A Qualitative Research on Genders in Crisis: Young Adults’ Perspective and Experiences towards the COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

As disaster occurs and impacts humanity negatively, issues like community-related risks for mental health, challenges within families and more will start to rise. People tend to lose jobs, businesses, places to live, or even family members. The government of Malaysia declared a Movement Control Order (MCO) in order to regulate viral replication and smooth the pandemic curve caused by COVID-19. Therefore, qualitative research about what the young adults of Malaysia perceive and experience in the COVID-19 situation has been conducted. Twelve individuals who have undergone MCO participated in the online interview. Results indicated that more than half of the participants experienced negative emotions and reacted badly to the whole situation. Furthermore, it shows that they have lower levels of resilience in coping as they have zero crisis planning beforehand. However, young adults have done activities and hobbies to regulate their emotions during the period. Unfortunately, the extension of MCO has made young adults feel even more helpless and alienated. Consequently, most of them developed covid fatigue. The results suggest that young adults should have a plan for crisis situations in the future to ensure that they are well-equipped to protect themselves and their families.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes in the existing literature on education, training, preparations, forecasting and warning systems. To help lessen the devastation caused by a natural catastrophe. By integrating all people in disaster preparation and recovery efforts, can raise everyone's awareness of disasters.

1. Introduction

Humans are always exposed and are vulnerable to many natural hazards in the world. Crisis and disasters range from earthquakes, flash floods, pandemics, and many more, which lead to the loss of lives. As a consequence, all humans are highly vulnerable to all types of crisis and natural hazards of Mother Nature, especially groups like the poor, women, and children, who are often hit the hardest (Manjari Mehta & International
Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 2007). Whereas for crisis response, it simply refers to all the advance planning and actions taken to address natural and man-made disasters, crises, critical incidents, and tragic events. According to Noji (2000), it is important for society to understand that to reduce the effect of disasters, an intensive appraisal of dangers, hazards, weaknesses, and limitations is significant. As disaster occurs and impacts humanity negatively, issues like community-related risks for mental health, challenges within families and more will start to rise. Moreover, problems like the economic recession serve as a major stressor in affecting households during the acute phase of disasters. People tend to lose jobs, businesses, places to live, or even family members.

SARS-CoV-2, also known as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), has been an unstoppable force that has spread rapidly across the globe from person to person with just a simple droplet from coughing and sneezing. This virus has caused the number of cases in Malaysia to grow exponentially, which is why the Ministry of Health (MOH) later announced a Movement Control Order (MCO) with further detailed sets of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in contemplation of controlling and containing the virus.

1.1. Problem Statement

According to the Emergency Preparedness Institute (2007), fear and indifference may play a big part in the seeming lack of preparedness steps implemented. People fail to plan and prepare for crisis for a variety of reasons, according to their research, including "1) not being worried that an incident would affect them, 2) not thinking about it, 3) not knowing what to do, or 4) believing that preparing takes too long and/or costly, and more.

When individuals are needed to respond to a catastrophic occurrence, their lack of personal crisis preparedness is likely to be very damaging and diminish their maximum capability. Currently, the data and information about how young adults would react to a crisis and whether they are even appropriately prepared for it are scarce. As normal lives are affected by disasters, it might further result in psychological and physiological stress that could be scarring for the rest of their lives. Their well-being raises concerns about the level of crisis awareness and preparedness among Malaysian young people, which has yet to be recorded. Consequently, a study on crisis awareness and preparedness is significantly required.

1.2. Research Question

What are the experiences and perceptions of young adults in Malaysia towards the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.3. Significance of the Research

The author firmly believes that all parties in the world, such as working adults, young adults, and researchers, will benefit from the research. This research will help provide a stable research infrastructure and demonstrate the importance of government funding for public health emergencies in the future. Moreover, raising awareness of crisis preparedness, response, and resiliency amongst the concerned units and individuals.
This research can also benefit future health care professionals and researchers in determining the best strategies to overcome pandemic issues just by understanding how young adults would react. It is also important to promote information sharing and to fortify limits amongst key professionals and practitioners in the field of calamity/crisis readiness and recovery. By understanding how young adults perceive, react, and respond to crisis, it can not only become an increment in epidemiological information but also give new research discoveries to identify individuals’ crisis discernment, social practices that may be connected to the spread of viruses, well-being practices, medical services, and other boundaries to be mindful of.

1.4. Objectives

The objective of this research is to examine how young adults in Malaysia perceive and react to pandemics. One of the objectives of this research is to find out how the pandemic has affected the daily lives of current young adults as the COVID-19 serves as a potential first-time crisis for them. The current available literature still does not offer enough in-depth analyses of young adults’ experiences and perspectives during crisis periods (especially the COVID-19), which is why this research could serve as a stepping stone for future researchers and other organizations to understand its significance and how it may drastically affect the level of global understanding of the seriousness of young adults’ needs, problems, and difficulties in extreme crisis situations. Furthermore, the objective of this research is to also promote the future of more comprehensive “preparedness” programmers that can help to lead the country with increased efficacy. This can all be achieved by relying on the extensive information gained from individuals during times of need in Malaysia. Moreover, to create dialogue, strengthen communications and collaborations between the different fields or organizations involved in disaster or crisis response. In addition, to promote more connected and critical thinking, academics and practitioners from different fields can be enriched intellectually by understanding the individuals’ experiences, perspectives, and needs during a crisis period.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

In 1980, the Theory of Perceived Behavior was developed by Ajzen (1991) to forecast an individual's intention to participate in a certain behavior at a certain time and location. The hypothesis was designed to describe all actions over which humans may exercise self-control. Behavioral intent is a fundamental component of this paradigm; behavioral intentions are impacted by one’s attitude about the possibility that the conduct will produce the expected result, as well as one's subjective assessment of the risks and advantages of that result. Figure 1 shows the Theory of Perceived Behavior developed by Ajzen (1991).

