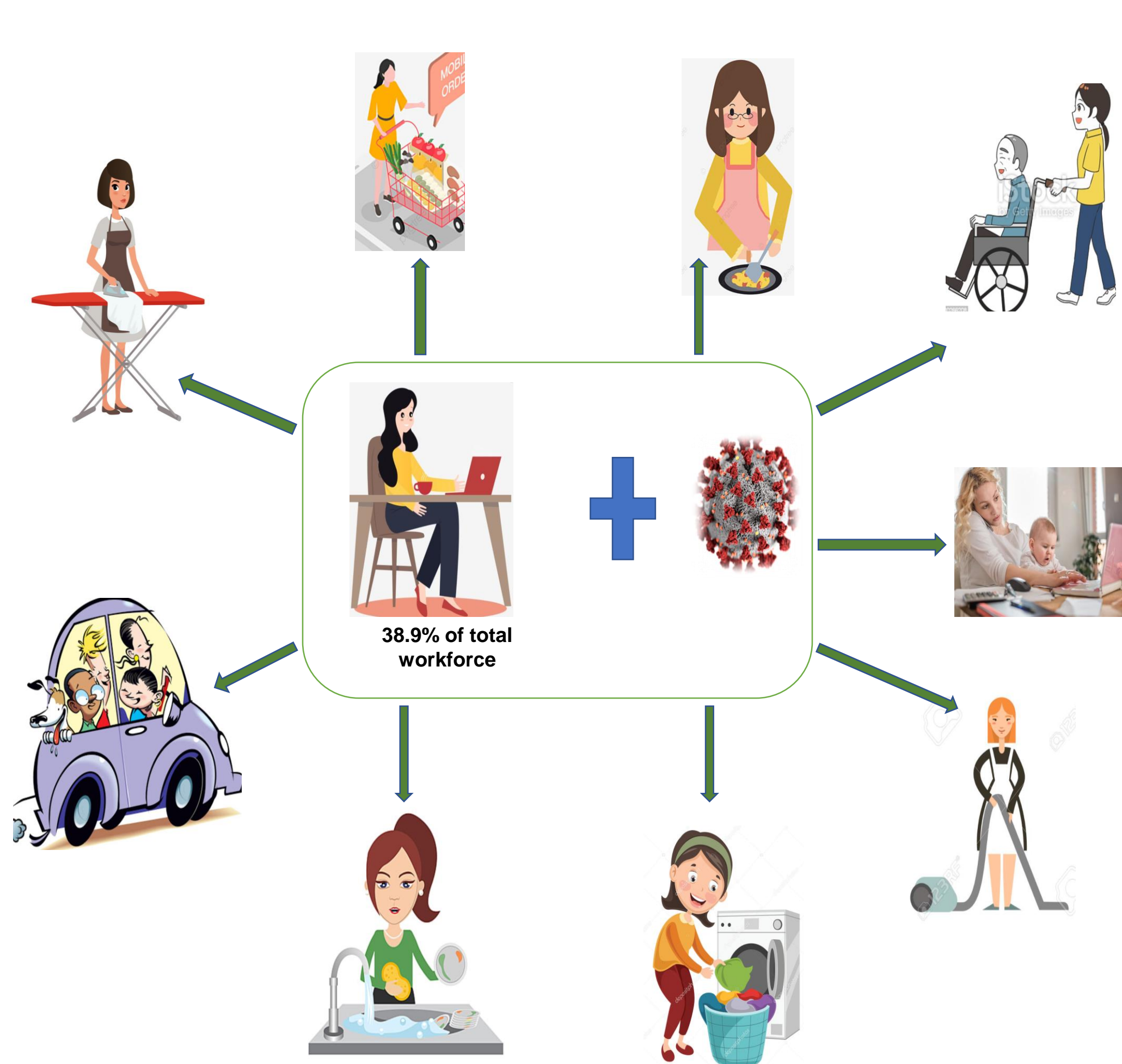# Investigating the Impact of Social Networks on Women Working from Home (WFH) in Alleviating Psychological Distress

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Team members:
1. Dr Jamilah Hanum bt Abdul Khaiyom
2. Prof Dr Mira Kartiwi
3. Awis Rumaisya Azizan

