

## Level of family support for university students during the COVID-19 pandemic: A case study among students at the University of Malaya, Malaysia

### *Tingkat dukungan keluarga bagi mahasiswa selama pandemi COVID-19: Studi kasus di kalangan mahasiswa Universitas Malaya, Malaysia*

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#### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only brought major changes to the survival of society at large. The spread of this virus also specifically has an impact on university students who are at home during the quarantine period. This study aims to identify the level of family support among the University of Malaya students. This study used a quantitative research method, with 103 respondents/university students from eight faculties at the University of Malaya. Researchers used a quantitative approach to analyze the information data obtained from respondents. In this study, the collected data were analyzed through descriptive analysis methods to determine the level of family support. The results showed that the level of family support was moderate. This shows that the role of the family is also very important for university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The family is the basis on which individuals depend for survival, where their basic functions include preparing an environment and situation that is suitable for the development of healthy family members physically, mentally, socially, and so on. This study concludes that family presence not only directly influences various aspects of child socialization but also has an important influence on individual mental health.

**Keywords:** level family support; pandemic COVID-19; university students

#### Abstrak

*Pandemi COVID-19 tidak hanya membawa perubahan besar bagi keberlangsungan hidup masyarakat secara luas. Penyebaran virus ini juga secara khusus berdampak pada para pelajar yang dirumahan selama masa karantina. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi tingkat dukungan keluarga di kalangan mahasiswa Universitas Malaya. Studi ini menggunakan metode penelitian kuantitatif, dengan 103 responden/mahasiswa dari delapan fakultas yang ada di Universitas Malaya. Peneliti menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif untuk menganalisis data informasi yang diperoleh dari responden. Dalam penelitian ini, data yang terkumpul dianalisis melalui metode analisis deskriptif untuk mengetahui tingkat dukungan keluarga. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tingkat dukungan keluarga tergolong sedang. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa peran keluarga juga sangat penting bagi mahasiswa selama masa pandemi COVID-19. Keluarga merupakan basis tempat bergantung individu untuk bertahan hidup, di mana fungsi dasarnya meliputi penyiapan lingkungan dan situasi yang sesuai untuk perkembangan anggota keluarga yang sehat baik secara fisik, mental, sosial, dan sebagainya. Studi ini berkesimpulan bahwa kehadiran keluarga tidak hanya secara langsung mempengaruhi berbagai aspek sosialisasi anak, tetapi juga memiliki pengaruh penting pada kesehatan mental individu.*

**Kata kunci:** tingkat dukungan keluarga; pandemi COVID-19; mahasiswa

## Introduction

At the end of 2019, the world was shocked by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 is caused by a contagious virus that spreads from person to person. Symptoms of COVID-19 can range from minimal symptoms to no symptoms at all, to severe symptoms that can be fatal. According to a

UNESCO Report at the end of 2019, COVID-19 began to spread rapidly around the world, causing more than 3000 deaths. In mid-January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially announced that this outbreak originated from the spread of the novel coronavirus found in 2019 (2019-nCoV) or SARS-CoV-2 and which became known as COVID-19 (Singhal 2020).

In April 2020, the Malaysian Ministry of Health (MOH) released updated data on the spread of the virus, with at least 5,251 cases of COVID-19 including 86 deaths and 2,967 reported recovered cases (Elengoe 2020). Studies on the COVID-19 pandemic are increasingly being carried out from various cross-disciplines and perspectives. The spread of the virus that was so fast then had an impact on most aspects of life, such as economic, social, and political aspects, which were also felt by various groups, both the smallest groups, namely families and for professionals (Nur Salina et al. 2020, Menhat et al. 2021, Naseri 2021).

Nonetheless, studies of the COVID-19 pandemic related to the social and humanities aspects are still very limited. Because in general, the study discusses more from a health and medical perspective. Several previous studies on the COVID-19 pandemic looked more at it from a medical analysis perspective, such as the infectious disease characteristics of the coronavirus and its transmission pattern (Jiang et al. 2020). Other studies explain the relationship between the infectious disease COVID-19 and pregnancy health (Rasmussen et al. 2020). Meanwhile, research on socio-humanities aspects such as collective awareness, survival strategies, and/or social solidarity, that has been conducted is not directly related to the phenomenon of the virus pandemic or health issues (Turner & Whitehead 2008).