The framework was chosen in the sphere of disaster/crisis preparedness, where the idea of planned behavior may be directly applied. For the time being, the behavior of interest is Crisis Response/Preparedness. It is postulated that Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control with regard to the individual’s action can predict intentions whether to conduct Crisis Response/Preparedness or not. Moreover, that intentions and perceptions of behavioral control can predict actual Crisis Response/Preparedness. Crisis Response/ Preparedness, on the other hand, is predicated on the consistency of intentions through time and the perception of behavioral control (Ajzen, 2002).
1.6. Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 is The Social Impact Theory (SIT) framework, which depicts how the COVID-19 epidemic affects young adults' experiences throughout its three elements, taking into account young adults' opinions of the influence of COVID-19 on their life (strength, immediacy, and number of sources). The cautious and preventative measures derived their power from procedures used to limit the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of young adults, but they also acted as a variety of sources affecting young adults' lives. In addition, the immediacy of these measures was linked to the social roles and psychological remoteness of these precautionary and preventative measures in the lives of people.
2. Literature Review

The conceptualization of crises as unexpected events disrupting daily life and causing death and destruction has been a common feature in crisis research. Poverty, environmental destruction, unequal ties of power that can be seen, among others, can further affect the magnitude of the effects of the crisis. Which is why the concept of an individual’s vulnerability, defined as one’s social, economic, and physical conditions or status, is often expressed to further explain the concept. In which, especially during cases of emergencies, citizens who are more vulnerable (less support) will have a much weaker and less established fallback position that automatically leads them to a higher risk (Hilde Van Dijkhorst & Vonhof, 2005).

According to Ryle (2020), gender leads as the way of assigning sex is determined by social assumptions about what is essential to the behavior of a male or female. Whereas Moser (1993) quoted: "The differences between women and men within the same household and within and between cultures are socially and culturally constructed and change over time." These differences are reflected in roles, responsibilities, access to resources, constraints, opportunities, needs, perceptions, views, etc. held by both women and men. It has also been claimed that Malaysia, often a patriarchal society, has lagged behind men primarily because of traditional cultural values that have not been challenged (Hirschman, 2016). This can be seen from the writings by specialists and social historians in field studies on gender roles and equality in Southeast Asia.

But is it true? This research aims to find out how different genders really prepare, react, and most importantly, how young adults perceive and experience the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic is an evolving collective trauma that affects everyone in this world (Demertzis & Eyerman, 2020). As a consequence of lockdown regulations, there is limited movement, social isolation, and financial hardship. Due to the pandemic, this could also increase the vulnerability of men and women from low and middle-income families, regardless of who is the head of the household (OECD, 2019). Besides that, it proves that during critical times, gender roles have definitely been affected and can be affected no matter what sector of life they are in. As research states, analyzing gender always brings with it the risk of generalization of male and female roles, with many exceptions to the rule (Hilde Van Dijkhorst & Vonhof, 2005). However, we should not look at it negatively because mainstreaming in gender research can further help different fields in humanitarian aid and create new approaches to conflict.

Even in the old times when wars and conflicts arose, or even now when natural disasters happen, different gender aspects and experiences can significantly influence the outcome of a situation and the recovery process from its impact. Ariyabandu (2009) also states the few key gender issues, like the needs and goals of women and men at different stages (biological, family, social, and cultural) of the disaster cycle are different. Furthermore, gender-based stereotypes perceive women in crisis situations as frail, passive, disabled victims in need of help, while in reality, women of various age groups actually play an active role (Elaine & Chakrabarti, 2009). Women, too, are flexible, resilient, and well adapted to unexpected changes and crises. However, that does not mean that men have to take up specific responsibilities or act according to their gender roles for the sake of the community. They too can feel helpless, weak, and vulnerable. These assumptions and stereotypes act as negative regulators and also change how different genders could actually react to save the country from recovering (Ikeda, 1995). In addition, both males and females are susceptible to crises, which is why they, along
with their capacities and coping mechanisms, should be identified for the sake of future relief programmers and humanitarian aid that are both efficient and egalitarian to the community.

The power of a system to adapt or respond to unique, distinctive, and most frequently profoundly unanticipated occurrences is typically characterized by resilience (Kuhlicke, 2010). In an effort to expand, create, and strengthen the capacity to cope with new and unfamiliar occurrences of crisis for the betterment of young adults’ lives, the broad focus of this research is therefore how the idea of resilience differs and can be beneficial for risk and crisis response amongst young adults in Malaysia. According to Berke and Campanella (2006), "Resiliency also applies to the process of recovery planning in which all affected stakeholders—rather than just a powerful few—have a voice in how their community is to be rebuilt." In this case, the focus of resilience should always complement and correlate to how the individuals recover from the crisis they face. With comprehensive and integrated planning, it is believed to assist and promote the recovery of young adults. Moreover, it gives them greater sustainability from many perspectives, whether financially, socially, or even ecologically. It can help alleviate individuals' worries whilst developing a larger understanding of communal resiliency.