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

38.9% of total workforce

- 37%(664) emotional distress
- 33%(592) depression
- 24%(430) stress
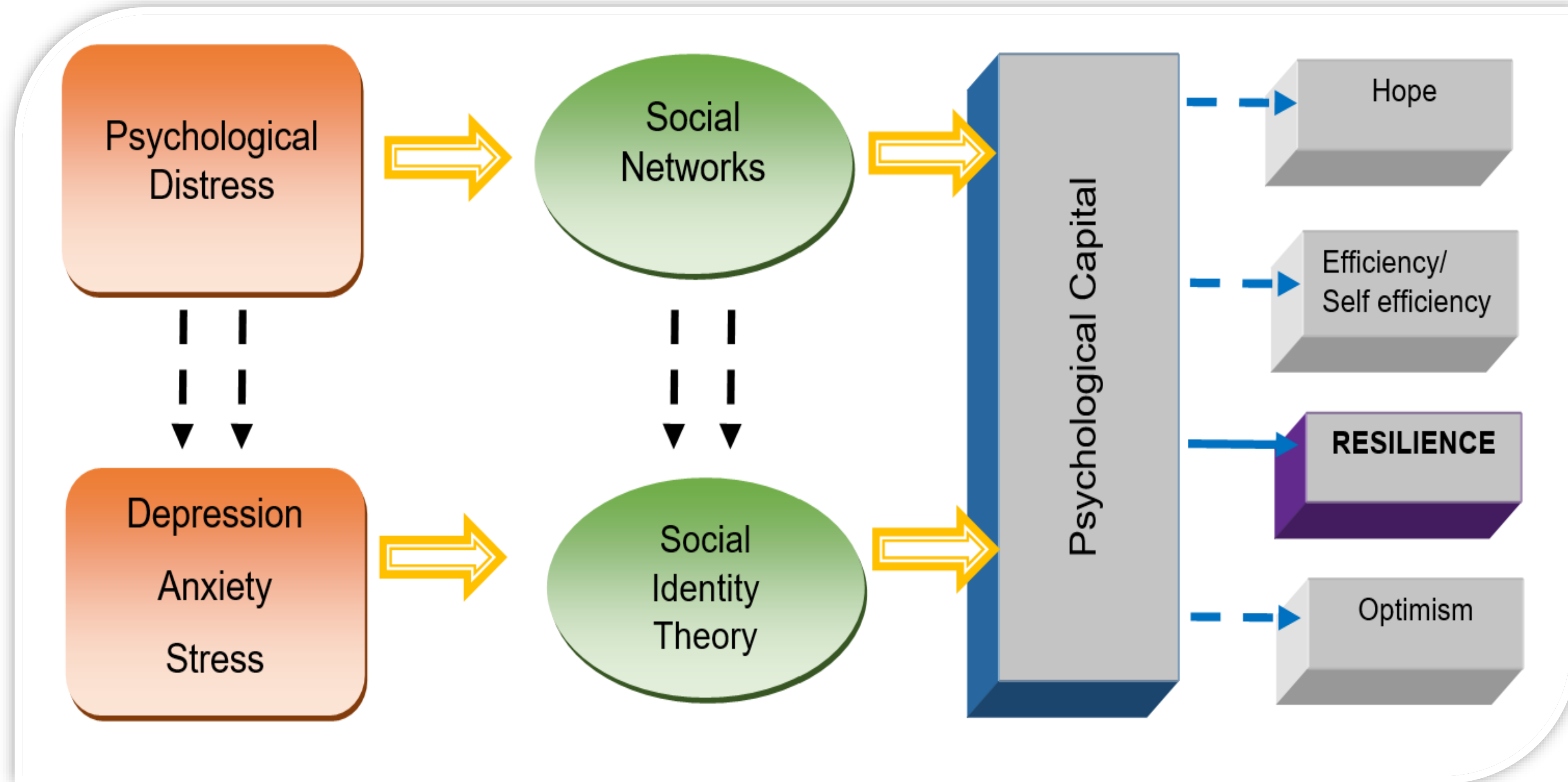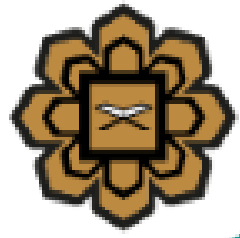(Balakrishnan, 2020)

SOCIAL NETWORKS
for support

Main Objectives: To understand the **impact of social networks in assisting women (WFH) to cope with psychological distress** and provide suggestions on how the **social networks can be further leveraged** to develop the **women's resilience** in facing future health threats.

Research Objectives

1 To identify the **level of psychological distress** faced by women (WFH)

2 To investigate the **extent** to which social networks help women (WFH) to cope with psychological distress.

3 To investigate the women's (WFH) **perceptions** on the effectiveness of social networks to provide support to them in coping with psychological distress

