



Malaysian Psychological Association

www.psim.org.my

MALAYSIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

The Malaysian Psychological Association was established in 1988 to promote the field of psychology in the country. In this exclusive interview, we speak with Associate Professor **Dr Rozainee Khairudin**, President of the Malaysian Psychological Association, to hear about their critical work in developing psychology, which during the global COVID-19 pandemic, is more important than ever.



To begin, can you tell us how the Malaysian Psychological Association was established?

The Malaysian Psychological Association (PSIMA) is registered with the Registrar of Societies Malaysia (Jabatan Pendaftaran Pertubuhan Malaysia; PPM-002-10-24031988). The establishment of PSIMA was initiated by several psychologists. It all started in 1980 with a discussion between several psychologists who were attending a seminar at the National University of Malaysia (UKM; Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia). Later, in 1983, the Department of Psychology at UKM organised an international conference on Cross-cultural Psychology. Here, some of the local psychologists continued discussing the potential for setting up the association. Finally, in 1988, the association was officially launched, and this event was attended by 24 psychologists. Several members, especially the counselling psychologists and educational psychologists, were also involved in the drafting of the Counsellors Act 1998, the result of which counsellors and counselling psychologists can register as counsellors.

PSIMA was established to provide a platform for its members to meet and interact while encouraging them to practice psychology in accordance with

ethical guidelines and a professional code of conduct. Currently, one of PSIMA's main priorities is to work with the Malaysian government to institute registration for professional psychologists to safeguard the profession of psychology and ensure a high level of service and ethical practice.

PSIMA approached the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) in 2010 to set up Program Standards for Psychology. It was approved by the MQA Council and since 2013, all institutions of higher learning in Malaysia are required to follow set standards when designing psychology programs. Beginning in 2011, several psychologists from PSIMA were involved in drafting the Allied Professions Act (Akta Kesihatan Bersekutu) through which Clinical Psychologists can be registered as an Allied Health Professional, and this was approved by the Malaysian Parliament in 2016. In addition, PSIMA was established to encourage greater cooperation, coordination and partnership among the Malaysian universities' psychology departments to raise the standards of academic programs and encourage more research collaborations in Malaysian psychology.

To fulfil the purpose of establishing PSIMA as a professional non-governmental organisation, various conventions, seminars and conference



Figure 1.
Poster on Awareness and Psychological Health Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic Published by PSIMA.

have been organised over the past years to gather professionals and students in the psychology professions from local areas and overseas. To date, PSIMA has more than 1,000 members from across the country as well as international members.

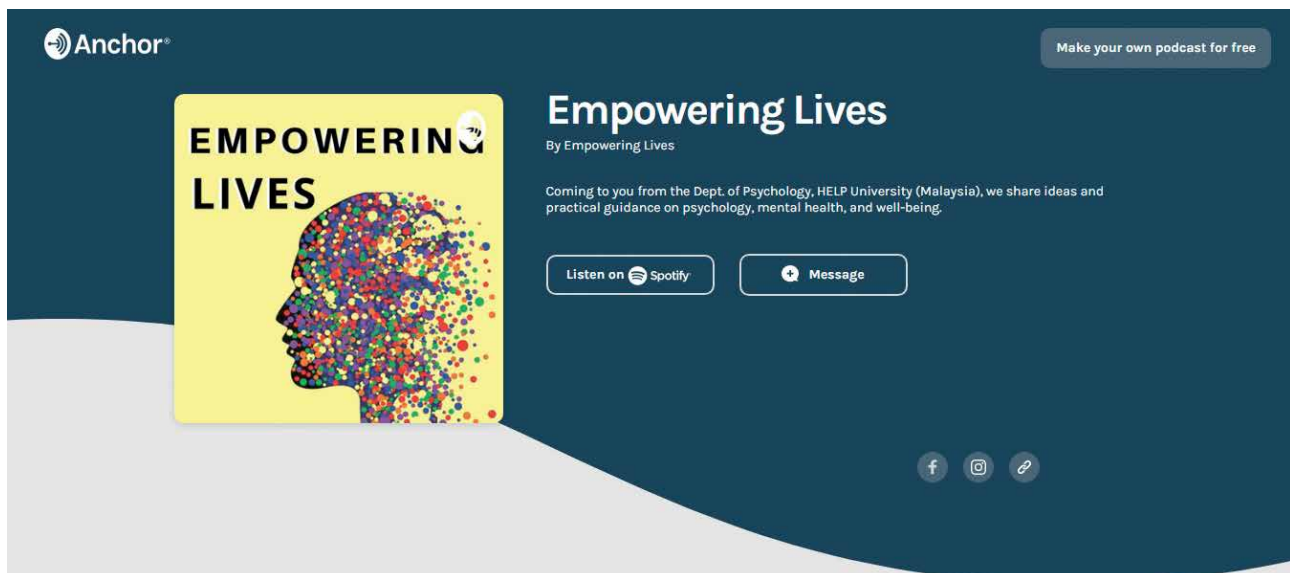


Figure 2.



Figure 3.

What is the overarching vision at the Malaysian Psychological Association? As President, what are your aims for the future of psychology in Malaysia?

The overarching vision of PSIMA is to provide a platform for its members to meet and interact while encouraging them to practice psychology in accordance with our established ethical guidelines and professional code of conduct.

