



Brief Review and Islamic perspective: Common Mental Health Challenges amongst Undergraduate Universities Students in South East Asia

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Abstract

Introduction: Mental health issue should not be taken lightly. As modernization paves its way into today's world, the burden of mental disorders increases. The aim of this review is to identify the prevalence of mental health problems among university undergraduates in ASEAN region, influencing factors, effects and types of interventions conducted to manage the problems. Brief Islamic perspective is also embedded in this review. **Methodology:** Relevant literatures were reviewed based on a combination of one or more of the following keywords: Mental health problems, South East Asia region, College, Undergraduate Universities. An Islamic perspective on mental issue was extracted using the primary sources (related Qur'anic verses and Hadith) as well as secondary sources (fatwa; Islamic jurisprudence, made by Islamic scholars). **Results:** This review revealed significant proportion of university students were afflicted with mental health disorders ranging from depression, anxiety, suicidality, self-injury and eating disorders with many underlying factors behind it. The effects of mental health problems were detrimental because they caused academic, physical, psychological and social impairment. However, several interventions such as mindfulness-based therapy, biofeedback intervention and counselling have been proven beneficial. In Islamic view, mental health issue can be discussed through several perspectives: trial and tribulation of life, seeking treatment in Islam and prejudice towards mental illnesses. **Conclusion:** This review highlighted that mental health is a growing problem with an interplay of multiple factors and deleterious effects. This study would also like to assert the importance of mental health programs among students to prevent prejudices against them. The main outcome of this review would allow various parties. i.e. the university, the community, health scientists, medical practitioners and, to be cognizant pertaining mental health issue.

Key words: Mental health problems, South East Asia region, Undergraduate Universities, Islamic Perspectives

Introduction

Mental health is of major concern in this modern era. According to World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is defined as a "state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (WHO, 2004, p.10). In the last few decades, the world witnessed tremendous advancement in transportation, communication and information technology (IT). Despite bringing huge benefits to mankind, this revolutionary development is also taking a toll on one's mental health. As an example, modernization directly correlates with higher rate of depression cases, especially in younger generations, due to causes like sunlight and sleep deprivation, inactive lifestyle, unequal opportunities, financial burdens, loneliness and many more (Brandon, 2012). Therefore, it is vital to conduct an extensive study on this matter.

Methodology

This study emphasized on the prevalence, factors, effects and interventions of mental health problems among university undergraduate students in Southeast Asia. The search engines used to find related journals were Google Scholar, Science Direct and PubMed. By using the keywords of 'mental health', 'university students' or 'college students' and 'southeast Asia', a total of 1201 articles were obtained after duplicates were removed. Their titles were reviewed to exclude irrelevant studies. If the title is ambiguous, the abstract was reviewed. The summary for methodology process is summarized in Figure 1 below:

