

MSIA Reading Series 13

**“PSYCHOLOGY &
SOCIAL IMPACT
ASSESSMENT: A
MEDIUM OF EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION”**

Panel Speaker:

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Basri**

Moderator:

**Prof. Dr. Abdul Rahim Abdul
Samad**

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Hard Talk MSIA
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Psikologi & Penilaian Impak Sosial

Komunikasi Berkesan sebagai Pengantara
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SPEAKER
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PSIKOLOGIS KLINIKAL


MODERATOR
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The poster features a blue circular background with a white brain icon on the right. It includes a yellow and orange striped border at the bottom. The MSIA logo is in the top right corner.

Edited By

**Abdul Rahim A.S. and Mohd
Shahwahid H.O.
(2023)**

1. Introduction

MSIA Reading Series 13 presents an understanding of the role of clinical psychology in enhancing mental health in general, and how psychology could serve as an effective communication medium in social impact assessment (SIA). This topic is rarely discussed amongst SIA consultants but skills in psychology could augment engagement activities with the community during the process of preparing good SIA reports. The followings are the sub-topics deliberated:

Clinical Psychology and Clinical Psychologists

The Trend of Clinical Psychological Cases

Parenting Style on Mental Health

Gender Effects on Mental Health

Psychology in Social Impact Assessment

which were the contents of the conversations by the Hard Talk Session Series 2/2023 panelist, Encik Mohd Akif Farhan bin Ahmad Basri who is by profession a Clinical Psychologist at the Psychology and Consultancy Clinic, UKM (Bangi) and a PhD candidate from the Faculty of Medicine, UKM (Cheras). His area of expertise focuses on the management of individual mental health such as mental disorders, depression, anxiety, delusions, and others. He is also the author of the best-selling book '*Kekok*' which helps readers on how to listen and give the right response to the vulnerable.

2. Clinical Psychology and Clinical Psychologists

Clinical Psychology is the science behind how people think, feel and behave. This field is different from academic psychology and pseudo-psychology. For example, it is common to make a lot of assumptions about other people's responses, such as the responses of individuals who are shy, arrogant among others, but those assumptions are not necessarily accurate. In this situation, the science behind clinical psychology is important to ensure that our assumptions are more accurate and less biased.

Clinical psychology is a branch of psychology that focuses on assessing, diagnosing, and treating mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders. Clinical psychologists are trained

professionals who work with individuals, families, and groups to alleviate psychological distress and promote mental well-being. They utilize various therapeutic techniques and interventions to address issues such as anxiety, depression, trauma, addiction, and relationship problems.

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² Dr. Mohd Shahwahid is the Managing Director of MSR Inspire Sdn Bhd. He is also currently an EXCO of MSIA.

3. The Trend of Clinical Psychological Cases

At the global level, suicide rates are significantly high. Suicide is a significant public health issue, and according to the World Health Organization (WHO), it is responsible for over 700,000 deaths each year globally where approximately one suicidal death occurs every 40 seconds. Globally, suicide is also the second highest cause of death for people aged 15 to 24, after the main cause which is road accidents.

In Malaysia, a study in 2015 showed that 1 out of 3 adults have symptoms of depression. For teenagers aged 13 to 17, 1 out of 5 people have symptoms of depression, 2 out of 5 have symptoms of anxiety, and 1 out of 10 have symptoms of stress. The suicide rate for this group is also increasing year by year. These statistics are important to show that mental health is important to know and detect at an early stage whether in studying, working, or in social relationships. Someone around us is almost certainly experiencing issues or problems related to mental health. However, expertise in this field is still low compared to what it should be. As a short-term measure because of this lack, it is important for all of us as individuals in society to raise awareness to help ourselves and anyone in our social circle who is experiencing this problem.

In Mohd Akif Farhan's experience in the field, mental health patients vary among age groups. A majority of mental patients are young people who often experience stress and burnout at work, depression, and anxiety. For children, many involve cases of neurodevelopment such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and slow learning problems. For the late adult group, most of the patients have problems such as Alzheimer's.

4. Parenting Style on Mental Health

Parenting style is very important and affects children's mental health. It plays a crucial role in shaping children's mental health and overall development. The way parents interact with their children and the strategies they employ to meet their children's needs can significantly impact their emotional well-being. Here are some key points regarding the influence of parenting style on children's mental health:

- Authoritative parenting: This parenting style, characterized by warmth, responsiveness, clear boundaries, and reasonable expectations, has been associated with positive mental health outcomes in children. It fosters a secure attachment between parent and child, promotes self-esteem, and encourages independence and emotional regulation.
- Authoritarian parenting: This style is characterized by strict rules, high expectations, and low responsiveness. Authoritarian parenting can lead to higher levels of anxiety, lower self-esteem, and difficulties in self-regulation for children. They may also struggle with decision-making and have a higher risk of developing behavioral problems.
- Permissive parenting: Permissive parents tend to have low demands and few rules, often allowing children to have control over their behavior without providing necessary guidance or discipline. This style can lead to difficulties in self-control, and impulse regulation, and may contribute to lower academic achievement and increased risk-taking behaviors.
- Neglectful parenting: Neglectful or uninvolved parenting involves a lack of emotional involvement, support, and supervision. Children raised in neglectful environments may experience emotional and behavioral problems, low self-esteem, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships.

