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DOUBLE DISASTER: EXPLORING POST-TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES AMONG STUDENTS

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ABSTRAC

The years 2020 and 2021 witnessed how the world had to deal with the unprecedented educational circumstance prompted by a global pandemic. The swift change to online learning was stressful and taxing in many ways, for both students and teachers, affecting their physical and mental health. Combating the spread of Covid-19 is aggravated by various natural disasters in several countries, including Malaysia. In the aftermath of a disaster, physical impacts such as the destruction of infrastructure and human casualties are easily noticeable. Yet there are often many psychological impacts present too such as anxiety, shock, sleeplessness and uncertainties concerning the future. With the combination of pandemic and natural disasters, the distress caused by these successive events may have become a hindrance to students' deep involvement in learning. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the difficulties faced by individuals affected by a combination of a global pandemic and natural disasters. Employing a quantitative approach through an online survey, 409 participants were selected from stratified random sampling. In addition, quantitative data gathered through a questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings indicate that the dual disasters increased stress levels, leading to heightened academic, behavioural, and financial pressures on students. The findings of this study will be instrumental in formulating strategic measures that best complement the needs of students during a double disaster, particularly in addressing the psychological impact towards this vulnerable group.

Keywords: global pandemic, natural disasters, Covid-19, post-traumatic events, teaching and learning

INTRODUCTION

The closure of schools and educational institutions due to the Covid-19 pandemic presented challenges to teaching and learning processes, prompting schools to implement unprecedented measures to sustain the education system (Chiu, Lin, & Lonka, 2021). During the pandemic, some individuals faced an additional crisis attributed to climate change. Termed "double disaster," these humanitarian emergencies involve a combination of pandemics, natural disasters, and man-made crises, posing significant challenges to the well-being of individuals and communities (Cueto & Agaton, 2021). Additionally, the rise in absenteeism and dropouts due to Covid-19 is a notable concern. In Malaysia, Education Minister Radzi Jidin reported a slight increase in dropout rates among primary and secondary level learners since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, indicating a 0.01 percent rise from the previous year (Hazim, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted teaching and learning processes. The sudden transition from traditional classrooms to remote learning has been a formidable challenge for institutions globally, particularly in engaging students and motivating their participation in online lessons (Xhaferri & Xhaferri, 2022). The online learning environment, reliant on intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and self-regulation to foster classroom engagement, demands learners to be more intrinsically motivated (Martens, Gulikers, & Bastiaens, 2004). However, the aggregated stress and anxiety from the pandemic can easily demotivate learners in the virtual classroom (Pekrun et al., as cited in Chiu, Lin, & Lonka, 2021). As a result, it hampers the learning process. This study aims to address the challenges faced by students who experienced double disaster.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study adopted the quantitative methodology by using an online survey. The questionnaire encompassed demographic details, open-ended questions pertaining to the challenges faced by the respondents during the double disaster. There are a total of 409 respondents who took part in this study. These respondents were selected using stratified sampling. Data were collected and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 to answer the research question in this study. A descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the challenges experienced by respondents during the double disaster.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 displays the results for Question 1, revealing 10 emerging themes. Financial issues emerged as the most frequently mentioned theme, with 111 responses (27.13%). Online Distance Learning (ODL) struggles closely followed, garnering 58 respondents (14.18%), and transitioning to new norms ranked third with 54 respondents (13.2%).
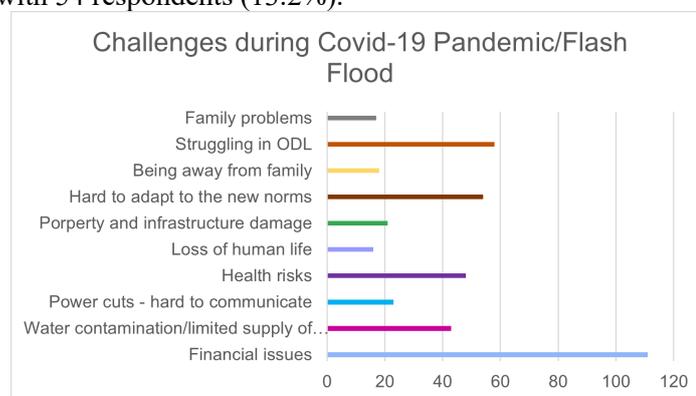

Fig 1. Challenges Faced by Students during COVID-19 Pandemic/Flash Flood

For Question 2, 7 emerging themes were identified. Economic instability topped the list with 111 responses (27.14%), indicating the most experienced traumatic event. Disruption of work and daily routines due to the global pandemic and flash flood closely followed, with 102 respondents (24.93%). Transitioning to remote learning secured the third-highest response, with 58 respondents (14.18%).
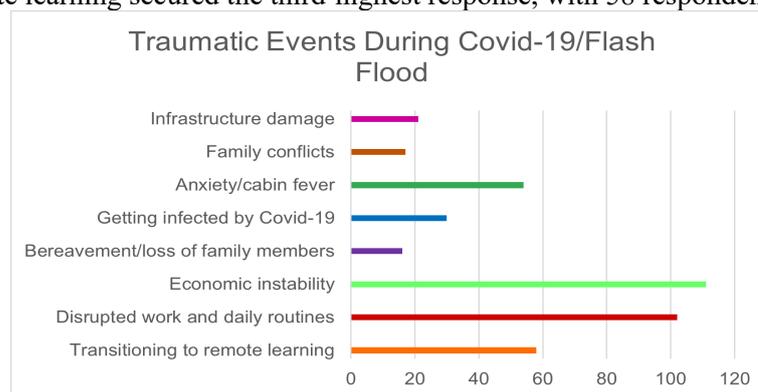