Why qualitative research? A critical and spontaneous study approach is required to better explore and understand the multidimensionality of such elements as well as how they impact individual crisis preparation. Additionally, improved protection for at-risk groups can definitely benefit from a more fine-grained research viewpoint. To better understand the impacts of crisis events on vulnerable groups (such as women, young adults, the poor, and more), in particular, they require more research diversity through attentive and circumstantial scientific inquiry. According to Panter-Brick (2014), "risk" and "resilience" are major conceptual paradigms currently deployed in the social and biomedical sciences. They provide different yet complementary lenses through which to understand and address the persistence of human health disparities. With the help of qualitative research, the detailed experiences of "risks" and "resilience" of different individuals can be further explored. It can help us understand the young adults’ risk exposures and well-being as well as their vulnerabilities and coordinated strength or capacity for personal enhancement in the future.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

12 participants that fall between the age range of 18 to 26 were selected to participate and interviewed individually. Six males and six females from Malaysia who have undergone the Movement Control Order (MCO) will be recruited for the research. A non-probability sampling, convenience sampling, was used to recruit participants who are interested in joining the interview via social media platforms like Instagram or Facebook. Participants should at least be able to communicate in English or Chinese, and have internet access on their electronic gadgets. The participants were provided with an information sheet and, in addition, received a text message to ensure that they fully understood the nature of the study. Participants were also asked for their verbal consent on the day prior to the interview taking place.
3.2. Method

The form of research to be carried out is the thematic analysis for this study. A semi-structured interview will be used for data collection for all participants individually. The interviews will be carried out exclusively online. Prior to the interview date, people who have indicated interest in participating in the study will first be contacted to discuss the interview date through social media applications such as Instagram, WhatsApp or Facebook. The time and date of the interview will be set according to their availability by the participants. Before the interview, the participants were provided with an information sheet containing the necessary research information. After the participant expressed interest, he/she would be given a consent form. The interview will then commence after the participant signs the consent form, where the whole interview will be recorded and transcribed later. The participants will then be debriefed by the researcher after the interview.

3.3. Procedure

Prior to the construction of interview questions, researches had been done on existing websites, journals and articles that gave in-depth details/meaning to the report. The interviews were all conducted online via Zooms or Teams. All the interviews were conducted in English and/or Chinese. Then, it is digitally recorded and only audios were available, as the participants requested not to show their faces. The online interviews lasted between 20 to 40 minutes. Revisions of the interview sessions were done at the end of each sessions. Later, the author transcribed the interviews into word documents for analysis. The research has also received full approval from the Research Ethics Committee, Bachelor of Psychology (Hons), Taylor's University. Reference No. : HEC 2021/056.

3.4. Analytic strategy

After the completion of the 12 interviews, the researcher then proceeds to transcribe all of the audio recordings into text files. The participants were given nicknames after every transcription, for the complete anonymity of the participants. An inductive approach was taken to generate codes from the transcripts. The coded transcripts were then analyzed and the answers were sorted into excel tables. Their answers and replies were arranged based on the questions asked for each interviewees. Then, the repetitive codes are later generated into sub-themes and themes into a separate excel table for the report. Quotes were then added from the audio file to the excel table for a more detailed explanation. The researcher chose the quotes that answers their personal themes.

4. Result

The transcripts were subjected to a thematic analysis method, which revealed important themes that were present in the data. These themes are believed to be crucial in defining the participants’ understandings. There are three main themes which have been labelled as “Knowledge and Awareness on Crisis and Crisis Preparedness”, "A Forced Upon Online Learning Experience" and "Resiliency and Recovery".

4.1. Theme 1: Knowledge and Awareness on Crisis and Crisis Preparedness

4.1.1. Sub-theme 1: Not Preparing for the Unexpected
The capacity of all participants to grasp the role of crisis preparedness and their awareness of crisis defines this theme. This is likely to be defined in part by the varied degrees of crisis preparedness that the young people represented have. Evidence from the transcript will be used to illustrate the influence of their crisis response on their crisis readiness and awareness.

When asked if they had prepared for a crisis, ten participants expressed no concern about the crisis and stated unequivocally that they had little or no plans for what problems might arise in the future. Whereas only 2 participants had thorough conversations with their families about developing a comprehensive disaster plan to safeguard their family members. The majority of the participants displayed apathy towards crisis preparedness and planning and overlooked the importance of it. "Jolin," (21 years old, female) mentioned: "I mean… who would prepare for stuff like this?" showing her indifference and apathy as she feels that it is unrealistic to prepare for a crisis, then she later quoted, "I've thought about it for a little, but I've never... never realized that its impact would be so big, it impacted my life that much." It further appears that she was never mentally prepared for the impact of the crisis and that it had given her a substantial amount of shock.

Simultaneously, "Tifanny," (21 years old, female) said: "Depends on what kind of disaster? I mean, maybe not. If I sort of knew what kind of disaster might happen, I could try to prepare for it. Not yet. " To Tifanny, she has no idea of crisis preparedness in mind unless she is informed of the type of crisis that is classified and given to her, so only then she can start to make some sort of plan. She does not have a strategy in mind yet for managing the crisis or a set of emergency responses to overcome the issue.

On the other hand, "Adam" (21 years old, male) has also stated that "Because my place where I'm currently staying is relatively safe and stable, it's like there aren't a lot of disasters going on." So, I don't really think about this anymore. He later said, "So I didn't have this sort of awareness, because we are relatively safer than others." While having his place of residence relatively secured from natural disasters and crisis and being protected from harm or danger, he lacks the awareness to prepare for it and has the tendency to not prepare himself for the worst. Moreover, "Jacob" (21 years old, male) has also quoted, "To be frank, I'm not really prepared." "I don't think I really prepared much. And I don't think my household in general is really prepared for this thing." Jacob lacks the fundamentals of crisis awareness and preparedness. His parents, too, are equally unprepared for this level of crisis.

