EMOTION, MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL REGULATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Higher education community faces a variety of challenges in teaching and learning following the imposition of the Movement Control Order (MCO) and post MCO during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study explains emotion, mental and spiritual regulation during COVID-19, and discusses the importance of emotion regulation in improving mental health. This study also provides the mechanisms to help individuals regulate their mental, emotional, and spiritual conditions post COVID-19. Emotional, mental, and spiritual regulation are important in overcoming the challenges during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this study serve as a guidance for policy makers, leaders, academics, and higher education staff

in preparing action plans and interventions to help individuals in regulating their emotion, mental and spiritual health following the foreseeable end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The conceptual understanding presented in this study forms the framework for future empirical research.

Keywords: **COVID-19, Higher Education, Pandemic, Psychology, Regulation.**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Aw, Teh, Ling, Leng, Chan, and Ahmad (2021) stated that as of March 31, 2021, the COVID-19 virus has infected a total of 129 million individuals around the world; causing the death of 2.83 million of them, and to date, in Malaysia, a total of 345,500 infections and 1272 deaths have been recorded since the first case was reported on January 24, 2020. COVID-19 has become a global pandemic that is affecting all communities in general, and staff as well as students in institutions of higher learning in particular. It has posed major challenges to the provision of mental health services in times of crisis, and placed an additional burden on mental, emotional and spiritual health, both in terms of existing psychological pressures and those that may arise from the outbreak. This challenge has affected both administrative and academic staff members in these institutions as well as students and their families throughout Malaysia. Each individual is exposed to the risk of mental health issues or emotional disturbances such as anxiety and depression, especially those already struggling with mental health problems, substance abuse, and financial difficulties. In addition, the spiritual condition of an individual is also impacted should a family member succumb to the COVID-19 infection, loss of employment, deterioration in the family's economic situation, and various other life-changing events during the pandemic.

Emotional disturbances often affect individuals during a pandemic like COVID-19 where a comprehensive and successful vaccination programme remains uncertain, and access to social, economic, emotional and spiritual support are not widely available. As such, researchers see the importance of mental, emotional and spiritual regulation as an individual's way of coping under the strains placed by the Movement Control Order **(**MCO). Mental, emotional and spiritual regulation refers to an individual's ability to regulate and control their emotional, mental and spiritual well-being. These internal characteristics need to be strengthened especially since no other external element will be of help while the pandemic persists.

Emphasis is placed on the three internal aspects of the individual as each is related to one another. According to Tarek Younis (2019), humans are made up of three interrelated

components namely spiritual, cognitive, and emotional. The spiritual component relates to a belief in God and doing good, while the cognitive aspects refer to mental processes. The emotional components cover the various emotions, such as anger, sadness, fear, shame, and guilt. The downplaying of spiritual elements in mental health interventions as evidenced in secular Western scholarship contradicts the reality of the human condition that is generally promoted in Islamic discourse on mental health (Mohd Nasrom, 2016).

Among the issues related to the higher education community in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic are the challenges arising from the sudden imposition of online teaching and learning (N. Hasan & Y. Bao, 2020), and psychological issues such as anxiety and mental fatigue due to extended usage of mobile devices and computers for work and study (Sheela et al, 2020).

Therefore, this study integrated these three elements to develop a more holistic and comprehensive approach to mental, emotional and spiritual self-regulation. The purpose of this study is to explore the documents on the measures involved in mental, emotion, and spiritual regulation among Malaysians, and provide an action plan and interventions needed to assist individuals in coping with the mental, emotional and spiritual issues following the outbreak of COVID-19. The objectives of this paper are to:

I.   To document the measures involved in mental, emotional, and spiritual regulation among higher education community

II.   To provide an action plan and interventions needed to assist individuals in coping with the mental, emotional and spiritual issues following the outbreak of COVID-19.

2.0 STATEMENT OF ISSUES

The scope of this study is to document the measures involved in mental, emotional and spiritual regulation among higher education community; and to provide an action plan and intervention strategies. Some knowledge of the strategies employed in dealing with psychological stresses and challenges faced by individuals in the higher education community during and after the occurrence of pandemics and epidemics need to be examined. Further, these studies need to emphasize the socio-cultural adjustments made by community due to the impact of such pandemics and epidemics. Therefore, this study will complement the knowledge available on COVID-19 with contemporary approaches in education and psychology.