As President, my aim for the future of psychology in Malaysia is that the field can serve the people not only in providing education in the field of psychology but also as a professional service in maintaining the psychological well-being of the community. Malaysia is a country that consists of very diverse ethnicity and culture. Psychology is

about the minds and behaviours of people. With diverse backgrounds and cultures come different views and perspectives, partly attributable to differences in upbringing. Psychology can be the bridging platform to harmonise people from different backgrounds. Particularly, in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, psychologists have to play the utmost important role in ensuring the mental health as well as the physical well-being of the people.

Psychology is a wide-ranging and varied field. How do you promote the education and training of psychologists given this diversity?

PSIMA has established an Academic Council Board. The president is the head of the board. This board consists of relevant PSIMA council members and all heads of department from all universities throughout Malaysia that offer psychology programs. The board meets at least three times each year. All matters relating to academic programs, including quality control, teaching and learning, and training, are discussed at this Board. In this way, PSIMA can successfully promote academic matters with regard to the diversity of psychology as a discipline in Malaysia.

Across the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the impact of challenging times on psychological as well as on physical health. What particular issues have you faced in Malaysia as a result of COVID-19? How has the Malaysian Psychological Association sought to address these?

Malaysians have not been spared by the pandemic. Some of the particular psychological issues that people in Malaysia are facing in these challenging times are cognitive distress and anxiety. The government enforced a Movement Order Control (MCO) from 18th March 2020 to contain the spread of the virus which was then extended to 28th April 2020. The uncertainty about the pandemic, coupled with the new routines that people have had to adapt to during the MCO imposed worry, anxiety and emotional instability. The enforcement also brought socio-economic sacrifices. The limitation of usual business resulting from the MCO imposed financial hardship on many people, leading to psychological distress.

What lessons do you think we might learn from the COVID-19 pandemic about sustaining our psychological health more generally?

What we might learn from the COVID-19 pandemic is that it is critical to sustain

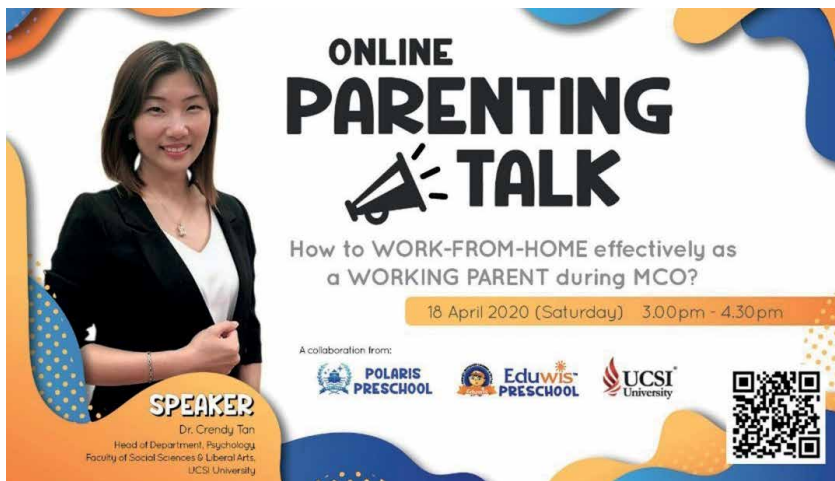


Figure 4.

not only our physical but also our psychological health. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a global crisis. For most people, this has been a new and previously unexperienced type of life event. It is very easy for negative thoughts to crop up in our minds, but we need to fight those thoughts and try to be positive. Positive thinking can help in coping with such a crisis. We know that the uncertainty of things can make our mental health worse and that expectations can increase anxiety. Therefore, it is important that we stay resilient. Social support is also important for our psychological health and we should talk with others – one’s spouse, siblings, parents, and children, for example.

Finally, how best might psychologists engage the general public in understanding the importance of psychology in our day to day lives?

One of the most important roles of psychologists is to convey the awareness of how prudent it is to have well-balanced psychological health. Psychologists are commonly known to cure those with troubled psychological well-being. However, psychologists can also promote psychological health to allow one to become an even better person. Psychologists should be the leaders in promoting well-being.

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Addressing Mental Health Needs in a Global Pandemic

The PSIMA has sought to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in several ways. These approaches have included spreading awareness about the importance of psychological health to Malaysians, offering help for those who are facing psychological issues

during the COVID-19 pandemic, using social media to promote psychological health and well-being, and undertaking research to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on psychological well-being among Malaysians. These findings are contributing to the development of interventions and programs for Malaysians suffering from psychological impact during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The PSIMA has collaborated with Briged Bakti Negeri Selangor in conducting tele-psychotherapy for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The service is offered through the BBM Sel-PSIMA Tele-PsychoTherapy Centre, using videoconferencing, WhatsApp video calls, telegram video calls, messenger video calls, and other video call applications. Cases are handled by professionals in clinical psychology and counselling.

A number of studies have and are still being conducted by PSIMA academic members to investigate the psychological impact of COVID-19 pandemic. The study titled ‘The Perception, Stress and Psychological Distress of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) among Malaysians after the Outbreak’ has identified that greater worry about the COVID-19 pandemic is associated with greater levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Further research studies are examining the relationships between mindset, personality and coping in combating anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To help address this impact on mental health, the psychology department at HELP University in Malaysia started a series of podcasts on psychological issues relating to COVID-19 (Figure 2) and other members of PSIMA appeared on radio and social media such as FBLive and other online apps to promote the importance of mental health (Figure 3). Advice has also been offered on how to work from home more effectively during these challenging times (Figure 4).