LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING TOWARDS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE

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Abstract: *In the current era, mental health issues have become common in society. There are several mental health issues commonly known such as sleep disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, depression, general anxiety disorder and panic disorder. However, the perception and acceptance of mental health by society is closely related based on the individual's level of understanding and knowledge about this issue. Referring to the Ministry of Health (MOH), Health Minister Dr.Zaliha Mustafa, in 2022 there is an increase on the issue regarding mental problems among children, teenagers and adults compared to 2020. Among the problems that were reported are suicidal thoughts, suicide plans, depression, anxiety and stress. The purpose of this study is to determine the level of understanding of mental health issues in the community and to determine the level of negative perception towards people with mental health issues. This study was conducted using quantitative methods through the distribution of Google Form on 338 volunteering respondents. The end results of the study show that the level of understanding regarding mental health issues is high (M=3.38) meanwhile the level of negative perception towards people with mental health issues is a low (M=1.94).*

Keywords: mental health, society, acceptance, individual

1.   Introduction

As time progresses in this world, so does the development of the human mindset. It is pretty obvious that in this current era, mental health has become a more accepted topic in society, but what is mental health? According to Njoku (2022), mental health is the foundation for emotions, thinking, communication, learning, resilience, hope, and self-esteem. Mental health is also key to relationships, personal and emotional well-being, and contributing to the community or society. Mental health issues, also referred to as mental illnesses or psychiatric disorders, are a significant challenge in society. While it is known to be a foundation for many human aspects, there is also a significant stigma surrounding mental health, and many people are struggling to seek help due to fear of judgement or a lack of understanding about their condition.

The stigma around mental health refers to the negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that are associated with mental illness in society. The stigma can manifest in many ways, such as perceptions of mental illness as a personal flaw or weakness instead of a medical condition. Some Malaysian citizens believe that people with mental illness are dangerous or unpredictable, leading to social isolation and discrimination. Not only that, but stigma towards mental health may also result from a lack of understanding of mental illness, leading to negative beliefs and stereotypes about those with mental health issues (Ridzuan et al., 2022).

In the current era, Malaysia's society is confronted with a significant problem. In Malaysia, the problem we face as a society is a lack of understanding of mental health issues. Due to a lack of understanding of mental health issues in Malaysia, it could have devastating effects on individuals, families, and society as a whole. If we continue to ignore and not address the stigma surrounding mental illness, people may not seek the treatment and support they need, which could lead to a decline in their mental health and an increase in adverse health outcomes. According to Raaj, Navanathan, Tharmaselan, and Lally (2021) 'only a quarter of Malaysians with mental disorders will have access to professional care,' which means that only a small number of people in Malaysia will have the opportunity to receive the assistance they need to overcome their mental issues.

Knowing the current state of this problem in our society, we can do a number of things to improve our comprehension of mental health so that the stigma associated with it disappears. Where do we go from here? Kindness and compassion are the most essential components of supporting others. For far too long, terms such as 'weirdo' and 'weak-minded' have been used to describe individuals with severe mental illness. Above all else, those struggling with mental health require compassion and humanity, not ridicule. Teach adolescents to respect their companions and those who do not share their behavior. Then, apply this teaching and demonstrate compassion not only for those who are plainly experiencing mental health issues, but for everyone you encounter. Secondly, take the comprehension approach to improve the mental health of yourself, your family, and your friends. Raising awareness is not limited to instructing individuals on how to identify mental illnesses. It also involves having an enduring, positive effect on their mental health. You can accomplish this by encouraging your loved ones to engage in self-care or by assisting them in focusing on their physical health through exercise and healthy nutrition. Organizing park runs or treks for mental health awareness could be advantageous in two ways.

In conclusion, Malaysian citizens are in dire need of being more compassionate and understanding in regards to mental health because, as time progresses, everyone will experience a period in which they are not mentally stable. In order to address this problem, we need to educate ourselves further and raise awareness about it more frequently, so that it may be picked up by other people. We may also attend awareness activities to obtain additional understanding and draw attention to the present situation.

2.   Research Methodology

2.1   Research Design

A quantitative survey is used to conduct this study. This survey was conducted online and shared on WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram. Researchers may access a greater range of sources and more accurate information by utilizing these social media sites.

2.2 Sampling Technique

In terms of sampling, this study conducts a convenience sample method that is non-probability based. According to Stratton (2021), convenience samples are often used for quantitative research. This sampling technique selects participants that researchers have access to, such as friends, family, colleagues and it depends on the motivation of those who participate in the research. This introduces motivation bias into the study. Motivation to participate may depend upon the interest one has in the research topic, a wish to express a disgruntled point of view, or desire to support one's specific opinions. For sample size sampling based on Raosoft Sample Calculator, with a 5% margin of error, a 93% confidence level, and a population size of 32 000 000 000, the suggested sample size for sampling is 329. However, 338 respondents were obtained by the researchers.

