WFH, losing jobs add to mental health stress

New Straits Times · 9 Jul 2021 · 18

THE severity and prevalence of mental health issues due to the Covid-19 pandemic must be recognised and acknowledged before they can be treated.

Mental health influences how we deal with stress, interact with people and make life decisions. The results of the EMIR Research Survey for the third quarter of last year showed that 72 per cent of Malaysians were concerned about their mental health.

From Jan 1 to June 18, 122,328 calls were received about social problems caused by Covid-19, as reported via the Health Ministry's Psychosocial Support Helpline.

Between January and June last year, 465 suicide attempts were treated at Health Ministry facilities. Also, 266 people committed suicide between the start of the Movement Control Order on March 18 and Oct 30, which is about 30 suicides each month.

The impoverished, the less informed and the jobless are disproportionately affected by economic downturns.

Unemployment has a negative effect on health outcomes, including stress and low self-esteem, and may lead to financial hardship, instability and lower future earnings.

Economic crises have an influence on mental wellbeing, irrespective of personal position or job status, and have a detrimental impact on all social levels.

Mental health problems are serious and must be handled in light of society's changing circumstances, such as working from home, being unemployed, online teaching and learning, and less physical contact.

Therefore, it is essential to understand the effect of the pandemic on mental health. Each of us have a responsibility to ensure the problems do not worsen.

Community participation provides a feeling of belonging, a strong support system and a sense of purpose through improving the lives of others, all of which are important components of mental health issues.

Having a sense of purpose and assisting others may make life more meaningful.

For example, the initiative by social media users in urging those in need to raise white flags is to draw attention to their predicament.

This is the least we can do as a community to help people dealing with the effects of Covid-19 and to indirectly contribute to the prevention of mental health issues.

Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's Pemulih stimulus package focuses on expanding psychosocial support through channels such as "Talian Kasih" and allocating RM15 million to non-governmental organisations to combat social issues.

This shows that the government is making every effort to grasp the needs of people with mental health concerns. Hopefully, in the long term, this will improve the community's resilience.

Employers too should prioritise their employees' mental health. Working from home (WFH) adds a new level of stress to the mix of personal commitments and managing work demands.

WFH issues should be met with support and understanding from employers. To boost efficiency and foster a work-life balance, employers should offer greater coaching, support and trust.

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