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Family Well Being & the Emergence of Global Pandemic

FAMILY SITUATION IN MALAYSIA, PRIOR PANDEMIC

In 2014, a total of 7.2 million households with an average of 4 members were recorded in Malaysia. According to the Fifth Malaysian Population and Family Survey (MPFS-5), 2 main types of households in the country are nuclear family household (66.4%), and extended family household (20.8%). Despite the differences in the distribution, we need to recognise that family institution (nuclear and extended family households) is the basic unit of society, and it is with utmost important to oversee the state of family well-being as they are the main driver of producing national human capital.

Family Well-being

A high quality of human capital is an important essence to country economic growth. At the same time, a high productivity on demand brings along a tonnes of challenges and pressures to the family institution. Hence, to ensure the well-being of families is keep in check, it is important to put a balance between the needs of economic and social development, with physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of the family. For this reason, the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) has introduced a Family Well-Being Index (FWBI) to specifically measure the well-being of families in Malaysia.

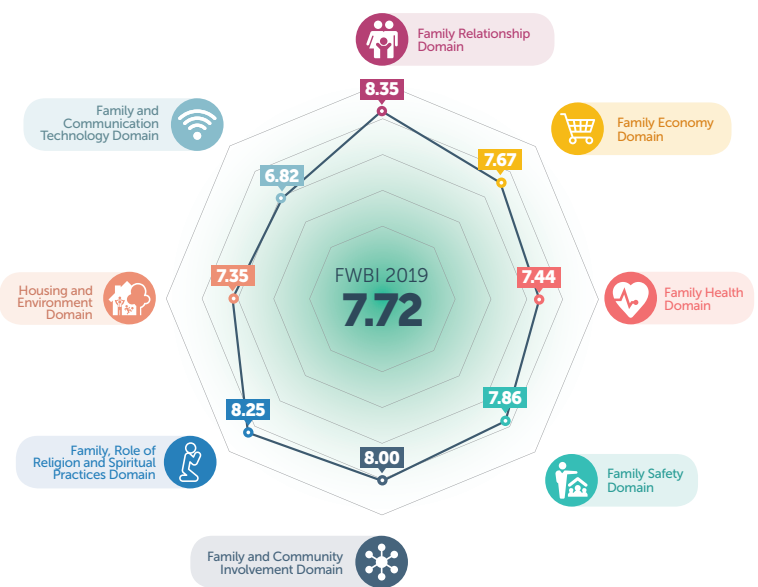
The Malaysian Family Well-being Index (FWBI)

Family well-being is a multidimensional concept that supports various aspects of individual and family life. The NPFDB defines family well – being as a condition where a family is in safe, healthy, peaceful, comfortable, harmonious and in satisfying state. This definition also emphasizes aspects of satisfaction and comfort in spiritual, economic and financial, mental, psychosocial, health, political and sustainability terms.

The FWBI was introduced in 2011 with a score of 7.55 out of a maximum scale of 10. Since then, to ensure that the FWBI remains relevant, the domains and indicators in this study have been reviewed and updated regularly in accordance with today’s development climate. As such, the second series of FWBI was conducted in 2016. The score obtained for the FWBI 2016 was 7.33 out of a maximum scale of 10.

The third series of the FWBI was conducted in 2019, prior to pandemic which start hitting the globe at the end of year. The FWBI 2019 reached a new highest score of 7.72 out of a maximum scale of 10. Although the FWBI 2019 score is still at a moderate level, it has shown an increase of 0.39 points compared to previous 7.33 for FWBI 2016.

THE EMERGENCE OF COVID – 19 PANDEMIC



The FWBI 2019 score is a reflection of the family well-being in the country before COVID-19 pandemic began. Since then, every aspect of our life have been affected and subsequently transform the way we work and doing things. In addition to hampering the economy, the pandemic has also impacting family institution as a whole. Thus, to further understand the impact and challenges of COVID-19 on family institution, the NPFDB have conducted a series of public opinion poll throughout 2020 and 2021.

