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Email: ajebi@e-palli.com

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Socio-economic Impact of Covid-19 on Marginalized Youth in Malaysia

Zainatul Shuhaida Abd Rahman¹, Sardar Md Humayun Kabir^{2*} and Mohamad Saleeh Bin Rahamad³

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ABSTRACT

The impacts of Covid-19 on society and economy are now a global concern. With the continuous growth of global pandemic caused by Covid-19 infectious disease, limitations on daily living and reduced business operations have squeezed the society and the economy. Although scientists are busy with coronavirus vaccine studies, sociologists and economists are taking policy measures to alleviate the crisis. This paper aims to focus on the social and economic impacts of Covid-19 in Malaysia. The study was conducted through interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire among marginalized youths. Using snowball sampling technique from 36 participants, it was found that 69% youths confirmed strengthening their relationships with family members, 25% youths are having psychological discomfort, 72% youths acknowledged reduced income due to the pandemic and 26% lost their job because of the pandemic. The findings are expected to help the researchers and policymakers to strategize their future actions towards a better Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic caused by Covid-19 has grown into a socio-economic crisis with countable and uncountable effects. Rising adverse effects on jobs, wages and livelihoods, supply chain and manufacturing disruptions, less consumption, insecurity and struggles, particularly among the most vulnerable, are slowing the economy (Lim, 2020). Maintaining social distancing prohibits individuals from working in close proximity to each other. Three forms of operations are automatically affected (McKibbin and Fernando, 2020): high-density collective output, which is an aspect of many manufacturing factories where workers need to work closely together; high-density collective consumption, which is an aspect of many facilities, such as entertainment (sports, music, and cinema), restaurants, and transport, where customers need to visit; and immediate development and consumption involving vendors reaching customers, which is a component of personal care, health care, shopping and household management. The pandemic made most of the individuals turn to streaming movies from going to the cinema; from meeting people to using more data and speech; businesses are switching from selling what is not needed (cars) to what is needed (medical equipment); people are moving from demand-driven jobs or social distance restrictions, such as face-to-face retail, to those that are not, such as electronic retail. There are several studies analysed the impacts of Covid-19 most of which concentrate on the health risk and environmental effects. Very few studies have interpreted information on social and economic impacts caused by the pandemic in Malaysian context. It is difficult to forecast the effect and extent of the social and economic crisis on individuals as a consequence of the pandemic, as many uncertainties surround the extent of the crisis, i.e. "lockdowns", "quarantine", "social distancing", the

length of "stay-at-home" orders, as well as the industries affected and the societies reacted during the crisis. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the social and economic impacts of Covid-19 in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Covid-19 in Malaysia

COVID-19 is a respiratory virus that has become a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). This new type of virus that affects respiratory organs in human bodies, was first reported in Wuhan province of China. It has not only impacted countries in the East Asia and Pacific region but has increasingly spread to all countries and territories across the world. It has spread quickly in almost all parts of the world because of high transmissibility, zero herd immunity and high population mobility. In Malaysia, from 3 January 2020 to 5:42pm CET, 23 February 2022, there have been 3,273,958 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 32,433 deaths, reported to WHO. As of 23rd February 2022, there were more than 31,000 confirmed cases daily (figure 1) in Malaysia as stated by the Malaysian Ministry of Health (MOH, 2022). Figure 2 represents the overall dashboard of Covid-19 in Malaysia.

Marginalized Youth

Youths are an energetic segment of every nation and they are similarly important for continuous growth. Given the long history of youth growth in Malaysia, which seems to be at risk due to the pandemic, it is clear that the path forward is based on a far more optimistic transition agenda. This poses enormous potential as well as dire challenges. Approximately, 73% of Malaysian households are Bumiputera and are in the multi-dimensional group of low-income backgrounds; uneducated, unemployed and have experienced a social breakdown (Kasim et al., 2014). They are having only Malaysia Certificate of

¹ College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

² Department of Business Administration, International Islamic University Malaysia

