

## **B38 The association between psychological distress and emotional eating with weight status among Malaysian youths throughout COVID-19 pandemic**

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Stay-at-home orders have abruptly altered the psychological distress, eating behaviour and weight status of young adults. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the association between psychological distress and emotional eating with weight status of Malaysian youths throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were required to self-report their demographics and socio-economic status, body height, body weight during the Movement Control Order 3.0 (MCO 3.0) and current body weight (January 2022). Psychological distress and emotional eating were assessed using a validated 21-item Depression, Anxiety and Stress scale (DASS-21) and 3-item three factor eating questionnaire (TFEQ-18), respectively. The findings revealed that 49.4% Malaysian youths gained weight as a result of confinement, with an average weight gain of  $3.60 \pm 2.53$  kg. Moreover, 18.7% of the young adults had mild-to-moderate levels of depression, 19.6% had mild-to-severe levels of anxiety and 2.1% had mild levels of stress after the pandemic lockdown. Emotional eating in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic was  $36.41 \pm 28.88$ . A path analysis models was built to investigate the indirect correlations between psychological distress, emotional eating and weight status of the young adults throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of path analysis indicated that depression ( $\beta=0.219$ ,  $p=0.024$ ) and stress ( $\beta= 0.229$ ,  $p=0.046$ ) were positively correlated with emotional eating. However, no significant correlation was observed between emotional eating and weight status ( $\beta= 0.042$ ,  $p=0.512$ ). Likewise, no significant correlation was observed between anxiety ( $\beta= 0.023$ ,  $p=0.819$ ) and emotional eating with weight status. To mitigate the psychological adverse effects of COVID-19 and emotional eating on youths, government contingency planning should include efforts to preserve work possibilities as well as mental health services.