Katz and Gottman (1995) define emotion regulation as the ability to manage both

positive and negative emotions by recognizing emotions and developing the skills needed to manage reactions resulting from positive or negative emotions. If an individual adopts a well-regulated strategy, the resulting response then will be positive, as opposed to a negative emotion regulation strategy which will produce negative and aggressive responses. The emotional state of a person depends on his mental and spiritual well-being. In essence, it is important for individuals to learn adaptive strategies for controlling their emotions in order to achieve their psychological well-being. Some of the adaptive strategies include acceptance of what is being experienced, having positive self-thoughts, and not worrying unduly about occurrences.

Education in emotional, mental and spiritual regulation can enhance social and emotional competence, positive attitudes, prosocial behaviours, and mental health by reducing anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and antisocial behaviour. Emotional regulation also has a positive effect on attitude and academic performance. Formal and informal education on emotional, mental and spiritual regulation needs to be imparted both at home and at school to ensure the positive development of youth. Accordingly, this study, which combines historical, psychological and educational research, seeks to provide a robust action plan for regulating the mental, emotional and spiritual lives of the staff and academic community in institutions of higher learning in dealing with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maintaining mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of individuals is a major challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has become a global issue affecting the lives of people around the globe. As of this writing, 267,046,516 cases of COVID-19 were reported with 5,282,822 deaths and 240,601,744 recovered cases recorded around the world (https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus, accessed on 8 December 2021). All-in-all, COVID-19 has not only affected people physically but emotionally, mentally, and spiritually as well, especially among staff and students in colleges and universities. The challenges they face respectively in organising online lessons and in living on campus during lockdown periods are the main precursors to these affects.

The MCO, whose complete ending cannot as yet be realistically determined, has generated much confusion and anxiety in regard to class sessions, industrial training, graduation periods, and student loan repayments, as well as the shortage of food and medical supplies. For postgraduate students, field and laboratory work have also been interrupted by the MCO, resulting in additional time needed to complete their academic programmes. The

same applies to academic and general staff of the higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia. Lecturers, in particular, have been instructed to conduct e-learning or online classes to ensure that academic activities continue to be carried out. Online teaching and learning resources that can be utilised are journal articles, e-books, YouTube videos, online collaboration tools, and web 2.0 applications. To meet the objectives of the academic programmes, the Ministry of Higher Education announced that all HEIs in the country can continue teaching and conducting e-learning activities provided that all students have access to the Internet, lecturers, and infrastructure (Ministry of Higher Education Website). The only physical equipment needed to link lecturers and students are laptops or computers with audio-visual features. Such a development indicates that there will be a major shift in the education system in particular which, in turn, will affect the mental, emotional and spiritual situation of both staff and students in the HEIs. Such awareness of the importance of caring for the well-being of the HEI community are in line with the precepts of humanitarianism as anchored in religious teachings and values (Syaidatun et al., 2017).

History has shown that outbreaks of disease have impacted society in various ways. Spiritually, outbreaks posed a great challenge to religion as seen in Italy in the 14th century during the Black Death epidemic that hit Europe. Among the spiritual challenges was that the Church needed to take drastic measures in managing the large number of casualties and in preventing the outbreak from further spreading. In addition, some Italian chroniclers such as Agnolo di Tura and Petrarch also expressed their sadness over the death of family members having to bury the dead without the accompanying religious rituals. Benedictow (2010) cited Tura's recollection of a tragic situation where he had to bury five of his deceased children at one time, an experience that would definitely inflict a traumatic effect on those involved. Such psychological trauma was felt by many of the Sienna community in Italy at the time. Meanwhile, the situation in Malaysia and several other Muslim countries saw mosques and *suraus* being forced to close during the MCO to curb the spread of COVID-19. From July 2021, with certain measures imposed during the MCO lifted, mosques and *suraus* around the country have been allowed to be re-opened. However, only those who have been fully vaccinated are allowed in, which has now created another issue concerning those who have chosen not to be vaccinated. Amongst them who are regular visitors to places of worship, there is a lot of stress and feelings of despair as they are facing similar restrictions as well in coming to their work place and visiting most public and commercial areas.

