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## Psychological Stress of Parents during the Movement Control Order (MCO) and the Effectiveness of teaching and learning at home (PdPR)

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### Abstract

The Movement Control Order (MCO) implemented saw reforms in the field of education. Students have to undergo Home-Based Teaching and Learning (PdPR) as recommended by the Ministry of Education Malaysia. However, the PdPR method requires parents to monitor their children's PdPR activities at home. This leads to an increase in psychological problems, especially among parents. According to the Islamic perspective, methods of overcoming the psychological stress of parents during the MCO period are urgent that should be given attention to enable children and families to thrive in online learning. This study aims to identify the cause of parental pressure on the PdPR process and its impact on children's development at home. The results of the study show several identified reasons such as the lack of electronic tools for PdPR, inefficient time management, and external pressure from teachers to worsen the psychological development of parents. In addition, it also directly sees the impact on children's emotional development as a result of being linked to the psychological problems of parents. Therefore, it is hoped that this study can help overcome the psychology of parents and further reduce the impact on children's development in learning.

**Keywords:** Psychology, Causes, Parents, PdPR, MCO

### Introduction

The Movement Control Order 1.0 (MCO 1.0), Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), and Movement Control Order 3.0 (MCO 3.0) are preventative measures taken by the government to combat the spread of COVID-19. Several guidelines were issued through the

implementation of MCO and CMCO to restrict the movement of individuals within the community. Economic sectors and activities that were deemed non-essential halted operations to reduce the risk of transmission among the population. The education sector was also impacted by the aforementioned guideline. As a result, children were not allowed to attend school. Instead, their learning sessions were conducted online in what is known as the Home-Based Teaching and Learning (PdPR) method. The method requires teachers to conduct their classes online through mobile or desktop applications on their devices.

This situation may appear fun and enjoyable as teachers and students are not required to attend schools physically, and all activities are conducted with the use of gadgets such as computers, laptops, tablets, or mobile phones. Once a learning session has been completed, students will be given exercises to complete within a designated timeframe by their teachers. Learning and teaching with the PdPR method at the beginning stage was lax and enjoyable. Although with time, teachers and students grew tired of PdPR. Teachers were at their wits end in finding effective teaching techniques whereas students were burned out from excessive screen time and online learning.

This is an issue that not only involves teachers and students, but also the parents who act as 'stand-in teachers' for their children. Based on observation, it is found that parents often become the 'student' while simultaneously taking up the role of the 'teacher' for their children. Older children may not face difficulties in focusing or revising for their classes, but younger children require parental supervision and guidance in attending virtual classes and completing their assigned works. Therefore, parents play a crucial role in ensuring the success of the PdPR method. Children whose parents are frontliners have to be sent to daycare centres. On the other hand, parents who work-from-home (WFH) have to manage their affairs with numerous constraints including carrying out their own workload, supervising their children, and dealing with housework. They also have to deal with interferences from their prospective partners. These factors contribute to stress. The stress in question is in the form of an emotional disorder, which can be classified as a psychological problem. Thus, this project paper will address and classify the causes of psychological stress among parents due to PdPR during the MCO period.

## Literature Review

Pandemic-related research has been done increasingly as of late as the world continues to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Research regarding the pandemic includes those by (Talha, 2020). Greyling et al (2020); Brooks et al (2020); Jiao et al (2020); Orgiles et al (2020); Sahid et al (2020); Li et al (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the everyday lives of people. Social restrictions enforced by most countries including Malaysia impacted the country's political, economic, social, health and education systems (Rashid, et al., 2020). Preventative measures like the Movement Control Order that restricts a considerable number of social activities has led to an abrupt change in lifestyle for the people (Talha, 2020).

In terms of public health and safety, these measures have been proven to be beneficial for the community. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the imposed restrictions have had adverse effects on individuals, families, and society. From an economic standpoint, Western and local researchers have agreed (Rashid, et al., 2020) that labour markets worldwide would be impacted due to the side effects in demand and supply. This has resulted in the disruption of economic activities that affect the income of households and businesses in rural areas (Philipson et al., 2020).

