

SELANGOR MENTAL SIHAT (SEHAT) HELPLINE: A DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTION FOR THE ADVOCACY AND INTERVENTION OF MENTAL HEALTH

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Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over 450 million people around the world are affected by mental disorders; with the estimation that one in four people experiences mental illness at some point in their lives. In Malaysia, one in three citizens suffers from mental health problems. The existence of COVID-19 may be exacerbating the trend of mental health. One's mental health might suffer through financial crises, relationship challenges, isolation, losing loved ones, uncertainty, anxiety, and powerlessness. The emergence of mental health applications through the pandemic era has tried to address mental health issues among the public. Digital technologies can facilitate direct supportive care and treatment by connecting the health care providers to consumers. These digital technologies have also helped to promote self-advocacy and empower oneself in their mental health and the people surrounding them. Moreover, mental health applications can fill up the lack of availability of mental health professionals and reduce the logistic barriers to service utilization and its costs. It also helps to promote health seeking behaviour as it involves their representation virtually.

Understanding the gaps, needs, and benefits of digital health technology in the community, a proactive initiative was taken by the Selangor state government to develop a mobile application that provides screening and intervention for mental health issues. The Mental SEHAT module, embedded in the SELangkah application, is Malaysia's first state-funded mobile application. The Selangor Mental Health program (SEHAT) was introduced in 2021, to which it offered a holistic approach to mental health issues starting from avocation and promotion, to screening and early intervention. The SEHAT helpline was also established as a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) initiative in helping individuals who needed psychosocial support during the crises. The MHPSS are psychosocial support services that cater to the psychological needs of those who suffered or were exposed to crises. These services are made available digitally, which include helplines, psychoeducation and other forms of communication technology. The objectives of MHPSS activities throughout the pandemic are to increase awareness on mental health, educate people on self-help techniques and stress management skills, and increase screening activities for early detection of mental health issues. This study aims to describe the characteristics of SEHAT helpline users since it was first introduced in June 2022.

Keywords

Mental health issues, psychosocial support, mental health helplines, digital health technology, mental health advocacy, mental health intervention.

Methodology

In the SELangkah application, Mental SEHAT provides validated questionnaires to screen for users' level of depression, anxiety, and stress through DASS-21, PSS-10, PHQ-9 and GDS-15. Based on their scores, users' will then be encouraged to follow the modules and watch the 60 psychoeducation videos to have a better understanding of their situation. Meanwhile, the establishment of the SEHAT helpline for those who are anxious and in distress, helps them to reach trained counsellors via phone calls. The helpline is available throughout the weekday working hour. The collaboration between SEHAT and Selangor Counselling Center, which consists of trained and experienced counsellors all over Selangor, ensures the smooth running of the help process.

Results

As of 1st May 2023, there have been a total of 610 calls from the SEHAT helpline that were directed from the screening tool in the MENTAL SEHAT SELangkah apps. More than 94% of the callers were of Malay ethnicity and more than 70% of the callers were within the age range of 20-40 years old followed by 41-59 years old. Most of the online counselling sessions were conducted individually (68%) and family sessions (32%). The issues discussed during the counselling sessions were mainly family issues (50%), psychopathology (15%) and self-development (12%). Majority of the users were from the Petaling district (39%).

Conclusion

Overall, it can be seen that the SEHAT helpline has benefited many individuals with various mental health conditions. It also has successfully reduced the barrier of seeking help in getting the diagnosis and intervention for mental health conditions. The initiative should be continued and embedded to the each state mental health programme.

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