



The Fear of Covid-19 among Malaysian Youths

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Abstract

The strike of Covid-19 has affected the mental health level among people. Therefore, this study aims to discover the level of fear towards the spread of this disease among Malaysians. A set of questionnaire was developed and distributed among 3000 respondents consisted of youths aged 15-35 years old. The data was analysed based on the percentage and illustrated in the form of pie charts. The research found that majority of the respondents agreed that the spread of Covid-19 has triggered their fear. Other related items also were measured including the reactions when the fear strikes as well as the need to gain more knowledge regarding the spread of Covid-19, such as the latest red zone areas and the preventive measures. The findings of this research will let the people aware of the impact of Covid-19 towards mental health and help the government to identify people's knowledge, especially on the preventive measure. Therefore, more strategies can be designed to help people save themselves from getting infected.

Introduction

When the Covid-19 pandemic began to increase the number of positive cases in Malaysia, it became one of the factors that have affected the mental health level among Malaysians. This situation has become even more difficult when the MCO was introduced and it has restricted the socio-economic activities of the community. The people's anxiety worsened when they saw the case figures, especially the death cases displayed by the media. According to The Lancet Infectious Diseases (2020), history has witnessed the detrimental impact of diseases on the mental health of affected populations, such as during the widespread of the Ebola virus disease (EVD) which caused panic attack among the people who had experienced a sudden loss of family members and friends, as well as the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), which had resulted in 33-42% of admitted patients identified with depressed mood, anxiety, impaired memory, and insomnia. To make this condition worse, there was also false information distributed virtually, causing people to panic. Even, during the earlier months of the pandemic, people had associated this disease with China, rising tension among the Chinese travellers (Yi, Edmund and Jun, 2020). According to Sundarasan et al. (2020), as in the context of Malaysia, tension and anxiety aroused among the students caused by financial constraints, remote online learning, and uncertainty related to their academic performance and future career prospects as Covid-19 has created social recession which also limited the access to emotional support. Sundarasan et al. also highlighted the guidelines given by Center for Disease Control (CDC) including to minimize frequent reading, listening and watching the stories on Covid-19 as they believe that these actions might trigger a state of fear and anxiety among the people. In this regard, this study was conducted to examine the fear of the COVID outbreak among Malaysian.

Research Objective

This study aimed to assess the state of fear towards the widespread of this pandemic. Older people are worried about getting infected also becoming the carrier of the disease and transfer it to the young people especially the children. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2020a) found from further preliminary data on the household transmission studies in China suggested that children are vulnerable to this infection which they might be infected from adults, rather than vice versa.

Methodology

A set of questionnaires in the form of scales was developed and validated to assess the fear towards the spread of coronavirus among Malaysians. The scales consisted of seven items as follow:

1. Covid-19 has triggered my fear.
2. I feel uncomfortable with the Covid-19 news/ figures/ information.
3. I become extremely hygienic due to the Covid-19 self-care precautions.
4. From my opinion, Covid-19 has affected society in the form of:
5. The reasons which have sped the number of Covid-19 cases are:
6. The youth have to identify a number of symptoms if they are suffering from Covid-19, which include:
7. I believe that the youth should have the following information about the Covid-19.

A total of 3000 respondents consisted of youths aged 15-35 years old have given their feedback based on the statements provided in the survey. 5 Likert-scale rating was provided for items 1 to 3. The respondents were needed to choose only one rating for each item. Whereas, they were allowed to have multiple responses for items 4 to 7. The data were analysed based on the percentage (%) and illustrated in the form of pie charts.

Findings

The following discussion expounds the pie charts obtained from the analysis of the data based on the items included in the survey.

Item 1: Covid-19 has triggered my fear

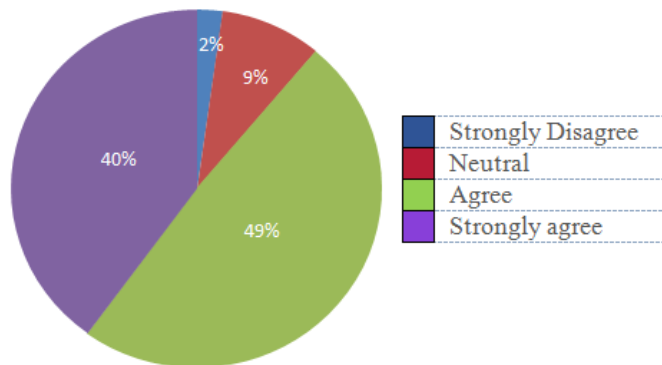


Figure 1: The Percentage of Responses based on Item 1.

