

Nooraini Othman **RISING OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES: A CHALLENGE TO MALAYSIAN
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There has been an increased in public as well as the government concern of mental health issues across the world. It is further noted that the burden of mental disorders continues to grow with significant impacts on health and major social, human rights and economic consequences in all countries of the world. Untreated and ignorant of mental health issues such as prolong and uncontrolled stress, worries, overthinking, negative feelings, unhealthy lifestyle and jealousy might



lead to a more serious issues. World Health Organization (2018) has come out with a Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 in which it recognizes the essential role of mental health in achieving health for all people. It aims to achieve equity through universal health coverage and stresses the importance of prevention. Focus was also given to the teenagers mental health issues. It is reported that almost 800,000 deaths by suicide occurred globally in 2016 in which men are 75% more likely than women to die as a result of suicide and it occurs in adolescents and

adults of all ages (World Health Statistics, 2018).

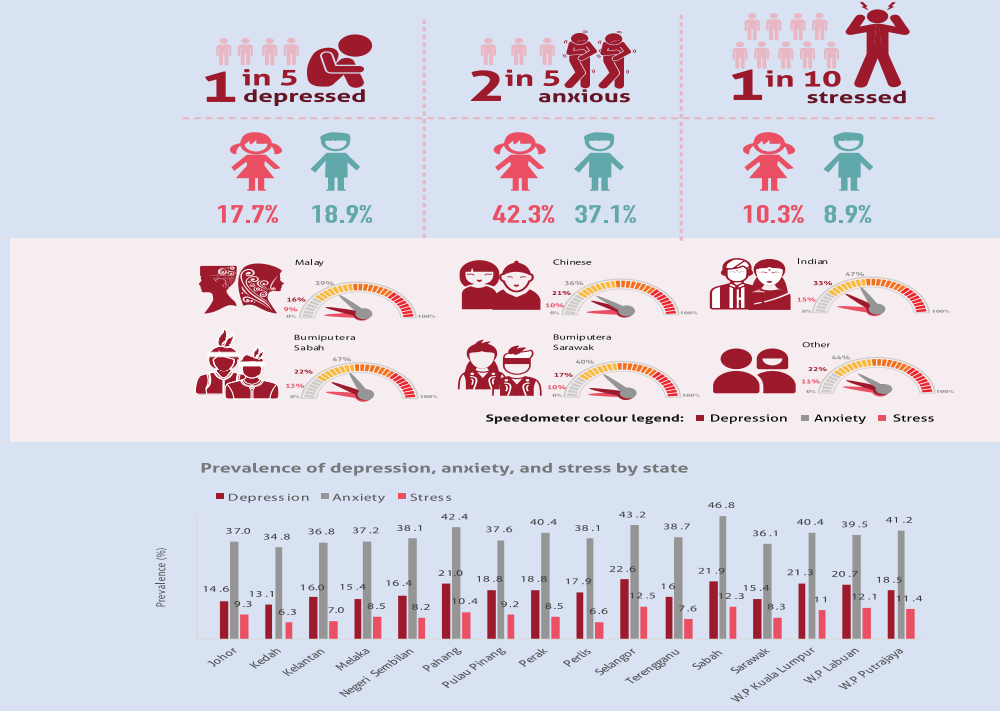
In the case of Malaysia, the National Health & Morbidity Survey (2017) reported in a study which was conducted among more than 30,000 of the Malaysian secondary school-going adolescents in March to May 2017. The Malaysian community composed of three main races that is Malay, Chinese and Indian. The prevalence of depression, anxiety and stress were 18.3%, 39.7% and 9.6% respectively. The prevalence of depression was higher among males (18.9%), those of Indian ethnicity (33.1%), and respondents from the state of Selangor (22.6%). The prevalence of anxiety was higher among females (42.3%), those of Bumiputera Sabah ethnicity (47.3%), and respondents from the state of Sabah (46.8%). The prevalence of stress was higher among students studied in urban areas (10.3%), females (10.3%), those of Indian ethnicity (15.3%) and respondents from the state of Selangor (12.5%).

As compared to the survey done in 2012, there is an increased in the prevalence of depression and anxiety and a reduction in stress. The increased might be associated with loneliness felt by the teenagers most of the time or always for the past 12 months. It is proposed that mental health promotion and prevention strategies should be focused on adolescents and their parents as one of the efforts to reduce mental health problems in Malaysia

National Health and Morbidity Survey 2017

Key Findings

22 State of Adolescents' Mental Health in Malaysia
(Based on DASS-21 scoring)



Source: Adolescent Mental Health (DASS-21), NHMS 2017
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Findings from the survey made by the Malaysia Ministry of Health showed that there is an increase in the number of women suffering from mental health issues (National Health Morbidity Survey, 2016, figure above). One in every three persons is facing the mental health issues whether they realise it or not. This research showed that there is an increase as much as twice the number of mental health patients as compared to 10 years ago in which the identified causes have been related to financial problem, failure to fulfil the expectations and environmental pressures. The 2006 National Health and Morbidity Survey highlighted the prevalence of acute suicidal ideas was highest among youth at the age of 16-24 at 6.4% compared with an overall prevalence of 11%.

Given the prevailing mental health issues, the mental health professionals namely, the psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and counsellors play a very important role in helping their patients or clients to overcome or manage their symptoms with a proper guidance. They could also help in developing strategies and skills such as coping mechanism in order to minimize as well as manage the psychological effects of the issues. The shortage of registered psychiatrists (Ng et. al, 2018), clinical psychologists (Seal, 2018) and registered and certified counsellors needs to be seriously addressed. As a trained medical doctors, psychiatrist is able to prescribe medications. The clinical psychologists able to identify psychological, emotional or behavioural issues through observation, interviews and tests. Together with the client, they will formulate a program of treatment to suit the client's needs.

The counsellors, other than becoming an active listener, they should be able to help the clients in managing their stress by turning it from a disturbance into a motivation. The ability to develop resilience and inner strength among those affected by the mental health issues would certainly enable them to prevent themselves from further self-destruction. This shortage in number might affects the quality of services offered as the ratio is bigger in the sense that one qualified and registered professionals will have to manage too many. The number of those who seek for services is increasing from time to time. The awareness level among the Malaysians to get psychological assistance in dealing with their issues is also increasing. However, the shortage of professionals might affect the efficiency of the service providers.



The National Mental Health Policy 2012 needs to be revised as proposed by the Deputy Prime Minister recently. The analysis and evaluation of the policy needs to be based on the current needs and conditions of the society. Conducting extensive national research and development

programmes in the field of mental health would certainly contribute to the service providers in improving the service to better meet the needs and requirements of the whole population. The research output could also be used to develop the evidence-based policy. It is agreed that policy which is based on systematic evidence is seen to produce better outcomes. The approach also come to incorporate evidence-based practices.

Any government serious about improving the lives of the public and understanding why intractable social problems persist must ensure that their policies and interventions are based on an in-depth understanding of human behaviour (Scott, 2019). The role of government in developing national programmes focusing on specific mental health issues such as depression, suicide and other chronic mental illnesses should be enhanced. Experience shared by Finland (Lehtinen & Taipale, 2001) in managing their mental health issues starting from redefining the mental health work, integrating the mental health services up to conducting the national development programmes in the field of mental health will be able to provide an excellent examples to other developing countries like Malaysia. There are lots of lessons to be learnt. Given these rising demands for a better mental health service, surely it is a challenge for the Malaysians to cope with the current lifestyles. Thus, to have a current up-to-date mental health policy can be considered as a must.

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