Based on a survey conducted during the spread of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome or MERS in 2012, 71.5 percent of respondents reported having obtained

information relating to MERS through social media (Kim & Yang, 2015). Lerner and Keltner (2000, 2001) conducted a series of experiments showing that fear is positively associated with pessimistic risk assessment while anger is positively associated with an optimistic risk assessment of possible future incidents such as sexually transmitted diseases, getting cancer, divorce, and so on. The results of this study show that social media exposure is linked to self-related emotions of fear and anger and that emotion is the link between social media exposure and perceived perceptions of personal risk and preventive behaviours related to MERS. Exposure to social media during the spread of infectious diseases can create strong emotional ties and thus increase perceptions of personal risk and preventive behaviour. In other words, although MERS-related information as exposed on social media does not provoke anger, the public tends to believe that the outbreak will affect them. Information gathered from the mass media also affects the mental, emotional and spiritual states of individuals and the community.

In addition, numerous studies show that the application of spiritual and religious elements in recovery interventions has enhanced and positive effects (Amber Haque, 2009; Hook et al., 2009; Lewis, Breslin, & Dein, 2008; Mukhtar & Oei, 2011). Dein (2006), for example, found that symptoms of depression were low among religious persons. In addition, religiously minded individuals have a tendency to recover faster from depression compared to the less religiously inclined. The ability to control emotions can reduce negative sentiments and increase the ability to cope with life's uncertainties, view the future more positively, and hasten decision-making (Barret, Gross, Christensen & Benvenuto, 2001). Those who have high positive lifestyle values and emotions are quicker in making decisions. This shows that having positive control over emotions and thoughts, feelings and behaviours is a strong driver for acting in a constructive manner.

In this current digital age, mental health issues can even be discussed through online and mobile applications (Liu et al., 2020). In addition, researchers around the world have increasingly covered COVID-19 matters by focusing on practices at health centres such as hospitals, clinics, and on health practitioners (Lee et al., 2020; El Zowalaty & Järhult, 2020; Sarif & Yahya 2020). The gaps in these studies show that there has been no research that has focused on the well-being of staff and students at HEIs in regard to the mental, emotional, and spiritual impacts arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. This is despite the fact that the HEI community represents a major contributor of the skilled manpower needed for the economic development and success of a nation (Azman et al., 2010, 2016).

Therefore, awareness of strategies and measures needed for mental, emotional, and

spiritual regulation is important for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic especially in HEIs as it can help improve their quality of life and that of their families. Individuals need to learn to effectively manage their emotions to cope with stress and the negative experiences of daily life (Nur Hafizah, 2015).

This study explains the emotion, mental and spiritual regulation during and after COVID-19 and discuss on the importance of emotion regulation in improving mental health. This study also provides the mechanisms to help individuals regulate their mental, emotional, and spiritual conditions post COVID-19, and the conceptual framework for empirical studies in the future.
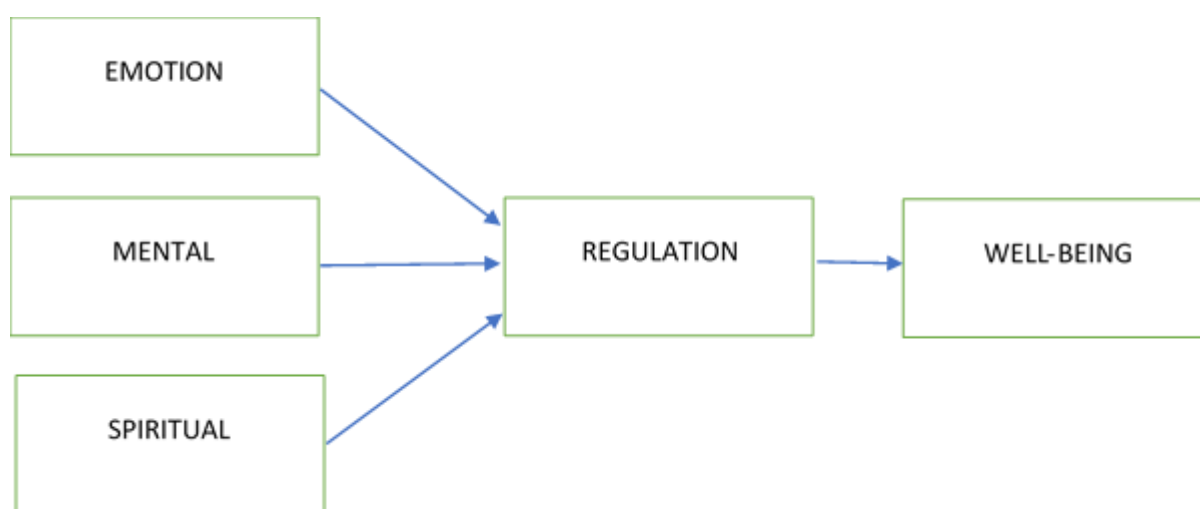

