- Mental health

Depression not something to joke about

Although CMCO was lifted in most states, labour market conditions were still influenced by Covid-19 pandemic

The Sun (Malaysia) · 9 Feb 2021 · 9 · by Noor Dzuhaidah Osman and Natasya Abdullah Noor Dzuhaidah Osman is senior lecturer of faculty of Syariah and Law, and Natasya Abdullah is medical lecturer at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

IN light of the current controversy regarding a group of panel members that ridiculed depression and suicide during an online discussion, we would like to draw the public's attention to the inappropriate stigma associated with the condition, importance of recognising the early symptoms of depression and encouraging those to seek treatment as soon as possible.

Depression is real and should not be underestimated. Whenever anyone faces a test, challenge or pressure, it is normal to have a particular fight-or-flight response reaction.

We may feel stressed, anxious, or sad and depressed, meaning we've lost our sense of enjoyment in what we usually do.

However, for most of us we bounce back, adapt and fight our way through until we feel calmer and can function normally.

There are times when a person reaches a breaking point, where the emotional and psychological disturbance is too much to handle.

If these disturbances persist for a long time and the intensity becomes too much to bear, that person can develop depression.

Everybody is vulnerable to developing depression, especially in the current situation which may exacerbate it.

No doubt, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought significant changes to human life and behaviour, and almost everyone is affected.

A housewife is tired of juggling housework and homeschooling the kids, especially if she has to do everything alone without help.

Children struggle with their studies, peerpressure, a new environment, and adapting to forced isolation during the pandemic.

A person might have lost his job when he has hungry mouths to feed at home.

Those undergoing quarantine can lose their sense of integration with society and feel lonely.

Even the disease itself could be worrying, more so to those who contract the virus.

Depression is not just about mental health being affected, but also physical health. People need to understand that the condition is highly treatable.

There is comprehensive management of depression available that includes medication and psychotherapies, where most of the time a person with depression can recover and live a healthy life.

Therefore, it is wrong to label them as crazy or insane.

The last thing they want to hear is people labelling them as such, causing them to lose their sense of individuality and pride, especially when they are in a professional group comprising a higher social status at work or in the district town.

Social stigmatisation of depression is inevitable, perhaps due to education and lack of understanding of the condition.

People lack information, awareness, and are sceptical of what constitutes depression, and, in some cases, are in denial that they are experiencing depression.

Some might think it is due to the lack of faith in God, religion, self-induced attitudes or exposures that made them unable to cope with excessive stress.

Failure to understand the situation will only inhibit acceptance and in turn cause them to refuse to seek treatment.

We had a contrasting experience in the United Kingdom. The community there was more open to talking and discussing mental health.

The community school even invited some speakers from a nearby government hospital and had some sessions with the parents, talking about the challenges they were facing and even to the extent of having private sessions.

During the sessions, we felt awkward as everybody was getting everything off their chest since those kinds of sessions are taboo in some cultures here.

Nevertheless, it was a "feel good" session with counsellors from the NHS or the local council giving tips on coping with the condition.

Facing stress is normal, but what is more important is knowing where to turn to if things get out of hand.

There was a sense of support due to everybody's encouragement, making the environment feel normal. In short, nobody thinks and treats you as a crazy person!

You are normal like everybody else but you need to have a coping mechanism.

If their case is more serious which involves suicidal thoughts, abusive behaviour, uncontrollable anger, drinking and also drug addiction, they might need to be referred to hospital counsellors, psychiatrists, drug or drinking rehabilitation, welfare, or the local council.

It is appalling that some people tend to have a stronger sense of individuality, thinking they are better positioned than others, especially when they have a higher social standing and professionalism.

When they joke about mental health, it already makes those affected feel worse and only adds to the public's already high stigma.

An honourable leader should lead by example. Sensitive issues should be approached with high caution, without judging and improper labelling.

Rather than take the "wait and see" approach, proactive solutions should be laid out to combat societal ills before it destroys the family institution and society as a whole.

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia's unemployment rate increased 4.8% to 772,900 persons in December according to the latest data released by the Department of Statistics.

Chief Statistician Malaysia Datuk Seri Mohd Uzir Mahidin pointed out the final month of 2020 saw the conditional movement control order (MCO) lifted in almost all states except for Selangor and Sabah, and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, along with the resumption of interstate travel from Dec 7.

He noted that although the number of new Covid-19 cases averaged 1,500 a day, economic sectors continued to operate with strict standard operating procedures (SOP).

"Thus, in December 2020, the number of employed persons edged up month on month by 0.1% to 15.22 million persons after registering a marginal decrease in the previous month," he said in a statement.

However, the employment-to-population ratio, which indicates the ability of an economy to create employment, remained unchanged at 65.1%.

Going by economic sector, services saw an increasing trend continue largely in wholesale and retail trade; human health and social work; communication and information; and education activities.

Employment in tourism-related industries such as accommodation and food services; transport and storage; and arts, entertainment and recreational activities remained on a declining trend, reflecting the consequences of the pandemic to this industry.

In the manufacturing sector, employment continued to record positive growth, whereas the agriculture and mining and quarrying sectors remained in negative territory for the fifth month.

Similarly, the construction sector posted a decrease month on month.

In terms of employed persons by status of employment, the employee category comprised 77.6% of overall employment, augmented by 0.2% to 11.81 million persons from the previous month.

The number of own-account workers, made up of daily wage earners working at farmers' markets, night markets and stalls; freelancers; as well as smallholders, which account for 15.8% of overall employment, decreased for the third month in a row, falling by 0.6% to 2.4 million persons in December 2020.

