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## **Social Distance Toward People with Mental Illness: An Assessment of Attitude and Knowledge**

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### **Abstract**

Social distance can be defined as the perception on the level of acceptance people have towards others outside from their social hierarchy. This study aimed to predict the influences of attitudes and knowledge on social distance towards people with mental illness among university students. The instrument used in this study is Social Distance Practice scale toward people with mental illness which was adapted from Crabb.J, his colleagues in 2012. Meanwhile, scale for attitude and knowledge were adopted form Wahl and his colleagues in 2012 and used in this study. This study was based on a sample of 384 adolescent public university students in Selangor Malaysia. The results showed that social distance toward people with mental illness among university students was mainly influenced by their attitude ( $P < 0.05$ ;  $t = 3.49$ ), not knowledge. This shows that even though people have knowledge of mental illness, they still have a negative view of people suffering from mental illness and distance themselves from it. Therefore, people suffering from mental illness often face stigmatization and an increase in public awareness and support is highly needed.

**Keywords:** Social Distance; Attitudes; Mental Illness person; knowledge.

### **1. Introduction**

People with mental illness are known to experience social distance from their society. Nowadays, there are many criminal cases involving people suffering from mental illness, for example; mother kills their daughter or son, suicide cases and more. To make matter worst, society only has the tendency to show sympathy but failed to understand the situation at large.

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In addition, their efforts to deny this incident have something to do with mental illness misconception in society. This is evidenced with a research conducted by [13] who found that in 2013, 28 murder cases were reported in mass media and 14 cases which is equivalent to 50 per cent were caused by people who are suffering with mental illness. The transition from school to university causes many university students to suffer from mental illness. This has been proven from the [3] stated that young people from the age of 16 until 34 years old are most likely to suffer from mental illness. Not only have that, the statistic also showed an increase in orders for young people suffering from mental illness which is 11.2% in 2006 and 29.2% in 2015 among the population of 4.2 million [14], but it is clearly known that the number of people who chose to get treatment for this illness are very little. . This is due to the negative perceptions that society has towards this illness moreover they are afraid of the social distance portrayed among society if they chose to do the treatment [7]. The most common mental illnesses suffered by these people are stress, depression and anxiety; which means that, they will experience these three illnesses at the same time throughout their lifetime. This study also continues the study to establish the basis of social distance for people with mental disorders. Therefore, this study will bridge the gap in the lack of research on social distance to mentally ill people in Malaysia when there is only one study conducted by [27] in Tampoi, Johor. According to [16], Selangor was the highest prevalent of these three common illnesses with 8.4% of students are suffering from it and public university recorded the highest percentage with 37.2%, 63.0% and 27.3% for depression, anxiety and stress repetitively compared to private university [18] and [23] and according to [8, 12, &21] student was make greater social distance toward people with mental illness. Besides that, peer is one of the most prominent factors in terms of social distancing towards people who are suffering from mental illness as they are the closest and easily felt threatened, embarrassed as well as shamed if others knew that they befriend with someone who are suffering from this kind of illness and assume that they are unable to perform well in the workplace [28]. Based on this scenario, the situation will get worse as the mental illness patient reluctant to get treatment from professionals such as therapist, counsellors and etc. If this situation happen we cannot help people with mental illness to get cure their disease. The implication on this situation, it will make the number of people that get mental illness will increase. Peer is the person that can say close was hope can help them, however their peer was make social distance toward them. All in all, it prove that university student did not accept their peer that was known have mental illness. There are many factors associated with social distance toward people with mental illness in the general population. These include attitude and knowledge. Attitudes is deemed to have a significant relationship with social distance toward people with mental illness [6,11,19]. It is understood that a mental illness patient are dangerous; because of their unexpected attitude, which lead society to create distance as they fear for their own safety . However, this perception was not significant as a study has been conducted and it was found that attitudes were not related to social distance towards people with mental illness [24]. Therefore, researchers hypothesize that positive attitudes will reduce social distance to people suffering from mental illness. The main purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between attitudes, media and social distance towards people with mental illness among university student. Specifically, this study would like to determine which variables were most influential in determining social distance to people with mental illness and addressed the following questions:

1. To examine whether attitude and knowledge contribute to social distance to people with mental illness.

2. To identify the variance of variables that influence social distance to people with mental illness.

## 2. Method

A survey was conducted in three public universities located in Selangor namely National University of Malaya (UKM), Universiti Putra, Malaysia (UPM), and University of Technology Mara (UiTM). Proportionate stratified random sampling was selected in order to verify the number of samples used for this survey. The data collected included mental attitude and knowledge of mental illness and social distance with people suffering from mental illness. Ethics approval was granted by the Education University of Sultan Idris (UPSI)

## 3. Material

This study used questionnaire that was adopted and adapted from the past researcher. Social distance instrument was adapted from [4]. Whereas for attitude and knowledge the questionnaire was adopted from [26] which consists of 17-items, 5 point Likert scale each regarding opinion statements about attitude and knowledge towards mental illness person.

## 4. Result

The results began with the researcher looking at the reliability and validity of instrumentation. The reliability of the survey was determined by Cronbach's alpha.. It is used for the purpose of measuring the internal consistency. Most scores are above the acceptable level of 0.70 as suggested by [22]. In addition to Cronbach's alpha, the internal consistency also can be seen in Composite Reliability (CR). The composite reliability (CR) value also must be greater than 0.70 [9]. Next, the researcher looked at the convergent reliability. Convergent reliability refers to the consistency shown by various items in measuring the same construct. The common measure of convergent reliability is Average Variance Extracted (AVE) [10]. The AVE value must be greater than 0.5. The table below shows the composite reliability for social distance is 0.90 and AVE value is 0.64. The composite reliability values for attitude and knowledge are 0.95 and 0.95The table shows the summery of the values.

**Table 1:** Assessments of reliability and validity

|                 | Crobach's alpha | Composite reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Social Distance | 0.86            | 0.90                  | 0.64                             |
| Attitude        | 0.94            | 0.95                  | 0.51                             |
| Knowledge       | 0.95            | 0.95                  | 0.53                             |

The composite reliability value, is more accurate than crobach's alpha. Then, we verify the loading value in the Smart PLS. The loading value must exceed 0.60. The value below 0.60 we can either remove it or it can remain there if the AVE value exceeds 0.5 (ramlan, 2019). Then, the researcher also search for Fornell & Lacker's Criterion. It is meant for validity purposes. The value must be greater than the correlation between the contract and other constructs in the model. The result also passes the Fornel &Lacker criterion validity. This is

for CFA and EFA. Once the requirements of CFA and EFA has been authorised, researcher was able to continue the analysis as the evidence was sufficient for reliability and validity purposes. . The researcher starts by looking at the demographic information from the survey. There were 382 respondents who completed this survey. To facilitate the demographic results of female students, undergraduate students and those under 25 years of age are the most involved in this survey. First, we look the contribution of knowledge and attitude toward social distance.

**Table 2:** Path Coefficients Table

|  | <b>Original Sample (O)</b> | <b>Sample Mean (M)</b> | <b>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</b> | <b>T Statistics ( O/STDEV )</b> | <b>P Values</b> |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>attitude -&gt; social distance</b>  | 0.16                       | 0.15                   | 0.04                              | 3.49                            | <b>0.00</b>     |
| <b>knowledge -&gt; social distance</b> | -0.09                      | -0.09                  | 0.11                              | 0.93                            | <b>0.36</b>     |

From the table above, the result show that the attitude has a significant relationship with social distance towards people with mental illness. This is because the value of the t-test is 3.49 and the p value is below 0.05 ( $P < 0.05$ ;  $t = 3.49$ ). As for knowledge it has no significant relationship because the p value is above 0.05. The biggest contribution to the social distance of a mental illness person is attitude. This is because the original sample value (O) is the highest. With regard to the results obtained in terms of social distance towards mental illness person, it showed that attitude have a significant influence on social distance towards people with mental illness. Even though some students showed that the knowledge on mental illness exist, but their attitude does not comply with the knowledge, as they still unable to show acceptance towards people who are affected from mental illness. Then researcher will look at the variance of the variable to social distance on mental illness.