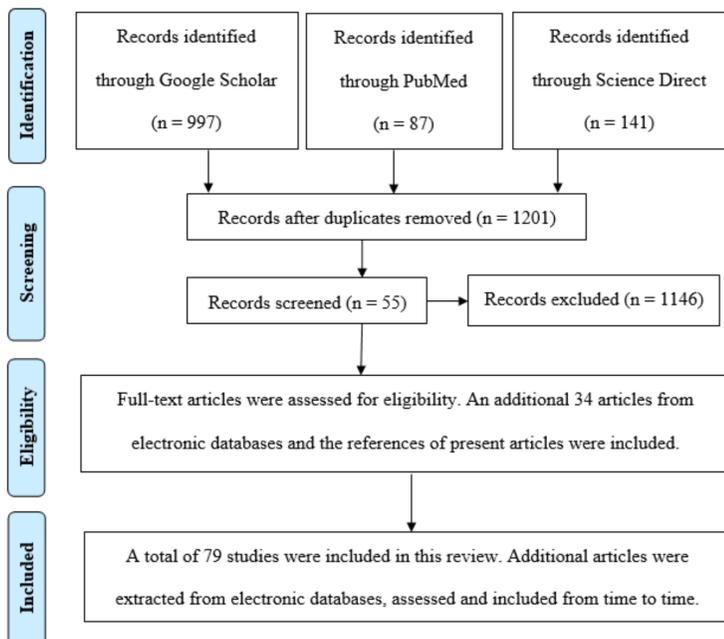


Figure 1: Methodology of this review

Discussions

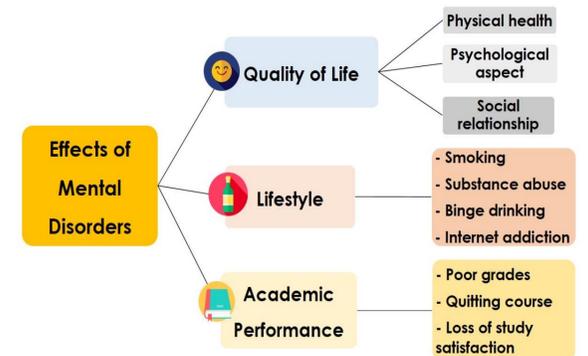
Prevalence of Mental Health Problems

Numerous studies conducted around the world have reported varying prevalence of different types of mental illnesses. In this section, the prevalence of five most common mental health problems among university students in Southeast Asia will be explored.

	Malaysia	Thailand	Cambodia	Vietnam	Myanmar	Indonesia
Depression	15.9% - 43.1%	13.7% - 47.0%	19.60%	15.20%	17.50%	18.80%
Anxiety	4.7% - 63.0%	26.00%	-	36.5% - 85.7%	-	27.40%
Suicidal ideation	5.8% - 9.0%	9.00%	11.90%	15.90%	16.30%	6.90%
Suicidal attempts	2.1% - 3.5%	5.30%	1.80%	2.10%	1.00%	3.00%
Self-injury	8.40%	-	-	-	-	38.00%
Eating disorders	6.3% - 13.8%	6.80%	-	9.10%	20.60%	7.4%

Effects of Mental Disorders

Mental health problems brings major effects on one's social, psychological and physical life. This review will discuss on the effects of mental health problems on ASEAN university students through three different aspects, which are quality of life, lifestyle and academic performance.



Due to the seriousness of mental health issues, several interventions have been conducted with the aim of improving mental health of the community. This review section will focus on mental health interventions conducted among university students in several universities throughout Southeast Asia. This intervention included Mindfulness-based therapy, Biofeedback, counselling, and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). In Islam, Muslim scholars recommended the patients/affected people to seek for pharmacological interventions/professional help in treating mental diseases. We agreed mental disorders also have their own treatment. In the book Sahih Bukhari, Abu Hurairah narrated: The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment." (Sahih Bukhari, no. 5678). In this hadith, Prophet Muhammad encouraged Muslims to seek appropriate treatment and medications for all kinds of diseases (Grogan, 2007). According to Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah, the Mufti of Saudi Arabia, The level of mental disorders should be regarded as equal as the level of physical illnesses, and professional help should be offered if necessary. The role of spirituality or religious interventions should also be acknowledged, and can be used as complementary or alternative therapy (Sabry & Vohra, 2013). This is because spirituality helps in offering optimism and hope and finding the true value of life (Talib & Abdollahi, 2017). In Islam, meditation (prayer) and Qur'anic therapy are highly recommended.

Conclusions

In conclusion, a significant proportion of university students were affected with mental health problems like depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, suicidal attempts, self-injury and eating disorders. Mental disorders were most commonly caused by a complex combination of biological and environmental factors and the effects of these mental illnesses encompass academic, physical, emotional and lifestyle impairment. Mental health interventions were also discussed in several articles and these interventions may be beneficial in reducing the burden of mental disorders. This worldwide issue can be addressed through three angles of Islamic perspective; persevering through Allah's tribulation, battling stigma of mental disorders and seeking appropriate treatment. Hence, pondering upon this perspective provides a better insight in handling mental health problems. Several recommendations can be suggested based on this review.

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