The number of employed persons who were temporarily not working increased to 146,200 persons from 142,000 persons in November 2020, due to the implementation of phases of MCO throughout the whole month as well as a short school break and festive holidays.

In December, labour market conditions were still influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic and its economic consequences have caused slower recovery momentum.

The labour market remained competitive with the number of labour force increased to 15.99 million persons (November 2020: 15.96 million persons) and the labour force participation rate (LFPR) remained at 68.4%.

The number of persons outside the labour force registered a decrease of 2,600 to 7.37 million persons compared with November 2020 with the largest composition due to schooling/training.

The labour market conditions improved gradually with the labour force and employment situation continuing to increase compared with the preceding quarter, recording 15.92 million persons and 15.16 million persons respectively, said Mohd Uzir.

Meanwhile, the number of unemployed persons increased 0.1 percentage point from 4.7% in third-quarter 2020 and the LFPR improved 0.1 percentage point to 68.5%.

In the fourth quarter of 2020, there were 533,700 persons who worked less than 30 hours per week due to working conditions or insufficient work, against 403,800 persons in the previous quarter.

The chief statistician observed that for 2020 the LFPR edged down 0.3% to 68.4% against 68.7 in 2019, and the number of employed persons decreased by 0.2% to 15.1 million persons.

"The marginal decrease was due to the uncertainty in the labour market following the health and economic crises during the year," he said.

"The health crisis has given a huge impact on the labour force which led to the unemployment rate rising above 4% as against an average of 3% recorded in the pre-crisis period. Thus, the unemployment rate rose to 4.5% in 2020, the highest rate recorded since 1993 (4.1%)."

Towards the end of last year, Malaysia passed the 100,000 mark in Covid-19 cases and January 2021 saw the number of new cases exceeding an average of 3,200 daily.

With that, the operation of certain activities remained restricted such as social gathering, cinemas and entertainment and recreational activities.

"Hence, it is foreseen that Malaysia's labour market will remain in a challenging situation in early 2021 but various assistance and initiatives introduced by the government will cushion the impact of the pandemic to the labour market," said Mohd Uzir.

In a note, UOB Research said it expects recovery to pick up from the second quarter onwards as the National Covis-19 Immunisation Programme gets under way.

"We reiterate our 2021 unemployment rate forecast of 4.0% (MOF official forecast: 3.5%) on the back of an uneven economic recovery," it said.

PETALING JAYA: Censof Holdings Bhd returned to the black for its third quarter ended Dec 31, 2020, posting a net profit of RM2 million against a net loss of RM83,000 reported in the same

quarter of the previous year, attributed to higher sales from attractive government grants in Singapore, savings in finance costs, and a profit contribution from Netsense Group acquired earlier in the year among others.

Revenue for the period stood at RM23.73 million, a 42.2% improvement from RM16.68 million reported previously.

For the cumulative nine-month period, the group's net profit stood at RM14.09 million, over a ninefold increase over RM1.54 million reported for the corresponding period of last year.

Revenue for the period grew 21.3% to RM54.97 million from RM45.33 million.

In its Bursa filing, the group expects the economic outlook for 2021 to remain challenging given the recent surge in Covid-19 infections and the return of travel restrictions in Malaysia.

Nevertheless, it opined that the pandemic has accelerated the shift towards digital transformation supported by initiatives by the government. Going forward, it is positive that the demands for technology solutions in Malaysia will continue to grow.

"As such, we view this as an opportunity to push the adoption of technology transformation, leveraging on the demands for technology solutions in Malaysia and Singapore," said Censof 's group managing director, Shaik Mydin.

The group recently entered into a share sale and purchase agreement to acquire an additional 30.87% equity interest in Asian Business Software Solutions Pte Ltd, which will increase its stake to 89.07% upon completion.

"This is a testament of our efforts as we remain committed to streamline and focus on growing our core businesses which have since produced positive results for the group," added Ameer.

PETALING JAYA: Foreign investors were net buyers last week with inflow to the tune of RM117.05 million, according to MIDF Research.

As the market reopened last Tuesday, foreign investors bought RM179.11 million net of local equities, with retailers and local institutions as net sellers of RM6.01 million and RM173.1 million respectively. Last week was a four-day trading period which started on Tuesday.

"Even with the weekly positive inflow, the market saw net foreign outflow every day of the week except on Tuesday. The only inflow was to the tune of RM179.11 million. Subsequent continuous selling was not able to negate Tuesday's inflow. Largest foreign outflow was recorded on Friday at RM38.78 million and the smallest outflow was on Wednesday at only RM4.9 million,"MIDF said in its fund flow report yesterday.

It was the opposite for retailers, who were net buyers every day for last week except on Tuesday. Largest net buying was recorded on Thursday at RM105.81 million and smallest net purchase was on Wednesday at RM49.52 million.

Meanwhile, local institutions were net sellers every day of last week. Cumulative weekly outflow was to the tune of RM339.17 million. The biggest outflow was on opening day of last week trading period and smallest outflow was on Friday at RM173.1 million and RM34.04 million.

Since the beginning of 2021, cumulatively, retailers have been the only net buyers of the domestic equity market to the tune of RM1.98 billion. Local institutions and foreign investors are net sellers to the tune of RM1.26 billion and RM720 million respectively.

"In comparison to another three Southeast Asian markets that we tracked last week, Thailand is the only country that recorded net outflow last week."

In terms of participation, the retail investors recorded a weekly decrease of 14.55% in average daily trade value (ADTV) while the foreign investors and local institutions experienced declines in ADTV of -9.68% and -19.85% respectively.