



MINISTRY OF HEALTH MALAYSIA

TECHNICAL REPORT

THE USE OF BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE IN ORGANISATIONS: A SURVEY AMONG THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH MALAYSIA'S WORKFORCE



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THE BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS UNIT
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NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (NIH)
MINISTRY OF HEALTH MALAYSIA
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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

BI Unit	The Behavioural Insights Unit
IHBR	Institute for Health Behavioural Research
MOH	Ministry of Health Malaysia
NMRR	National Medical Research Registry
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
WHO	World Health Organization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Globally, behavioural science is increasingly used by governments and organisations to study how cognitive, social, and environmental factors shape behaviour. The adoption of the Resolution on Behavioural Sciences for Better Health at the 76th World Health Assembly in 2023 marked a key milestone, encouraging countries to advance its use. As the resolution's sponsor, Malaysia is working to improve the understanding and application of behavioural science in health. To support this, the Behavioural Insights Unit at the Institute for Health Behavioural Research conducted an online survey between February 26 to April 30, 2024, to identify barriers and enablers for applying behavioural science within Malaysia's Ministry of Health (MOH). The survey, adapted from a World Health Organization tool developed with input from global experts, comprised 28 questions across nine sections. It was translated into Malay using the back-translation method and tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha.

Out of 1,200 MOH employees who responded nationwide, 99.1% (n = 936) agreed to participate in the survey, exceeding the targeted sample size of 385. The highest participation came from the management and professional group (48.4%) and the support group (48.3%). Temporary staff (MySTEP) and top management had nearly identical participation rates, at 1.9% and 1.4%, respectively. Among the participants, 36.7% worked in hospitals, 21.8% in District Health Offices, and 12.9% in State Health Departments. About 7.9% were based at the MOH headquarters, 5.3% at the MOH's training institute, and 5% at institutions such as the NIH, the National Cancer Institute, and the National Public Health Laboratory.

A total of 37.4% of the 936 participants reported being unsure about their understanding of behavioural science. In contrast, 35.0% classified themselves as novices, 27.0% as competent, and only 0.5% as specialists. Even among healthcare professionals with 20 or more years of experience, 38.4% considered themselves beginners, while more knowledgeable individuals ranked higher. This survey revealed that 29.5% of participants with at least 10 years of experience were unsure about their competency in behavioural science. Approximately 23.4% of the support group and 22% of the management and professional group reported incorporating a behavioural science approach into their work.

Approximately 16% of the management and professional group and 14% of the support group were uncertain about utilising a behavioural science approach. Moreover, about 22% of all participants indicated that they do not apply behavioural science in their work. Only 0.4% of participants considered themselves absolute experts in behavioural science, while 21.1% reported having proficient knowledge in the field.

Additionally, 27.3% identify as beginners indicating basic familiarity with behavioural science principles. Meanwhile, 29.2% of participants are uncertain about their level of knowledge in this area. A cross-tabulation analysis showed that 53% of the support group and 43.9% of the management and professional group reported being beginners in behavioural science. Furthermore, 48% of both groups were unsure about their level of knowledge in this field.

Regarding the difficulty of carrying out behavioural science activities in their work, 20% of participants identified implementation as the most challenging aspect. Lack of time and inadequate technical support (both at 14%) were also cited as significant barriers. To facilitate the application of behavioural science, 16% of participants highlighted the need for guidelines, training, and expert advice. Overall, 62% agreed that the MOH supports the use of a behavioural science approach in their work. Approximately 25% believed that behavioural science enhances the understanding of complex problems, while 20% stated that it contributes to achieving better outcomes.

The results show that clear guidelines, expert advice, and teamwork can facilitate the effective use of behavioural science. The survey also highlights the need for ongoing training and skill-building to help employees feel confident and prepared to apply behavioural science in their daily work.



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