4 To provide **suggestions** on how the internet (including social networks) can be further leveraged to provide support to women (WFH) in coping with psychological distress and make them more resilient.
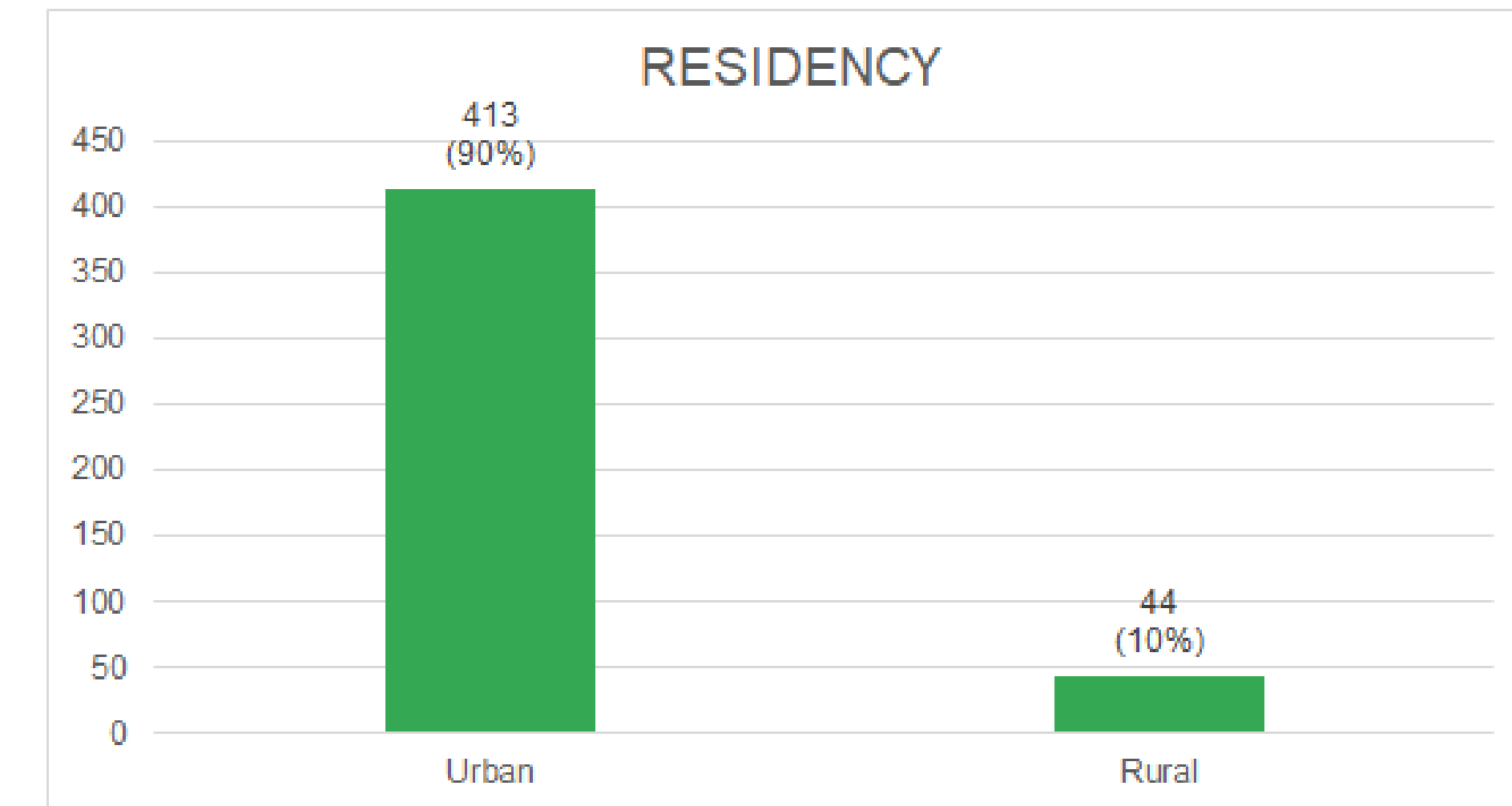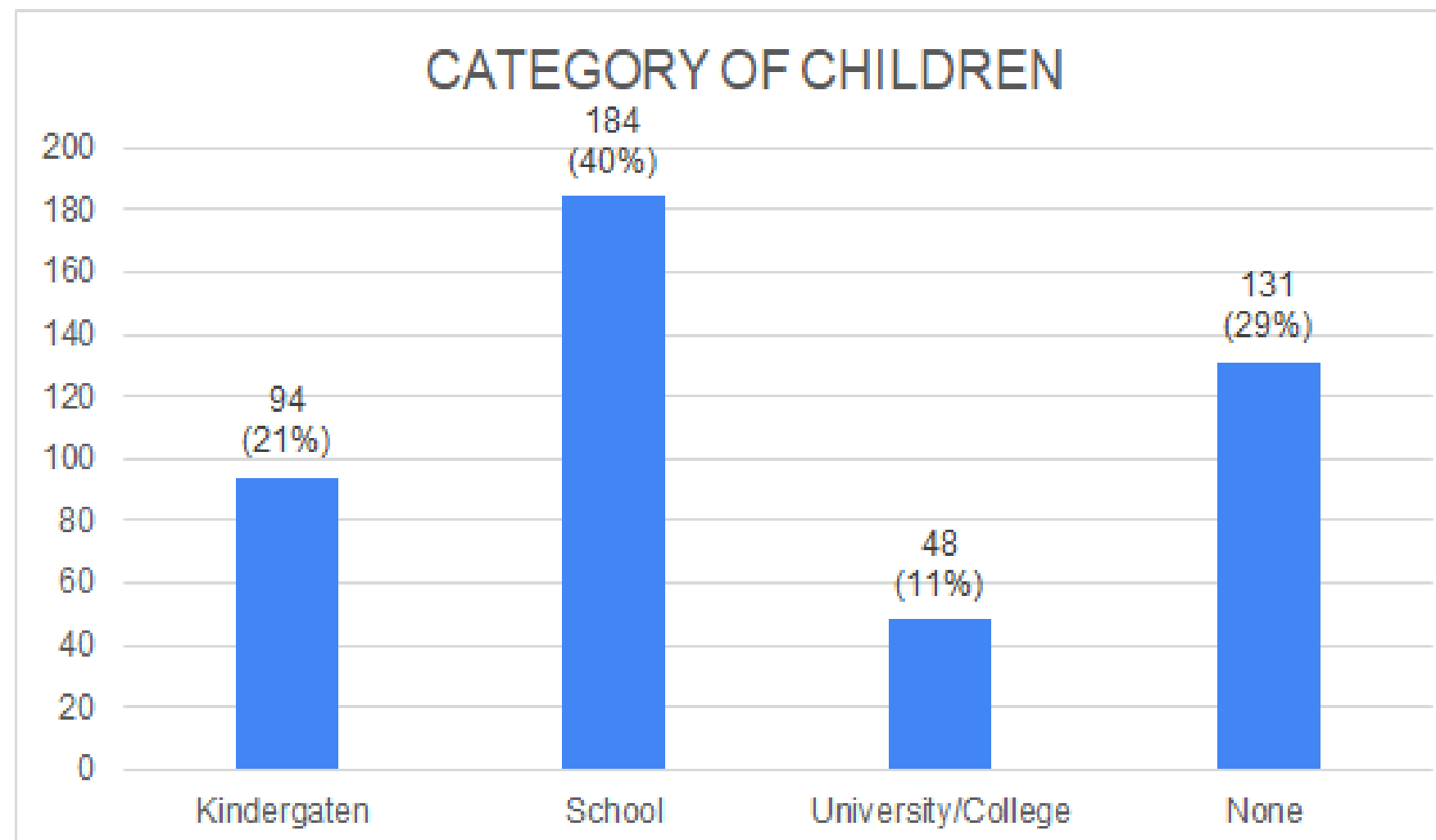
Methodology

Research Objective	Research Question	Data collection/Analysis	Participants
To identify the level of psychological distress faced by women (WFH)	What is the level of psychological distress faced by women (WFH)?	Self-report questionnaire (DASS 21)	**Quantitative** Convenient sampling No of respondents: 443
To investigate the extent to which social networks help women (WFH) to cope with psychological distress.	How does social networks help women (WFH) in coping with psychological distress?	1. Online survey questionnaire 2. Online semi-structured interview	**Qualitative** 1. Online survey – convenient sampling – no of 443 respondents 2. Virtual online semi-structured interview – convenient sampling – no of respondents (20)
To investigate the women's (WFH) perception on the effectiveness of social networks to provide support to them in coping with psychological distress.	What is the perception of women (WFH) on the effectiveness of social networks in providing support to them to cope with psychological distress?		