³ Department of Media and Communication Studies, Universiti Malaya

* Corresponding author's e-mail: kabir.sardar@live.iium.edu.my

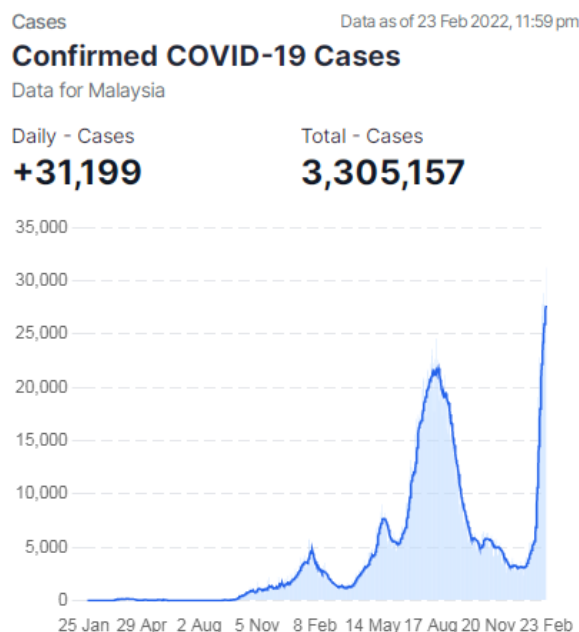


Figure 1: Covid-19 confirmed case graph in Malaysia
(Source: Ministry of Health)

Education (SPM) for household heads; that is, 11 years of education or lower qualifications, and self-employment or employment as general staff. The bottom 40 percent of households are constrained in their economic mobility due to their lower degree of expertise and, in many situations, their distant areas, and do not receive higher paid employment (Muzafar and Kunasekaran, 2020). This has left them feeling marginalised and victimised. Youth in these disadvantaged populations lack equitable opportunities to receive social and economic resources regardless of all related causes for culturally, socially low-income parents and insecure young people aged between 15 and 25 years.

Marginality is described by Leonard (1984) as 'being beyond the norm of productive activity and/or reproductive social activity' (p.180). The probability of

marginalisation will either increase or decrease at some points of one's life cycle. For example, as they grow older, the potential marginalised status of children and young people will decline, while as they become elderly, the potential marginalised status of adults will rise (Salman et al., 2017). Regardless of the reasons or mechanisms behind marginalisation, the traditional impacts of marginalisation in terms of social isolation are also common, whether it is social behaviours such as disability, race, nationality, etc. or social conditions such as closing of the workplace and lack of adequate housing, etc. In addition, based on the personal and social capital available to them, marginalised individuals respond differently to marginalisation (Burton & Kagan, 1996). Therefore, in this study, the social and economic impacts due to Covid-19 in Malaysia has been undertaken for marginalized youth community.

Impact of Covid-19 on Society and Economy

Covid-19 has impacted the life of every human being on earth. Because of the unprecedented nature since its inception in the late of 2019, it has devastated billions and took millions of human lives till date. There is a wide saying in medical science as "prevention is better than cure". But, Covid-19 being a new infectious and highly contagious disease, both prevention and cure for the disease are not globally approved yet. The new norm is on taking extensive safety measures such as regularly washing of hands, maintaining social distancing among family, friends and peers, wearing of face masks, and so on (Haleem et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2020; Campbell, 2020). Therefore, Covid-19 has impacted mostly the social lives beside other exponential impacts (Kabir et al., 2020). Some impacts are consequences of another impacts. Impacts can be positive or negative depending on its development over time. Although, most of the impacts of covid-19 are negative, some impacts may lead to a more sustainable future by increasing flexibility of the socio-ecological systems (Cheval et al., 2020).

Government reform choices are often described as a straightforward compromise between saving lives and

