

DEPRESSION AMONG COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENTS DURING COVID-19 ATTACK

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Abstract

Depression can be detected through students' behaviors such as anxiety, pressure and stress. Depression among university students has been a controversial issue nowadays. The aim of this paper is to see the level of depression among college-bound students during COVID-19 attacks. The data of the study were obtained by distributing questionnaire forms to 100 female students from various faculties who are 'trapped' in college and unable to return home due to Movement Control Order (MCO) during COVID-19 attack. The researchers used the Beck Depression Inventory which describes the students' level of depression and factors contributed to their depression. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 23. The result of the study showed that the students were depressed not because they cannot go home during COVID-19 attacks, but due to other factors like family, personal issues, academic performance achievement issues, communication barriers and social interaction problems related to peer relationships. It is hoped that the results of this study provide solutions to educators and students as to how depression can be overcome so that life becomes balance, safe and enjoying.

Keyword: Depression, stress, students

Introduction

Depression among university students has been a controversial issue nowadays. This is because over a decade ago many experts denied the existence of depression among university students. Many studies conducted lately have shown that depression is not only present among university students but more serious than expected. Many think university students are good at taking care of themselves. It is not possible for them to be depressed. However, the opinion is incorrect. Depression among university students requires good attention and intervention.

Depression is a type of mental illness. If the problem is less diagnosed, until it becomes severe, an intensive treatment is required. Most of all depressed people have low mood episodes. They have lost interest in doing activities they liked. Among the signs of depression are frequent sadness, anxiety, irritability, significant low self-esteem, guilt, restlessness and difficulty concentrating, remembering information or making decisions. Depressed people also have physical symptoms like weight gain, appetite decline, wake up early, lack of energy, headache, digestive problems and chronic pain. People around depressed individuals may notice a dull appearance. However, not all depression individuals show the same symptoms. In order to classify a person as depressed, certain symptoms (except for the feeling of suicide) must be present for at least two weeks.

This study is conducted because the researchers see depression as a problem that has hit society, especially university students. Lately, depression is a major problem among university students. One of the factors drive them to this problem is that they are vulnerable as they are burdened by tight schedules. The researchers hope that this study will help prevent and reduce depression among university students by adopting a healthy living style. Therefore, this paper tries to look at the extent to which college-bound students who were unable to return home due to COVID-19 attack suffered from depression.

Literature Review

According to Mohd. Sofian (2014), people who face depression often experienced a problem of emotional imbalance. According to a study conducted by Turkington & Kaplan (1997) in See & Lee (2015), they found that when someone reached the age of fifteen, one in five adolescents experienced depression. According to Bachanas & Kaslow (2011) depression among adolescents requires good attention and intervention. Depression is a clinical syndrome that incorporates a combination of emotional, cognitive and behavioural symptoms (Oltmanns & Emery, 2015).

Depression is a mood disorder and also includes psychiatric disorders in which the sufferer acts self-blame, is confused and feels like he has no chance of survival. According to Iran Herman (2005), previous studies on depression cover age ranges from adolescence to adulthood. Depression in adolescence is less regarded as a clinical problem. According to a study by Lee (2014) in Mohamed Alfian & Mohamed Sharif (2006) found that a total of 140 fourth year students showed that they suffered depression caused by emotional and social loneliness.

According to Jamaludin et al. (2010), there are several symptoms of depression which are divided into four aspects: affective, cognitive, behavioural and physiological. These aspects are related to one another. According to Mohd Farhan (2018), the factors of depression among students are divided into three main factors such as tiredness due to exhaustion, lack of focus on learning and difficulty in completing tasks; students' cognitive and emotional well-being without being overwhelmed by the loss of thinking and emotion in their lives; and issues related to academic motivation, class problems and motivation issues.

According to a study conducted by Sander & McCarty (2015), there is some evidence of family factors affecting adolescent depression. First, adolescent depression is clearly associated with parental depression. The relationship reflects a set of interactive and multidimensional factors. Second, parent-child relationships, children's temperament interactions in the family environment, parental pathology, and the impact of situations and environmental pressures on the family system are also contributing factors to adolescent depression. Third, lack of warmth and parental availability is a continuing risk for adolescent depression.

Butler et al. (2016) have listed three factors that cause individuals to experience depression that are self-blame, self-pity and compassion for others. According to Butler et al. (2016), further self-blame means accelerating a person's culpability for wrongdoing. When these feelings of self-blame exist within themselves, they tend to continue to criticizing and hating themselves. This attitude assures them that they are evil and useless. If persistent, self-blame causes the individual to feel disturbed and may feel like crying, sitting in silence or feeling sad which may lead to depression.

