


Emotional Intelligence, Depression, Anxiety and Stress of Civil Servants in COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The focus of this study was on the relationship of emotional intelligence with the scale of depression, anxiety, and stress of civil servants in the COVID-19 pandemic scenario. The specific purpose of this study was to test the relationship between four domains of emotional intelligence namely emotion domain, self-awareness, emotional well-being, and emotional regulation of COVID-19 challenge with the scale of depression, anxiety, and stress of civil servants in a statutory body in Malaysia. A total of 2268 respondents were selected for the category of academic and non-academic services. The first measurement tool used was a questionnaire developed by the researcher, and it went through a process of instrument validation and construct validation, namely the Emotional Intelligence Domain Inventory of COVID-19 Challenges (EIDInv-CvdC). While the second questionnaire is a questionnaire that has been established that is the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS21). In this study, correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship and influence between the domains of emotional intelligence with the dependent variables namely depression, anxiety, and stress scales. The findings of the study indicate that there is a significant correlation and relationship between the domain of emotional intelligence with the scale of depression, anxiety, and stress of the respondents.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Pandemic

Introduction

Employees are a very significant human resource functioning in the human capital development and physical development of a country. Employees are also an administrative and management machinery that allows the people to bring the framework of national development that is valuable at the world level as a consistent model. In addition to employees are a component that is a key added value in the country's economic growth. Civil

servants as employees remain the largest service provider in the country which includes the transmission of knowledge and services from one generation to another. Certainly, the context of human capital through human resources itself is driven along with the vision, mission, and operations in the organizational transformation component for management change that has been designed and prepared by the Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU), in the country's efforts to generate dynamic transformation and needs to be strengthened. by an organization in Malaysia (MAMPU, 2009).

However, no one expected the presence of heavy allegations that hit the whole world, including Malaysia, when in the blink of an eye the nightmare began in early 2020, following the aggressive attack of the COVID-19 virus pandemic. The situation is very affecting to all sections of society, across various sectors of employment and the economy. The condition has an indirect and direct impact in many elements spanning the social, economic, physical, emotional, and mental of the individual. Statistics on the number of infected in Malaysia began to increase day by day since January 23, 2020, until it reached the four digits in mid-March 2020. To face the big threat, the Malaysian government set March 18, 2020, is the start period of the Movement Control Order (MCO) for all citizen activities involving schools, universities, factories, and shops that need to be closed (Syah Rul, 2020). The control directive also applies to all workers in the country including every civil servant who must work from home (WFH), although flexibility is given to workers and civil servants who are directly involved as the front liner.

The situation that worries all citizens of the world is appreciated with a deeper understanding so that all parties need to work together to always sit at home to break the chain of spread of the COVID-19 virus (Syah Rul, 2020). Basically, citizens and civil servants must stay at home during the MCO period which has taken months and do their work from home. Yet it should be understood from the perspective of emotional reality and mental health, that is not a moment of relief. When the fact is that the people are overshadowed by worries if they or their families are at risk of contracting the virus, with the hope that the dangerous pandemic will end soon. The hope is accompanied by an awareness of the impact not only on employment, economy, and daily life, but also importantly the impact of emotional aspects and self-confidence. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic phenomenon, the researchers felt the need for a study to determine the relationship and influence of the domain of emotional intelligence with the scale of depression, anxiety, and stress among employees.

Background

The increasingly demanding environment of today puts many people in a state of stress to compete in continuing the struggle of life. The increasingly stressful demands of the job, coupled with bureaucracy and various other individual grievances around make many begin to feel a variety of negative emotions, which can eventually disrupt their mental health and life. The stress that exists because it is influenced by negative emotions among employees should not be taken lightly. This situation also seems to indicate that the current environment is less effective in providing a low-stress work environment as once enjoyed by previous

employees. Rapid development, global competition, technological transformation, and job characteristics nowadays make work increasingly challenging. High levels of stress will lead to negative emotions and personalities and will disrupt the functioning of life in society, while levels of stress that can be addressed appropriately can lead to positive emotions and personalities and normal well-being (Goleman, 1998).