Active COVID-19 Cases

Data for Malaysia

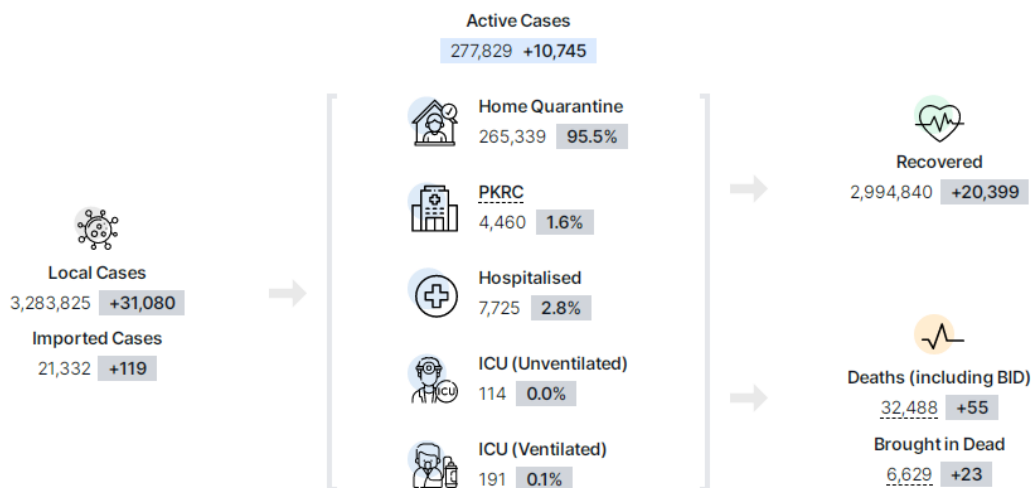


Figure 2: Covid-19 Dashboard in Malaysia
(Source: Ministry of Health)

saving the economy. More stringent sanctions, according to this rationale, help curb the pandemic and minimize the overall death rate but brought more economic pain as more families hold spending, more companies go bankrupt, and more employees risk their jobs. Individual spending is also partially on behalf of other members of the household; for example, a person may buy flights for himself and his wife and children from his personal account. Many forms of ingestion exist in areas with a high human population (e.g., restaurants, mass transit) or require close physical interaction (e.g., hair dressers, dentists) and lead to the transmission of the disease. Most forms of customer purchasing (e.g. retail shopping) require proximity and can often raise risks to shop assistants and other customers (Martin et al., 2020). Most jurisdictions also enacted regulations on social distancing that regulate some of these economic practices. However, the severity of these restrictions varies greatly across nations, and in reaction to recent research on COVID-19 cases and mortality, many policymakers are debating day-by-day whether to relax, retain, or tighten restrictions.

According to business sectors, a report comprising income loss schedule in the United States of America was undertaken to model the shock of the COVID-19 crisis on households from economic impacts attributable to disease, shortages and loss of activity due to social distancing orders. The analysis used 15 aggregated business sectors listed by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) reported that construction, retail trade, travel, arts and entertainment are believed to be the hardest hit sectors (Leatherby and Gelles, 2020). During the stay-at-home order, which in the study was referred to as the crisis era, impacted people are believed to have a 100 percent loss of labour income. The reduction of income for impacted people is expected to begin at the initial stages of the crisis and to continue for the length of the crisis. The affected people achieve full jobs at the outset of the rehabilitation process and the marginal rate of savings is estimated to be 10 percent of consumption. This is an optimistic prediction, but due to the broad macroeconomic impact of the coronavirus and the prospects for a slowdown, several workers who were laid off after the depression would have trouble re-entering the market (Avalos, 2020). In comparison, household consumption is believed to be steady during the recession, where families share income revenue, state and federal aid and consumption replenishment savings. In fact, due to the delay in assistance, the crisis could have worsen savings exhaustion, especially for the marginalized youth community (Flanders et al., 2020). Key reviews of labour force status in Malaysia as of November 2021 stated by DOSM (Release Date : Monday 10, January 2022) are mentioned below.

- The number of employed people increased for the fourth month in a row in November 2021, with a gain of 55.7 thousand people (0.4 percent) month over month, bringing the total to 15.61 million (October 2021: 15.55 million persons). In November 2021, the

employment-to-population ratio, which measures an economy's capacity to produce jobs, increased by 0.2 percentage points to 66.0 percent (October 2021: 65.8 percent).