I think before that I am not. But right now, I am. Before that, I think I put so much of my like…I hold on too much to whatever I'm doing right now. And I don't really have any fallback or backup plans (Vincent, 21 years old, Male, Pg 1)

I don't think anybody is prepared for pandemic like even when that happened in China at first and we were at what, the January semester. We're still joking around like (chuckles)...it's not gonna be a thing. Then, suddenly BOOM, you're supposed to stay home for what, two to three months. (Vincent, 21 years old, Male, Pg 2)

Before COVID, he had no crisis planning to deal with situations like the pandemic because he was too engrossed in what he did, and he had no backup plans for any
disaster he could face. In his opinion, people are never prepared for a catastrophe. Even when COVID-19 first emerged, he dismissed it as a joke until it reached Malaysia.

4.1.2. Sub-theme 2: Communications and Pre-Planning

There was some evidence that showed parents played a role in crisis preparedness within the theme of knowledge and awareness on crisis and crisis preparedness. Nonetheless, there are also participants who have an awareness of crisis preparedness and are somewhat prepared for it from their parents’ guidance. The communication and planning done together with their children is also important as well. Which has influenced and shaped the young adults’ attitudes towards this theme.

This level is......they did talk about it for a little. Like, what is a little ‘leh’, it is because they simply stated...that if these like natural disaster (flood, fire breakout) happen, they'll deal with it. And if they are not around or anything, where the important documents are kept, they will tell me. Like what issues should be prioritized to solve they also told me before. (Cassie, 21 years old, Female, Pg 2)

This shows that her parents have actually taught her about a key aspect of crisis preparedness planning, but only when they are not around anymore. Then she could execute/respond to what they have given her, which is the knowledge of assets. If Cassie's parents are still around, they will still take up the responsibility instead of entrusting her with a role.

I don't think I am relatively prepared for a disaster. Me personally. (Nora, 25 years old, Female, Pg 1)

Okay, if there's anything that happened in the house, you open this up, there’s money inside, don’t forget the password to this to the safe for your documents very important. If anything happens to us go and find this person for your insurance, and go and find your, your auntie for this, this, this. So yeah, we have to have that discussion before. (Nora, 25 years old, Female, Pg 2)

Despite the fact that Nora thinks that she is not relatively well-prepared for a disaster, she has had a discussion on the matter beforehand and has outlined the steps to prepare for it. Ranging from important documents to people to contact or reach out to. Minimizing the risks as much as possible.

Yeah, I think so. Because when the MCO was announced to be implemented before 18th March, the MCO 1.0. I think, for my fam, we would always buy canned food, just in case to keep at home. So, just in case we had, there was a disaster, there was a lockdown or if a state of emergency was announced, or things like that, so we, we had enough food. So we only needed to go and buy groceries once to keep us at home. But we did ration things like being careful not to open too many cans a day or whatever, just so that we can make sure if the lockdown is extended, then we wouldn’t be affected as much. (Ivan, 23 years old, Male, Pg 1)
So, I will say that we normally…the content of what we discussed will include like, do we need to prepare and go and buy things early?" (Ivan, 23 years old, Male, Pg 1)

“I think my family is a family of paranoids so we have a briefcase, a grey, hard briefcase, where all our important documents and stuff are stored in, and my dad even when I was like nine years old, he showed me this briefcase and the combination to open it so if anything ever happens like the real…the family emergency stuff are all inside that briefcase, I can just, I know what to do if things ever do happen. (Ivan, 23 years old, Male, Pg 2)

Although Ivan is paranoid, along with his whole family, he is still pretty calm and systematic in his reactions before the whole implementation of MCO. Ivan and his parents have updated alertness and responsive procedures to prepare for the COVID-19 lockdown. As they have conversed about crisis preparedness, they have also identified efforts to prepare for the worst possible outcome. Everything is pre-planned and can be carried out according to what he has been taught.

Many elements of the transcripts revealed that both genders of participants were completely unaware of the situation and had no awareness of the crisis. Furthermore, almost all of the participants lacked the fundamentals and understanding of crisis preparedness.

4.2. Theme 2: A Forced Upon Online Learning Experience

4.2.1. Sub-theme 1: Lack of Interactions and Motivations

I was so happy. I was. I mean, it gave me hope to go to physical class in camp...in campus, because like, we already did online class for like, what, two years and it really sucks. And it's not good for my mental health. Because, like, it's so hard, like, online classes so hard. I wanna interact with my friends and lecturers. (Natalie, 21 years old, Female, Pg 5)

Oh my god. I don’t think like I’ve learned, like I learned anything from it. Before this, like, when you in campus, you have the motivation to study, you see your friends study and then you have tests coming over, and you have read a lot of things, memorize study. But then like when this online happened, like, just makes me......how to say like, it makes me...... (I: lazy and want to give up?) Yeah. Like, I want to give up already. Like oh my god, like this sucks, you know? (Natalie, 21 years old, Female, Pg 7)

Natalie was ecstatic to learn that schools, especially colleges, could reopen and that physical classes were once again permitted by the government. She believes e-learning and online classes are extremely difficult and detrimental to her health. During the lockdown, the lack of connection with people, such as her lecturers and friends, had really damaged her mental stability. She misses the social connections after nearly two years of being socially isolated. She feels that she has not learned anything useful from online classes after almost two years of social isolation and e-learning. All she thinks is that online school has made things more difficult for her, particularly her pace when doing work and studying for upcoming tests.
After some time with the MCO, I started feeling a bit, demotivated, or especially while I’m learning at home, it just doesn’t feel like the best learning environment. (Tifanny, 21 years old, Female, Pg 3)

I think my energy for learning is slowly declining, to be honest. Mentally...I’m still okay. But in terms of motivation for learning, or even working itself is slowly declining. (Tifanny, 21 years old, Female, Pg 4)

In Tifanny's opinion, online classes at home are not stimulating and are the best venue for an individual to learn. Implementing that the best place for students to learn is in the physical environment of classrooms. The physical layout of a classroom plays a significant impact on her motivation and learning. She feels demotivated during the MCO times, and her desire to learn is slowly waning. Despite the fact that she is mentally stable, she is still unmotivated to do work and assignments at home.

