



ASSESSING SOURCES OF STRESS ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF VOLUNTEERS

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a notable increase in the number of people engaging in volunteer work in society. Volunteering allows individuals to offer support and contribute to society amid the pandemic. Understanding the impact of volunteering on mental health and well-being is of utmost importance. Hence, this research paper aims to examine how perceived stressors affect the mental well-being of PPV volunteers. An online survey was distributed to PPV volunteers in Selangor, focusing on their experiences of stress, mental health, and symptoms of well-being during the initial months of volunteering in response to COVID-19. Both descriptive statistics and multiple regression analyses were carried out. The study involved 226 volunteers, with 58% being female and 42% male. Nearly half of the participants were 35 to 44 years (46.5%), and 65% came from non-academic backgrounds. Additionally, 60.6% were part-time non-clinical volunteers who completed the survey questionnaire. The regression analysis results reveal that workload, environment, and interactions with vaccine recipients significantly predict psychological distress, physical discomfort, and mental stress among volunteers during the ongoing pandemic. On the other hand, knowledge and skills are only significantly influenced by physical discomfort. These findings will aid policymakers and all stakeholders in implementing necessary measures to prevent mental health issues during future pandemics, guiding potential volunteering efforts in emergencies, and enhancing community volunteer programs.

Keywords: *Mental Health; Stressors; Workload & Environment; Organizer & Colleague; Knowledge & Skills; Volunteers.*

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

1. According to the findings, the workload, as well as the working conditions played a significant role in the levels of mental stress, physically discomfort, and psychological distress that the PPV volunteers experienced.
2. This study revealed that interacting with vaccine recipients was a significant predictor of psychological distress, physical discomfort, and mental stress.
3. It is essential to note that while the present study found a significant relationship between knowledge & skills and physical discomfort, no such relationship was found between knowledge and psychological distress or mental stress.

Research Objectives

Volunteers in the healthcare field have a variety of duties, such as administering vaccinations, monitoring the ill or emergency bay and providing Covid-19 vaccine counselling. In contrast, non-medical volunteers are tasked with administering the waiting room, scheduling appointments, registering patients, taking temperature readings, and performing symptom checks. During the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia, the Ministry of Health reported that over 1,000 retired nurses and 2,300 volunteers joined frontline workers (Zainul, 2020). As of August 2021, 311,241 individuals participated in the volunteering programme. Kpanake et al. (2019) noted that, from a social perspective, volunteering is viewed as an opportunity for personal development and community recognition, which explains the increase in volunteer numbers during the pandemic. While mental health issues among COVID-19 healthcare personnel have been extensively, the mental health

status of volunteers remains unknown. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the mental health and perceived stressors of PPV volunteers in Selangor, Malaysia. The findings will provide policymakers and stakeholders with vital insights for implementing the necessary measures to prevent mental health issues during future pandemics.

Methodology

A survey-based cross-sectional correlational research design was implemented. Volunteers at Pusat Pemberian Vaksin (PPV), also known as Vaccine Administration Centres (VACs), were the intended respondents. The National government and health authorities established PPVs to facilitate the administration of COVID-19 vaccines. The distribution of survey questions to volunteers, who did not receive any volunteer allowance or inducement from the government and were restricted to non-clinical volunteers only in Selangor, was conducted. Prior to data collection, the Research Ethics Committee of the university granted ethical approval for the study. In this investigation, there were five sections to the questionnaire. Section A contains questions about the respondent's demographic information. Using a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (least concern) to 10 (greatest concern), Section B examines volunteers' general concerns regarding COVID-19. In Section C, respondents were asked about perceived volunteer stressors. Section D assesses the mental well-being of respondents and Section E investigated respondents about their coping strategies. For sections C, D and E of the questionnaire, the 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree) was utilized. All questions were derived from established questionnaires (Petersen et al. (2021); Roncone et al. (2021); Wu et al. (2021); Coffey et al. (2021); Beusenberg and Orley (1994). All obtained data were analysed using IBM SPSS (Ver 26). Both descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted.

