

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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# Involvement in Malaysians' physical activities and e-sports during the COVID 19 Movement Control Order (MCO) 2020

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** During the pandemic COVID19 in 2020, Movement Control Order (MCO) was implemented worldwide, including in Malaysia. This MCO restricts the movement and activities of the public to limit the community involvement in physical activity such as sports, exercise, and recreational activities. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify the trend of involvement of Malaysian people in sports, exercise, and recreational activities while MCO.

**Methods:** This pilot survey was conducted among 150 randomly selected respondents from the enumerators around Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, and Putrajaya. Malaysia Sports Culture Index questionnaire (2018), with high validity and reliability used to collect the data. The data were analyzed descriptively using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26.

**Results:** The findings showed that exercise was carried out by 60.5%, followed by e-sports by 19.5%, physical sports by 11.7%, and active recreation by 8.3%. Aerobics, walking, yoga, Zumba, and jogging are the five most frequent exercise activities in the exercise category. For the sports category, people prefer badminton and table tennis. The choice of time to be active during MCO shows the most common time is in the evening, 43.7%. This is followed by the morning option 28.8%, night time, 25.0%, and afternoon time, only 2.5%. Social media 78.7% is the most dominant medium used by Malaysians in performing sports activities, exercise, active recreation, or e-sports. On the other hand, some respondents used video conferencing 13.5% and conventional media 32.4% as a medium for being active.

**Conclusion:** In particular, involvement in active sports and recreational activities declined significantly during the MCO. However, the dominant percentage of exercise activity plays a vital role in reducing the health risks associated with physical inactivity.

**Keywords:** Pandemic, COVID19, Participation, exercise, sport, recreation, and e-sports.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian Sports Culture Index (IBSM), introduced in 2018 by the Institute of Youth Research (IYRES), Ministry of Youth and Sports, is a research tool used to measure Malaysia's level and trend of sports culture. This study has been successfully implemented in succession until 2020. However, the Covid 19 pandemic that hit the country from the beginning of 2020 directly affects measuring the level and trend of the country's sports culture. Therefore, a pilot study on the level and trend of Malaysians' involvement in sports, exercise, and recreation during the Movement Control Order (MCO) 2020 was conducted to see the impact so that preventive measures can be taken before it is too late.

From 2020 to early 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic spread worldwide at alarming levels. As a result, practices according to the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), such as physical and social distancing, became the new norms in life. The closure of gyms, sports complexes, stadiums, public swimming pools, dance studios, and playgrounds has left many of us unable to participate in sports activities and watch live sports events. As a result, the global sports community faces serious challenges due to the actions of countries in the world that introduce MCO policies, such as Malaysia. Directly, the MCO policy affects an individual's sports culture and the community's lifestyle, which in turn affects the national sports culture [7].

This does not mean we should be idle or physically inactive. To the athletes, you should not sever relationships with coaches, teammates, instructors, and friends who can help you stay healthy and fit as an athlete. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that we do 150 minutes of physical activity at moderate intensity or 75 minutes intensively each week. WHO also provides some guidelines for achieving this with limited tools and space [5,6]. Many online or digital tools can be accessed to provide opportunities and encourage people to stay active despite having to 'lock up' at home.

Even if done for a short time, exercise can rejuvenate the body. This exercise activity is the foremost choice of Malaysians during the Movement Control Order (MCO) implementation compared to active sports and recreation. Sports and recreational events were postponed and later canceled since the MCO was declared on March 18, 2020. Standard Operational Procedures (SOP) for high-performing athletes undergoing training and competition were introduced, and they need to adhere to them. Similarly, the public who wants to be actively involved in sports, exercise, and recreational activities must comply with the SOP. The basics of SOP to fight Covid 19 include social distancing, avoiding narrow areas, not participating in events or gatherings, and minimizing contact between individuals. This has caused many countries like Malaysia to cancel and postpone sporting events. The world's largest sporting event, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, has also been postponed [8].