Figure 1   Conceptual Framework for the Emotional, Mental and Spiritual Regulation

This conceptual framework focuses on the well-being of staff and students in HEIs by offering a framework for both research and practice in relation to mental, emotional and spiritual regulation during the pandemic COVID-19. Several recommendations have been given in the form of action plans and intervention strategies that can be applied in the institutions of higher learning.

The following findings are based on library research and resources gathered from exegesis of the Qur'an and al-Sunnah, academic journals, books, online news materials, research articles and other relevant sources. These reference materials are mainly published between 1981 and 2021 and obtained from search engines such as Google Scholar, Google Search, Science Direct, Science Hub, Customer Care, and books from libraries and private collections.

3.0 MEASURES INVOLVED IN MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SPIRITUAL REGULATION AMONG INDIVIDUALS OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITY

3.1 Emotion Regulation During and After COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic not only threatens the physical, commercial, and economic well-being of a nation, it also presents a host of other challenges such as changes in employment and individual careers especially of academics. Due to the MCO, academics face the challenge of working from home and having to balance the needs of family members and their careers. Changes that occur in daily routines, and social or physical relationships can raise feelings of anxiety among individuals. However, emotional disturbances that occur frequently or are persistent so as to impair the ability to function, disrupt appetites, and interfere with sleep patterns and the enjoyment of regular activities can lead to mental health problems.

Fear and anxiety are normal emotional reactions, even if they are uncomfortable. On the positive side, these reactions are good as they prepare a person to act accordingly when faced with challenges. Hence, negative emotions serve a certain set of functions that are crucial for adaptation and survival. What is important is to manage them well and to prevent them from creating panic. To address the emotions of anxiety and the fear of being infected by the virus, the public needs to look at the rational aspects of how the COVID-19 outbreak brings about certain levels of fear and anxiety and how they can be overcome by adhering to the recommendations issued by the Ministry of Health. In addition, these feelings can be allayed by having confidence in the reliability of information presented on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Effective emotion regulation can counteract some of the detrimental effects of work-family stress on the performance of employees and their psychological well-being (Diestel & Schmidt, 2010; Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004). First, the ability to disregard emotional interference enables individuals to remain focused (Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti, Moreno-Jiménez, & Mayo, 2010). Thus, employees who successfully manage their emotions may be more effective and efficient in accomplishing their work goals despite having to suddenly switch work to a home environment where other distractions and demands are present (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Second, emotion regulation has many social benefits as it facilitates positive social interactions and enhances the quality of relationships (Gross, 2014). For example, emotion regulation promotes empathy, compassion, and the desire to help others

(Eisenberg, 2000; Lebowitz & Dovidio, 2015).

Chen, Allen, and Hou (2020) note that dual-career partners who give their full attention and empathise with each other enjoy more positive work-family experiences. Sharing pleasant and positive events together creates effective and constructive conditions that promotes employee satisfaction, a sense of work fulfilment, and sound relationships (Ilies, Keeney, & Scott, 2011). Moreover, couples who effectively control their emotions not only maintain their own well-being but also provide emotional and instrumental support to their partner (Ocampo, Restubog, Liwag, Wang, & Petelczyc, 2018). These studies show that emotion regulation not only benefits oneself but also extends to couples and other family members.

