

Students anxious but ready to see it through

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PETALING JAYA: Three weeks under the movement control order (MCO) is taking its toll on our students' mental health.

But they are keeping their spirits up and staying strong – determined to stick it out in the third phase.

While cases of depression and anxiety among students staying on campuses are mostly under control, some varsities have recorded a spike.

Prior to the MCO, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's (UKM) depression and anxiety cases stood at less than 10%.

Now, of the 1,642 students screened on campus, 15.1% experienced high anxiety, 11.2% suffered from high depression, and 7% were in the high stress level.

UKM centre for student affairs director Dr Mohd Suhaimi Mohamad said some of the issues the students faced included worrying that they were at risk of Covid-19 infection due to rumours (1,084 students); being unable to go out of their accommodation which leads to anxiety and depression (913 students); loneliness (382 students); not being able to see their families (417 students); and insufficient personal finances (450 students).

"We have a tele-counselling hotline and a 24-hour Telegram service (an instant messaging app) where we update students on Covid-19 and mental health information.

"We also post infographics on Facebook on what they should do and how to keep positive," he said, adding that their own counsellors too were facing burnout.

The varsity has only one hotline number available and nine counsellors, including trainees.

"Students who are highly stressed



Staying indoors: University student Syukri Ariffin Mokhtaruddin taking part in an online class amid the MCO in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. — Bernama

are referred to Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz UKM," Mohd Suhaimi said.

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) has also seen a slight increase in mental health cases.

The rise is not significant but its counsellors are on rotation for 24 hours, seven days a week, deputy vice-chancellor (student affairs and alumni) Prof Dr Mohd Roslan Sulaiman said.

"Counsellors' phone numbers are provided to all our students and we reach out to them via social media," he added, adding that the challenge was ensuring students remained indoors.

UPM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk

Dr Aini Ideris said posters, videos and tips on emotion and mental health management were also made available to students.

Taylor's University centre for counselling services head Ng Shan Na said Skype calls were available for emergency cases and a hotline for registered clients to schedule appointments.

"The lack of productivity and that being away from their families have been challenging."

Sunway University counsellors noticed that more students were feeling anxious due to the uncertainties brought on by the MCO.

"Humans experience discomfort when there's a change. With coun-

selling, students are able to adjust better," Sunway Education Group student LIFE director Lee Siok Ping said.

Medical student Muhammad Adib Farhan Abdullah, 23, is keeping his spirits up by video calling his family members and staying in touch with his friends.

"I am stressed because the fasting month and Hari Raya are coming, and I don't know how long the MCO will continue.

"It is tough being away from my family. But I fill my time by reading books and articles, and I join NGOs to make personal protective equipment," he said, advising his peers to persevere and stay strong.