The Beck Cognitive Depression Theory (Beck, 2019) is a theory for dealing with depression among students. According to his theory, many of the symptoms of depression are due to the negative attitude and thinking of the individual. The symptoms are the result of

insecure thinking that can lead to psychological stress and conflict. They fail to see family as a healthy environment which give them happiness. Most of their conflict is related to interpersonal issues. They may rebel and act deviant due to lack of interruption and effective interaction.

The effects of COVID-19 are felt by many parties. Daily affairs, planning and activities are interrupted, especially when the government establishes Movement Control Order (MCO) to curb the outbreak. One of the parties affected by this COVID-19 are students, especially university students. Some of them are stranded and unable to return home due to MCO. Despite the many help and assurances provided by university management, what about these students' emotions? So, this study was conducted to see if these students are suffering from depression symptoms? Is it caused by COVID-19 attacks or family factors, environmental factors and social factors?

Method

The population of the study consists of 199 female students who were stranded at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Pahang Branch Jengka Campus during 2020/2021 academic sessions when the government announced the second level MCO. In the researchers' opinion, they may experience depression because they cannot go home to be with their family or for other reasons. Thus, the researchers use the purposive sampling method to these students.

The researchers used questionnaire as a research instrument. The questionnaire is divided into two parts, Part A and Part B. Part A is related to the students' background. Part B consists of 70 interval questions based on Beck's Cognitive Depression Theory (Beck, 2019). A 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) Likert Scale was used for respondents to indicate their answer to the statement provided. Out of 199 questionnaires distributed, only 100 (50.25%) questionnaire forms could be used for further analysis.

The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 23 involving frequency and mean. According to Beck's Cognitive Depression Theory (Beck, 2019), if the score (in mean) is less than or equal to 2, the level of depression experienced is low. Scores between 2.01 to 3.00 (equal to or less than) represent a moderate level of depression. Finally, a score above 3.01 indicates high level of depression.

Results and Discussions

Respondents' Background

A total of 100 female respondents were involved in this study. As illustrated in Table 1, 77% of them aged between 19 to 21 years. 45% of them represent the Faculty of Business and Management (FPP). Most of them (55%) are in Semester 04. 43% of the respondents obtained a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) between 2.50 to 3.00.

Table 1 Respondents' Background

	Items	Respondent (Number)	Percentage (%)
Age	19 to 21 years	77	77
	Over 21 years	23	23
Faculties	Faculty of Business and Management (FPP)	45	45
	Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation (FSSR)	21	21
	Faculty of Applied Sciences (FSG)	16	16
	Faculty of Accountancy (FP)	11	11
	Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences (FSKM)	7	7
Semesters	02	13	13
	03	17	17
	04	55	55
	05	15	15
Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)	2.00 to 2.49	27	27
	2.50 to 3.00	43	43
	3.01 to 3.49	19	19
	3.50 and above	11	11

Reliability Measurement

The reliability measurement used in this study is the Cronbach's Alpha. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is acceptable (Hair et al., 2010). The results of the reliability analysis in this study is between the range of 0.81 to 0.87. Therefore, this indicates the items are valid and reliable for further testing as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 Reliability Coefficients

Item	Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
B1	Family factors	26	0.81
B2	Environmental factors	18	0.85
B3	Social factors	26	0.87

Family Factors

Table 3 illustrates the mean values levels of items related to family factors contributing to the students' depression.

Table 3 The Mean Values for Family Factors

Items	Mean Values	Level	Items	Mean Values	Level
B1	1.91	Low	B14	2.25	Moderate
B2	2.72	Moderate	B15	2.13	Moderate
B3	2.28	Moderate	B16	1.98	Low
B4	2.33	Moderate	B17	2.19	Moderate
B5	1.76	Low	B18	2.05	Moderate
B6	2.34	Moderate	B19	2.15	Moderate
B7	2.55	Moderate	B20	3.42	High
B8	2.59	Moderate	B21	3.36	High
B9	2.74	Moderate	B22	3.18	High
B10	2.57	Moderate	B23	3.06	High
B11	1.83	Low	B24	3.30	High
B12	2.00	Low	B25	3.43	High
B13	1.92	Low	B26	3.35	High
Total			2.52	Moderate	

Of the 26 items involved, 6 items recorded low mean values and 13 items recorded moderate mean values. 7 items have high mean values. Item B5, ‘I want to kill myself’, has the lowest mean value of 1.76 whilst item B25, ‘I am not happy with family’, has the highest mean value of 3.43. This result shows that the students are still rational and do not intend to commit suicide despite they are depressed. However, feelings of unhappiness with the family certainly make them uncomfortable and depressed.