The consequences of these side effects have indirectly triggered detrimental implications on all aspects of life, notably emotional effects on individuals, which in turn can cause deterioration in familial institutions. Studies conducted by Brooks et al (2020); Jiao et al (2020); Orgiles et al (2020) have revealed how social restrictions affect the emotional well-being of adults and children. This is due to the fact that limitations and restrictions placed on most if not all social activities are new and unusual, thus contributing to the increase in domestic conflict. These adverse repercussions are also being experienced by those living in Malaysia, where the pandemic has inflicted negative psychological effects on individuals (Ali & Rashid, 2020). such as increased levels of anxiety, loneliness and depression as a result of lengthy lockdown periods and persisting economic pressure.

The impact of the pandemic extends to familial institutions globally. In France, stress as a result of financial issues has led to an increase in domestic violence of approximately 32 per cent within the one week of compulsory lockdown in the country (Mapjabil et al., 2020). The same can be said in China where the drastic increase of domestic violence prompted an upwards trend in divorce cases of as much as 25 per cent in mid-March 2020 in the Xian and Dazhou prefectures (Mapjabil et al., 2020). Therefore, the reoccurring stress stems from the financial crisis, which consequently leads to domestic misconduct inclusive of domestic violence, runaway, and suicide cases.

Truthfully, whilst the implementation of MCO contributed to the overall decrease of COVID-19 cases, it had also contributed to the instability of familial institutions (Hamjah, 2020). Majid (2020) highlighted that the abrupt change in routine experienced by members of a household is a major contributing factor to the emotional instability of each individual, resulting in dissimilar and conflicting reactions within a household. Examples of changes in routine are managing the household, working, and social routines. When a family manager (the member of the family who is in charge of managing the household) is unprepared physically and mentally to deal with any sort of situation in this challenging period, it can become a cause of familial dysfunction; which could eventually lead to divorce. It is also found that parents were concerned about their children's emotional and mental health during the MCO (Hayin, 2020). seeing that children were also stressed and burdened by PdPR (Megat, 2021).

A study conducted by UNICEF Malaysia (2020) on residents of 500 low-cost housing units in Kuala Lumpur reported alarming findings of which more than 40 per cent of respondents experienced emotional distress. The respondents' state of emotional distress was classified as due to being "afraid of their family's future" (UNICEF, 2021). The findings are an indication that the emotional distress experienced by the head of the household towards their family's future stems from the seemingly endless COVID-19 pandemic. Henceforth, this current situation calls for self-adjustment and proper coping strategies (Sahid et al., 2020) to strengthen familial institutions as a way to move forward and adhere to new norms and post-pandemic life.

In addition, a cramped or overcrowded living environment causes limited movements, thus causing stress upon members of the family (Harian, 2020). Hence, it is crucial for parents and other members of the household to remain positive and rational to maintain their emotional wellbeing and prevent any negative psychological impacts. Whilst negative emotions are experienced by most people during MCO, it should be noted that those living in cramped and crowded living spaces such as flats and apartments experience it to a higher degree. A physically restrictive home environment, as well as ongoing financial troubles during MCO (Chabraa, 2020), are factors that induce high levels of stress in parents, which

would eventually affect their own families. Psychological impacts that parents or families may face include being in a constant state of anxiety, inability to focus on tasks, irritability, negative thinking patterns, and suicidal thoughts.

### Problem Statement

Author + Year	Cause	Explanation
1. Lim (2020)	Emotional disturbance within children	Parents are faced with the challenge of ensuring that their children are not under any emotional disturbance or behavioural disorder. Lim (2020) asserts that an organised daily routine helps build healthy behaviour and reduces stress. Besides that, parents can manage their children's activities or organise a daily schedule to lessen their children's worries and overcome their boredom. In this situation, parents should communicate with their children more frequently to allow for the young ones to discuss their feelings and tamp down any concerns and worries. It is also recommended for parents to monitor and limit their children's social media usage if they appear to be overexposed to sensitive issues or obtain inaccurate information that invokes anxiety and depression.
2. Choi et al (2020)	Worrying excessively about COVID-19	The COVID-19 outbreak and the extension of the Movement Control Order (MCO) are factors that could impact an individual's emotions, thoughts and behaviour. Parents are not exempt from the psychosocial effects of the pandemic. Some parents have revealed that they excessively worry about the spread of COVID-19 compared to their own personal and familial problems. As a result, their excessive worrying might cause secondhand anxiety for their children. Secondhand anxiety is the phenomenon of stress spreading; hence, children might also worry excessively about the pandemic because of their parents. The uncertainty surrounding the current situation invokes feelings and thoughts

