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會議時間： 2020/11/6-11/8 (星期五至星期日)

Date: 2020/11/6-11/8 (Fri.-Sun.)

會議地點： 彰化師範大學王金平活動中心、輔導與諮商學系明德館

Venue: Jin-pyng Wang Activity Center / Department of Guidance and Counseling,
National Changhua University of Education



Mental Health Movement in Sarawak in response to COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

As the COVID-19 outbreak is affecting the whole world, Malaysia, like many other countries in this world, is also experiencing the crisis. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, a greater need for mental health and psychosocial services is expected with the rise in mental health issues nationwide, testing the limits of our current health care system. In fact, mental health is a significant topic within and beyond the Malaysian context even before the COVID-19 pandemic. According to The National Health Morbidity Survey (2015), every 1 in 3 adults aged 16 years and above in Malaysia suffer from mental health issues. Mental illness is expected to be the second biggest health problem affecting Malaysian after heart disease come 2020. Data from the 2017 National Health and Morbidity Survey also revealed that 29 percent of Malaysians suffered from depression and anxiety disorders, an increase from 12 percent in 2011. Nevertheless, the stigma of mental illness remains a barrier for people to seek help. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 pandemic has caused devastating mental health consequences (Qiu et al., 2020). In other words, on top of physical health, mental health is undermined in which psychological distress appear in individuals with or without mental illness. The negative impacts such as financial burden and loneliness alongside the implementation of Movement Control Order (MCO) in fighting the COVID-19 also led to an upsurge in depression, anxiety, substance use, trauma, and even suicide among the affected population (Shanmugam et al., 2020). Thus, mental health professionals need to be better prepared in facing such critical events. To date, the literature on mental health and COVID-19 has been published by several affected and more developed countries; yet this may not reflect the experience of people from developing countries like Malaysia. Mental health services in Malaysia is considered as a relatively young industry (Chong et al., 2013) and more so in East Malaysia with its different social and cultural background as well as limited resources. Sarawak, Malaysia's largest state on the island of Borneo is home to 27 ethnic groups with 45 different dialects while each group has its very unique traditions, values, attitudes, and practices. In the past, mental health was not given high priority and thus the mental health service is underdeveloped. In recent years, the Sarawak government had started to pay more attention to the mental well-being of its people. Despite that, the awareness of mental health services in Sarawak is still low. Therefore, the dearth of local literature on mental health and Covid-19 in Sarawak calls for the current paper. This paper presents a review of the mental health movement in Sarawak. Firstly, this paper provides a brief historical overview of the development of mental health services in Sarawak. Researchers trace the establishment of asylums in Sarawak as well as the growth of major mental health professionals in the field. Secondly, the current situation of the mental health sector is followed, including the shift of conventional service to the provision of teleconsultation and psychological first aid in the era of COVID-19. In addition, the mental health resources in terms of professional service providers and NGOs' involvement in Sarawak's mental health providers such as the Mental Health Association of Sarawak and Befrienders Kuching are reviewed. Researchers also highlighted the formation of the first one-stop centre by Sarawak state government i.e. the Sarawak Psychology & Counselling Centre in the efforts of addressing mental health issues. Thirdly, the potential paths of the mental health movement are discussed. Amid the crisis, the researchers remain hopeful that COVID-19 could drive mental health movement forward to create a more holistic healthcare system for Sarawakians.

Keywords : Mental Health Development, Malaysia, Sarawak, Covid-19

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