Maintaining a supportive and nurturing environment, open communication, setting appropriate boundaries, and being responsive to a child's emotional needs are generally associated with positive mental health outcomes. However, it's essential to remember that each child is unique, and various factors beyond parenting style can contribute to their mental health, including genetics, temperament, and external influences.

5. Gender Effects on Mental Health

Gender differences can be observed in mental health, both in terms of the types of mental health issues experienced and the way they are expressed. Based on research, certain mental health disorders are more common in one gender than the other. For example, depression and anxiety disorders tend to be more prevalent in women. However, this does not mean that men don't have depression and anxiety, but men may be more hesitant to seek support due to factors like traditional gender roles, societal pressure to appear strong, and concerns about being perceived as weak or vulnerable.

However, mental health problems typically do not have a single, specific cause and we cannot pinpoint the cause. Mental health issues are complex and can arise from a combination of various factors such as biological factors, environmental factors, psychological factors, social factors, and developmental factors.

6. Psychology in Social Impact Assessment

In carrying out SIA, it is necessary to deal with various respondents whose level of mental health is unknown. Identifying mental health problems can be challenging, as symptoms and signs can vary depending on the specific condition and the individual. However, here are some general indicators that may suggest the presence of a mental health problem:

- Changes in mood or emotions: Persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, irritability, anxiety, or anger that interfere with daily life and relationships.

- Behavioral changes: Noticeable changes in behavior, such as withdrawal from social activities, changes in sleep patterns (insomnia or excessive sleep), changes in appetite or weight, increased substance use, or engaging in risky behaviors.

7. Discussions, Questions, and Answers

The moderator, panelist, and participants have discussed and elaborated on the following matters:

- i. TPr. Herlina Ab Aziz asked what the impact of the physical project on individuals such as the sense of loss of land, source of income, and others.

The panelist highlighted that the first thing to do is to recognize and respect an individual's subjective nature of meaning and value of the impacts faced. It can foster understanding, empathy, and appreciation for diverse perspectives. The meaning and value of an impact can indeed vary from person to person. Everyone has their own unique set of experiences, beliefs, values, and perspectives that shape their understanding and interpretation of the world. As a result, what holds significance and meaning for one person may not necessarily hold the same meaning for another.

The most important thing to observe is cognitive bias, in which one of it is "black or white thinking" also known as "all-or-nothing thinking". It involves categorizing things into absolute categories of "good" or "bad", "right" or "wrong" without considering nuances, complexities, or alternative perspectives. Characteristics of black-or-white thinking may include extreme judgments: Seeing situations as either entirely positive or completely negative, without acknowledging shades of gray or considering a middle ground.

However, to see the psychological effects of any development projects it is necessary to conduct screening and serious cases should be diagnosed in depth by a psychologist. However, if you want to see the effect in general and on the surface, it can be done quantitatively through questionnaire instruments to get the perception and attitude. To get deeper data, FGD or individuals can be utilized to be triangulated with the data obtained quantitatively.

ii. Social community development assistance (SCDA) Project Officer asked how to manage individuals with personality disorders where their attitudes change in different situations.

Firstly, in general, humans tend to prefer conformity and being in line with social norms. Social norms are the unwritten rules and expectations that govern behavior within a particular society or group. Conforming to these norms helps individuals feel a sense of belonging, acceptance, and validation from others.

Secondly, it may happen because of personal growth and development where attitudes can evolve as individuals gain new knowledge, develop a broader perspective, or go through personal growth and maturation processes. New information, experiences, or exposure to different perspectives can challenge or modify existing attitudes. For example, interacting with individuals from different backgrounds or receiving new information can lead to attitude change.

Lastly, diagnosing a personality disorder involves a comprehensive evaluation conducted by a qualified mental health professional, such as a psychiatrist or psychologist. The process typically includes a clinical interview where a mental health professional will conduct a structured or semi-structured interview to gather information about the individual's symptoms, personal history, and current mental functions. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) or another diagnostic manual to assess if the individual's symptoms align with the criteria for a specific personality disorder.