So one thing I realized is that if I don’t get any form of interaction it’s super hard. Like I rely on interactions and people looking at me and giving me those kind of body movement to continue, to give me motivation to continue my speech because I often interact with my audience. But then, when this happened, I realized that, oh my goodness, I can’t do it. Because everyone is just like so quiet. Sometimes you can’t see their faces 'lagi'. And like classes goes on where you have 0 interactions! (Vincent, 21 years old, Male, Pg 5-6)

On the flipside, for Vincent, the lack of interactions between the presenter and the audience during presentations demotivates him from presenting well. As online presentations lack the visual and physical cues available in-person, he feels stressed out and frustrated that he cannot engage with his audience, which leads him to feel more run down than ever. Through this, Vincent obtains his confidence and recharges himself through social interactions with people. While not all lecturers require their students to turn on their cameras, Vincent expressed that little to no forms of interaction were received during the entire virtual setting and e-learning sessions.

4.2.2. Sub-theme 2: Demanding and Troublesome

And like online ‘macam’ like, it’s so hard because, like my internet connection, always have a problem. So it’s really hard. Like the challenge are real. Like every time I watch zoom, call the meetings or like teams or whatever. It always reconnecting and it makes me like, you know what, that’s it. I’m not gonna watch this class...I’m fed up and I don’t know, what, what am I doing with my life. (Natalie, 21 years old, Female, Pg 7)

Natalie has been having connection issues for the duration of her MCO, which is causing her dissatisfaction. These connectivity issues triggered her pent-up rage and negative impulses, prompting her to question the meaning and purpose of her current life during the lockdown. She could be going through some sort of existential crisis, or maybe it's because the frustration got to her and she had nowhere to turn, no outlet to release her suppressed emotions.
Because when I want to discuss about assignments, it is not convenient, because like if we were around the school compound, we could just gather and come out to do the assignment. It would just take half a day or few hours and then we would be done. However, because its online, we would have to do our work separately and if there is other problems we would have to...uh...ask again. And we would waste a lot of time waiting...moreover, we have to wait for our lecturers’ replies then only we can continue to settle our other problems. (Cassie, 21 years old, Female, Pg 1)

When lockdown had not happened and physical classes were available, she could finish her assignments in a swift manner. However, now Cassie’s work time is being extended and disrupted. Getting together with teammates for work and assignments via the internet is actually more troublesome for her. She feels burdened by extended wait times and slow responses from her group members and instructors. E-learning has become difficult for her as a result of having to deal with uncertainty and working long hours.

C: When during MCO, I still have online classes to...to attend and facing the facing screen for a long time. Really, really makes your...makes your eyes, your mind, and your entire body really tiring. So yeah. That’s my experience.

I: So for the whole...during the first and second MCO period, it was very tiring for you?

C: Exactly. Heh. Exactly. It was very repetitive and tiring. (Chelsea, 21 years old, Male, Pg 5)

Due to e-learning, Chelsea has been staring at a computer or smartphone screen for significant amounts of time throughout the MCO lockdown. This actually had a negative impact on his health. Long screen periods not only caused eye strain but also depleted his mentality and energy, leaving him psychologically and physically exhausted. He, too, finds the e-learning classes monotonous.

4.2.3. Sub-theme 3: Self-disciplined

However, whenever I want to study at home I would lose my focus and suddenly go to play my phone for hours. (laughs) Then, I completely forgot about the studies I was preparing for before my class starts. (Aurelia, 21 years old, Female, Pg 4)

To get the most out of e-learning, an individual must have a high degree of attention and self-discipline in order to study effectively online. Aurelia, in this scenario, lacks self-discipline and is easily distracted anytime she begins e-learning. She’d start playing games on her smartphone and forget about her plans to study.

I haven’t been back to university for like, about full one year already. So of the classes are replaced with e-learning, like online learning, and the effectiveness of e-learning is very questionable as well. Because first of all, you need to be very self-disciplined, because there’s just too much
Adam has been doing e-learning for a year and is still dubious about its effectiveness. Despite having a year of online learning experience, he believes that only self-disciplined students can study well through the new medium of education. Adam finds online lessons difficult since there are too many interruptions in the home setting. In his opinion, one of the most significant hurdles to e-learning is family concerns such as housework and disputes. These problems caused him to lose focus in his online lessons.

Participants of both sexes had negative experiences with online classes and e-learning. Ranging from slow feedback to social isolation or even requiring strong self-motivation or self-discipline, students are negatively affected, and they do not feel as engaged in virtual classes as they were, compared to the educational format they received in the past.

