

Handling students' mental health during MCO

By [Murniati Abu Karim](#) - April 8, 2020 @ 4:35pm



Under the Movement Control Order, students are worried about their academic schedules, getting infected by Covid-19 and the situation at home. Pic from www.freepik.com

The closure of higher learning institutions and the abrupt shift towards online learning, combined with the admonition to stay put may hit students hard, especially those who are stuck in the university premises.

Universiti Malaysia Pahang Student Affairs and Alumni Department psychology officer Paridah Mat Ali said these students might face legitimate worries about the virus, their health and family conditions back home. With the Movement Control Order (MCO) enforced and extended, they are stripped off their normal routines and forced to avoid social contact.

She said there were 1,260 students staying in the university premises or nearby.

“This situation makes it impossible for us to conduct a face-to-face counselling session. Therefore, we make full use of social media platforms, such as WhatsApp and Skype, to communicate with those in need of a counselling service.





Paridah Mat Ali

“We also encourage students to use the e-counselling service in the university’s website where students can set an appointment to talk to the counsellor about their concerns and problems. Among the common issues faced by students during the MCO are related to their academics, fear of getting infected and homesickness.”

Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Psychiatry Department Faculty of Medicine clinical psychologist Associate Professor Dr Azlina Wati Nikmat said the restriction on movement and social contact might lead to intense boredom, emotional instability and other psychological issues.

Based on a quick article review done at an international level, quarantine can have negative psychological outcomes, including acute stress reaction and long term post-traumatic stress disorder. The negative impacts appear to be worse if the quarantine is over ten days for some individuals, she added.



Dr Azlina Wati Nikmat

“Students are not exempted from being affected by this situation. Luckily, quite a number of universities offer tele-counselling services for their students and staff in case they need psychological support. In our faculty, we offer psychological first aid as well.”

To keep worries at bay, Paridah said students needed to stay connected.

“To avoid feeling isolated, students are advised to keep in touch with their family and friends. Check in on friends who are staying alone by asking how they are doing.”

While it is important to stay informed about the outbreak, Paridah said, try to avoid rumors and speculation about the Covid-19 as it can fuel anxiety.

“Only read from reliable sources, like the Health Ministry and the Malaysian National Security Council, on information relating to the virus.”

Dr Azlina Wati advised students to maintain their everyday routines to keep themselves occupied or create new routines to stay out of boredom.

“Challenge yourself to improve on skills, such as catching up with reading materials, exercise and doing crossword puzzles or riddles.”

UiTM Shah Alam Career and Counselling Centre head and registered counsellor Wan Noraini Wan Yusoff said the students unable to go home were left feeling insecure and anxious

were left feeling insecure and anxious.

“With quick arrangements by the committee, we kept things under control. It is not easy to handle thousands of students during this crucial period, but we make sure that they are safe and in good hands. Students need not worry about their meals and accommodations.



Wan Noraini Wan Yusoff

“To aid students psychologically, we provide telephone counselling services from 8am to 6pm daily, where counsellors on duty can be reached through Whatsapp. Students can also have a discussion with the counsellor via Google Meet upon request.”



Maisarah Mohd

In an effort to reach out to those having a hard time staying at home or working from home, Universiti Malaya Professional Counselling Masters student Maisarah Mohd offers free remote counselling, as part of her course requirement.

“As a student, staying at home could be distracting for me to complete my assignments. The amount of time I spent on social media is not healthy and I believe a lot of people feel the same way too. I want to reach out to these people and let them know that they are not alone.

“People are in an uncertain time with the Covid-19 pandemic. For some, going to work and meeting people would keep them sane. However, with social distancing and the MCO, they might face more anxiety and depression in general.



Muhammad Qhayyum Zulkarnain

“Those who are living alone and lack self-care would be the most affected. One way to brave this period is to take care of your mental state by talking to other people. If there is no one to communicate, look for other resources like online counselling or support groups.”

UMP Engineering Technology (Manufacturing) second-year student Muhammad Qhayyum Zulkarnain said he was sad as he couldn't make it home like many of his friends did.

“At the same time, I feel like it is my responsibility to stay put because going home would put my parents and the people in my hometown at risk,” said Qhayyum, who is from Klang, Selangor.



Muhamad Mukhriz Abdul Halim

Hailing from Rawang, Selangor, UiTM Bukit Mertajam student Muhamad Mukhriz Abdul Halim said: “I've made an attempt to go back with a friend, but after seeing the condition worsen, we cancelled our plan. It is only considerate to do so although, at a time like this, all I want is to be with my family in my own home.

“With the extension of the MCO period, I am concerned about how I am going to catch up with my studies. Of course, we are moving towards online learning, but it has not been fully implemented yet,” said the third-year Civil Engineering student.