However, moving is an essential human trait. An individual could not 'sit still and be stiff' all day because that is contrary to nature. After 1 to 2 weeks, during the MCO

period, people began to feel restless and wanted to go out to do outdoor activities. They want and need to move and function mentally and physically [9]. What is the pattern and trend of Malaysians' involvement in sports, exercise, recreation, and mind sports activities during MCO 2020?

Based on the current situation, IYRES, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, has conducted a pilot study on the involvement of Malaysians in physical activities during MCO. Among the objectives of the study set by the researchers are as follows:

- I. Identify the dominant elements of sports activities (sports, exercise, active recreation, or e-sports) among Malaysians during the Movement Control Order (MCO).
- II. Identify the main choice of time and medium of Malaysians to be active during MCO.
- III. Evaluate the trends of sports activities among Malaysians during the MCO and discuss its implications in the enculturation of sports

## METHODOLOGY

This pilot study in the form of a survey was conducted among 150 randomly selected respondents. The questionnaire built by IYRES in 2018 has been modified by selecting the appropriate items and meeting each domain through a factor analysis process. Factor analysis has determined that questionnaire item are constructed according to domains and indicators. For example, the domain of passion for sports and volunteerism has two indicators, while the domain of facilities and expenses has no indicator breakdown. Sample selection was made based on the recommendations [3,4]. The number of subjects of 150 people is sufficient to find reliability [2]. All selected respondents were excluded from the actual study. The respondents of this pilot study consisted of various demographic categories, including age, race, educational status, marital status, and residential location.

The study data was collected with the help of 10 enumerators registered with IYRES, Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia. All enumerators have been trained until they understand and can handle the respondent selection process and data collection according to plan. The data of this pilot study were administered in the States of Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, and Putrajaya. The data obtained were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 [10].

Five experts in the field did the process of determining the validity of the content of this instrument. Those experts have reviewed all the questionnaire items constructed and provided feedback on improvements along with a scale rating of 1 to 10 for each section in the instrument. An expert review can ensure the accuracy of the construct and the clarity of the content [11]. Reliability tests were performed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient test. For this study instrument, the value obtained exceeds .80. Validity and reliability values above .80 are high and can be used without hesitation. This value convinces researchers that the data obtained are valid and the results can be generalized to the targeted population [1].

## FINDINGS

As an impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, it is expected that community involvement in sports activities throughout 2020 will decline. This expectation is logical given the limited population movement, prohibition of public gatherings, and cancellation of all official sporting events. These restrictions do not only occur in Malaysia but all over the world. The findings of the pilot study of the Malaysian Sports Culture Index 2020, however, showed strange and exciting results, some of which coincided with the above expectations and some did not.

Table 1 shows that the involvement of the Malaysian community in exercise activities is at a total of 60.5%, followed by e-sports at 19.5%, physical sports at 11.7%, and active recreation at 8.3%. Exercise is the most dominant active activity compared to active sports and recreation, while e-sports is the second choice of activities during MCO. These findings refute the perspective that expects society's lifestyle to be passive due to 'curfew.' The level of 60.5% involvement in exercise activities proves that the average Malaysian is aware of and understands the importance of active lifestyle practices even in confined conditions.

**Table 1:** Activities During Movement Control Order 2020

	Activities	Percentage
1	Exercise	60.5
2	e-Sports	19.5
3	Sports	11.7
4	Active Recreation	8.3

This study also details the types of exercise activities, e-sports, physical sports, and active recreation. Aerobics, walking, yoga, Zumba and walking are the five (5) types of exercise activities most often done for the exercise category. Aerobics and walking are easier to do individually in the backyard of a house. E-sports activities are the choice of young people. For the sports category, people prefer badminton and table tennis. These sports activities are individual sports whose activities are more accessible to implement by complying with the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). For the recreation category, respondents choose cycling as their active recreational option.