		<p>of anxiety and worry; this is a normal reaction to the situation. However, it is advised for parents to not appear excessively worried in front of their children to avoid them from worrying as well. Parents should uplift themselves with prayers and zikr for their troubles to be eased with the hopes that Allah will bestow upon them strength to endure these challenging times. Parents should also look at things from a positive perspective. The MCO period should be seen as an opportunity for parents to become even more productive, strengthen and improve their relationship with their children, and carry out enjoyable hobbies and activities.</p>
3. Berita Harian (2020)	Cramped living space	<p>It is of utmost importance for family members to remain rational and positive during MCO to avoid negative psychological impacts. It is undeniable that most parents will experience varying degrees of stress and anxiety as a result of the MCO. However, the effects are much more pronounced among those living in cramped and crowded houses such as flats or apartments. Small and overcrowded living spaces, when combined with financial issues are enough to cause parents to be overwhelmed. In turn, this will affect the harmony and wellbeing of the family. Psychological impacts that may be experienced by family members include being in a constant state of anxiety, inability to focus on tasks, irritability, negative thing, and suicidal ideation.</p>
4. Chabraa (2020)	Economic impact	<p>Financial issues and poverty are major stressors in a person's life. Global experts have warned that the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and businesses, as well as unemployment could damage a person's self-esteem, which could ultimately lead to suicidal thoughts. The economic fallout from</p>

		COVID-19 has prompted many to be laid off from their jobs. Choi et al. (2020) has stated that there are also workers who experience a salary cut because of the pandemic. This is a major cause of concern for certain communities as their careers and futures are on the line. Breadwinners feel especially burdened by these changes as they feel pressured to support the rest of their families.
5. Mustaffa (2020)	School closure	From an educational standpoint, schools are forced to close during MCO. Teachers make do with available facilities to provide online learning sessions for their students. The main hindrance with online classes is internet connectivity and the lack of gadgets. These issues are especially common for those living in rural areas. Certain families are unable to afford gadgets for online learning, thus causing parents to feel burdened.
6. Irawan et al (2020)	Workload from online learning	Online assignments are a stressor for students, where they are required to immediately master a recently learned topic and complete their assigned online work. Aside from that, the enforced lockdown has caused students to be confined within their homes with a lack of physical interaction with peers, and reduced physical activities. These factors bring about negative psychological impacts among students. In retrospect, worried and anxious students cause their parents to worry for them as well
7. Jarnawi (2020)	Supervising children's learning sessions and becoming the 'teacher'	Teachers and students are unable to attend schools physically by virtue of restricting social interactions to reduce COVID-19 transmission. Thereupon students are not able to study or learn properly because of inadequate study sources and limited internet connection. Parents are then burdened with the task of having to take over the role of a teacher and thoroughly

		supervise their children's at-home learning to fully ensure that they understand the topics they have learned.
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## Results and Discussion

The online method of Home-Based Teaching and Learning (PdPR) has become a need for students and teachers in Malaysia especially in facing the COVID-19 pandemic. This method has affected a lot of people especially parents. This is due to parents having to take over the role of teachers to teach their children at home. Thus, this situation will give some impact on children's learning. Since March 2020, it was informed by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) regarding the execution of PdPR. According to MOE, PdPR is a home-based teaching and learning method that can be carried out at home, a community centre, or any suitable place. PdPR can be carried out online, offline, or in more structured and organised places such as the park or the library. There are some causes of psychological stress among parents throughout PdPR sessions with children at home.

