

Digital Mental Health and COVID-19: Mental Health Literacy Among General Population In Selangor

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction: Mental health increased in prevalence during the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused changes in health-seeking behaviour among the general population. Having adequate knowledge helps to improve community attitudes on mental health. Thus, measuring mental health literacy is essential in developing policies, prevention strategies and formulating interventions. Therefore, this study aims to measure mental health literacy among the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic in Selangor.

Methods: A validated Malay version of the self-administered Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS) was used in this cross-sectional study among all Selangor citizens through SELANGKAH Apps from 13th September 2021 until 7th March 2022. This app was initially used as a contact tracing during the pandemic. Later features of the mental health module (SEHAT) were added, consisting of screening questionnaires, literacy questionnaires, and psychoeducation videos. This app was promoted to all Selangor citizens and can be downloaded for free. Data was analysed using IBM SPSS version 26.

Result: There are a total of 42072 SEHAT app users, while 1222 users completed the MHLS questionnaires. Most respondents were female (52.8%), Muslims (79.3%), had formal education up to secondary level (51.1%), had a monthly income below RM 5000 (90.5%), and age group of 21-40 years old (58.5%), and lived in the district of Petaling, Selangor (29.5%). The overall mean (sd) MHLS was low, which is 101.3 (17.03) and was significantly associated with all determinants ($p < 0.05$). Those with higher mean MHLS include females, Muslims, aged 21-40 years old, university graduates, had a monthly income of RM 5001 to RM 10000 and living in the district of Petaling, which is an urban centre in Selangor.

Discussion: This is one of the most extensive state-wide level studies during the pandemic. Higher mean MHLS among females could be due to more sensitive recognition and perception of symptoms in females than males. Access to mental health information is now at one's fingertip with the luxury of the internet and devices. A surge in internet usage among Malaysians was seen during the pandemic, mainly during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period. Subsequently, those in the younger age group, with higher monthly income, and living in urban areas have greater access to the mental health information on media, hence having higher MHLS. Furthermore, the higher the formal education level, the higher the mental health literacy as more information is known via greater exposure in higher institutions.

Conclusion: The mental health literacy scores were low among the general population in Selangor during the pandemic. Hence, more mental health advocacy and awareness programs should be carried out.

KEYWORDS: Public mental health, health literacy, Covid-19, pandemic, Digital health, mobile mental health