Based on Figure 1, the majority of the respondents have agreed (49%) and strongly agreed (40%) that Covid-19 has triggered their fear. Meanwhile, there are small portions of the respondents who perceived Covid-19 as a neutral situation (9%) and strongly disagree with the capability of Covid-19 to trigger fear (2%).

Item 2: I feel uncomfortable with the Covid-19 news/ figures/ information.

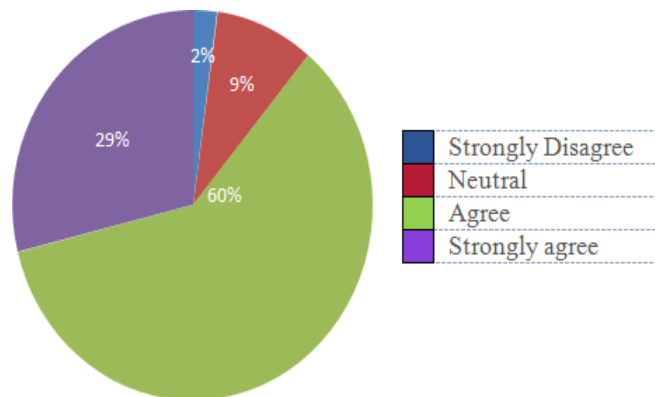


Figure 2: The Percentage of Responses based on Item 2.

Based on Figure 2, the majority of the respondents have agreed (29%) and strongly agreed (60%) that they felt uncomfortable with the news/ figures/ information on Covid-19. Meanwhile, there are small portions of the respondents who perceived them as neutral (9%) and those who strongly disagreed that the news/ figures/ information about Covid-19 would have made them feel uncomfortable (2%).

Item 3: I become extremely hygienic due to the Covid-19 self-care precautions.

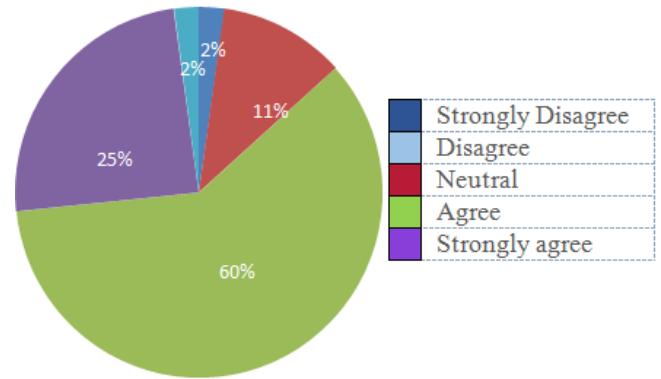


Figure 3: The Percentage of Responses based on Item 3.

Based on Figure 3, the majority of the respondents have agreed (60%) and strongly agreed (25%) that they become extremely hygienic due to the Covid-19 self-care precautions. On average, some respondents felt neutral (11%), whereas, there are small portions of the respondents who equally disagreed (2%) and strongly disagreed (2%) with the statement.

Item 4: From my opinion, Covid-19 has affected the society in the form of:

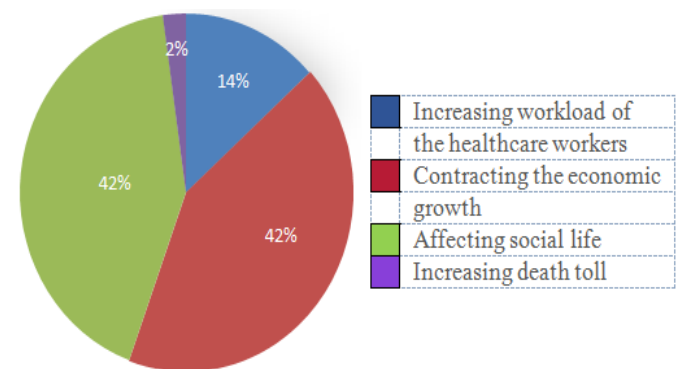


Figure 4: The Percentage of Responses based on Item 4.