### i) Lack of Gadgets for PdPR Session

The PdPR method has affected many communities in Malaysia, especially parents. Most parents in Malaysia come from the lower-income class, B40. As shown on television, most of them were heavily affected in terms of the economy because of the pandemic that has caused unemployment, decreasing sales in business and many more. This situation has caused parents of B40 households to face problems in providing suitable devices such as mobile phones and laptops which are essential for PdPR. Apart from that, parents of B40 households from rural areas face issues in providing sufficient internet data and mobile phone credit along with issues on internet connection speed.

Buang & Lee (2020) reported in [malaysiakini.com](http://malaysiakini.com) that a 42-year-old housewife named Jumiaty Ilyas, bewail the fate of her family since the start of PdPR. She is a mother that has always focused on her children's needs and monetary savings. Now, she has to work twice as hard to afford the needs of her family and her children's education. At the same time, PdPR requires more attention and focus from parents to ensure their children attend classes consistently without any issues.

### ii) Poor Time Management

Apart from that, some parents need to sacrifice their working hours at home. As an example, some housewives have no time for themselves as they are busy managing their children. Some parents have had to postpone their meetings. Not only that, parents who are also the frontliners such as nurses, doctors, police and many others are also affected. Poor time management among parents caused by their children's education may affect them physically and mentally. This situation causes stress and exhaustion among parents. In time, this issue will affect parents' working performance negatively which might cause them to be reprimanded by their employer or even fired.

### iii) Pressure from School Teachers

Every day, parents are pressured by teachers to make sure their children attend online classes accordingly without considering the issues faced by the parents. As a result, parents may give up on monitoring their children and give freedom for the children to attend classes



or not. We often see that in today's economy, parents, especially those that live in the rural areas, discourage their children from venturing into education and encourage them to work at a young age so they can help out their family financially.

#### **iv) Parents' Incompetency to Teach Children at Home**

Other than that, another issue that arises is that some parents worry about their competency to teach their children. This issue surfaces when the parents do not have enough knowledge of the subjects in their children's education. As we are all aware, not all parents have the basic criteria of a teacher. Therefore, it is understandable that some parents doubt their ability to teach their children at home.

#### **v) DidikTV As an Alternative by the Ministry of Education**

Looking at the situation, parents are now able to breathe a sigh of relief as the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced an educational TV channel known as DidikTV KPM to overcome the issue that arose due to the PdPR. The Senior Minister of Education, Dr. Mohd. Radzi Md Jidin, said in Utusan Malaysia that the Ministry of Education has re-established conventional education TV to assist students with no access to the internet or lack of devices to attend online PdPR sessions. Therefore, a lot of parents said that they are grateful for DidikTV for being able to overcome the issues of online PdPR especially those who live in the rural area.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is hoping that students can focus more on learning and increasing their understanding. With the existence of the educational TV, it is also hoped that all questions or missed lessons can be solved without having to depend on the help of parents. DidikTV KPM does not only benefit the children, but it is also able to increase parents' knowledge while they spend quality time watching the program together. To make sure that the program remains entertaining, parents can conduct the activities together with their children during the lesson. Parents can be alongside their children to assist and guide them. By doing so, parents can improve their bond with their children and witness the varying teaching methods utilised by teachers. Through this, parents will be able to gain further comprehension and understanding on teaching and conducting classes from the teachers.

### **The Impact of Children's Learning Development**

#### **i. Parents as Drivers of Children's Success**

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) stated that parental involvement in children's development is very important. Parents need to be aware of the importance of involving themselves in their children's education. As parents, you should have the knowledge and skills to handle emotional stress so as not to affect your children's educational development.

Parents who can control their emotions well will have a positive effect on the development and growth of their children's education. Encouragement and positive attitude shown in education show their caring attitude toward children's education (Md Isa, & Abu Bakar, 2021).