- Employment in the Services sector continued to rise, mostly in wholesale and retail commerce, food and beverage services, and transportation and storage operations. Employment in the Manufacturing and Construction sectors followed a similar pattern, while employment in Agriculture and Mining and Quarrying stayed flat.
- During the month, the workers' category, which accounted for 76.9% of all employed people, increased by 0.2 percent (+27.1 thousand people), to a total of 12.0 million people (October 2021: 11.97 million persons). Similarly, the own-account workers category, which includes mostly daily wage earners who work as small business operators such as retailers, hawkers, market and stall sellers, and smallholders, continued to rise by 0.8 percent (+20.1 thousand people) in November to a new high of 2.63 million people (October 2021: 2.61 million persons).
- The number of jobless people fell below 700,000 for the first time in November 2021, the lowest since April 2020, with a monthly reduction of 1.5 percent (-10.6 thousand people) to 694.4 thousand unemployed people (October 2021: 705.0 thousand persons). The unemployment rate for the month was 4.3 percent, unchanged from October 2021, as more people who were unemployed looked for work.
- In November 2021, the number of people in the labour force increased by 45.1 thousand, or 0.3 percent, to 16.30 million (October 2021: 16.26 million persons). As a result, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) for the month increased to 68.9%. (October 2021: 68.8 percent).
- In November 2021, the number of people working outside the home fell by 20.1 thousand people, or 0.3 percent, to a new low of 7.34 million people (October 2021: 7.36 million persons). With 42.2 percent, the category of outside labour force due to schooling/training was the highest, followed by the category of housework/family duties with 41.1 percent.
- Since August 2021, Malaysia's labour force situation has steadily improved, with most economic and social activities continuing to run smoothly in compliance with tight standard operating procedures. The continued operation of such operations may result in additional job openings, providing more prospects for job searchers and, as a result, strengthening the labour market in the future months. The recent flood catastrophes that affected the country's central and east coasts are expected to have a more localized effect and may not have a significant influence on the whole labour market. In addition, the existence of a novel COVID-19 type of Omicron might complicate the healing process.

METHODS

The study consisted of data obtained through targeted qualitative interviews using WhatsApp social media platform and a random selection of phone calls. It was administered in Bahasa Malaysia and later translated to English. To meet the objectives of the study, a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire was used. The following questions are being asked during the interviews:

1. How do you see the positive side of social impact due to Covid-19?
2. How do you see the negative side of social impact due to Covid-19?
3. How do you see the positive side of economic impact due to Covid-19?
4. How do you see the negative side of economic impact due to Covid-19?

Using the snowball sampling procedure, the participants were randomly chosen as it was the most appropriate approach for this analysis. Compared to other sampling methods, snowball sampling solves many other limitations of the sampling process, needs less preparation, and needs fewer workers. This is because, in addition to reducing sampling bias, it is easier to start interacting with a small population, especially when reaching unknown people (Taherdoost, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2017). The questionnaires were circulated to the contacts of the researcher, as well as to those who fulfilled the requirements of marginalised youth and Malaysian citizenship. Each participant was required to nominate another participant. There were 36 interviews conducted in three months of time from May 2021 to July 2021. The data was scrutinized using NVivo 12 Professional software program which is widely used by researchers for analysing qualitative and mixed mode research. All data coded independently and unbiased by the author.

RESULTS

Table 1 represents the number of respondents who have participated in the interviews. The selected respondents are mainly youth from marginalised community of Malaysia, i.e. youths with parents whose incomes are

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents

Name of States	Number of Participants
Perak	3
Johor	10
Kedah	4
Pulau Pinang	1
Kelantan	3
Negeri Sembilan	2
Pahang	3
Selangor	5
Sabah	2
Melaka	1
Terengganu	1
Kuala Lumpur	1
Total	36

below RM 2,000 and living in rural areas; and below RM 3,500 for those living in urban areas. The ages of youths are between 15 to 25.

The interviews verbatim have been transcribed and organized according to Bazeley and Jackson's (2013) qualitative data analysis with Nvivo. Figure 3 and 4 represents the word clouds generated during analysis for social and economic impact groups.



Figure 3: Word cloud of Social Impact



Figure 4: Word cloud of Economic Impact

The word frequency count shows the highest words spoken in the interviews was “youth”, “time”, “social”, “friend”, “mental”, “group”, “marginalized”, “employment”, “money”, “work”, “affected”. The mapping among most used words in the interviews was built upon the codes found in word frequency count. The tree maps of words for social and economic groups are presented in figure 5 and 6.