Based on Figure 4, majority of the respondent believed that Covid-19 has affected the society in the form of increasing the workload of the healthcare workers (42%) and contracting economic growth (42%). Some respondents believed that Covid-19 also has affected the social life of the community. Less than 10% of the total respondents believed that Covid19 has increased the number of death cases (2%).

Item 5: The reasons which have speeding the number of Covid-19 cases are:

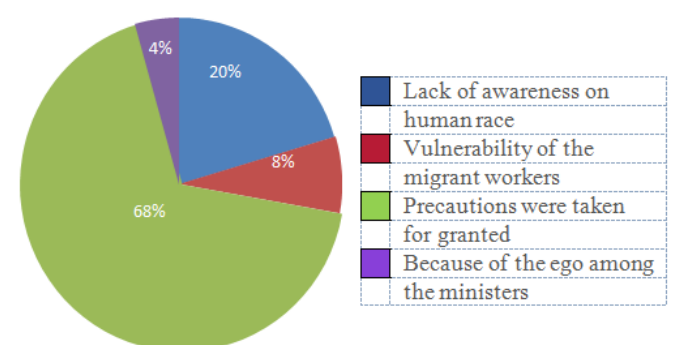


Figure 5: The Percentage of Responses based on Item 5.

Based on Figure 5, out of the total number of the respondents, the majority of them believed that the speeding number of the Covid-19 cases was due to the people who have taken the precautions for granted (68%). This is followed by the lack of awareness on the human race (20%). Nevertheless, a few people also believe that the number of Covid-19 cases kept on increasing due to the vulnerability of the migrant workers (8%) and the ego among the ministers.

Item 6: The youth have to identify a number of symptoms if they are suffering from Covid-19, which include:

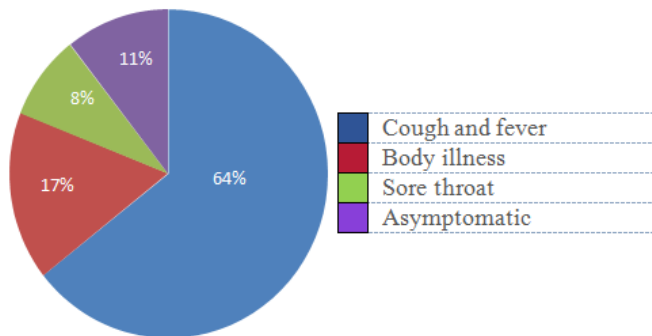


Figure 6: The Percentage of Responses based on Item 6.

Based on Figure 6, the majority of the respondents believed that the youth can identify the symptoms of Covid-19 through cough and fever (64%). This is followed by body illness (17%) and asymptomatic (11%). Only a few respondents believed that Covid-19 can be identified through the sore throat (8%).

Item 7: I believe that the youth should have the following information about the Covid-19.

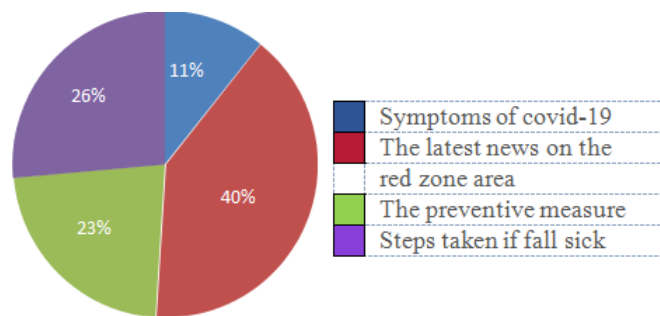


Figure 7: The Percentage of Responses based on Item 7.

Based on Figure 7, the majority of the respondents believed that the youth should get updated with the latest news on the red zone area (40%). This is followed by steps taken if they fall sick (23%) as well as the preventive measure (23%). A few respondents believed that youth should have information on the symptoms of Covid-19 (11%).

Discussion

The finding has shown that the Covid-19 pandemic has triggered fear among the Malaysians. A polling company, You Gov survey, tracked attitudes towards Coronavirus among 26 countries found that Malaysia was the highest country with approximately 90% of its citizens expressing fear to have infected with Covid-19 (Travers, 2020, March 30). This study also found that people believe that the youth should become alert with the latest news

about the red zone are. These two findings are actually related to one another as according to Sundarasan et al. (2020), people will become more afraid when they are traumatised by the information delivered by the media. That is why the Center for Disease Control (CDC) justifies that there should be a slow-down in getting information about the Covid-19.