The pandemic has also led to the closure of businesses, sports activities, and schools, and most institutions have been forced to move to online platforms (Nur Salina et al. 2020). Online learning with the use of the Internet and other technologies can expand materials for education, instructional delivery, and program management. Following this situation, several countries started to take relevant strategies to contain the virus, including closing schools. This causes many students to face stress due to suspended schools, home confinement, and online learning (Raj & Fatima 2020, Xiang et al. 2020, Zurlo et al. 2020).

This arrangement hurts students' physical student's health. In addition, other problems such as fear of the continued spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, depression (Wang et al. 2020) and boredom (Brooks et al. 2020), lack of learning information (Zurlo et al. 2020), and lack of personal space at school Home also contribute to stress among students. Families play an important role in making sure their children are not under too much stress from COVID-19. The family functions as the basis on which children depend for their survival, their basic functions include preparing suitable environments and conditions for the healthy development of family members physically, mentally, socially, and so on (Morrissey et al. 2015). The family not only directly influences various aspects of a child's socialization but also has the most significant influence on an individual's mental health.

Hatw et al. (2015) in his research found that there was no effect of family support on students, especially during their teenage years. Similarly, the study by Dornbusch et al. (1990) reported no significant relationship between family support and student achievement but found that family support was closely related to student self-esteem and certain aspects of the learning approach. Such deeper processes and outcomes are positively correlated with academic achievement. Most of the previous studies used measures of family social support, but there are other types of family support, such as material and economic, that also play a role.

Levens et al. (2016), in their research on family support for 181 respondents found that family support is related to the improvement and development of students. Regression analysis showed that when levels of stress reactivity were perceived as low, family emotional support significantly protected against depressive symptoms. When a person shows a high level of stress reactivity, family emotional support is less effective at protecting against depression. Research findings suggest that family participation in teaching transitions to increase emotional support to early-graduate students can help protect them from depressive symptoms.

Therefore, the studies mentioned above inform researchers that family support plays an important role in overcoming stress problems faced by students which can cause fatigue, especially during this pandemic. Based on Wentzel’s (1998) study on family support and student GPA, this Wentzel study analyzes the relationship between family support and academic achievement at university-level students. This study involved 240 students from the University of Texas, 62 male, and 178 female respondents. The findings show that the level of family social support is considered significant not only as the main predictor and stability of GPA score but also as an actor that supports female students towards success without considering the level of family support. In general, the data shows that family social support is more important for the success of female students than male students.

As explained in the previous studies described above, this study is considered important to be carried out to focus more on discussing and analyzing the social humanities side of the reality that exists in society. A deeper discussion in this study explains family support for students who were sent home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Research Method**

This study used a quantitative approach, with a study population of 19,164 undergraduate students at the University of Malaya. For the research location, the researcher decided to focus on students at the University of Malaya, the most suitable location for this research. However, because the COVID-19 pandemic was still increasing at that time, data collection had to be done online through platforms such as Google Forms to obtain data and information.

Selection of the appropriate sample is very important in research. The determination of the sampling method depends on several factors such as research objectives, sample size, cost, and time. The population size for this study was  $N = 18,112$  local students and 1,052 international students. This study selected undergraduate students from the University of Malaya as respondents, as suggested for a sample size of 250 people, but only 103 respondents were available. Because the number of questionnaire results did not meet the target, researchers looked for other alternatives to distribute questionnaires from Google Forms via email and other social media applications such as Facebook.

Researchers used the “Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) Version 25” to collect data obtained from respondents. According to Bryman & Cramer (2011), SPSS is a general software that can fulfill research requirements by enabling several analytical methods including data conversion and output form. Because the COVID-19 pandemic was still raging at that time, the questionnaire had to be distributed online via the Google Form platform which allowed respondents to answer any questions given. The questionnaire was designed through a family support instrument.

The Family Support Scale uses a scale developed by Dunst et al. (1984). The family support scale is a questionnaire that uses six items that measure the feeling of support given by parents to their children. Items generally consist of individuals or institutions from whom the respondent has the potential to obtain emotional support (e.g., “I receive needed emotional help and support from my family”), and (“Home life has prevented me from completing assignments and attending classes on time”). This scale uses a Likert scale from 0=disagree to 4=strongly agree. Higher scores indicate a stronger sense of support.

The data that has been obtained from this study was then analyzed using descriptive analysis methods. This analytical method is used to explain the level of family support for students who live at home or are sent home during the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine period. Finally, conclusions are drawn as a result of the study findings which allow for recommendations for further research. This study provides descriptive information and accurate and detailed data from the processed quantitative data.