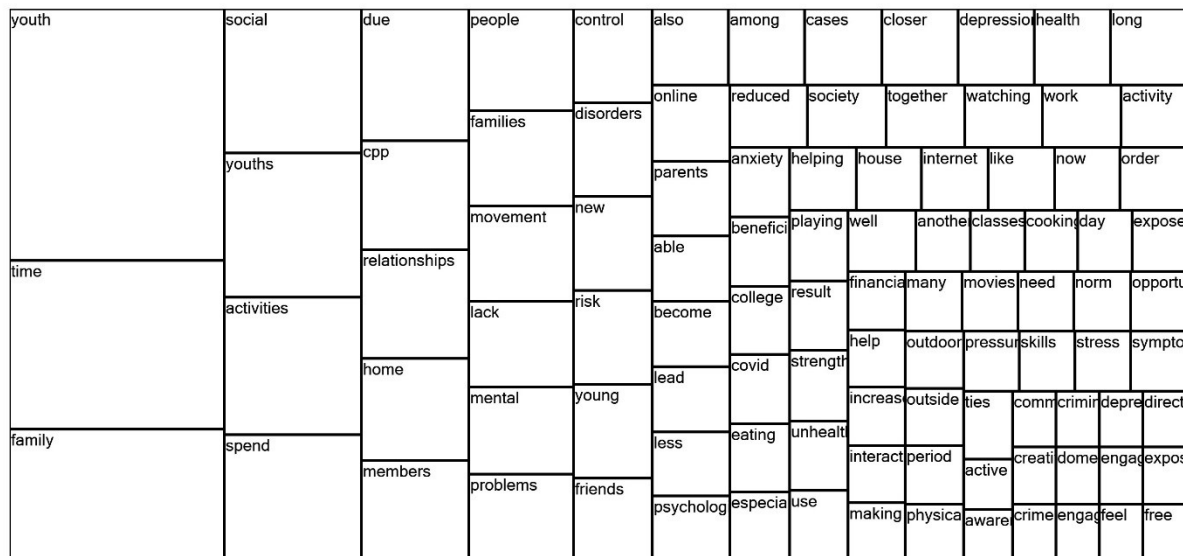


Figure 5: Tree map of words (Social Impact)

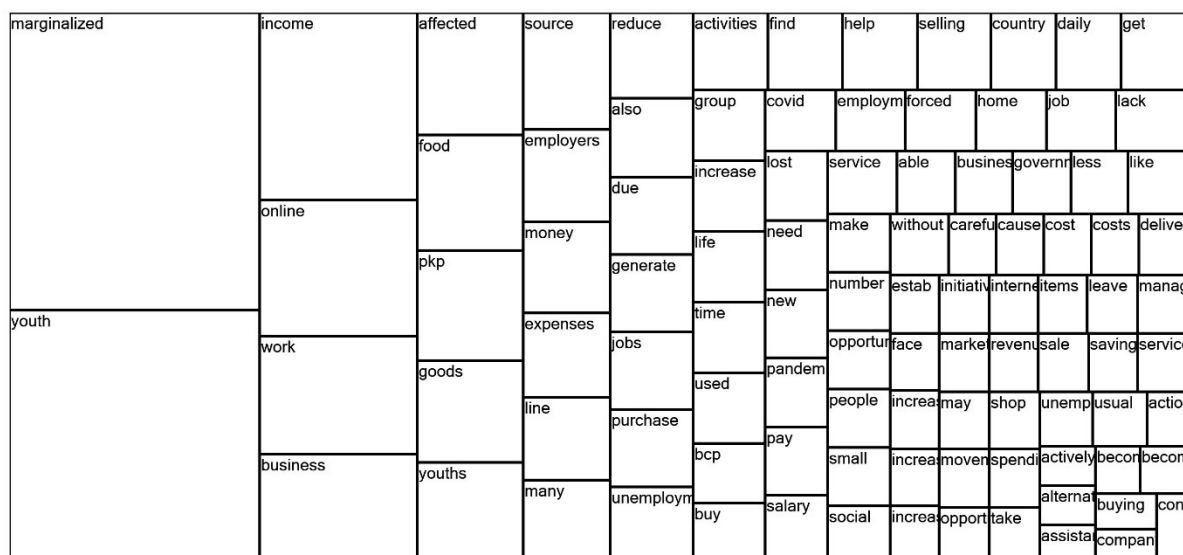


Figure 6: Tree map of words (Economic Impact)

Then, the codes are recoded and categorised in six themes for each group respectively. These six themes are labelled and put on a hierarchy model (table 2) depending on number of sources and number of references from high to low.

