

News Release

For immediate release

Malaysian Women and Youth Experience Higher Levels of Stress During MCO

KUALA LUMPUR, June 11, 2020 – A recent survey conducted by Think City, a social purpose organisation for urban rejuvenation, has revealed that women and those aged 18-24 experienced higher levels of stress compared to other demographic profiles during the recent Movement Control Order, imposed by the Malaysian government due to the Covid-19 crisis. The survey, with over 2,000 responses was structured around Maslow’s Hierarchy of Need to determine how Malaysians fared during the lockdown. The purpose of the survey was to obtain data that would help the organisation examine how the pandemic has impacted Malaysians, to understand long term social changes and to guide the creation of possible solutions to alleviate or mitigate community issues, particularly if further lockdowns are imposed.

According to Dr Matt Benson, Programme Director at Think City, who devised the survey, the baseline study would present data that can also be revisited to compare how views and circumstances may change in six months’ time.

“Covid-19 has been an unprecedented event, with the MCO being a unique challenge for all Malaysians. The survey was undertaken to gather baseline data on how Malaysians fared during the MCO. It was also an opportunity to document a slice of history, recording how the Malaysian community felt and dealt with the pandemic,” Benson said.

“We structured the survey around what is known as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Need, which ranges from basic needs such as food and shelter, to psychological needs like relationships and a sense of achievement. At the apex of the hierarchy are self-fulfillment and spiritual needs, which we also surveyed.

“It is important that we understand how Malaysians are coping, whether they are in need of help, and if so, what kind of help. The results will be useful to us in innovating solutions that could potentially help reduce stress or deliver aid to Malaysians in need,” he added.

“We had a total of 2,240 responses to the survey. It was conducted online so it has some biases, but we have a good cross-section of age, gender and ethnicity, so we can be reasonably confident that the results are representative, at least, of ‘middle Malaysia’,” Benson said.

“The main finding is that in general Malaysians fared reasonably well during lockdown. While there were certainly some people who struggled with the basics like paying bills, the majority felt more connected to the rest of humanity, had improved relationships with their family and took the time to reflect spiritually,” he emphasised.

Some key findings from the survey showed:

- Malaysians generally fared well with many reporting home and self-improvement during the period.
- There were differences in experiences based on certain background demographics, such as gender and occupation
- Factors affecting a respondent's experience of the MCO are interrelated, both positively and negatively. This is shown through generational and stress patterns. Those who felt stressed at work, generally felt stressed in other aspects of life as well, such as having poorer quality of sleep, difficulty in accessing food and feeling more strained family relations
- Interrelatedness of factors could also be seen in age groups. While younger generations reported experiencing more negative emotions during the MCO, older generations were found to have more positive emotions during the MCO.

Other findings revealed that Malaysians kept happy and relaxed during the MCO by spending time with family/friends (57%), working on hobbies (53%), and being entertained online (43%). However, nearly a quarter of people (23%) felt demotivated; while a small proportion (14%) felt super-motivated. The most commonly mentioned achievements during the MCO were new skills (44%), better relationships (38%) and personal growth (35%).

However, different demographics were affected in different ways. A higher percentage of women (40%) felt stressed about their family relationships than men (35%). Women were also more likely (38%) than men (26%) to feel that childcare duties were not equal, with similar ratios for housework. Interestingly women felt more connected to the rest of humanity (32%) compared to men (26%).

Younger age groups were impacted by the MCO in different ways to the general population; nearly half of all 18 to 24-year-olds felt stressed during the MCO, much higher than most other age groups. Additionally, 1 out of 4 Malaysians under 24 years of age indicated that the MCO had a detrimental effect on their friendships, which was a slightly higher number than the older demographic.

People working in education and the arts as well as those living in PPR Flats and low-cost housing found it harder to pay for rent / mortgage than others.

A wide variety of lessons were learnt during the MCO as Malaysians took the time to reflect on themselves and on humanity. These ranged from their relationships with religion, the need to be more prepared for unexpected events, gratitude for what they had, the importance of health, value of community spirit, and the fragility of humanity.

On the question of what would face the most change in the next 10 years due to the pandemic, respondents gravitated towards the key sectors: Social interaction (27%), Economy (27%), Technology (24%), Environmental policies (12%).

Not surprisingly the thing Malaysians missed most during the MCO was to '*lepas*' – including eating out (71%), going to a shopping mall (44%) and recreation in parks (34%).

The survey, entitled "You Ok or Not during MCO?" was rendered in a humorous tone peppered with Malaysian colloquialisms and was accompanied by relevant classic Lat cartoons, used with

the artist's consent, to encourage survey participation. The survey ran from Friday May 15 to Saturday May 23, 2020.

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About Think City

Think City is a social purpose organisation dedicated to making cities people-friendly and resilient by being a catalyst for change in the way cities are planned, curated, developed and celebrated. As a regional citymaking agency, Think City provides urban policy thinking, management and implementation of urban solutions in Southeast Asia and beyond.

Established in 2009 to spearhead urban regeneration in George Town, their impact and successes have led to expansion into Butterworth, Kuala Lumpur, and Johor Bahru. Adopting a community-first, evidence-based approach, Think City focuses on four main communities of practice: Placemaking, Resilience, Analytics and Conservation.

Owing to their position as a neutral party, Think City has enabled synergies between the public and private sectors, the community and international partners. Together, they work to implement projects that enhance the arts, heritage, culture, environment, economy and resilience of cities in the ASEAN region. For more, see thinkcity.com.my.

For media enquiries, please contact:

Roxanne Lim
roxanne.lim@thinkcity.com.my

Maya Tan
maya.tan@thinkcity.com.my