Other emotional feelings that may arise are frustration and boredom. Individuals need to accept reality and practice positive thinking. Rational thinking is important for dealing with emotional distress during the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, these emotions can be overcome by engaging in activities that free the mind of negative emotions. In addition, it is advisable for individuals to use mind-training techniques to view frustrations from different perspectives. Stressful emotions such as frustration or boredom can be countered by watching comedies, reading motivational books, and having hobbies as these activities can help channel thoughts into more positive and creative areas. Focusing on positive things to enjoy inner tranquillity is also an effective technique for diverting thoughts into more constructive ways.

Proper health care, healthy diets, and adequate sleep are important factors in helping to maintain stable emotions. Creating space for expressing emotions with family members is also a beneficial way relieving unhappy emotions and fatigue. This technique can help maintain healthy relationships and build strong support systems with family members. Overall, emotional stability in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis is important to ensure that daily routines can be conducted with minimal stress.

3.2 Mental Regulation During and After COVID-19

Mental health forms an integral part of individual's overall health. Managing mental health and psychosocial well-being is as important as caring for physical health. The imposition of the MCO placed a toll on individuals many of whom were prone to bouts of depression and other mental health symptoms. Among the signs of distressed mental health include drastic changes in sleep patterns such as insomnia, changes in appetite, extreme mood changes such as irritability and anxiety or feeling very sad, being easily fatigued, and difficulty in concentrating or focussing. (see COVID-19 Management Guidelines No.5/2020 at Appendix 33). Thus, it is

extremely important that a person takes care of his/her mental health to prevent the occurrence of more serious mental disorders. COVID-19 Management Guidelines No.5/2020 offer several measures that can be employed to reduce stress, such as deep-breathing exercises, meditation/yoga, listening to music, talking to someone you trust, and staying in touch with others. Such measures can be continued even after COVID-19 to reduce stress.

Other than that, individuals need social support to address such issues. Such support can be sought through the Mental Health and Psychological Support Services (MHPSS) of the Ministry of Health. MHPSS refers to any type of local or external support aimed at protecting or promoting psychosocial well-being or preventing or treating mental disorders. Support can include interventions in health and education or through those that are community-based. The prevailing guideline on mental health is the COVID-19 Management No. 5/2020 (Appendix 33) issued by the Ministry of Health and appears on its official portal. MHPSS provides diagnosis and management of mental conditions such as depression, fear, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to Zuhaira Nadiah, Siti Hafsyah and Noraiza (2020) the Ministry of Health and Mercy Malaysia provide psychosocial counselling for frontliners and members of the public who feel emotionally disturbed as well as to address other mental health issues in general.

3.3 Spiritual Regulation During and After COVID-19

According to several studies, spiritual aspects play a positive role in improving an individual's mental health in the face of challenges (Koole et al., 2009, 2016; Zell, 2013; Aldwin, et al., 2014; Vishkin, 2014; Tey, et al., 2017). This aspect of spiritual regulation is an internal step of an individual to avoid afflictions (Koole et al., 2016). Spiritual regulation is a self-control, or *mujāhadah al-nafs* in the Islamic perspective (Al-Muhasibi, 1992; Ḥawwā & Sacid., 2002; Ibn Qayyim, 2005; Salasiah Hanin Hamjah, 2008) as found in the process of *tazkiyah al-nafs* w

hich means striving to resist or to suppress lust (الأغيار قتل أو الأغيار دفع في الجهد بذل) (al- Ghazālī, 1994). Al-Ghazālī (1994), Shaykh Ahmad Farid (2013) and Zakaria Stapa (2012) explain that the method or process is to strive against lust and unnatural desires (الشهوات مضادة المجاهدة طريق أن ومخالفة الهوى). It is also a method of eliminating blameworthy traits (*madhmūmah*) and their related properties until Allah SWT places the light of knowledge in the heart (Al-Jawziyyah, Ibn Qayyim, 2008; Abdul Mujib, 2012; Sharifah Fatimah, 2012; Che Zarrina Shaari & Sharifah Basirah, 2015).