FINDINGS (QUANTITATIVE: n=457)

Demographic Profile

EDUCATION

- High School: 15 (3%)
- Diploma: 42 (9%)
- Degree: 211 (46%)
- Master: 123 (27%)
- PhD: 66 (14%)

Marital Status

- Married: 407 (89%)
- Unmarried: 79 (17%)
- Single Mother: 23 (5%)

CATEGORY OF CHILDREN

- Kindergaten: 94 (21%)
- School: 184 (40%)
- University/College: 48 (11%)
- None: 131 (29%)

RESIDENCY

- Urban: 413 (90%)
- Rural: 44 (10%)

DASS 21
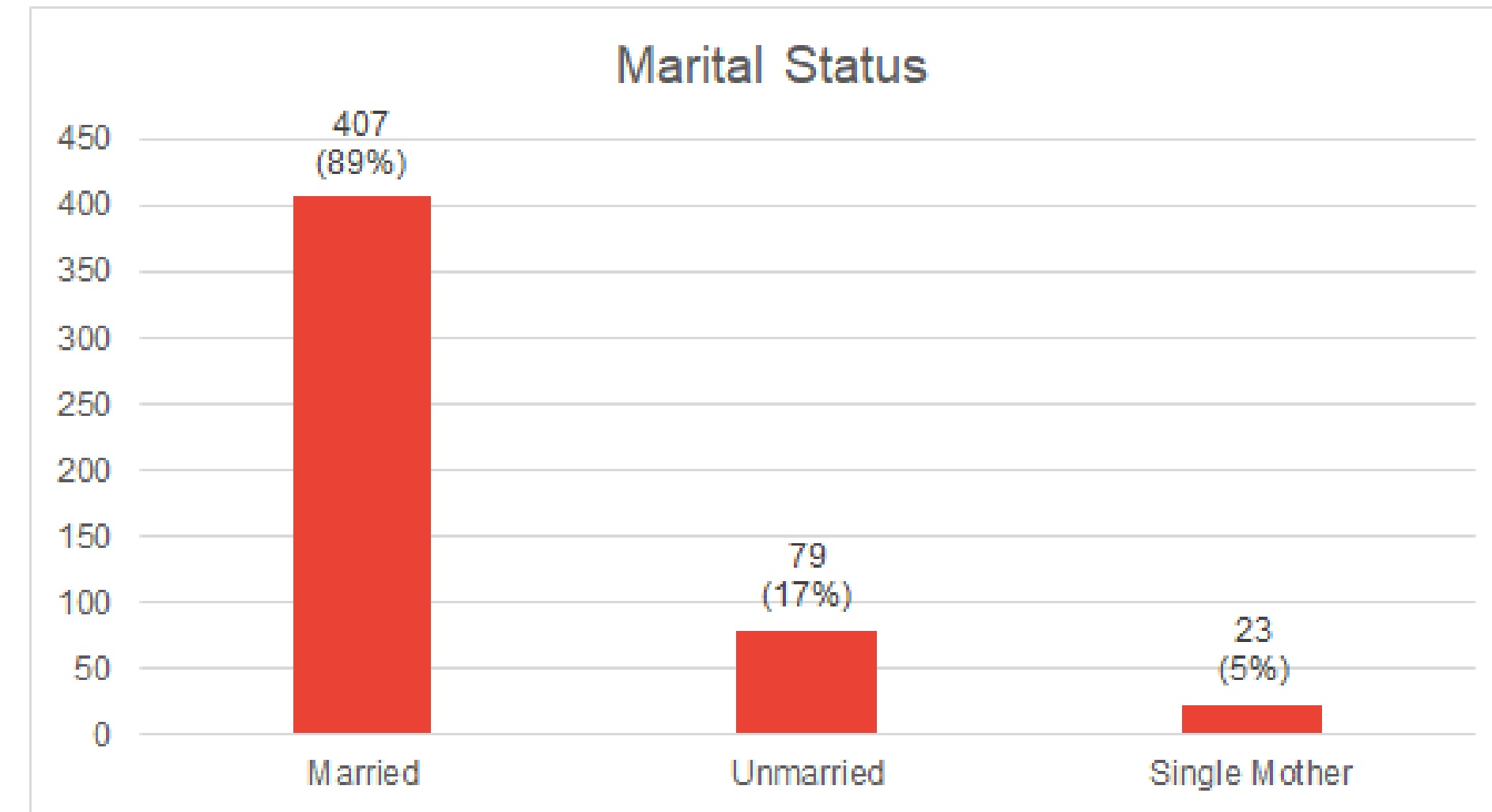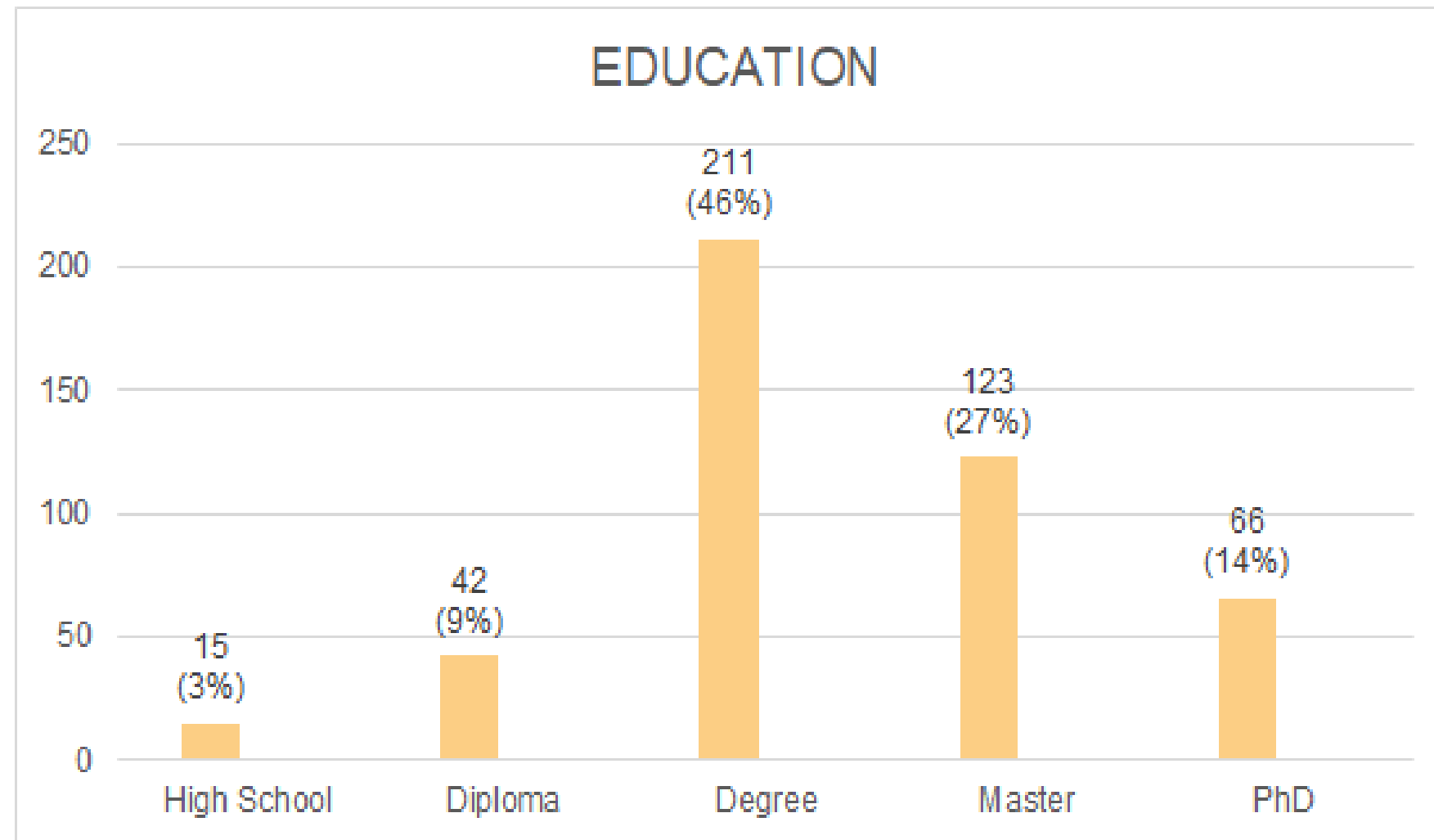
DEPRESSION - Mental Health Status