4.3. Theme 3: Resiliency and Recovery

4.3.1. Sub-theme 1: Reactions and Negative Emotions

Yeah, then like, I always, when I go out, I have like, a lot of sanitizer with me. Every time, every second I will sanitize my hand and I wash my hand like, it gets really crazy sometimes, especially during the 1st MCO (Natalie, 21 years old, Female, Pg 3)

It's shocking. It's shocking me. My, my whole family also, and then it just makes me sad. Because when MCO happened, I'm in Sarawak, and my other, my family, my parents are in KL. And I haven't seen them in so long, already. And this really, like, heartbreaking. And I have to celebrate Raya without them this year. So without them, and it's just really sad. (Natalie, 21 years old, Female, Pg 4)

Before this when I was in Kuching, yeah, when it first happened, yeah, we have a lot of like, sanitizers spray, to wash or spray the grocery with. (Natalie, 21 years old, Female, Pg 4)

When Natalie went out for the first MCO in Malaysia, she was very mindful of the environment and her surroundings. She is very paranoid when she goes out, and she always carries a hand sanitizer with her to disinfect her hands. She, too, maintains proper personal hygiene by frequently washing her hands whenever she goes outside because she is terrified of contracting the virus. She was startled and saddened to learn that when the first MCO was introduced, she was separated from her family and left alone, even at a festival. She was socially isolated and lonely, so the lockdown was shockingly painful for her. Moreover, she has a personal set of SOPs for overcoming COVID-19, by disinfecting contaminated surfaces and groceries bought as she gets concerned about contracting the virus through food or food packaging.

I think that it's valid la. It's valid...because...because 'kan' we never we've never experienced anything like this before. So I, I definitely overreacted (Nora, 25 years old, Female, Pg 3)
First MCO, I reacted panic. I, I didn’t want to come out of the house because I was so scared what, what it was. And I think that because of the reactions of everybody else, like my friends. I have a very close friend that, that just kept talking about in non-stop and he...he...he was very, he made me feel very, like anxiety about it. (Laughs) So I don’t think I reacted very well la. I was very scared of the COVID, the pandemic. (Nora, 25 years old, Female, Pg 4)

Nora believes she overreacted, however justified, to the COVID-19 pandemic when it first emerged and Malaysia was forced to undergo MCO. She becomes panicked and worried about the unknown as she is afraid of what the future holds for the entire pandemic situation. She does not even dare to leave her house during these unprecedented times. Even though COVID-19 is anxiety-provoking on its own, she is also influenced by her friends, which increased her stress and anxiety level. This whole lockdown period has only brought a sense of fear and anxiety.

All 6 of the female participants were actually experiencing negative emotions during the MCO. The confinement at home had generated many negative consequences, especially towards their mental health. Fear of infections, lack of contact with other people and individual perceptions of threat (contracting COVID-19) has actually made it hard for them to cope with the first MCO. Participants like Aurelia and Natalie had also generated other negative emotions too like loneliness. “Aurelia”, (21 years old, Female) stated: “I’ve been feeling a little lonely at home for far too long.” And “Natalie”, (21 years old, Female) quoted: “...like this great big house, but then like I’m alone, and it gets really lonely.”

Conversely, 4 male participants were very much underreacting on the arrival of COVID-19 in Malaysia. Participants like “Ivan”, (23 years old, Male), mentioned that “We didn’t really think it will be costly and be so terrible. I thought that, we will definitely take precautions...So I thought that nothing will really happen. It wouldn’t get so bad because we were screening people.” Furthermore, in the beginning, “Vincent”, (21 years old, Male), believes that COVID-19 is not a huge issue and thinks it’s a joke, he said: “When it first appeared. We thought it was a joke. Until the government was like ‘Okay, you know what, MCO’. And everybody was like ‘Oh shit, this is serious.’”

I feel like I was, I was too flamboyant about it, I didn’t care too much about it, because I really thought it would have been controlled, and it never reached KL. You know, when it was there, but then when the first MCO strike when we knew it was all serious. So I was a bit taken aback because I knew I was, I needed the daily day to day interaction. And, and that, you know, I wasn’t gonna get any of it. So as an extrovert, it was really painful to know that. (John, 21 years old, Male, Pg 3)

He was underreacting a lot to the arrival of COVID-19. As he seems quite confident in the government’s ability to manage and contain the virus in order to prevent it from spreading. Unfortunately, he was taken aback by the notion that Malaysia still had to go into lockdown. His outgoing personality has suffered as a result.

Although the male participants were underreacting to the arrival of COVID-19 in Malaysia, they still felt the negative emotions during the very first pandemic lockdown, belatedly. COVID-19 makes no distinctions based on geography, ethnicity, or gender.
Everyone is impacted, just not in the same form. The male participants later were taken aback, panicked and scared about the uncertainty of COVID-19. Most participants felt alienated because of the effects of social distancing and isolation in Malaysia. As a result, their mental health suffers.

4.3.2. Sub-theme 2: Covid Fatigue

Even though all 12 participants had divided responses and emotions during the arrival of COVID-19 in Malaysia and the very first implementation of MCO, they all experienced COVID fatigue during the second MCO (MCO 2.0). Participants experienced decreasing efforts, and they had lower risk perceptions for the COVID-19 situation. They have also expressed that they are too jaded and insensitive to obey the government’s instructions and regulations. Some participants also started to go out more as the SOPs and rules set by the governments were less stringent during MCO 2.0.