The *mujāhadah al-nafs* method is suitable for treating all forms of depression (Arena Che Kasim, 2000; Imam Malik Masyhuri, 2005; Soleh A Khudori, 2009) as it is applied in a

counter or opposing manner and is most appropriate when one is quarantined for suspected COVID-19. For example, anger is treated with forgiveness, pride with humility (al-Ghazālī, 2000), and such is the method for treating all other psychological afflictions (Al-Muhasibi, 1986, 1990, 1991; Anshori, Fuad, 2000; Rahman Z.A. et al., 2018). Therefore, an individual will have a spirit of acceptance and patience in facing any difficult challenges (Ibn Qayyim, 2001; Murtadza, 2017; Rahman Z.A. et al., 2018). As quoted from al-Ghazālī's (2000) words in *Iḥyāʾ*:

Every ailment is treated using the opposite process, the overpowering darkness is caused by vices that are engaged in and there is no other way to dispel the darkness except by the light that results from good, and every evil is treated with good.

The second element of spiritual regulation, the *riyāḍah al-nafs*, is the training of the being that leads to good in an incremental manner (Al-Jawziyyah & Ibn Qayyim, 2001; Shaykh Ahmad Farid 2013; Al-Muhasibi, 1991). Here, what is imagined to be formidable or difficult initially would eventually become normal habits such as frequent handwashing with soap, wearing a face mask, and maintaining physical distancing as when the MCO took effect in Malaysia.

In addition to Ali Isa (1981), al-Ghazālī (1990), al-Muḥasibī (1991), al-Nadwa (1994), and Abu al-Hasan (2000) also discussed spiritual training and struggles (*riyāḍah* dan *mujāhadah)* as inner battles against the habits of the being by directing it to always resist the ever-present urgings and whisperings of satan (Ibn Qayyim, 2001; Murtadza, 2017; Rahman, Z.A. et al., 2018). Thus, al-Muḥasibī (1991), al-Ghazālī (2000), Imam Malik Masyhuri (2005), Soleh A Khudori (2009), Rahman, A.Z. et al., (2018), and Salasiah Hanin Hamjah et al., (2020) warn Muslims to be always vigilant and constantly resist satan's enticements and wantonness with knowledge that is sound and certain.

Thus, the above discussion on spiritual regulation from an Islamic perspective explains that both the components of self *riyāḍah* and *mujāhadah* are elements of spiritual regulation based on the spiritual development of Muslims that emphasizes aspects of self-control in the Islamic way. This internal form of social management is an important means of countering the COVID-19 pandemic related challenges faced by staff and students of tertiary institutions.

4.0 ACTION PLAN AND INTERVENTIONS

The action plan and interventions for addressing current and post-COVID-19 pandemic issues are pertaining to recognizing the importance of emotion, mental and spiritual regulation:

4.1 Recognising the Importance of Emotion Regulation

The emotions we feel and express are crucial for our psychosocial well-being and physical health. Emotions can facilitate interpersonal interactions, and guide behaviour as well as improve health (Verzeletti, Zammuner, Galli & Agnoli, 2016). A person's emotional expression needs to be appropriate to the requirements of the situation or circumstances (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010; McLaughlin, Hatzenbuehler, Mennin, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011).

Effective emotion regulation enables individuals to adapt to a variety of surrounding circumstances or settings (Patel & Patel, 2018). Expressing true emotions and feelings is important for physical and mental health, and general well-being. Patel and Patel also emphasize the importance of appreciating positive and negative outcomes using different emotion regulation strategies. Such strategies include suppression of emotions, talking to a friend or psychotherapist, writing a person's true feelings and emotional state in a diary, and seeing the light or humourous side of things. The use of proper emotion regulation strategies can have a positive effect on managing and controlling emotions as well as positively impacting one's mental and physical well-being.

Emotions can also affect a person's mental health. Emotions and cognitions are related and affect each other. Emotions influence the way we think, make decisions, and resolve problems (Jung et al., 2014; Schwarz & Skurnik, 2003). Individuals rely on their emotional state as a source of information to determine how perceptions and emotional states influence their perceptions of information in their minds (Schwarz & Clore, 1996).