Table 2: Social and Economic Impact of Covid-19

Social	Economic
1. Family relationship	1. Unemployment
2. Psychological stability	2. Salary structure
3. Online presence	3. Financial stability
4. Recreation	4. Job opportunity
5. Participation in social events	5. Online business
6. Educational barrier	6. Household consumption

DISCUSSION

This paper studied how marginalized youths respond in a pandemic coupled with job loss, mental dissatisfaction as negative side and being more productive, caring in family matters as positive side, where both are investigated

with considerable volatility. 69% youths stated that their relationships with other family members became more interactive and better. Whereas 25% youths stated that they are having mental problems due to the movement control order. Overall, the negative side of the impact has come up significantly. There has been substantial understanding among Malaysian marginalized youth community of possible uncertainty in the future. It was found that there is a large income loss effects which is aligned with decision-making regarding basic needs. However, closing down sectors and regulating business activities with SOPs with social distancing measures decreases the occurrence of the virus in society at large in the sense of the pandemic. Malaysian households also bear a lot of debt and have no savings (Muzafar and Kunasekaran, 2020); many households will easily lose access to basics like food or accommodation without a source of income. The Malaysian government has produced a series of stimulus packages in response to Covid-19. Stimulus packages to tackle the impact of

ongoing pandemic have been launched in many countries over the world. However, in the next few months, majority of the respondents in the interview are still fearing of running out of money.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic crisis started in 2020, the problem of job-loss has been predicted in Malaysia in recent times. According to Bank Negara, which is the Central Bank of Malaysia, in their 2019 Economic and Monetary Review released on April 3rd, 2020 projected that the unemployment rate would increase to 4%, significantly higher than the unemployment rate (3.7%) during the Great Recession of 2008-2009 (Flanders et al., 2020). Therefore, in 2020, the prevalence of global pandemic crisis caused by Covid-19 has triggered the crisis moment once more.

The findings of this study supports the study conducted by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) to gain a better understanding on how the pandemic crisis affects the economy and social lives. Majority of the respondents (72%) experienced income loss one way or around. These youths used to work day and night to meet the end's need and this pandemic has deprived them from working due to closure of many business sectors (i.e. Tourism). 26% youths acknowledged that they have lost their jobs due to the outbreak and now waiting for business sectors to reopen. Self-employed respondents are the most heavily impacted group, as they have minimal savings that can only last for less than one month. These youths are the most underprivileged group, the marginalized community.

IMPLICATIONS

Globally, for every country, the society and economy are having very challenging days. When contemplating the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on Malaysian society and economy, there is a considerable gap. At this time, we have little knowledge of the true effects of the pandemic on heterogeneous people from all walks of life. If Malaysian policymakers wish to further protect the country from budget crises after disbursement of all the stimulus economic packages, they should be more strategic about their future actions. Identifying the most economically affected groups of the community and making public-private partnership programs more effectively can reduce the impact in the long run. Like social distancing breaking the infection chain, social awareness programs need to be in place for breaking the psychological dilemma. Enhancing emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence for youths can result better mental stability (Gardner, 1999). The issue of internet speed has been raised by some of the respondents in the interview. So, there is no alternative to improve the ICT infrastructure in rural areas so that the adaptation of technology for marginalized youths in their daily lives can be smoother in crisis moment.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has some limitations: the interviewees are not

representative as the number of respondents from each state are oddly distributed. The responses came during the MCO period, so the number of Malaysians who have lost their jobs or have confronted reduced income after the MCO are not considered. In addition, the research has been done using qualitative content analysis which has issues with generalization. Therefore, the recommendations are only preliminary, so the outcomes can only be considered indicative. Future researchers who wish to study more on the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 with marginalized youth community in Malaysia can consider the themes depicted in this study for further statistical analysis with larger sample size. Additionally, the demographic variables (i.e. gender, education level, cultural background) can be good moderators in assessing the impacts in a country like Malaysia where multi-cultural races exist.

CONCLUSION

In Malaysia, this research is among the few studies that tells how marginalized youths effected by socially and economically due to Covid-19. Given different policy measures to the management of the containment of Covid-19 in different nations, the Malaysian government has launched equally large measures to alleviate the financial loss to companies and households incurred by the crisis. In this paper, we have focused on discussing counterfactual scenarios to get a rough estimate on the positive and negative sides of the impact due to Covid-19 in Malaysian society and economy from marginalized youth community perspective. The pandemic has caused a global crisis, and, while Malaysia has controlled the infection effectively more than most of the countries by imposing early MCOs, SOPs which eventually affected the social and economic lives of most Malaysians. Because of Covid-19, social distancing ultimately creates major socio-economic sacrifices. It threatens job loss and cause depression for the marginalized youths in Malaysia. Therefore, better mitigation plans need to be in place urgently for post-pandemic crisis management.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest as declared by the authors.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval is not required.

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