2.3 Research Measurement

This questionnaire has 3 sections. The first section has 10 questions about demographic profile, the second section has eight questions about the level of understanding regarding mental health issues, and the third section has six questions about the level of negative perception towards people with mental health issues. Total question that are contained inside this questionnaire is 24 questions. The respondent will find it simple to understand and respond to the questions because this questionnaire uses multiple choice questions (MCQ) and rating scale of strongly disagreeing (1) to strongly agreeing (4). Lastly, the data will be collected and keyed-in on an Excel Spreadsheet.

2.4 Data Analysis

Version 23 of the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) software is used to do the data analysis. Creating a survey stage, conducting a pilot test, and data transmission are all steps in the data analysis process. The survey or questionnaire is made up of inquiries related to the investigation's research goals. To determine the validity of the research, the questionnaire is given to the first 50 respondents. The survey will continue until it receives 300 replies, at which point the data will be sent to SPSS for analysis and discovery (Ridzuan, Ridzuan and Ridzuan, 2018). Researchers examined frequency, proportion, and mean using descriptive statistics.

3. Findings: Results And Discussion

In the first section, there were 10 questions asked. These questions were asked to identify respondents' demographic background and also general question about mental health issue. Table 1 represent the 6 questions related to demographic backgrounds. Aside from the demographic questions, there are also additional questions on general information related to mental health coping mechanism. There are 4 questions asked in this section. These questions were distributed to see the respondent's feeling and knowledge regarding mental health.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents by demographic (n=338)

DEMOGRAPHIC	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Sex		
Male	78	23.1
Female	260	76.9
Age		
18 and below	31	9.2
19-20	216	63.9

21-25	35	10.4
26-30	3	0.9
31-35	10	3
36 and above	43	12.7
Ethnicity		
Malay	293	86.7
Chinese	11	3.3
Indian	1	0.3
Other	33	9.8
Marital status		
Single	284	84
Married	51	15.1
Widowed	3	0.9
Household income		
B40 (Less than RM 4850)	202	59.8
M40 (RM 4850 – RM10,000)	107	31.7
T20 (RM 10,000 & above)	29	8.6
Occupation		
Working in a government sector	50	14.8
Working in a private sector	18	5.3
Student	257	76
Retired	0	0
Unemployed	9	2.7
Self-employed	1	0.3
Housewife	2	0.6
Other	1	0.3
Have you been experiencing any of these feelings and emotions this past few months?		
Frustration	224	66.3
Fear	140	41.4
Panic	114	33.7
Sadness	217	64.2
Loneliness	169	50
Hopeless	149	44.1
Other	22	6.5
How do you cope with your mental health issues?		
Listening to music	237	70.1
Reading	66	19.5
Sleeping	248	73.4
Meditating	44	13
Playing sports	72	21.3
Other	64	18.9
Do you agree mental health can affect all ages?		
Yes	333	98.5
No	5	1.5
Do you agree that mental health issues have been underestimated a lot?		
Yes	329	97.3
No	9	2.7

Table 1 above shows the demographic of 338 respondents. Based on the results, most of the respondents who answered the questionnaire are female (76.9%) and male (23.1%) which aged between 19-20 (63.9%) and majority of them is Malay (86.7%). Most of the respondent is single (84%) and come from B40 (Less than RM 4850) group of household income (59.8%). Last but not least, nearly all of the respondent are student (76%). According

to World Health Organization (WHO), Mental health is influenced by various individual, social, and structural determinants throughout our lives. Factors like psychological and biological factors, exposure to unfavorable social, economic, geopolitical, and environmental circumstances, and developmental sensitive periods, such as early childhood, can increase the risk of mental health conditions. Protective factors, such as social skills, education, and community cohesion, strengthen resilience. Local and global threats heighten risk, with limited predictive strength. Most people do not develop mental health conditions despite exposure to risk factors, and interacting determinants can either enhance or undermine mental health.

For the second section, a total number of 8 questions were asked to determine the level of understanding regarding mental health issues.

Table 2: Level of Understanding Regarding Mental Health Issues

Level of Understanding Regarding Mental Health Issues	Mean
I believe mental illness can affect daily living.	3.74
I believe mental illness can affect relationship.	3.66
I believe people can have more than one mental illness.	3.54
I believe mental illness can be treated.	3.38
I believe young adults are more likely to suffer from mental health issues.	3.36
I believe people with financial problems are likely have mental illness.	3.30
I believe females are likely to have mental illness more than males.	3.09
I believe mental illness is the same as any other medical illness.	3.03
OVERALL	**3.38**

Table 2 above shows respondents' overall result regarding understanding on mental health issue. Based on the findings, most of the respondents believe that mental health illness can affect daily living since the mean is the highest (M=3.74). According to Foley (2023), Mental health issues can have significant negative effects on our daily lives, even the simplest tasks. Some of the most challenging tasks include getting out of bed, going to a doctor's appointment, dealing with household chores, going out in public, and going to sleep. Getting out of bed can be the hardest task for those with mental health conditions, as it often stems from stress, anxiety, or depression. The overall mean is high (M=3.38) which shown the level of understanding on mental health issue in society is high. Unfortunately, according to Hisham (2022), nowadays campaign about awareness and mental health is viral but it is just an overrated media play. When he asked around, most of the people still can't accept people with mental illness. Hisham (2022) also stated that Siti Fatimah the Senior Psychological Officer, Human resource Services Division (UPM) the societies will have more understanding on mental health issue if there is an initiative from the government and non-government.