## **Results and Discussion**

As explained in the introduction, the COVID-19 pandemic has had both direct and indirect impacts on various aspects of people’s lives. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic, which took place very quickly, prompted countries to apply mitigation to overcome the possibility of an economic recession in almost all countries (Atkeson 2020). The economic impact is indeed the greatest felt, many things have suffered

from this pandemic, in the economic field such as illness and death, loss of time, loss of future income, loss of income, and expenses for medical expenses (Fernandes 2020, Hall et al. 2020, McKibbin & Fernando 2020). The surge in the COVID-19 pandemic triggered uncertainties such as the speed of weak economic recovery, market locking, new business formation, business survival, and capital investment (Baker 2020). The existence of disasters also reveals inequality in low-income communities because they do not have social, political, and economic power (Elliott 2006, Donner et al. 2008, Motesharrei et al. 2014).

However, it cannot be denied that other impacts have also arisen as a result of this pandemic, namely the psychological impact. Many of them cannot survive this condition, thus triggering various mental health cases (Simon et al. 2020, Spoorthy et al. 2020, Liu et al. 2021), environmental neglect of emotional support (Lanozo et al. 2021), and disruption of family conditions. Depression (Wang et al. 2020) and boredom (Brooks et al. 2020) were also felt by many individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even more so for those who are still children, school youth, and university students. They think that the pandemic has affected every existing activity, movement has become limited and increasingly narrowed, public spaces have been closed, and the decision to stay at home. The learning process is also hampered, adaptation to new learning models that are not used to being carried out requires them to make adjustments as quickly as possible.

Another study explaining factors related to the COVID-19 outbreak among college students highlighted high levels of anxiety and high concern about delays in academic acceptance and the impact of the epidemic on daily life, due to disruptions in students' daily routines as well as students, in terms of activities, social relations (Cao et al. 2020, Chen et al. 2020, Lee 2020, Masha'al 2020, Sahu 2020, Simamora 2020, Vala et al. 2020). Fundamentally, quarantine does hinder the possibility of experiencing university life, and certainly impacts academic learning (i.e., uncertainty regarding the cancellation/postponement of academic activities that will take place, difficulties in using digital platforms for distance learning), but also interferes with the possibility of benefiting from relationships that can represent distance in students' lives, such as the presence of associations of peers, colleagues, and professors (Lee 2020, Sahu 2020).

**Table 1.**  
Data on the background of the University of Malaya respondents

Category	Frequency (people)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	32	31.1
Female	71	68.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Academic Level</b>		
First	25	24.3
Second	23	22.3
Third	43	41.7
Fourth	12	11.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Faculty</b>		
Academy of Islamic Studies	6	5.8
Built Environment	8	7.8
Economics and Administration	6	5.8
Engineering	5	4.8
Education	9	8.7
Science	9	8.7
Computer Science and Information Technology	5	4.8
Arts and Social Sciences	55	53.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Academic Achievement (CGPA)</b>		
3.00 – 3.39	40	38.8
3.40- 3.69	39	37.9
3.70- 4.00	24	23.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Primary data questionnaire

The results and discussion of this study will be explained in advance through the categories of the distribution of respondents who have been successfully collected. As shown in Table 1, the gender category shows that the majority of respondents are female, namely 71 female students or 68.9 percent, while 32 male students or 31.1 percent. In the academic year category, of the 103 respondents who filled out the questionnaire, the majority were third-year/class students. In the first year, there were 25 respondents (24.3%), in the second year there were 23 respondents (22.3%), in the third year there were 43 respondents (41.7%), and in the fourth year there were 12 respondents (11.7%).

Furthermore, in the faculty category, this study was taken from the distribution of respondents from eight faculties, namely: (1) the Academy of Islamic Studies as many as six respondents or (5.8%); (2) the Faculty of the Built Environment as many as eight (7.8%); (3) Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences as many as six respondents (5.8%); (4) Faculty of Engineering as many as five respondents (4.8%); (5) Faculty of Education as many as nine respondents (8.7%); (6) The Faculty of Science had nine respondents (8.7%); (7) the Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology had five respondents (4.8%); (8) the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences had 55 respondents (53.4%). From these data, the largest number of respondents came from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

The distribution of respondents in the category of achieving academic scores (CGPA) is as follows: (1) There are 40 respondents (38.8%) having a CGPA of 3.00 to 3.39; (2) A total of 39 respondents (37.9%) have a CGPA of 3.40 to 3.69; (3) A total of 24 (23.3%) had a CGPA of 3.70 to 4.00. Therefore, the data shows that the majority of respondents have a CGPA of 3.00 to 3.39.