**Table 3:** Assessment descriptive analysis

| VARIABLE        | N   | MEAN  | STANDARD DEVIATION | VARIANCE |
|-----------------|-----|-------|--------------------|----------|
| SOCIAL DISTANCE | 382 | 14.59 | 4.34               | 18.87    |
| ATTITUDE        | 382 | 56.60 | 15.54              | 241.34   |
| KNOWLEDGE       | 382 | 59.82 | 16.92              | 286.18   |

The table above showed the mean and standard deviation of the variables. For social distance mean value shown is 14.59. This value means that social distance toward people with mental illness is low, however there are some respondents that have high social distance towards people with mental illness. Meanwhile, the mean for attitude is 56.60. This indicates that the students' attitude toward people suffering mental illness are mostly positive but have a very negative number of respondents. Lastly for knowledge the mean is 59.82. This value represents the respondent who mostly did not have knowledge of mental illness. Then, the researcher will explain the variance. The variance for social distance indicates a high variance. This shows that respondents do not want to take the risk of establishing social relationships with people suffering from mental illness, they can

maintain relationship, talk and do the same job with people suffering from mental illness but have no intention to involve in a marriage or share a room with them. At the same, time variance value for attitude and knowledge also showed high variance. This showed the spread of data was high. This explains that, there are people who have a very positive attitude and there are a number of respondents who have a very negative attitude towards people with mental illness. While for the knowledge, most respondents do not have knowledge, but some respondents have knowledge about mental illness.

## **5. Discussion**

Social distance is related to the society acceptance towards people that have different norms from them. Meanwhile, mental illness refers to the condition of mental state that influences our thinking, behavior and feelings (National institution health,2007). This study may contribute to a better understanding on mental illness. The result obtained confirmed the assumption that the knowledge did not guarantee that they will not distance themselves toward people with mental illness. Attitudes are more impacted by social distance on mental distance. It is known that although some people receive formal education on mental illness, they still consider mental illness as dangerous. This is the reason why they distance themselves from people with mental illness. Campaigns on mental health issues should focus more on changing students' attitudes toward people suffering from mental illness, rather than focusing on the knowledge they have about mental illness. In addition, the results of this study showed that respondents had good knowledge and attitudes and did not have knowledge and negative attitude. It is known that, lacking in knowledge and average attitude, it creates social distance for people with mental illness. It has been proven that attitude and knowledge are reliable and valid for measuring social distance toward people with mental illness among university students in Selangor. If these conditions changed, people suffering with mental illness can't fully recover from their illness. In short, mental illness cannot be cured by solely focusing on the illness itself but also on the well-being of the patient. Well-being can be defined from four different domains namely physical, psychological, social and spiritual [19]. Therefore, if they do not get the sport of psychology, they cannot fully recover. This shows that supporting the mentally ill will make them fully recover, and social distance will only make the situations worst. Further research should attempt to use the instrument to validate the findings of this study by testing more diverse participants in different contexts; as in different situations and probably among medical students. This is because some evident has showed that medical student also have negative attitude and stigmatization toward people with mental illness [25].

## **6. Conclusion**

Social distance toward people suffering from mental illness is related to the level of acceptance from their own social group or class that has different characteristics to form their norms. In short, the index shows that the key observed variables are measured very well and this study has implications for education as it can assists in creating strategies to promote mental illness awareness among students at public universities in Selangor. In addition, the results of the study are also in line with the study conducted by [1, 2, 6 &17] which clearly stated that a positive attitude will create less social distance toward people with mental illness. Future research should examine social distance of people with mental illness in other areas to make findings more general to the sample

and other conditions.

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