For the third section, there were six questions asked. These questions were distributed to the society to calculate the level of negative perception towards people with mental health issues.

Table 3: Level of Negative Perception Towards People with Mental Health Issues

Level of Negative Perception Towards People with Mental Health Issues	Mean
I believe someone with a mental illness is considered 'incompetent' rather than unwell.	2.10
I believe someone with a mental illness is considered 'dangerous' rather than unwell.	2.07
I believe people with mental health issues are considered weak.	1.90
I believe everyone who has mental health problems are violent.	1.89
I believe people with mental health issues should not be allowed	1.84

to be employed.	
I believe someone with a mental illness is considered 'crazy' rather than unwell.	1.83
OVERALL	**1.94**

Table 3 above shows the findings among respondents toward the level of negative perception towards people with mental health issues. Based on the findings, most of the respondents that answered the questionnaires have the perception that a person with mental health issues is considered 'incompetent' rather than unwell which have the highest mean (M=2.10). According to Campbell, Auchterlonie, Andris, Cooper and Hoyt (2023), in the military context, stigma may unfairly link service members who are experiencing mental health problems to other undesirable characteristics, such as being incompetent, dangerous, disobedient, or undisciplined. Service members may perceive stigma from the attitudes and behaviors of peers and leaders (public stigma) and may internalize these beliefs (self-stigma), in turn decreasing self-efficacy and willingness to seek treatment. The overall mean for the level of negative perception towards people with Mental Health issues is low (M=1.94). However, according to Hamzah (2019), Mohamad the leader of creative communication MINDAKAMI said that the stigma and discrimination towards people with mental illness is still prevalent. Whereby people with mental illness are badly treated by nurse and doctors, fired by the employers and physically and mentally abused by their family member due to the mental illness.

4.   Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, we can draw the conclusion that Malaysians are very knowledgeable about the mental health issues and stigma associated with mental illness. The responses to our study questions can be sorted as follows.

level of understanding	3.38
level of negative perception towards people	1.94

Based on table below, this shows that Malaysia has a very high level of understanding and low discrimination towards people with mental health issues. Patients with diagnoses of mental illness, bipolar disorder, and depression in particular were singled out as needing urgent treatment since they experience the greatest stigma and discrimination. The three main and most discriminatory groups were identified as being friends, family, and colleagues. Patients who experienced stigma were shown to be socially alienated, disempowered, and caught in a circle of prejudice. Thus, as underlined by the mental health experts in this study, there is an urgent need to reduce stigma of mental illness in civil society and the health system, particularly through education and awareness.Further in-depth everyone is required in order to effectively, efficiently and sustainably develop interventions to tackle negative perception towards people mental health and understand more about mental health issue.

The most important is parents play a huge role to watch their children behavior changes. It is normal that children experience behavioural changes as they advance through various developmental stages. However, if you find that your child is being more reclusive or distant from their friends, family, or daily activities, it could indicate that they are going through something that they are unable to deal with on their own. Let them know they are loved, supported, you are always with them and willing to help. Parents also need to keep

communication open and honest. It's important that your child knows they can approach you with any issue, and that they will be received help and listened to without judgment.

Furthermore, we can also help people with mental illness by being a good friend. Firstly, validate what they're saying. People want to feel understood, particularly when they are dealing with challenging feelings or situations that could make them feel incredibly alone. You don't have to pretend you are feeling the same way as your friend. Saying, "That sounds hard," while listening without passing judgement, can be helpful too. Validating your friends demonstrates that this is not a "overreaction" or "underreaction," even if you have never experienced that precise circumstance or felt an emotion nearly as deeply. It is completely acceptable because that is how they feel. Secondly, ask if you can help with anything, it shows you care and it will please them to share their problem with you. Let them share as much or as little as they want to. Let them lead the discussion at their own pace. Don't pressure them to tell you anything they aren't ready to talk about. Talking can take a lot of trust and courage. You might be the first person they have been able to talk to about this. In that case, automatically their burden will be reduced and help them to slowly think that there is always someone by their side.

In conclusion, it is up to each person in Malaysia to help each other. The future health of our environment depends on us as individuals positive perception and understanding towards these mental health issues. As a society, we must continue to challenge negative stereotype and educate ourselves to be supportive and prioritize mental health. By doing so, we can create a future where mental health is valued, understood, and effectively addressed. It will leads to happier, healthier, and more inclusive communities in Malaysia.

5.   Acknowledgement

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