Overall, family factors have a modest effect in contributing to students’ depression. The result shows that the total mean value of the family factor is 2.52 which is moderate. This supports the findings of Beck’s Cognitive Depression Theory (Beck, 2019), if the score (in mean) is between 2.01 to 3.00 (equal to or less than) represent a moderate level of depression.

Environmental Factors

Table 4 shows the mean values levels of items related to environmental factors contributing to students’ depression.

Table 4 The Mean Values for Environmental Factors

Items	Mean Values	Level	Items	Mean Values	Level
B27	2.33	Moderate	B36	3.19	High
B28	2.34	Moderate	B37	3.49	High
B29	2.36	Moderate	B38	3.33	High
B30	2.35	Moderate	B39	3.03	High
B31	2.30	Moderate	B40	2.96	Moderate
B32	2.09	Moderate	B41	2.93	Moderate
B33	2.43	Moderate	B42	2.86	Moderate
B34	2.40	Moderate	B43	2.29	Moderate
B35	2.85	Moderate	B44	3.17	High
Total			2.71	Moderate	

From the 18 items involved, 13 items recorded moderate mean values and 5 items recorded high mean values. No item has the low mean value. The item with the lowest moderate mean value was item B32, ‘I feel frustrated and upset’ with a mean value of 2.09. Meanwhile, the item with the highest mean value was item B37, ‘I am not happy to be in campus’ with a mean value of 3.49. The result shows that students have levels of anxiety and pressure in control but they do not feel that campus is a happy place to live. This probably due to the MCO which do not allow them to perform any recreational activities.

Overall environmental factors have a moderate effect to the students' depression. The result shows that the total mean value for the environment factor is 2.71 which is moderate. This supports the findings of Beck's Cognitive Depression Theory (Beck, 2019), if the score (in mean) is between 2.01 to 3.00 (equal to or less than) represent a moderate level of depression.

Social Factors

Table 5 illustrates the mean values levels of items related to environmental factors contributing to students' depression.

Table 5 The Mean Values for Social Factors

Items	Mean Values	Level	Items	Mean Values	Level
B45	2.72	Moderate	B58	2.26	Moderate
B46	2.30	Moderate	B59	2.61	Moderate
B47	1.94	Low	B60	2.08	Moderate
B48	2.69	Moderate	B61	2.20	Moderate
B49	2.75	Moderate	B62	1.94	Low
B50	2.74	Moderate	B63	2.48	Moderate
B51	2.19	Moderate	B64	2.96	Moderate
B52	2.56	Moderate	B65	3.49	Moderate
B53	2.36	Moderate	B66	3.03	High
B54	2.26	Moderate	B67	3.40	High
B55	2.20	Moderate	B68	3.06	High
B56	2.39	Moderate	B69	3.13	High
B57	2.00	Low	B70	3.11	High
Total			2.57		Moderate

Of the 26 items involved, 3 items recorded low mean values and 17 items recorded moderate mean values. 6 items have high mean values. The items with the lowest mean value was item B47, 'I am not interested in learning' and item B62, 'I do not like to make friends' with mean value of 1.94. Meanwhile, the item with the highest mean value was item B65, 'I do not have many friends' with mean value of 3.49. The result shows that the students have a passion for learning and love for friends but no real friends to be trusted. The finding of this study shows that students are depressed due to social factors with friends. They have communication barriers and social interaction problems related to peer relationships.

Overall social factors have a moderate effect to students' depression. The result shows that the total mean value of the social factor is 2.57 which is moderate. This supports the findings of Beck's Cognitive Depression Theory (Beck, 2019), if the score (in mean) is between 2.01 to 3.00 (equal to or less than) represent a moderate level of depression.

Conclusion

The results of the study showed that the students' depression levels are at a moderate level. In addition, each factor that led to depression was also at the moderate level with the highest contributing factors are environmental factors (mean value = 2.71) followed by social factors (mean value = 2.57) and family factor (mean value = 2.52). Overall, the findings showed that students are depressed not because they cannot return home due to the COVID-19 attack, but other factors such as family, environmental and social factors. It is generally seen that the level of student depression is moderate. However, this should not be overlooked because if left unchecked, it is feared that the effects of this situation could adversely affect students' survival. If not taken seriously, it is possible for students not only to fail in academic achievement, but also to give up on life. Given that this study has certain scope and limitations, it is advisable to

broaden the scope of the study by engaging more students and expand inference data analysis methods such as looking at the relationships between the depression factors. Depression is a disorder of one's feelings, therefore, if a student experiences this situation, then his or her survival will be affected. Students with depression can be restored to normal and lead a prosperous life as others with the support and encouragement from friends, lecturers and families.

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