



TECHNICAL REPORT

Health Behaviour Changes and Psychological Impact

among Malaysian Adults during COVID-19 Pandemic

Technical Report

**HEALTH BEHAVIOUR CHANGES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT AMONG
MALAYSIAN ADULTS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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Institute for Health Behavioural Research
National Institutes of Health, Ministry of Health Malaysia

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Technical Report

HEALTH BEHAVIOUR CHANGES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT AMONG MALAYSIAN ADULTS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC – KEY FINDINGS

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

BMI	Body Mass Index
WHO	World Health Organization
NRP	National Recovery Plan
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
MREC	Medical Review & Ethics Committee
MOH	Ministry of Health
PHQ	Patient Health Questionnaire

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Our sincere gratitude and appreciation also go to all parties who were involved in the implementation of the study as well as all the respondents who had contributed their time to participate in the study. We hope that our report findings will provide valuable insights to all relevant stakeholders in understanding people's health behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate the strategic planning of suitable health education programmes and other interventions in the future.

Thank You

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2020, COVID-19 has resulted in millions of deaths globally. The unprecedented pandemic has also led to significant behavioural changes that may be associated with long-term adverse health effects. Thus, this study aimed to assess and compare health behaviour changes including smoking, alcohol consumption, physical activity, eating and sleep pattern, as well as family relationship before and during COVID-19. This study also aimed to assess psychological health among the respondents during the period.

A cross-sectional study was conducted from January to March 2022. An online validated questionnaire was disseminated to 1,004 Malaysian adults aged 18 years and above via convenience sampling. Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test were used to compare health behaviours before and during COVID-19.

From the results, the respondents were mainly females (69.0%) and between 36 and 45 years old (38.9%). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, 41.6% of the respondents perceived that they have gained weight and 53.0% reported that they spent more time sitting or lying down. Furthermore, 3.9% and 10.8% of the respondents have started smoking and drinking alcohol. However, 21.6% and 34.9% of current smokers and drinkers reported that their smoking and alcohol consumption decreased during the pandemic as compared to before. Additionally, a notable decrease in the frequency and duration of physical activity per week was observed to be tied with increased screen time on weekdays and weekends compared to before COVID-19.

With regard to eating behaviour, there was a significant increase in the percentage of respondents who snacked more, drank more than eight glasses of water daily, and consumed more daily fruit intake compared to before COVID-19. However, there were no significant differences in the consumption of fast food and the frequency of daily vegetable intake. As for sleeping hours, the results indicated a significant difference before and during the pandemic.

Furthermore, due to the movement restriction during the pandemic, family members had to spend more time under the same roof. Unfortunately, it also led to an increased frequency of fighting/arguing compared to before. According to the study, 25.0% of the respondents experienced moderate to severe psychological distress. A closer look into the results reveals that 11.6% of them suffered from severe distress. Moreover, when assessing suicidal ideation, 6.6% and 8.2% of them admitted having thoughts of hurting themselves and being "better off dead".

Overall, this study indicates significant health behaviour changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. As COVID-19 persists, promotion and education about healthy lifestyle should be continued and intensified to ensure that the public can modify undesirable negative behaviours and sustain positive health behaviours. Such modifications are vital to prevent diseases and as part of preparedness towards future pandemics.



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