The balance of human capital, especially in the development of human resource organizations for the sake of sustainable national development, should be considered paramount by all parties. However, there is no doubt that there are still various phenomena and significant problems in organizations that involve the climate of psychological interaction among employees, including academic staff and non-academic staff, thus giving a negative impact on the emotional aspect that can also have a lasting effect on work commitment and employee behavior itself (Zainuddin, 2009). Clearly here, focus of this study was to test the emotional element. Emotions are something that a person feels internally. The word 'emotion' means 'movement of energy' which is derived from a Latin word (Childe and Martin, 1999). According to them, a person's emotional experiences affect brain cells and memory, then form patterns that influence a person's behavior.

To what extent do emotions play an important role and their relevance to the COVID-19 pandemic scenario that has occurred since early 2020? It will be explored in this study, through aspects of emotional intelligence and mental health among civil servants. As we all know, almost the whole world is now suffering from the effects of the COVID-19 virus pandemic. At the time this paper was written on 9 October 2021 at 1.00pm, the total number of COVID-19 cases worldwide had reached 237,828,569 cases and recorded 4,853,198 deaths (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>). Of the 18,104,605 cases that are still active, 83,776 cases are in critical status and 18,020,829 cases are in stable condition, while a total of 214,870,766 cases have been cured. Malaysia so far (9 October 2021) has been listed in the 20th highest position of positive cases which recorded a total of 129,049 active positive cases and 27,113 deaths (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>). Thus, the focus of this study was to explore the domain levels of emotional intelligence and scale levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among civil servants during the COVID-19 pandemic period, as well as the relationship between these variables.

Problem Statement

The Corona 2019 virus (COVID-19) which was first detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019 has spread widely around the world, causing the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Azizi, 2020). Attack after attack from the invisible enemy against human beings daily until now has triggered various changes in human emotions, minds and behaviors. The scenario can have a psychological and mental health impact on the people, among them are extreme anxiety, symptoms of depression, panic, and stress (Firdaus, 2020). For example, in the early stages of MCO, it was found that many people suffered from extreme anxiety to panic buying and collecting items in large quantities to prevent COVID-19 infection such as face masks, sanitizers and gloves until prices doubled due to high demand exceeding supply. The psychological

impact needs to be considered in facing this pandemic phase of COVID-19, both during and post-pandemic. Even the people are aware that the period for the world to produce vaccines as well as the distribution of the vaccination process is not in a short period. According to the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) before, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the first vaccine for COVID-19 is expected to be produced within 18 months from early 2020 (BH Online, 14 February 2020). The expectation is almost accurate because up to the present date (9 October 2021), the vaccination process to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is still ongoing in Malaysia, while in other countries it has also started in stages from early 2021.

Focusing on the impact on human psychological impact, there are many studies done on the psychological impact caused by pandemics, epidemics, or disasters. According to a study published by the *International Journal of Research and Public Health* in 2020, there were 53.8% of respondents reporting moderate to severe psychological impacts. Of these, 16.5 percent reported symptoms of depression, 28.8% reported symptoms of anxiety and 8.1% reported symptoms of stress. The online study involved 1,210 respondents from 194 cities in China on the psychological impact of the COVID-19 outbreak (Firdaus, 2020). Most respondents said they stayed at home for 20 to 24 hours per day (84.7%) as well as worried about other family members experiencing an outbreak (75.2%). The results of the study also found that women, students as well as specific physical symptoms were associated with higher psychological impact (Firdaus, 2020). However, those with accurate knowledge of the pandemic, as well as an understanding of the precautionary procedure were found to have a lower psychological impact. Based on a study conducted in Korea published in the *International Journal of Healthcare* in 2018, almost half of health workers namely nurses who were directly involved in handling the Mers-CoV outbreak in 2015 suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder or better known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Younglee et al., 2018).

The reality of the situation causes emotional outbursts and eruptions of anxiety, nervousness, worry, panic and stress about the risks and threats of COVID-19 that can strike anyone. Although it may be that after the MCO is terminated or it may be that the data of patients infected with the virus decreases with the findings of the sloping graph, but the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic will always seize the value of freedom and instill peace in the hearts of all people in this country. However, this frightening phenomenon will be a prolonged constraint that may possibly affect the daily functioning of an individual, including possibly affecting the quality and focus of work among civil servants (Shivangi, 2020). It should be noted that emotional well-being and mental health are just as important as physical health.