In addition, constantly harbouring negative emotions makes a person more susceptible to illnesses. Emotional suppression is associated with coronary heart disease (Pennebaker, 1992) and the development of cancers (Gross, 1989; Jensen, 1987; Temoshok, 1987). Many benefits can be gained from subduing or reducing the level of negative feelings. Individuals report changes in their health when they use more positive emotional expressions in diary as that eventually translate into more positive thoughts and feelings (Pennebaker & Francis, 1996; Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997). Individuals who maintain a positive emotional outlook despite facing stressful experiences have a lower likelihood of becoming ill or forced to use medical services (Goldman, Kraemer, & Salovey, 1996; Catanzaro & Greenwood, 1994).

4.2 Recognising the Importance of Mental Regulation

There is a lot of evidence showing a positive correlation between an optimistic outlook and good health. People with positive mindsets find it easy to consider issues or events that may even be unpleasant to them personally. Individuals with an optimistic view of health spend more time reading about health risks, are better able to retain that information (Aspinwall & Brunhart, 1996), and take the necessary steps to address any health issues.

A person's emotional state changes when the information received is evaluated (Jung et al., 2014). For example, emotionally disturbed persons generally have lower logical reasoning abilities (Oaksford et al., 1996), and studies have shown that emotions have a positive effect on logical reasoning performance (Blanchette et al., 2007; Chang & Wilson, 2004). Individuals with negative emotional states are more likely to deviate from the norms of logical reasoning. Physical activities have a role in building and maintaining positive mental health. Incorporating regular physical activities into one's weekly or daily routine can help improve self-esteem, reduce stress and decrease anxiety levels (HM Government, 2021). In addition, individuals must know where and how to access mental health and psychosocial support services for themselves and facilitate others in accessing to such services when in need of assistance (World Health Organization, 2020).

4.3 Recognising the Importance of Spiritual Regulation

Al Muhasibi (1991) and al-Ghazālī (2000) state that although *riyāḍah al-nafs* may be a difficult endeavour, it produces a positive impact on an individual's quest to avoid deviant behaviour (*madhmūmah*) and to follow diligently all rules and procedures. An example is the consistent and long-term adherence to the various COVID-19 prevention guidelines by the Ministry of Health to the point that they become part of standard practices and routine habits. From another point of view, al Muhasibi (1991), al-Ghazālī (2000), Ibn Qayyim (2005), and Salasiah Hanin Hamjah (2008) state that *riyāḍah al-nafs* is the training process to replace bad behaviour and attitudes with good ones, in line with the challenging situation faced by everyone due to the imposition of numerous MCO procedures to ensure zero Coronavirus transmission. Once the individual is able to regulate his inner spirit, he will be able to face and overcome all challenges in relation to the pandemic gracefully with *iman* (belief) and *ihsan* (goodness).

Such emotional, mental, and spiritual regulation is essential for the survival of individuals and communities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerns raised about the fears of disease transmission and adverse effects of the MCO on students, families, and staff HEIs should be addressed in an informed manner. This will ensure that the new normals

practiced post-COVID-19 will enable the continuation of human civilization under healthy and wholesome emotional, mental, and spiritual conditions.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This library-based research is expected to inspire the creation of a caring community full of love and empathy that exhibits genuine concern for all members of the community and human beings in general. It aims to develop individuals, especially those in HEIs and their family members, with strong mental, emotional, and spiritual regulation that can contribute toward economic and social development. It also seeks to assist the Ministry of Higher Education and other policy makers in providing a platform to promote the well-being of individuals at work and at home. This will also assist them in preparing recovery plans to overcome social illnesses that may arise from an inability to regulate mental, emotional, and spiritual issues.

From an academic perspective, this research is expected to inspire the design and execution of future empirical research to test conceptual frameworks involving the relationship between emotional, mental and spiritual regulation among staff and students in higher education institutions. The potential moderating effects of personality factors and various demographic variables can also be tested simultaneously.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Overall, this study has a positive impact on higher education staff and students of public institutions of higher learning and private institutions of higher learning in terms of addressing their mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is hoped that this sense of well-being will provide the catalyst for strengthening the resilience of the people, promote their economic well-being, and restore their competitiveness spirit in the post-COVID-19 era in the future.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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