	Bandar	Luar Bandar
Normal	72.88%	68.18%
Mild	15.50%	18.18%
Moderate	7.75%	11.36%
Severe	2.42%	
Extremely Severe	1.45%	2.27%
Grand Total	100.00%	100.00%

Those in the rural areas experienced higher level of depression, anxiety & stress.
However, due to the limited sample size on rural, this finding cannot be generalised.

ANXIETY - Mental Health Status

	Bandar	Luar Bandar
Normal	60.53%	50.00%
Mild	15.50%	20.45%
Moderate	11.38%	13.64%
Severe	6.05%	2.27%
Extremely Severe	6.54%	13.64%
Grand Total	100.00%	100.00%

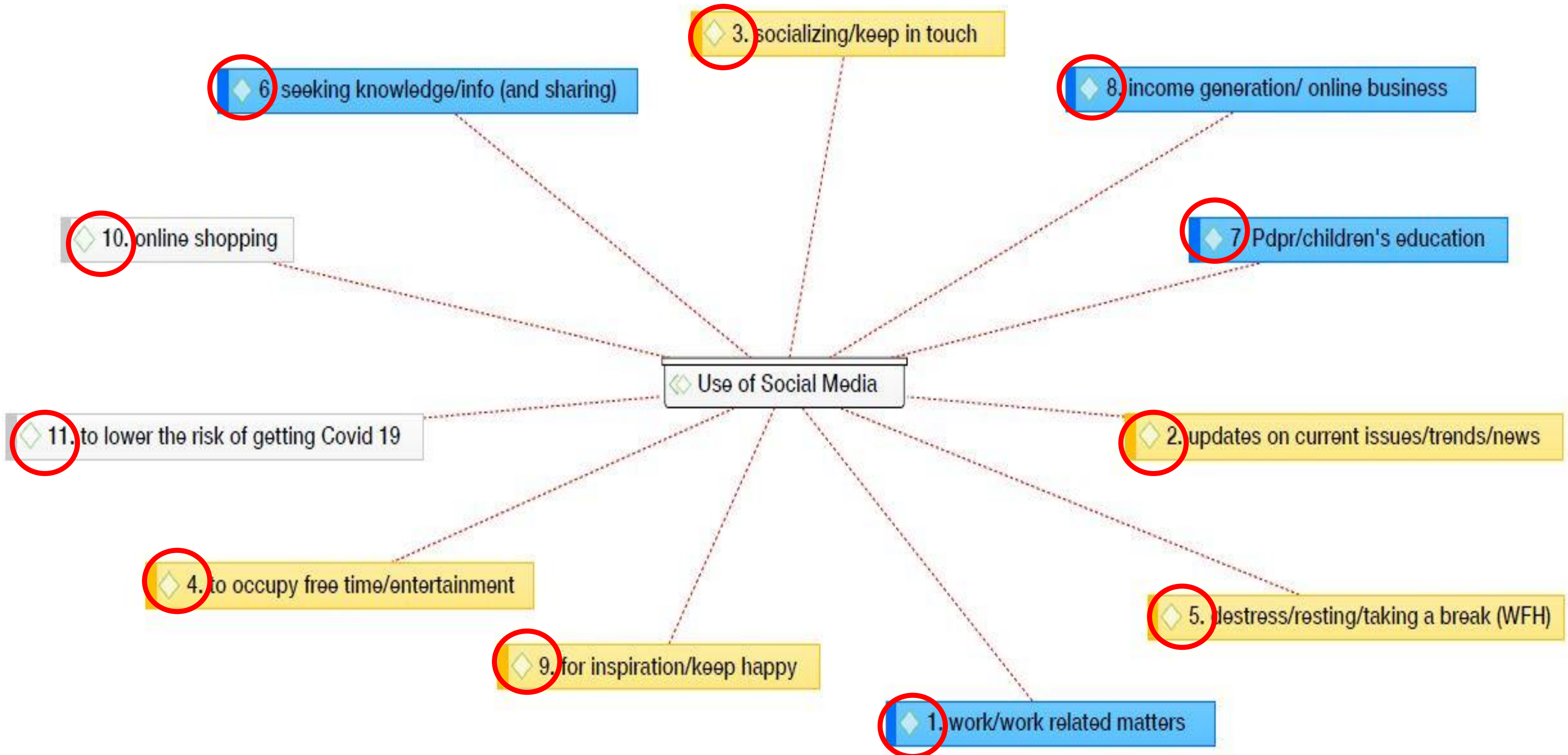Women from both urban & rural experienced **anxiety** more than depression & stress