**Table 2:** Detailed list of active exercises, e-sports, sports, and recreational activities

Exercise	e-Sports	Sports	Recreation
Bodyweight workout	Board Games	Badminton	Cycling
Indoor cycling	Chess	Table tennis	
Walking	Crossword		
Jogging	Dota		
Tabatha	FIFA		
Light exercise	Game Mobile Phone		
Aerobic exercise	Mobile Legend		
Fitness exercise	Pes		
Tai Chi	Plank		
Treadmill	PUBG		
Yoga	Spelling Bee		
Zumba	Tabatha		

What is the time and main mediums for Malaysians to be active during MCO? Table 3 below shows Malaysians' most frequently chosen times for sports activities, exercise, active recreation, or e-sports. The most common time is in the

evening, which is 43.7%. This is followed by the morning option of 28.8%, followed by the night time, 25.0%, and the minimum time option is the afternoon time, only 2.5%. Perhaps the selection evening is influenced by the routine habit before the MCO, where the evening is chosen for sports. People are still tied to morning and afternoon work hours as they work from home. After completing working hours, including work from home and house chores, people choose evening and night to engage in exercise and e-sports activities.

**Table 3:** The most frequent time chosen to do sports activities, exercise, active recreation, or e-sports

	Time	Percentage
1	Morning	28.8
2	Afternoon	2.5
3	Evening	43.7
4	Night	25.0

What is the foremost choice of medium for Malaysians in carrying out sports activities during MCO? Table 4 shows that social media (78.7%) is the most dominant medium Malaysians use in sports activities, exercise, active recreation, or e-sports. Some respondents used video conferencing (13.5%) and conventional media (32.4%) as a medium for them to be active. These findings give us the impression that being confined at home does not mean that an individual or a family is just sitting still and stiff. They can still move actively and sweat doing various exercises, stretching, Thai Chi, and yoga

**Table 4:** Medium used for sports activities, exercise, recreation, and e-sports

	Medium	Percentage
1	Social Media	78.7%
2	Video Conferencing (skype, WebEx, zoom, etc.)	13.5%
3	Conventional Media (TV, video recording, etc.)	32.4%

## DISCUSSION

The dominant exercise culture among Malaysians indicates a promising future for the country's health sector. This culture is prevention that can be a barrier against the attack of various diseases on the physical body. Evidently, during the Covid 19 pandemic, when most people were limited in movement, exercise practices remained. Therefore, this active lifestyle should be maintained and nurtured as essential for all ages. For example, standing for a while from sitting by doing physical movements for 3-5 minutes, such as walking or stretching the legs, will help reduce muscle and mental tension and improve blood circulation [12]. What's more, if you can exercise regularly as individuals and families, it is a good daily routine that brings benefits of physical fitness and strengthens social relationships among family and friends [13].

Specifically, exercise is essential during MCO because it can reduce stress, prevent weight gain and improve the immune system. We can do exercise and sports activities with the family safely in our backyard by using the online medium. We can still burn calories while doing other chores at home. Indeed exercise can be a helpful tool to

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help us maintain fitness and serenity. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that every individual practice moderate-intensity physical activity for 150 minutes or high-intensity 75 minutes per week. The practice of physical activity should be done according to the guidelines of specific activities and based on the individual's ability.

### CONCLUSION

Doing exercise while at home when MCO is very important to help us maintain fitness and health. *"We all try to adapt to this new normal life where physical interaction becomes limited and emotional adjustment needs to be done. Staying active may be more important than ever to maintain physical and mental health. One way to stay active during this MCO period is to exercise. Exercise helps balance the body and mind, manage stress, increase energy, maintain weight and reduce serious health risks such as heart disease and stroke"*[8]. The findings of the pilot study of the Malaysian Sports Culture Index 2020 identify that the involvement of Malaysians in sports is still at a moderate level. In particular, involvement in active sports and recreational activities declined significantly during the MCO. However, the dominant percentage of exercise activity plays an important role in maintaining the identified moderate level. Doing exercise activities can reduce the health risks associated with physical inactivity. The government should pay attention to high-risk groups, those over the age of 60, by encouraging them to exercise consistently throughout the MCO period.

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