*Ah MCO 2.0 was...we didn't panic anymore, because I think we had all gotten used to the life during MCO, and we had all gotten used to the amount of news being poured into our lives. So we, we felt Okay, we felt fine. Like maybe the reaction was, 'oh no, not again', but it wasn't like, 'Oh my god, what do we do?' We weren't panicking. We were just tired. We just felt kind of exhausted. Kind of like, sick of it already. Yeah. (Nora, 25 years old, Female, Pg 5)*

Nora’s energy has dwindled as a result of the extended crisis, and she is feeling demotivated. The entire extensive MCO concept was stressful, and it took a toll on her mind and body. She has a burnout response after experiencing the second pandemic lockdown scenario. Now it is a long-term stressor for her. Though she had recovered well and no longer panicked, her overall emotional distress and mental exhaustion began to soar. Making her feel unpleasant and exhausted.

*Considering the fact that it was the second MCO was not too harsh. And I was able to go out a little bit and you know, hang out with my friends once in a while. And in that sense, I was happy that I could, you know, have that interaction that I’ve been longing for. (John, 21 years old, Male, Pg 4)*

*So there was situation where degrading happened. But it came to a point where you know, you just didn’t care...So I think this was by the second MCO I didn’t actually care too much about it, but it was a bit more, you know, easygoing. And, you know, it was just like, a recovery kind of thing. (John, 21 years old, Male, Pg 4)*

Because the second MCO had fewer stringent regulations, John was able to meet with friends and enjoy the social contacts he desired. As an extrovert, he felt helpless and adapted to the pandemic life at the same time as he went out and meet his friends more. He was more calm and easygoing and thinks it is some form of recovery period as he just does not care anymore about the whole pandemic situation.

*And like what I’ve said just now my MCO 2.0 I started to go out to buy stuff, tapau ah, and see my friends more from those small gatherings la. (Vincent, 21 years old, Male, Pg 5)*
Back then, I was really okay with traveling. But right now, after the MCO I realize I haven’t traveled for so long, you think like traveling 20 minutes also a chore. You know, so the energy definitely died down and I sleep a lot more. Because back then I don’t, I don’t really sleep a lot. I sleep like around 11, 12 and I wake up at 7 or 6 something. Like I really don’t sleep a lot. But, but, but, I can sleep damn long now. (Vincent, 21 years old, Male, Pg 5)

As the MCO 2.0 was implemented, Vincent actually did not care much about it. Vincent’s ingrown urge for freedom to go out has skyrocketed. He was going out for takeaways and gathering with his friends more as compared to the first MCO, where he abided by the government’s SOPs. Furthermore, he is also experiencing new signs and symptoms of COVID fatigue. He has undergone a significant change in his sleep patterns and habits, as he has started to sleep more and for longer periods now as compared to the past.

In addition, participants have also revealed that they started to notice signs of reduced risk perceptions from their daily experiences, such as public’s awareness about the COVID-19’s SOPs dropping and society starting to let their guards down. “Cassie”, (21 years old, Female), stated: “The public awareness has decreased. They started to go around more. For younger children, I saw something is that their parents didn't help them wear masks anymore.”

There were 8 participants who started to go out more during the second MCO when the governments were more lenient towards the rules and regulations. They started to take up a more active social life and went out to meet their friends and gathered for a meal or so. “John” said: “I was able to go out a little bit and you know, hang out with my friends once in a while.” Young adults do not adequately follow guidelines and limitations that much anymore, to the extent where they are too demotivated to protect themselves. The feeling of helplessness in young adults reached a new height during the second MCO.

4.3.3. Sub-theme 3: Well-being

Most of the participants had self-care routines to keep their sanity and well-being in check. They compartmentalize their lives at home pretty well by doing their favorite hobbies and activities during the whole pandemic lockdown. Participants picked up new hobbies and learned new skill sets for past-times and to adapt to the new “normal”.

“I play guitar and write music. That's what helps me to get through. Workout and dance. That's like my old time hobbies. Then I just do it like every single day to make sure I’m not depressed or, you know, like I’m alone. And my family is not with me. So I just do everything that makes me, Get off my mind, and get my mind off of this thing. (Natalie, 21 years old, Female, Pg 4-5)

“I play football or jogging every day. And then, you know, how, like, exercise can help with your mental health condition also. (Natalie, 21 years old, Female, Pg 5)

Natalie engages in exercises, hobbies, and activities to distract herself from her unpleasant feelings and thoughts. Changing her concentration was the most effective
way for her to clear her thoughts. She went outdoors and exercised, as well as participating in her hobbies of singing and dancing. One of the wonderful ways she introduced pleasant activities into her life and took a break from the stressors and anxiety of the epidemic was a simple act of diversion.

So by the time the second MCO hit, I feel like I was used to it. I started to stay home all the time, like as I said earlier, and then mostly I just did work, was more careful, didn’t go out as much and then spend most of my time online. And learning new hobbies. I think when the second MCO hit, I definitely took the time to learn more hobbies and learn new skills because I started to spend like every day at home so there was nothing else to do in between classes anymore. (Ivan, 23 years old, Male, Pg 4)

For the betterment of his well-being, Ivan executed self-care activities to help himself regain control of his life and fight back the stressors. Hence, fulfilling his responsibilities or goals in life and keeping himself sane and motivated at all times.

Many will be confronted with difficulties that may be stressful, upsetting, and elicit intense feelings in young adults. The pandemic lockdown is seemingly a good thing, but it makes young adults feel lonely and isolated, which can cause stress and worry. Learning how to cope healthily with stress will ensure that they are more resilient. Fortunately, almost every participant has their own ways of dealing with stress during the whole lockdown.

5. Discussion

Even though the origin of disasters, as well as theories and applications in subject areas, have been studied for many years with constant changes in the framework, learning about the perspectives and experiences of young adults is still a relatively new concept. Young adults’ crisis experiences are a complicated and difficult topic to grasp.