STRESS - Mental Health Status

	Bandar	Luar Bandar
Normal	79.90%	72.73%
Mild	7.51%	9.09%
Moderate	5.33%	13.64%
Severe	5.57%	
Extremely Severe	1.69%	4.55%
Grand Total	100.00%	100.00%

These findings are **indicative** in nature as DASS 21 is just a screening tool. Clinical assessment needs to be performed in order to reach a more conclusive outcome.

Hours Spent On Social Media

- 1-2 hours per day
- 3-5 hours per day
- 6-10 hours per day
- more than 10 hours per day

16%
21%
27%
36%

WeChat, Pinterest, Kakao Line, Reddit, Viber, Slack

Types of social media

Type	Value
Others	13
Email	6
Youtube	8
Tiktok	18
Video Conferencing	26
Telegram	272
Whatsapp	449
Twitter	90
Instagram	287
Facebook	360

Use of Social Media

- 3. socializing/keep in touch
- 6. seeking knowledge/info (and sharing)
- 8. income generation/ online business
- 10. online shopping
- 7. Pdpr/children's education
- Use of Social Media
- 11. to lower the risk of getting Covid 19
- 2. updates on current issues/trends/news
- 4. to occupy free time/entertainment
- 5. destress/resting/taking a break (WFH)
- 9. for inspiration/keep happy
- 1. work/work related matters

CHALLENGES	NUMBER OF QUOTES		
	Urban	Rural	Quotes
Adapt to new norm - stressful	4	0	4
Boring routine	3	0	3
Children online learning- stressful	17	0	17
Lack of interaction	17	3	20
Family matters/handling children	18	3	21
Unconducive working environment	9	0	9
Internet connection	23	4	27
Juggling different responsibilities (work/family/study)	102	13	115
Lack of energy, sleep, rest and eat.	3	2	5
Lack of social support	6	1	7
Long hours of being indoor	1	0	1
Lack of focus on work due to family	27	3	30
Low self-esteem, not confident	1	0	1
Need for more gadget/upgrade IT skill	5	0	5
Limited activity & dormant life	2	1	3
Time management-too many things to handle	28	0	28
Difficult to remain positive/discipline	3	0	3
Lack of resources to get work done	38	2	40
Work related (teaching challenges)	26	2	28
Workload & long working hours	35	7	42
	368	41	409

Challenges in working from home during the pandemic

Top 3 challenges:
1. Juggling different responsibilities
2. Workload & long working hours
3. Lack of resources to get work done

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Feelings on working from home during the pandemic

FEELINGS	NUMBER OF QUOTES		
	Urban	Rural	Quotes
Happy/okay/positive (+ve)	68	5	73
More relax after some time (+ve)	6	0	6
Agitated/annoyed or angry	4	1	5
Bored	9	2	11
Guilty	3	0	3
Lonely	4	0	4
Mixed feeling	27	3	30
Stress/challenging/overwhelming	53	8	61
Tired/lethargic	29	2	31
Unhappy/distracted/anxiety/demotivated	31	4	35
	234	25	259

Positive feelings:
74 quotes were found in the Urban, while only 5 were found in the Rural.

Negative feelings:
1.Stress/challenging/ overwhelming
2.Unhappy/distracted/anxiety/ demotivated
3. Tired/ lethargic

Effectiveness of social media to provide support to women in handling emotional distress