This proclamation is also supported by the finding of the second item when the respondents of this study agreed that they felt uncomfortable with the Covid-19 news/ figures/ information. In order to avoid themselves from getting infected, people have become extremely hygienic due to the Covid-19 self-care precautions, as shown in the discussion of item 3 result. This finding supports the study conducted by Wise et al. (2020) found that subjects reported engaging in protective behaviours, such as hand washing, more than usual and representing high engagement with sanitization. A shift in consumer behaviour during the spike of Covid-19, as reported by ShopBack Malaysia, witnessing the increase in spending on disinfectants, for example, the 20-times increased of Dettol-products sale with disinfectant sprays, antiseptic liquid, and hand sanitisers emerging as the best-selling products (BOTS team, 2020, October 23).

This study also found that people are mostly affected by Covid-19 in the area of economy and society. Based on the latest edition of the World Bank’s Malaysia Economic Monitor, Surviving the Storm, The World Bank predicted that Malaysia’s economy was projected to contract by 3.1 percent in 2020 due to a sharp slowdown in economic activity and measures to control its spread (Foong, 2020, July 25). A study conducted by a recruitment company, JobStreet, over 5,000 participants found that one in five Malaysians who were previously working have lost their jobs due to Covid-19 and estimated that one in five Malaysians who were previously working have lost their jobs due to Covid-19 (Choong, 2020, Jun 3). Social distancing which supposed to help in constraining the disease has become one of the factors that leads to job loss.

According to Shanmugam et al. (2020), social distancing helped to decelerate the spread of Covid-19, yet at the same time putting mental health at stake when social distancing also disrupted regular coping mechanism with stress by disrupting the social rhythm. The time we should spend with other people or seek help when it is needed is now replaced with the need to social distance and limit close contact, especially when symptoms that are associated with Covid-19 are identified. Everyone is striving to adapt to the new norms; family got separated, teachers conduct virtual classes, people work from home, and so on. These situations seem to be difficult for Malaysians because the people were so acquainted with getting together in many activities such as during gotong-royong, celebrations, weddings, funeral, etc.

This study found that due to the tendency to neglect the precaution measures, the number of cases which was previously depreciating, started to reach two to three digits. As the pandemic dragged for months, the restrictions imposed to control the widespread of the disease started to be neglected. This situation is known as Covid fatigue/ caution fatigue/ pandemic fatigue. World Health Organization (WHO) (2020b) describes pandemic fatigue as follow;

“The pandemic fatigue reported from countries is expressed through an increasing number of people not sufficiently following recommendations and restrictions, decreasing their effort to keep themselves informed about the pandemic and having lower risk perceptions related to COVID-19. Previously effective core messages regarding washing hands, wearing face masks, and practicing proper hygiene etiquette and physical distancing may

seem less effective, and many countries have identified a need for reinvigorating approaches.”

The symptom which has become a major concern for the people as found from this study is cough and fever. People tend to depreciate other symptoms such as body illness, asymptomatic, and sore throat. Lovato et al. (2020) have made a justification on including sore throat as a vital sign of Covid-19. They drew arguments on the finding of Sun et al (2020) who conducted a meta-analysis on 50,466 patients with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Lovato et al. highlighted a number of studies that described that pharyngodynia was not rare, sore throat was presented in 5% to 17.4% of COVID-19 patients, and pharyngodynia was found in 13.9% of cases in a large series of 1099 COVID-19 patients.

Conclusion

From this study, it can be concluded that Covid-19 has tremendously triggered fear among Malaysians. People felt uncomfortable with the news related to Covid-19 and started to become more hygienic than normal. At this stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is fundamental to gain knowledge related to Covid-19, including the symptoms as well the preventive measures. Of course, it is also important to become alert with the news broadcasted by the media, especially about the red zone and other special announcements made by the government, yet people should also slow down the pace of relying too much on sources like media and social networks as it might trigger fear, stress, and anxiety. Overwhelming information also puts people in trauma including the fear of losing family members and the effect on the economy and earnings at present.

Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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