Personal experiences teach individuals about the importance and values of crisis preparedness (Mishra et al., 2009). The young adults in Malaysia lack personal experience as the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a first-time crisis for them, which explains why most of them have zero crisis preparedness and risk perceptions in mind to prepare for and overcome. In Lee and Lemyre’s (2009) research, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) was demonstrated to further explain that an individual’s willingness to prepare for a crisis is a reflection of their cognitive and subjective reactions to a natural danger. The results are congruent with Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which determines the behavior of young adults in terms of personal and environmental variables (external social context, "parents"). Ballantyne (2000) further states that people are less likely to act on their awareness and intent if they believe others (local governments, disaster response organizations) are holding them accountable for their safety. People only feel stimulated when the goals of the plan are based on their hopes for results and self-efficacy (Ateneo et al., 2015). However, in this case, “parents” played an important part in influencing the young adults’ perceptions to prepare for crisis (or not) in the form of informing, educating, and planning with them, or avoiding the particular topic, which shaped the young adults’ behavior for preparedness. The emphasis on social impact and its attention to social reinforcement (externally and internally) are one of the distinctive features of SCT.
Moreover, results also demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the online education element of young adults. At this point in time, research has shown that e-learning in general indeed degrades performances and are worse than in a physical setting. Long haul PC use can be very unsafe to individuals' wellbeing. Electromagnetic radiation, eye harm, organ harm, and different elements are all factors that contribute to it (Nazarlou, 2013). Young adults also experience reduced motivation and a sense of alienation, or detachment from their lives. It is because they are all unable to create spaces or have the opportunity for themselves to build relationships in the online setting. Being stuck at home with no one to interact with, they all feel socially isolated and helpless as they have no outlets to release their emotions. Online learning had imposed substantial effects on the young adults’ mental and physical health.

Young adults in Malaysia are mostly experiencing negative emotions and are having a hard time recovering. According to these findings, their resilience is severely impaired and they begin to develop pandemic fatigue during the second MCO. According to the World Health Organization (2020), "Pandemic Fatigue expresses itself as an emerging demotivation to engage in protection behaviors and seek COVID-19-related information and as complacency, alienation, and hopelessness." Participants started to experience two key aspects of the negative emotions of pandemic fatigue, which were "alienation" and "helplessness." Research by Sameer et al. (2020) has stated that during the lockdown of COVID-19, the most commonly used coping strategies were watching TV, listening to music, and doing house chores like cleaning and washing. Furthermore, another excellent predictor of state resilience in individuals throughout the pandemic was hobbies and home tasks (Verdolini et al., 2021). In this study, although young adults were able to carry out their favorite hobbies and do past-time activities for the time being, the extended pandemic lockdown had caused their resilience and motivation to deplete. If people require self-control to comply with government guidelines to isolate themselves, they may get tired as their resources are drained (Harvey, 2020). Consequently, young adults resorted to socializing and gathering with their friends to find the long-lost social interactions they hoped for.

5.1. Limitations of Study

One of the limitations of this study would be that this research lacks further details next time about how different races, economic status, and other intersectional information form or change the individuals’ thoughts processes. The research only provided details about how different genders react to and perceive the COVID-19 situation, not from other cultural or intersectional perspectives to understand the young adults’ crisis response and abilities. Maybe different races or economic status could shape individuals’ opinions and views.

5.2. Implication & Recommendations

Crises and disasters are both unaccountable and uncountable to humans. Therefore, more defined intersectional and cultural research is necessary to explain how, on a worldwide scale and in the context of crises, young adults' lives and emotions are shaped by different citizenship, race, family conditions, financial conditions, and so on. Furthermore, research could be done based on low, medium, and high-income families to see how income impacts the differences in education levels, resilience, and preparedness for crisis response differ amongst them.
Besides focusing and increasing the number of studies on young adults’ skills, abilities, and behaviors, likewise, the essential role of youths in disaster risk reduction and crisis response approaches is also significantly critical. Furthermore, to learn how different values in religious, societal, governmental, and technical practices from various communities will affect and influence the participation and recovery of young adults from disaster aftermaths,

Moreover, researchers can make pandemic fatigue a new field of research with extensive theories and frameworks about how pandemic fatigue affects the individual. For example, "How long can an individual sustain the negative impacts of lockdown before pandemic fatigue happens?" and such. This could ensure governments create better SOPs and regulations to counter the virus spread that are unknown and newly encountered in the future. Thus, protecting the well-being of all individuals in the country.

6. Conclusion

To boot, young adults can be resilient and can offer thoughts and activities that even experienced adults may overlook in the course of a crisis. Involving young people in crisis preparation well in advance of an emergency will teach and enable them to react properly and calmly in the face of an actual occurrence in the future. Parents should entrust role-playing to their children. Then only the whole family can mitigate and recover as a whole. In the case of a disaster, children may provide hope to the family and community, allowing society to return to normalcy more rapidly. Young adults’ support can have an impact on how others recover from disasters (Mohammadinia et al., 2018). Learning about crisis preparedness and disaster appraisal can enable them to develop understanding and control. This ensures that they are equipped to react quicker and more efficiently if they know what to do in advance. Thus, building the young adults’ resilience level. Individual resilience contributes to communal resilience because healthy individuals contribute to a healthier community. In healthy societies, disasters and crises will then become easier to handle and recover from. Schools should also assess the workloads and assignments given so that individuals can learn properly at home without feeling stressed out.

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