In this study, several limitations can be explained. Among them, in this study the, sample size of the respondents was on a small scale, namely N=103. Researchers targeted more than 250 respondents, but due to a lack of a good internet connection and free time, many students were unable to participate in the online questionnaire, reducing the total number of respondents collected. In addition, the country is still amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and the distribution of physical questionnaires is still limited so access to the intended target is not achieved. This situation affects research because research does not have strong generalization power to get more accurate research results. Future studies on the topic could go in a different direction.

Since the announcement of the movement control order in Malaysia, it was implemented to help curb and minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Educational institutions in all regions have taken great steps to ensure their students can continue teaching and learning through digital/online facilities (Nur Salina et al. 2020). Education agencies are starting to establish the idea that they must be able to adapt to a new learning process that does not allow face-to-face meetings, this condition is also experienced by students at the University of Malaya. All activities are diverted through remote activities and online methods are more widely used in the teaching and learning process (Putri et al. 2020).

**Table 2.**  
Level of family support, mean score, and standard deviation of family support (n=103)

No	Statement	Mean	SP
E1	My family helped me with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic	2.57	1.081
E2	I receive the necessary emotional help and support from my family	2.57	1.185
E3	My family is willing to help me during my online learning	2.56	1.063
E4	I can't complete my assignment because of my family	1.48	1.119
E5	Life at home prevented me from completing assignments and attending classes on time	1.90	1.225
E6	Stress from family issues interfered with my ability to study more comfortably	1.82	1.266
<b>Total</b>		<b>2.15</b>	<b>.519</b>

(Level: Low = 1.00 – 1.54, Medium = 1.55 – 2.74, High = 2.75 – 4.00)

Source: Research data processed

Table 2 shows the mean scores and standard deviations for each element of family support. Based on the findings of the research data, one element recorded a low average score, while five elements recorded a medium average score. Two elements recorded the highest average scores, namely E1, “My family helped me with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic” with an average score (mean = 2.57, standard deviation = 1.081) and E2, “ I receive the necessary emotional help and support from my family” with an average score (mean = 2.57, standard deviation = 1.185), while the element for E4, “I cannot complete my task because of my family” records an average score mean (mean = 1.48, standard deviation = 1.119), included in the lowest average score. The overall analysis resulting from this study shows that the mean score and standard deviation for family support are at moderate levels (mean = 2.15, standard deviation = 0.519).

In dealing with natural disasters such as the COVID-19 outbreak all people in society feel a big impact and students at the university level are no exception. To get out of this problem, various support efforts are needed that can be done both from related educational institutions, from within the students themselves, and even from the family as the closest member they have. This support can be in the form of financial support, emotional support, or social support (Hado & Friss Feinberg 2020, Zurlo 2020, Fauziah et al. 2022, Vachkova et al. 2022).

However, some of them feel a heavier burden when they have to study at home, as shown in Table 2. Students feel they cannot complete their lecture assignments because of their families. According to them, life at home prevented him from completing assignments and attending classes on time. Even stress from family problems interferes with their ability to study more comfortably. This is in line with the study of Eva et al. (2020) that resilience is very important in online learning to improve and maintain students’ subjective well-being. Students with a high level of resilience tend to have a high level of subjective well-being, meaning that they can manage their emotions better besides being able to control the internal pressure caused by online learning.

Living with or close to extended family is more likely to get help. A high sense of solidarity also influences individuals and families to survive. In addition, the existence of extended family or relatives also easy to ask for help. Including in this case the support of parents or family helps students and/or students in dealing with academic stress during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hadi 2020).

## Conclusion

The results of the study showed that the level of family support was moderate, meaning that there were negative impacts but there were also positive impacts during the study period at home. This means that the role of the family is also very important for students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The family is the basis on which individuals depend for survival, where their basic functions include preparing an environment and situation that is suitable for the development of healthy family members physically, mentally, socially, and so on. This study concludes that family presence not only directly influences various aspects of children’s socialization but also has an important influence on their mental health.

Family members don’t hesitate to help out in earnest in the online learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic. The emotional help and support they need from their families are also felt by students. Stress due to the pandemic has been handled well because of the attitude of helping each other family members. So that the existence of a pandemic is not only seen from the negative side but also has a positive impact by bringing warmth and a stronger kinship system.

Studies related to family support in dealing with future pandemics can be further improved by looking at other supporting factors. This study recommends several things, including; educational institutions, as well as the government, can carry out two-way cooperation in supporting the online learning process. Providing supporting facilities and collaborating with students and parents to promote a more effective teaching and learning environment.

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