#### **ii. Parents as Role Models**

Parents are the closest people to children. Children will learn through the process of observation and imitation. When they observe their parents' behavior, this will make the children respond to their parent's behavior. If the behavior is positive, then the children will

apply good behavior as well. Therefore, it will affect the children's psychology as a result of the attitude displayed by parents directly or indirectly.

The role of parents in providing education and care to children to become useful people will give birth to the right emotions. Parents who are skilled in practicing an effective parenting style can increase their child's self-motivation. Every parent wants to see their child grow up well. Therefore, various approaches and different parenting behaviors have been played by parents so that their children do not face pressure or problems during the socialization process (Mohamad, 2018). In addition, parents will be role models for children and determine their well-being of life (Abdullah et. al., 2013).

### **iii. Children's Emotional Development is Disrupted**

If the parents are under emotional stress, it is not impossible that it also affects the emotional development of the children. Children, especially those still in primary school, need more attention during home learning sessions (PdPR). Before the learning session begins, concerned parents need to educate about the ethics of internet use and constantly monitor their learning process. Parents are considered the closest 'teachers' to children. Parents need to have skills or techniques to be teachers so that the learning process is understandable and interesting. When there are parents who take a careless attitude by not asking their children if they understand the topic being studied, the question will only leave a burden of fear and no fun in the learning process.

### **Conclusion**

Conclusively, the findings of the study report that show several identified reasons such as the lack of electronic tools for PdPR, inefficient time management, and external pressure from teachers to worsen the psychological development of parents. These emotional stress and psychological problems affect parents who work from home (WFH). In addition to carrying out the duties and responsibilities of working at home, these parents also need to supervise their children's PdPR sessions. Furthermore, parents, usually mothers are assigned to do housework including cooking and cleaning. These household chores continue to accumulate in their list of duties and responsibilities during the MCO. A decrease in work performance can also be seen among WFH parents due to the burden of tasks that need to be completed at home. In addition, teachers and educators provide several exercises for their students to complete during PdPR, which further burdens parents as they are responsible for supervising their children's homework. These factors can result in high levels of emotional stress among parents in Malaysia.

In addition, the psychological development of parents directly affects the emotional development of children. This has adverse effects such as neglect of their children's education. If parents do not manage to control their emotional development, it will affect their emotional development and learning process. Parents are the main drivers in determining the success of children. Parents become the best role models in providing guidance and words of encouragement as the first teacher who is always by their side when needed.

Therefore, to control and improve their mental health, parents should instill moral values together by practicing al-jama'ah prayer (congregational prayer) with their family members. More suggestions include reading the Quran and dhikr to enable the mind to always remember Allah SWT. Parents are also encouraged to participate in physical activities

to improve their physical and mental health. Examples of physical activities include playing badminton, gardening and cleaning the house.

The findings of this study are also expected to contribute to the development of indicators of parenting skills and Islamic psychological management. This instrument can be used as a guide for the development of Islamic family welfare policy and future programs on family and parenting through related agencies. Relevant agencies include the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWK), the Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS), the National Population and Family Development Board Malaysia (NPFDB), the Department of Social Welfare (JKM), the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), and other related Non-Government Officials (NGOs). Therefore, this study is expected to help overcome the psychology of parents and further reduce the impact on children's development in learning.

### **Contribution**

It is hoped that this study can help parents in identifying factors and causes that can contribute to psychological problems. When the causes and problems have been identified, it is hoped that the psychological effects will not cause harm to the children's learning process at home. Although the burden of teaching responsibility is taken over by parents, as individuals who are concerned about the development of children's learning, emotional stress needs to be overcome by discussing with the teacher and the parties involved to understand the problems that occur. Therefore, it is hoped with this study can help find weaknesses in the PdPR implemented by the Ministry of Education. Although we are aware that education is the most important thing in life, we cannot ignore the development of mental health in fostering a harmonious society. The problems listed above also need to be taken into account by the government in considering and reassessing the effectiveness of PdPR implementation.

Overall from this study, the researcher found some gaps that can still be studied in future studies. Different family backgrounds consisting of the B40, M40, and T20 groups show different levels of problems due to time constraints and also the problem of lack of income sources to fulfill PdPR.

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