In general, to deal with people like this, should always take an attitude of 'benefit outweighs the risk' where the advantages or positive aspects of something are more significant than the drawbacks or negative aspects. It suggests that the overall outcome or result of a particular action, decision, or situation is favorable or advantageous despite any potential drawbacks. Furthermore, we can always "Agree to disagree" to acknowledge and accept that two or more parties hold different opinions or viewpoints on a particular matter, but they choose not to continue debating or trying to convince each other. It is a way to peacefully resolve a disagreement or avoid further conflict by recognizing that individuals have a right to their perspectives and that it is okay to maintain differing opinions.

iii. To an enquiry on relevant steps to be taken to reduce the anxiety of communities that are directly affected by a development project, the panelist recommended the following:

Reducing anxiety within communities that are directly affected by a development project requires proactive and inclusive measures to address concerns, foster communication, and build trust. The most important thing is to control the outcome of the anxiety by:

- Early and transparent engagement: Initiate the engagement process as early as possible to involve the community from the project's inception. Communicate the project goals, scope, and potential impacts, and provide opportunities for community input and feedback.
- Effective communication: Maintain clear and consistent communication channels throughout the project. Provide regular updates on progress, address concerns promptly, and be transparent about any changes or challenges.
- Demonstrating that their voices are heard and valued can help alleviate anxiety.
- Involve mental health specialists in the SIA for community engagement and utilizing local knowledge and resources can also be beneficial in designing and implementing effective strategies to reduce anxiety and foster community support.

iv. TPr. Herlina Ab Aziz, shared her experience encountered while doing research for the railway project from Kuala Lumpur to Johor Bahru. The issue is the presence of misinformation that a station will be built around the residents' houses. These residents were very aggressive and did not cooperate during the SIA study.

The problem of misinformation indeed has the potential to cause anger and confusion within society. Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information that is spread either knowingly or unknowingly, often through various media platforms. Indeed, humans can be easily misunderstood due to several causal

factors. One of the main causes is when the information is not acquired firsthand and the interpretations would vary, caused by subjectivity and biases. Each person's perception is shaped by their own subjective experiences, beliefs, values, and biases. These subjectivities can influence how individuals perceive and interpret information, leading to misunderstandings or misjudgments about a project that has been planned.

To address and reduce misunderstandings, it's important to:

- Foster open communication: Encourage open and honest dialogue, active listening, and empathy to facilitate better understanding between individuals.
- Seek clarification of the real cause of the fear among the society. Instead of making assumptions, ask questions and seek clarification when something is unclear or when there is a potential misunderstanding. This helps to ensure that you have an accurate understanding of the other person's perspective.
- Add a human touch to explaining something because it taps into our natural inclination for interpersonal connection and understanding. Human touch can be a powerful complement to verbal communication when used appropriately and in alignment with the comfort levels of both parties involved. It has the potential to enhance understanding, create emotional connections, and convey support and empathy,

v. To a question on how as a consultant can control their feelings from provocation, accusation, and anger of respondents when doing research in the field.

First of all, it is necessary to ensure that there is no compromise on personal safety. Not only the aspect of physical safety but also mental abuse such as slander, and swearing should not happen to a consultant. Mental abuse, also known as psychological or emotional abuse, involves behaviors or actions that deliberately harm a person's emotional well-being, self-esteem, and mental health. It is a form of abuse that can have severe and long-lasting effects on an individual's overall well-being.

Secondly, there is a need to learn to control the inner feelings when faced with such situations. If the consultant himself cannot control his feelings, then it is more difficult to control the reaction or response from the residents or other stakeholders. Being aware of one's own emotions and triggers, is an essential aspect of emotional intelligence and self-care.

Thirdly, controlling one's own breathing can be a helpful technique to manage overthinking and promote a sense of calm and relaxation. Controlled breathing can be used to regain control over one's thoughts. Take a deep breath in, inhale slowly and deeply through your nose, filling your lungs with air. Allow your abdomen to expand as you breathe in. Exhale slowly through your mouth, letting go of any tension or stress with each breath. Focus on the sensation of the breath leaving your body.

vi. TPr. Herlina Ab Aziz shared her experience on how to manage a hostile situation with a respondent.

Firstly, create a suitable environment for managing a heated discussion can help foster open communication, respect, and the potential for resolution. Ensure physical comfort: Arrange seating and the physical environment in a way that promotes comfort and equality. Make sure everyone has a seat at the table and feels physically at ease during the discussion.

Secondly, disconnecting yourself from a hostile situation is important for your well-being and safety. Recognize the signs of hostility, such as aggressive behavior, verbal attacks, or a tense atmosphere. Assess the potential risks and determine if it's necessary to remove yourself from the situation. Stay calm and composed: It's important to maintain your composure and avoid escalating the situation further. Take deep breaths, focus on grounding yourself, and try to remain as calm as possible.

8. Conclusion

By integrating psychological insights into social impact assessments, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of how projects and policies affect people's lives, emotions, and well-being. This knowledge in psychology can lead to a more informed decision-making

pertaining to development projects, and can support the creation of interventions that address both the social and psychological dimensions of human impact. MSIA acknowledges that psychological aspects should be given due attention in the implementation of the SIA studies. MSIA members are encouraged to acquire skills in the field of psychology to be more effective in their engagements with the communities potentially affected by the proposed development projects that they are preparing SIA reports.

Acknowledgment

The contributions and deliberations of the panelist and participants during the MSIA Hard Talk Session Series 2/2023 session are very much appreciated.

Disclaimer

In the spirit of inclusivity and transparency, MSIA is open and frequently invites experts of various fields and stakeholders to share their perspectives on how the SIA processes can be more effective. Their views are analysed and reported. Any views and assumptions expressed however are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect that of MSIA.