Fig 2. Traumatic Events during COVID-19/Flash Flood

Figure 3 illustrates the responses for Question 3, with 186 respondents (45.5%) indicating a significant impact on their finances due to the Covid-19 pandemic and flash flood. Additionally, 92 respondents (22.5%) reported a decline in learning performance following these events. Emotional distress and deterioration of health gathered 77 respondents (18.8%) and 54 respondents (13.2%), respectively.
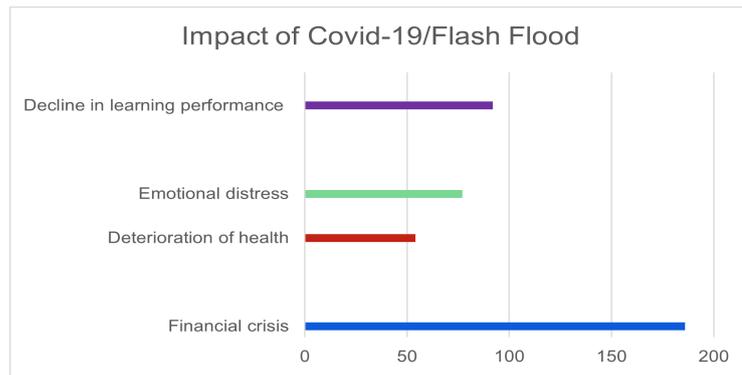
Fig 3. Impact of COVID-19/Flash Flood

Question 4 aimed to assess the impact of the double disaster on respondents' studies. Figure 4 depicts that 367 respondents (89.7%) agreed that their studies were highly affected, while the remaining 42 respondents (10.3%) claimed otherwise.
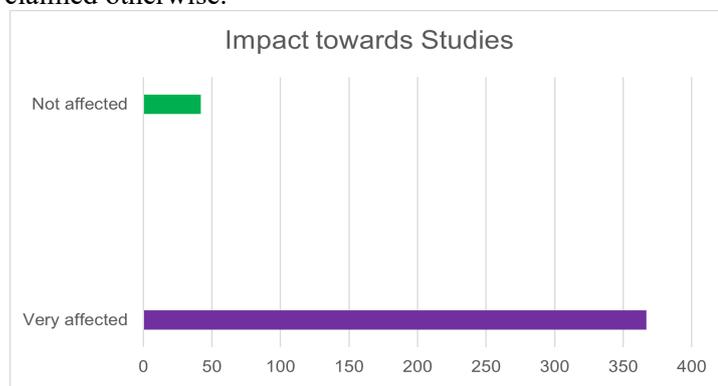

Fig 4. Impact of Traumatic Events towards Studies

It is evident that the abrupt transition from traditional classrooms to remote learning posed significant challenges for the majority of students. Encouraging student engagement and participation in online lessons proved to be difficult due to the intrinsic motivation required in the online learning environment (Xhaferri & Xhaferri, 2022). A study by Othman, Sulaiman, Mohd Najib, and Wan Ismail (2022) highlighted issues such as reduced concentration, poor internet connectivity, and difficulty comprehending online content among Diploma in Pharmacy students at a local university. Some students reported poor exam results, indicating a decline in learning performance attributed to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 outbreak and flash floods.

Jafar et al., (2022) also found that deteriorating focus on studying and students' inability to adapt to e-learning were major challenges faced by higher education students in Malaysia during the implementation of online learning. The reduced focus may be linked to the sudden social isolation imposed during the pandemic, leading to cognitive inactivity and cognitive decline (Shankar et al., 2013). Students also reported losing motivation to continue their education and experiencing emotional distress, with the lack of social interactions contributing to poorer physical and mental health (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). These findings align with a study done by Leal Filho, Wall, Rayman-Bacchus, Pritchard, Lovren, Farinha, Petrovic, and Balogun (2021), who noted that anxiety, amplified by social isolation and the shift to online learning, resulted in mental health consequences. The limitations on social interactions during the pandemic have intensified anxiety and depression among individuals perceiving themselves as vulnerable to Covid-19, compounded by factors such as financial constraints, social isolation, and the inability to leave their homes (Ibrahim & Alexcius, 2022).

Disrupted daily routines emerged as another major challenge, disrupting academic activities and demotivating students due to the lack of social interactions (Leal Filho et al., 2021). Economic instability, exacerbated by the dual crises of the global pandemic and flash floods, particularly affected vulnerable groups already experiencing poverty and relying on financial or humanitarian support (Nordling, 2020). Respondents reported cutting expenses due to financial anxiety induced by the Covid-

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19 pandemic. Natural disasters and healthcare crises typically influence consumer behavior, including herd mentality, panic buying, or changes in discretionary spending (Loxton et al., as cited in Trkulja & Tadic, 2021).

CONCLUSION

It is crucial to acknowledge that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the flash flood has diverse effects on students, impacting them physically, emotionally, and financially. This research offers a perspective on the difficulties students encounter during these crises. Given the ongoing challenges posed by COVID-19 and natural disasters, it becomes imperative for nations to prioritize the protection of the most vulnerable group, shielding them from the negative repercussions of both crises. In addition, the government should promote strategies to help individuals detach from the overwhelming emotional distress caused by eco-anxiety. Over the past few years, the use of asynchronous technologies has witnessed growth in various healthcare settings, and this trend has now expanded to mental healthcare (Yellowlees & Shore, 2018). The increasing adoption of asynchronous tools makes it more accessible for people to seek mental support. Since the results indicated a significant disruption in the students' learning process due to the double disaster, future studies could delve into exploring the potential consequences of these shocks on the overall quality of education across various levels

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