Note:

- The nuclear family household consists of members related by blood, marriage or adoption. It comprises a husband, wife and never married children.
- The extended family household consists of a nuclear family, including parents or married children or related members. It comprises a husband, wife, children and grandfather, grand mother or other relatives.

Impact of COVID-19 on Family Institution

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO). This unprecedented move has kept people to “stay at home” in order to break the chain of COVID-19 transmission, as family health and safety become a priority concern. People were also been advised to adapt to “the new normal” of social distancing, avoid mass gatherings and crowded places and most importantly by practising self-discipline of personal hygiene, to minimise the risk of contracting COVID-19. The NPFDB’s poll in November 2020 found that almost 80.0% people had reduced their outdoor activities and keep practising SOP during the MCO period.

Families had to bear the brunt of this pandemic, from disrupting daily routines, to reshaping relationships and modifying roles. This sudden transition of new norms has left many by surprise. As a result, family become stress, uncertainty anxiety about what the future may hold, fear of getting infected, job security and financial stability on the line, as well as severely disrupting education system of children across the world. All this in turn has resulted a negative impact on the mental health and psychological well-being of individuals and family. Findings from poll conducted in March 2021 showed that more than 8.0% people often facing depression during the third wave of COVID-19 pandemic this year. This and many events will subsequently weaken family institutions resiliency in general.

Parenting has never been this challenging. During these trying times, juggling between parenting responsibilities and demands of working from home, managing house chores that includes supervising home-based teaching and learning for kids is hard to manage and first experience for most parents. As a result, the role of parents has become increasingly complex and only half of the working parents (52.0%) chose to work from homes according to a survey. On the economic front, the lockdown has turned many families into financial hardship. More than one quarter of parents (27.8%) interviewed in March 2021 did admit that their family financial was getting worsen during the MCO 2.0 as compared to the previous MCO.

Despite these challenges, the pandemic also represents the opportunity to families to re-evaluate their relationships. From the family’s perspective, this situation has created an opportunity and ideal space for families to improve their relationships and understanding. As a result, many of them emerged out of this crisis as a closer and more tight-knit family. Latest poll in June 2021 found that

more than half parents (51.6%), especially fathers have improved communications with their children during the third wave of pandemics.

GOVERNMENT’S INITIATIVES

The government is committed to help its citizen who is in need, especially during this hardships. To help ease their burden, a slew of initiatives that targeted all facets of life were introduced such as *PRIHATIN*, *PENJANA*, *KITAPRIHATIN*, *PERMAI*, *PEMERKASA* and *PEMULIH*. Furthermore, additional assistance such as emergency retirement withdrawal facility, loan moratorium and utility waive discounts were also introduced.

The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) playing its role by distributing an essential supply assistance to those in need and offering an important yet critical family support assistance program of *Talian Kasih* and *Tele-Kaunseling*. This program is crucial as it offers a vital online protection and psychosocial support service for those in need including women whom experiencing violence and domestic conflict at home.

WAY FORWARD

Keluarga Malaysia

Moving forward, as Malaysia enters a critical recovering phase of the pandemic, YAB Dato’ Sri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, Prime Minister of Malaysia have introduced a noble aspiration of **#Keluarga Malaysia**. Besides devising strategies to revive the economy and combat COVID-19, its prime focused is on reinvigorate the spirit of unity among the community by emphasizing values and characteristics such as inclusion, equality and gratitude.

The NPFDB on the other hand, is also responsible to strengthening existing family programs with the adoption of 5 main values from *Keluarga Malaysia* concept, known as K.A.S.I.H (*Kasih sayang, Akhlak, Sihat & selamat, Ilmu and Harmoni*). It’s expected that with strong collective efforts of family institutions, we will be able to weather this storm and rise up stronger towards sustainable economic growth and better future.



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