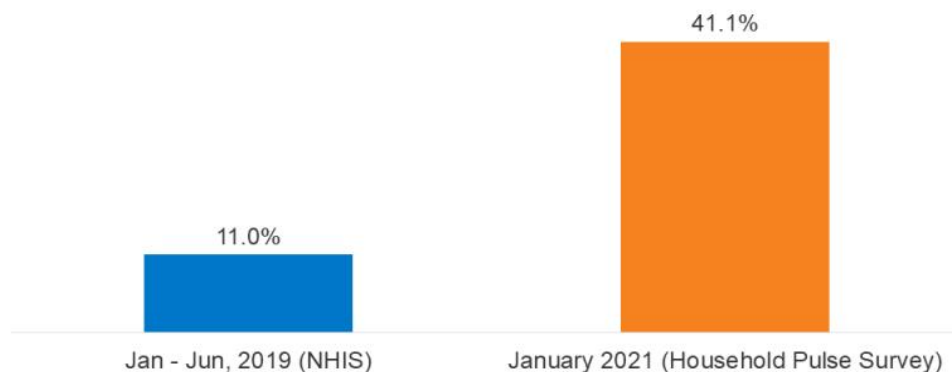
Aside from that, each of these changes and disruptions in our daily lives can lead to feelings of insecurity, anxiety, disappointment, and even boredom. As a result, in order to manage my mental health during the lockdown, I constantly try to keep myself occupied. One of the things I usually do is clean up my room once a week. Personally, I believe that by cleaning up my room, I will have more motivation to study and read, as well as a better sleeping environment. This also allows me to be very stress-free because I will not be paranoid about the little things that happens in my personal space. Moreover, I try to keep myself healthy by eating healthy and also exercising every day. By doing this, I realised that my brain works better and faster when it comes to studying. Individuals should spend enough time outdoors but must also keep in mind that their safety matters too. In addition to that, eating healthy helped me to keep my body weight and appearance bearable. Physical appearance also matters when it comes to maintaining a good mental health. For example, when an individual starts to feel insecure about how they look, it manipulates their mind to isolate themselves from people and this will eventually cause individuals to have major inferiority complex issue. One thing in specific that really helped me to keep my life going in track during this pandemic is dancing. I've been a traditional Indian dancer for 13 years, and it's the only thing that keeps me sane aside from my family. Having an online dance session with my friends and teacher kept me motivated every time.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the ensuing economic downturn, have had a negative impact on many people's mental health and created new obstacles for those who already suffer from mental illness and substance use disorders. Throughout the pandemic, approximately 4 in 10 adults in the United States have reported symptoms of anxiety or clinical depression, a share that has remained relatively consistent, up from one in ten adults who reported these symptoms from January to June 2019. According to a July 2020 KFF Health Tracking Poll, many adults are reporting specific higher risk of poor health and well-being, such as difficulty sleeping (36%) or eating (32%), increases in alcohol intake or substance use (12%), and worsening serious illnesses (12%), as a result of concern and stress about the coronavirus. As the pandemic progresses, continuous and vital public health measures expose

a growing number of people to situations associated with negative mental health outcomes, such as loneliness and loss of employment. Teenagers have faced a number of pandemic-related consequences, such as university shutdowns and income loss, which may have contributed to poor mental health. During the pandemic, a higher-than-average proportion of young adults (ages 18-24) report anxiety and/or depressive symptoms (56 percent). When contrasted to all adults, young adults are more likely to report substance use (25 percent vs. 13 percent) and suicidal thoughts (25 percent vs. 13 percent) (26 percent vs. 11 percent). Prior to the disease outbreak, young adults were at high risk of poor mental health and substance use

Figure 1

Average Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder and/or Depressive Disorder, January-June 2019 vs. January 2021



NOTES: Percentages are based on responses to the GAD-2 and PHQ-2 scales. Pulse findings (shown here for January 6 – 18, 2021) have been stable overall since data collection began in April 2020.
SOURCE: NHIS Early Release Program and U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey. For more detail on methods, see: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/ERmentalhealth-508.pdf>

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disorder, though many went untreated.

To conclude this essay, I believe that many students find college to be a stressful experience, especially during this global pandemic. Aside from academic strain, some students must cope with the unpleasant duties of separation and individuation from their family of origin, while others may have to attend to various employment and family commitments. Due to this case, many college students tend to encounter the start of mental health and drug use problems, or an aggravation of existing symptoms. For example, the only escape a college student gets is by meeting and socialising with their friends, but now they are forced to stay home for their safety. Besides that, online classes may be quite demanding because students are continuously required to gaze at their monitors for extended periods of time while still

maintaining excellent marks. Furthermore, College students frequently experience mental health issues. Academic stress, along with the pressures that come with entering and going to school, may trigger the onset of or worsening of mental health and drug use issues. Because of the low incidence of treatment seeking and commitment to therapy, the nature of psychopathology is frequently chronic. As a result, it is important to establish awareness campaigns and methods to guarantee treatment retention. Since many traditional students continue to rely on their families while attending college, parental engagement in therapy is critical. Lately, I promised myself to always strive for what exactly I want and also keep my life under control. Yes, I completely agree that times like this is very unpredictable, but all we can do is pray to be safe and hope for a speedy recovery.

(1335 words)

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