	URBAN	RURAL
■ NO	70	9
■ YES	328	36

Perceptions on Social Media
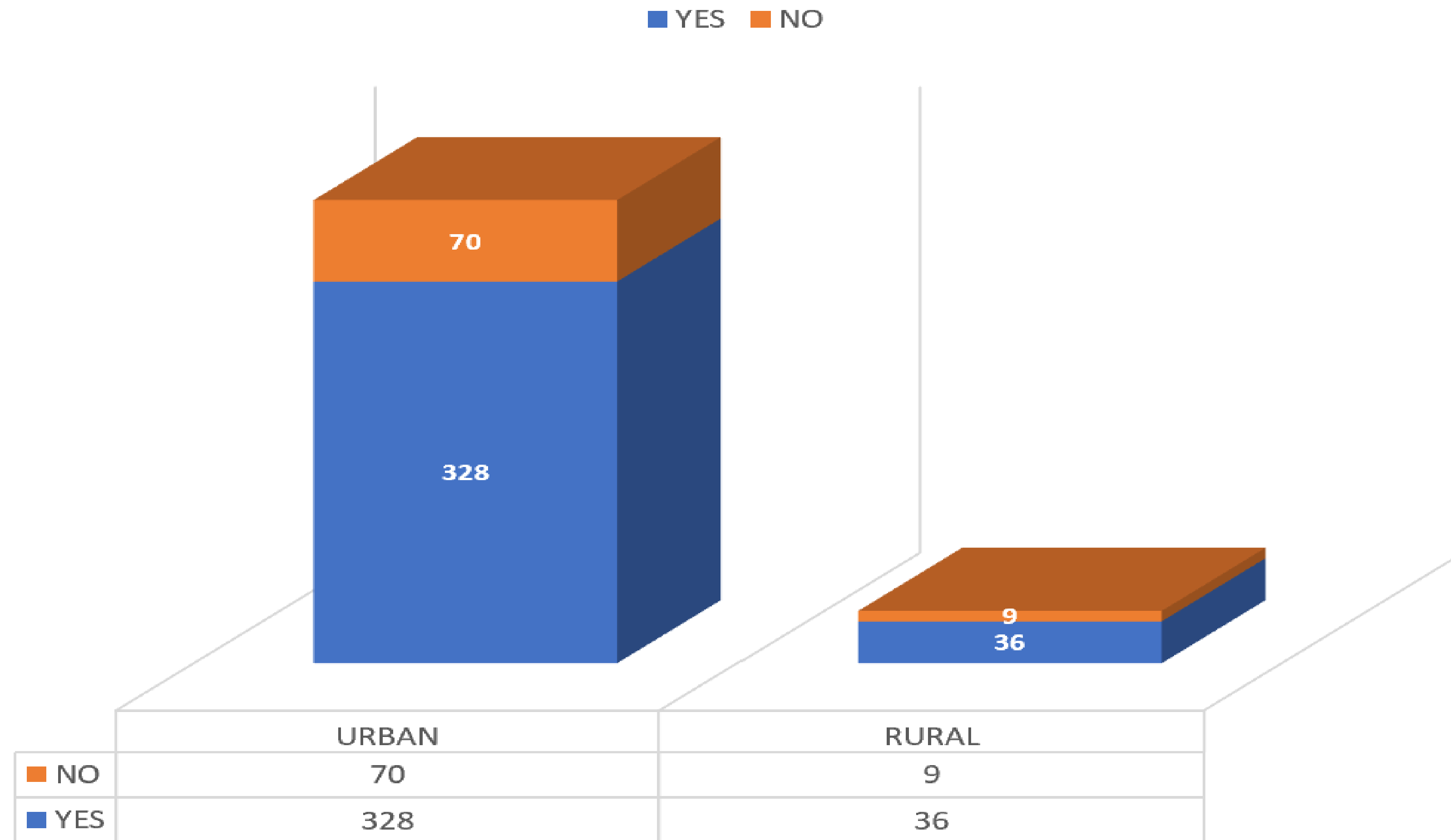
YES	NUMBER OF QUOTES		
	Urban	Rural	Quotes
If you choose wisely/right content	33	2	35
If you know how to handle yourself/emotion	10	3	13
It helps in doing my work	7	2	9
It's a sharing platform	27	3	30
It's convenient/necessity	4	0	4
It's informative/full of knowledge	49	8	57
Connected with others	60	8	68
Finding solutions	6	1	7
Gain income	1	0	1
Get moral/emotional support	17	1	18
Learn from others	11	0	11
Release stress/relaxing	76	6	82
Remain positive/motivated	23	2	25
Shop online	4	0	4
	328	36	364

Effectiveness of social media to provide support to women in handling emotional distress

Top 3 reasons for effectiveness:
1. Release from stress
2. Connected with others
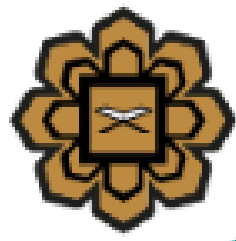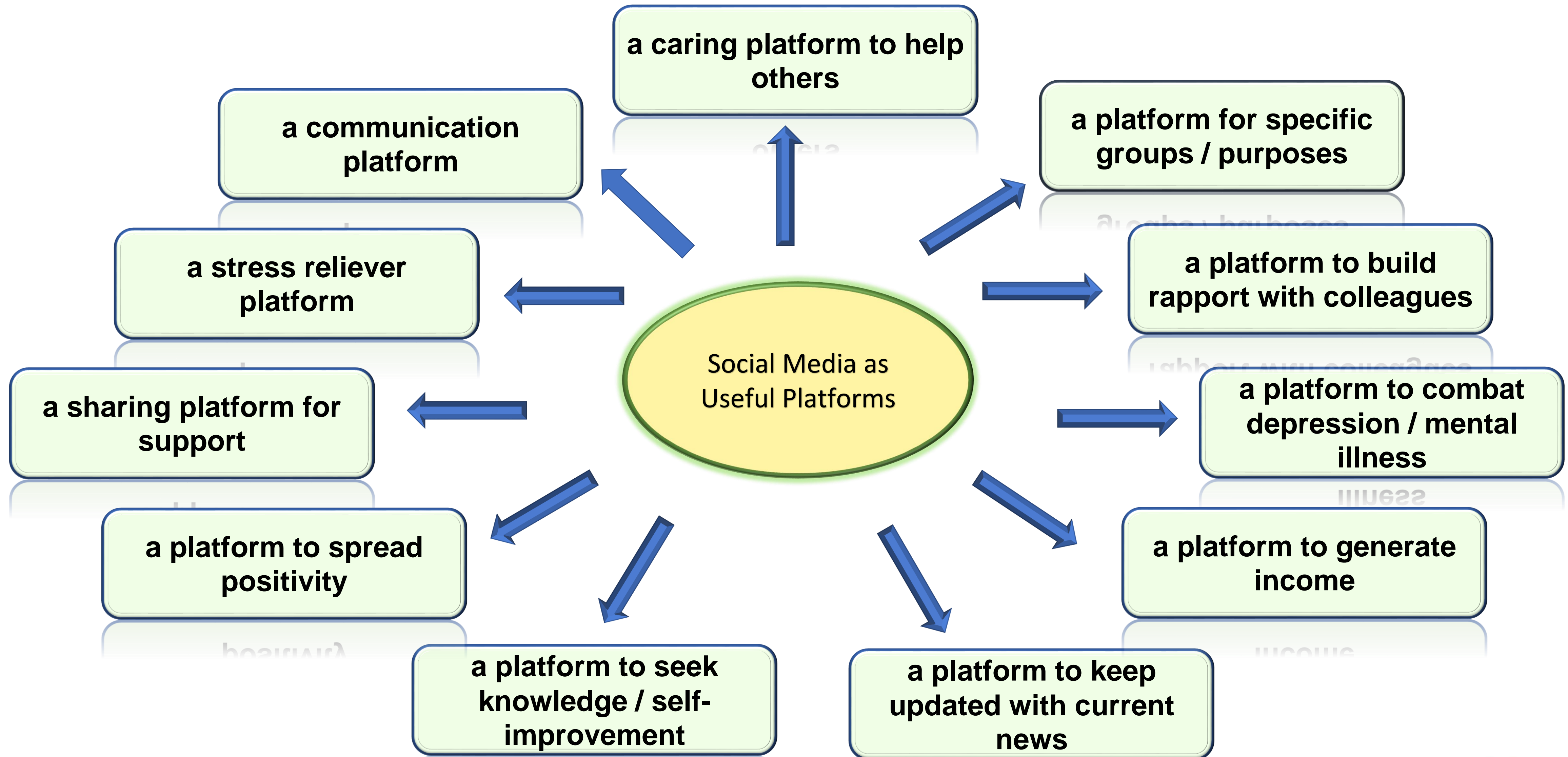3. Social media is informative