The outbreak of all negative feelings arising from the COVID-19 pandemic scenario will affect the emotional stability of civil servants and can lead to behavioral changes and will even have an impact on the quality of work in the organization. Such emotional, mindset and behavioral changes need to be understood through the domains studied in emotional intelligence and the scale of depression, anxiety, and stress. Thus, the researchers felt that a study needed to be done to examine the level of emotional intelligence and scale of depression, anxiety, and stress among civil servants during the COVID-19 outbreak, further identifying the relationship and influence between those variables. The results of this study can be used as a reference and guide not only in the

post-outbreak period of COVID-19, but also can be referred for future periods.

Research Objectives

- To test the relationship of emotion domain with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress of civil servants in the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To test the relationship of the self-awareness domain with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress of civil servants in the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To test the relationship of the emotional well-being domain with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress of civil servants in the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To test the relationship of the emotional regulation domain of COVID-19 challenges with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress of civil servants in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

- What is the relationship of the emotion domain with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress of civil servants in the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What is the relationship of the self-awareness domain with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress of civil servants in the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What is the relationship of the emotional well-being domain with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress of civil servants in the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What is the relationship of the emotional regulation domain of the COVID-19 challenges with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress of civil servants in the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study is a cross-sectional and field study, as well as descriptive with the use of correlation statistics. Field studies are quite relevant to use due to their high reliability, while the use of cost is relatively low (Maimunah, 1992). The purpose of this study is for descriptive and hypothesis testing. Hypothesis testing approaches toward the elaboration of an independent variable in two or more factors in each set of conditions (McIntyre, 2005). Correlation analysis was chosen as describing the relationship between the variables.

Research Location

The study location is focused on Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) organizations from most states throughout Malaysia, including Sabah and Sarawak. Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA; Malay: People's Trust Council) groups of Malaysian government offices from most states throughout Malaysia are the focus of the study. This

organization was created to assist, train, and guide Bumiputra (native Malaysians) in the areas of business, industry, economics, and education.

Research Sampling

The study sample consisted of 2268 employees, consisting of academic staff and non-academic staff, from the salary category of grade 19 to grade Jusa/VK/VU). For this study, the MARA education cluster was chosen as the setting. Systematic random sampling method was used in the sample selection process.

Research Instruments

The study uses quantitative methods by analyzing the correlation of variables. The indicator used to test the level of emotional intelligence domain was a self-developed questionnaire by the researcher based on the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form questionnaire (TEIQue-SF V1.50; Petrides, 2009). The developed questionnaire went through a process of instrument validation and construct validation, named as the Emotional Intelligence Domain Inventory of COVID-19 Challenge (EIDInv-CvdC; Siti Sarawati Johar, 2021). The reliability value of this instrument is .894, and the KMO total is .954. While the second questionnaire is a questionnaire that has been established and has been confirmed validity in Malay language that is the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS21; Ramli et al., 2007). The reliability of this instrument is .955, and the KMO total is .973.

Research Findings Analysis

The Relationship of the Emotion Domain with the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales

Table 1 shows the finding of the relationship of emotional intelligence for the emotion domain with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress of respondents. The result of the analysis found that the emotion domain had a significant negative correlation with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress, with sig values = .000 and $R = -.250$. The finding also showed the emotion domain contributed as much as 6.2% ($R^2 = .062$) of variance change in the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Table 1. Correlation of Emotion Domain with Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scales

Variables	Emotion Domain	
	Sig.	Correlation
Depression, Anxiety & Stress	.000	-.250**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

The Relationship of the Self -Awareness Domain with the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales

Table 2 shows the finding of the relationship of emotional intelligence for the domain of self-awareness with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress of respondents. The result of the analysis found that the domain of self-awareness had a significant negative correlation with the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress, with sig values. = .000 and $R = -.213$. The finding also showed that the domain of self-awareness contributed as much as 4.5% ($R^2 = .045$) of variance change in the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Table 2. Correlation of Self-Awareness Domain with Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scales