Results

A total of 226 responses were valid for data analysis, with nearly 60% of the respondents ($n = 95$) were female and 42% ($n = 131$) were male. All variables exhibited Cronbach's alpha values above the recommended threshold of 0.7, as suggested by Kaur and Paruthi (2019), in which the values ranged from .877 to .927. Correlation analysis results demonstrated significant correlations among all independent variables, indicating convergent validity. The regression model using psychological distress as the dependent variable was deemed acceptable, with an R^2 value of .392, indicating that the independent variables explain 39.2% of the variance. Two factors showed significance: workload & environment ($\beta=.347$, $p<0.01$) and dealing with recipients ($\beta=.304$, $p<0.01$). However, the additional stressors, organizer & colleague, and knowledge & skills, showed no relationship with psychological distress. Regarding the model with physical illness as the dependent variable, the regression model was acceptable, explaining 38% of the variance with an R^2 value of .38. Three factors were found to be significant contributors: workload & environment ($\beta=.358$, $p<0.01$), dealing with recipients ($\beta=.219$, $p<0.01$), and knowledge & skills ($\beta=.173$, $p<0.05$). However, the stressor organizer & colleague did not significantly contribute to physical illness. Lastly, the regression model with mental illness as the dependent variable was also

considered acceptable. The results indicated that two stressors contributed to mental illness among the respondents: workload & environment ($\beta=.300$, $p<0.0145$) and dealing with recipients ($\beta=.213$, $p<0.01$). The additional stressors, organizer & colleague, and knowledge & skills did not have an effect on mental illness.

Findings

The objective of this study was to examine how perceived stressors impact the mental well-being of volunteers working in vaccine administration centres (VACs). The findings revealed that workload, work environment, and interactions with vaccine recipients had an influence on psychological distress, physical discomfort, and mental illness. Furthermore, inadequate knowledge and skills were associated with physical health problems. The physical discomfort reported by respondents included symptoms such as stomach discomfort, poor digestion, trembling hands, headaches, excessive worry, heightened sensitivity, fatigue, reduced appetite, difficulty sleeping, and impaired cognitive function. The participants in this study identified knowledge and skills as factors contributing to physical discomfort during their volunteering experience. They emphasised the importance of a physical work environment that supports workers, such as the presence of good air circulation, a sense of security, and positive relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates. Effective communication was also highlighted as crucial in reducing the ethical risks associated with vaccination. This involves delivering information in a manner suitable for the target audience and collaborating with trusted community leaders to convey evidence-based messages. Additionally, conducting vaccine coverage surveillance in culturally acceptable ways was emphasised. It is crucial for volunteers and workers in the centres to exhibit professionalism when dealing with the various attitudes and behaviours displayed by individuals.

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Author's Biography



Mohd Zulkifli Abdullah is a senior lecturer in the Department of International Business and Management Studies, Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Puncak Alam. He holds a Ph.D in Health Management in 2015. He was appointed as a visiting researcher at the Centre for Epidemiology versus Arthritis, The University of Manchester from 2019 – 2021. His primary areas of interest in study are public health, health psychology, general health management and quality of life.



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Naliza Solat starts her career as Personal Assistant and now she is a Senior Lecturer at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Pahang, Jengka Campus. She holds a Bachelor of Corporate Administration (Hons) in 2003 and obtained a Master in Office Systems Management in 2009 from UiTM Shah Alam. She was appointed as Program Head (2010 - 2012) and has over 20 years' experience teaching diploma and undergraduate students in the Faculty of Office Management and Technology, and the Faculty of Business and Administration. Her areas of expertise include Document Processing, Office Management and Technology, and Office Systems Management.



Mas Anom Abdul Rashid is a senior lecturer at the Institute of Graduate Studies UPTM. Prior to joining the university, she was a lecturer at one of the public universities in Malaysia where she started teaching in 1994. With her vast academic experience, she joined the university in 2015. Throughout her 29 years in academics she is involved in a very diverse research discipline ranging from management to social science and IT application. This evident from her research in areas such as office management, green management, generational studies on gen Z and e-government. Her latest research is focused on psychological elements of employees.