NO	NUMBER OF QUOTES		
	Urban	Rural	Quotes
Distraction from work	4	0	4
Started comparing with others	4	1	5
Support too general, not individualised	3	0	3
Never ending workload	6	1	7
Not a healthy way of healing oneself	4	1	5
Social media is toxic	12	1	13
Too much info can create anxiety/uneasiness	8	1	9
Too much pressure	6	1	7
Virtual bonding is hard to form	9	0	9
No (no reason provided)	8	3	11
Other means are better.	6	0	6
	70	9	79

Effectiveness of social media to provide support to women in handling emotional distress

Top 2 reasons for non-effectiveness:
1. Social media is toxic
2. Too much info can create anxiety/uneasiness
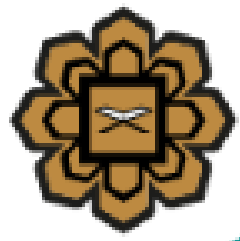2. Virtual bonding is difficult to form

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Suggestions on how the social media can provide psychological & emotional support during a pandemic

a caring platform to help others

a communication platform

a platform for specific groups / purposes

a stress reliever platform

a platform to build rapport with colleagues

Social Media as Useful Platforms

a sharing platform for support

a platform to combat depression / mental illness

a platform to spread positivity

a platform to generate income

a platform to seek knowledge / self-improvement

a platform to keep updated with current news

Avoid toxic contents/ read good info only

Info should be filtered

Don't simply share things read

ADVICE TO SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

Learn from others but don't compare

Control yourself or emotion

Limit the time on social media/ be disciplined

FINDINGS (QUALITATIVE: n = 17)

Respondents were selected based on their DASS 21 scores and their income brackets.

B40: 3 respondents
M40: 6 respondents
T20: 8 respondents

Interview Questions:
1. After almost two years, how do you find working from home (WFH)?
2. In your opinion, do you think social media plays a role while you're working from home? If yes or no, ask why.
3. Overall, do you find social media to be helpful or not for your mental health? Can you give reasons and examples?
4. Do you prefer face to face or online support? (Assuming things get better / number of cases reduced)
5. Are you aware of any social support for mental health issues? Describe.
6. If WFH is introduced as an option at your workplace, would you agree to it? Why?

1. Most of the respondents agreed that the use of social media is beneficial for personal and work purposes.

2. They had mixed reactions on mental health support whether it should be face-to-face or online.

3. They have limited awareness on the kind of support available (only Talian Kasih & Befrienders).

4. The respondents admitted that social media can add to the stress when it disrupts their work-life balance. On the other hand, it can be a stress reliever.

5. The support should not be generalised, rather it should be personalised.

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1. Those in the rural areas experienced higher level of depression, anxiety & stress. **However, due to the limited sample size on rural, this finding cannot be generalised.**

2. Women from both urban & rural areas experienced **anxiety** more than depression & stress. Based on the literature on mental health status and COVID-19, many people developed anxiety symptoms due to their apprehension about the future. The uncertain, unpredictable, and uncontrollable situations of COVID-19 maintained the symptoms.
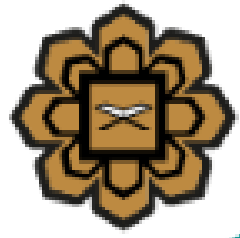
3. The feelings and challenges faced by the respondents clearly indicated that they are in need of support to handle emotional distress.

4. Social media can be an effective means to provide support to working women in facing mental distress.

5. Most of them welcomed the idea of **flexible or hybrid working condition** where they can work-from-home a few days a week.

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Recommendations

Based on the review of literature & the key findings of this study, in order to develop women's resilience in facing future health threats, it is suggested that:
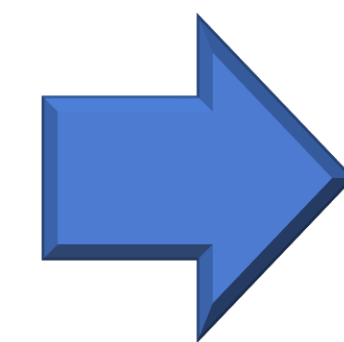
1. a National Mental Health support platform be established which may embody the following criteria:

a. One single platform which is wholistic in nature, integrating and synergising the involvement of various related Ministries, agencies, NGOs, employers.

b. The platform should be a combination of online and face-to-face or hybrid mode since "virtual bonding is difficult to form".

➢ A systematic approach where the diagnosis could be done online followed by in-depth assessment and treatment done face-to-face & online.

➢ A personalised approach is adopted, not generalised or one-size fits all approach.

c. Awareness of the platform needs to be created at the national level.

2. a flexible or hybrid working condition should be implemented where they can work-from-home a few days a week. (This corresponds with the amendments that shall be made to the Employment Act on flexible schedules and shorter work week for working women, The Star, 29 Nov 2021)

Thank you!