Variables	Self-Awareness Domain	
	Sig.	Correlation
Depression, Anxiety & Stress	.000	-.213**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

The Relationship of the Emotional Well-Being Domain with the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales

Table 3 shows the finding of the study of the relationship of emotional intelligence for the domain of emotional well-being with the scales of depression, anxiety and stress of respondents. The result of the analysis found that the domain of emotional well-being had a significant negative relationship with the scales of depression, anxiety and stress with sig values. = .000 and $R = -.205$. The finding also showed that the emotional well-being domain contributed as much as 4.2% ($R^2 = .042$) of variance change in the scales of depression, anxiety and stress.

Table 3. Correlation of Emotional Well-Being Domain with Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scales

Variables	Emotional Well-Being Domain	
	Sig.	Correlation
Depression, Anxiety & Stress	.000	-.205**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

The Relationship of the COVID-19 Challenge Emotional Regulation Domain to the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales

Table 4 shows the finding of the study of the relationship of emotional intelligence for the domain of emotional regulation COVID-19 challenge with the scales of depression, anxiety and stress of respondents. The result of the analysis found that the emotional regulation domain provided had a significant negative correlation with the scales of depression, anxiety and stress with sig values. = .000 and $R = -.214$. The finding also showed that the emotional regulation COVID-19 challenge domain contributed 4.6% ($R^2 = .046$) of the variance change in the scales of depression, anxiety and stress.

Table 4. Correlation of Emotional Regulation Domain with Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scales

Variables	Emotional Regulation Domain COVID-19 Challenge	
	Sig.	Correlation
Depression, Anxiety & Stress	.000	-.214**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

Discussion

This study was conducted to test the relationship and influence of the Emotional Intelligence domain on the constructs of Depression, Anxiety and Stress among civil servants. The results showed that there was a significant negative correlation between the domains in Emotional Intelligence namely the domains of Emotions, Self-Awareness, Emotional Well-Being and Emotional Regulation of the COVID-19 Challenge with the Depression, Anxiety and Stress scale. Although the total contribution of the correlation is not very high, but it can be interpreted that the domain of emotional intelligence of the respondents in this study has a significant influence in the relationship that helps strengthen the elements of emotional well-being and stability.

The findings of this study indicate that the domains of emotional intelligence have functions and relationships in reducing depression, anxiety, and stress among employees. All four domains of emotional intelligence produced significant correlation coefficients with constructs of depression, anxiety, and stress. In this situation, these four domains of emotional intelligence were assessed as elements that were estimated to be able to serve as variables that could control the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among respondents. The results of this study support the findings of the study of Salovey and Mayer (1990) who emphasized that individuals who possess emotional intelligence can regulate any form of their emotions, and even able to handle emotions that involve others.

In summary, the function of emotional intelligence is no less important in helping to ensure that employees are not in depression, anxiety, and depression in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic threat. The ability in dealing with the symptoms of such emotional disorders is also in line with the dimension of emotional intelligence introduced by Bar-On (1997). Individuals who have high emotional intelligence are individuals who wisely manage stress most of the time (Bar-On, 1997).

Conclusion

Overall, the results of the study indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has its own distinct effects on civil servants. However, the effect can be stabilized by the influence of the positive emotional intelligence relationship with the negative scale of depression, anxiety, and stress among employees. The ability to control emotions to achieve emotional well-being was found to help employees be in a calmer and more controlled state

even when the surrounding conditions are tested by the threat of dangerous diseases that not only plague our country but have an impact globally for a relatively long period of time. Strength in emotional intelligence can help the people of the world to keep moving forward in this life despite being tested with severe allegations because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hopefully the COVID-19 pandemic will end soon, and the people of the world will be able to return to living a free, healthy, and safe life as before.

Recommendations

In this study, the emotional intelligence instrument was successfully constructed and has achieved the validity is proposed to be used as a guide to other interested researchers. The results of this study are also proposed to be used as a future reference for any organization in the government agencies.

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