

The Pandemic and Its Effect on Malaysian Women – Emotional Distress, Stressors and Socio-Demographic

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ABSTRACT

Stress, anxiety and depressive levels were reported to have elevated amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, more prominently among women. The present study investigates the emotional distress prevalence and identifies its stressors and socio-demographic correlates among Malaysian women. Quantitative data were gathered through online questionnaires prepared in dual languages, that is, English and Bahasa Malaysia. The measures were adapted from existing studies, and the well-known Distress Anxiety Stress Scale – 21 and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support scale. A week-long data collection (June 2, 2020 – June 9, 2020) process resulted in the recruitment of 1793 women. Approximately, 37% (N = 669/1793) of the women were found to be emotionally distressed. Both Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis were administered with results indicating Financial Issues, Marital Issues, Living Condition, Emotion, Working from Home and Social Support to significantly predict the women's emotional distress, collectively accounting for 25% of R². Further, younger women and those from lower income groups were found to experience more emotional distress compared to the rest of the women. The women were mostly found to self-manage and/or depend on family members to help manage their issues during the lockdown. The study is deemed timely considering the on-going pandemic and lockdown in the country, and also in several countries worldwide, and the findings provide insights for mental health professionals and policymakers to devise strategic measures to help this vulnerable cohort to cope better psychologically.

Keywords: Emotional distress, Women, COVID-19, Lockdown, Malaysia

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