

What can I help with?

From Anxiety to AI:
**What the Numbers Say
about Malaysia's
Mental Health Future**

By:

Versa x stratsea

November
2025



From Anxiety to AI: What the Numbers Say about Malaysia's Mental Health Future

By Versa x stratsea | 18 November 2025

A recent internal survey of 1,500 Versa users reveals that Malaysians are anxious, financially strained and increasingly open to technology-based mental health support. Developed by Versa, in collaboration with stratsea, this report provides a data-driven look at Malaysians' emotional wellbeing, help-seeking behaviour and the emerging role of technology in shaping the future of mental health care.

1. A NATION ON EDGE

The pandemic years sparked long-overdue conversations about mental health in Malaysia. But new data from fintech app Versa shows that concern remains high even as public awareness has improved. Of the 1,500 respondents, the top three emotions Malaysians reported were **anxiety** (679 respondents), **happiness** (588 respondents) and **feeling overwhelmed** (562 respondents). In short, many Malaysians **feel both joyful yet burdened**—potentially having a positive outlook or perceiving living a meaningful life but emotionally stretched by day-to-day pressures. Data also revealed that **work or study demands** were the most significant stressors (1,018 respondents), followed by **financial pressures** (905 respondents) and **uncertainty about the future** (816 respondents).

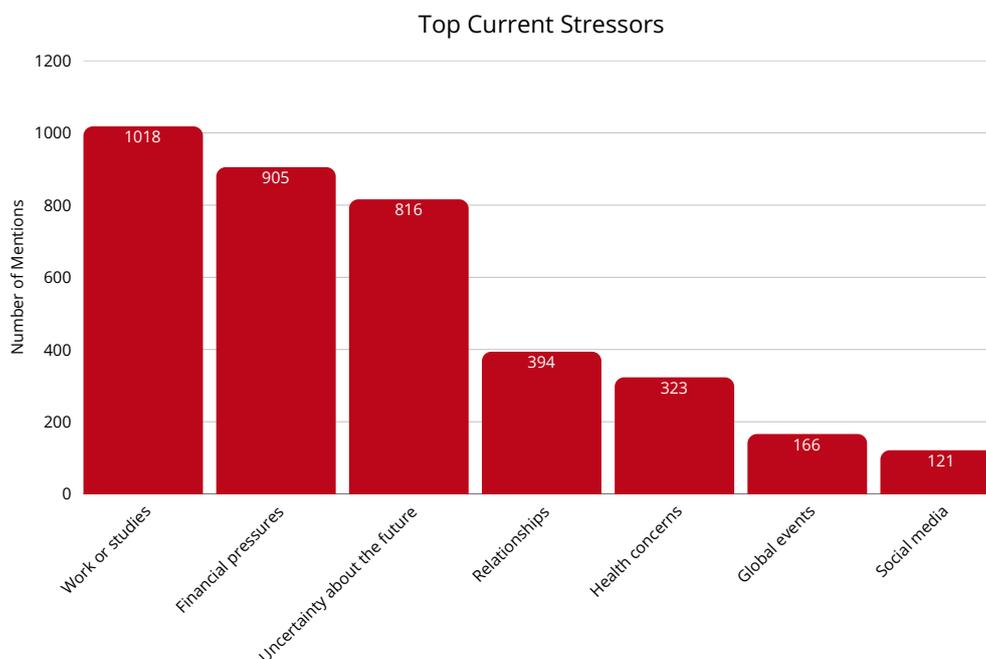


Chart 1: "What are your top three current stressors?"

¹ Respondents were asked, "Which of the following emotions do you experience most frequently? (Select up to three)." Besides anxiety, happiness, and feeling overwhelmed, respondents also selected motivation (539 respondents), loneliness (400 respondents), anger (285 respondents), and contentment (257 respondents).



Why so?

Indeed, between 2019 and 2024, Malaysian wages rose only 7% while food prices jumped 17%, indicating a **decline in real income** and deepening the sense that living standards are slipping. This aligns with global findings by the World Health Organization: when costs rise faster than incomes, mental health indicators often worsen, even in middle-income groups. Unfortunately, this phenomenon culminates in **high academic pressures** for students to outperform peers in seeking suitable jobs, often limited in supply. For those employed, such pressure fuels the need to work tirelessly in the hopes of job security.

2. THE HELP GAP

In terms of seeking help, 925 respondents are **open to professional help** (such as therapy and counselling), while 522 respondents believe that they can **manage on their own**. Self-management aside, 422 respondents cited **high costs** as the main barrier to seeking help, followed by **not knowing where to start** (337 respondents) and the **lack of time** (327 respondents).

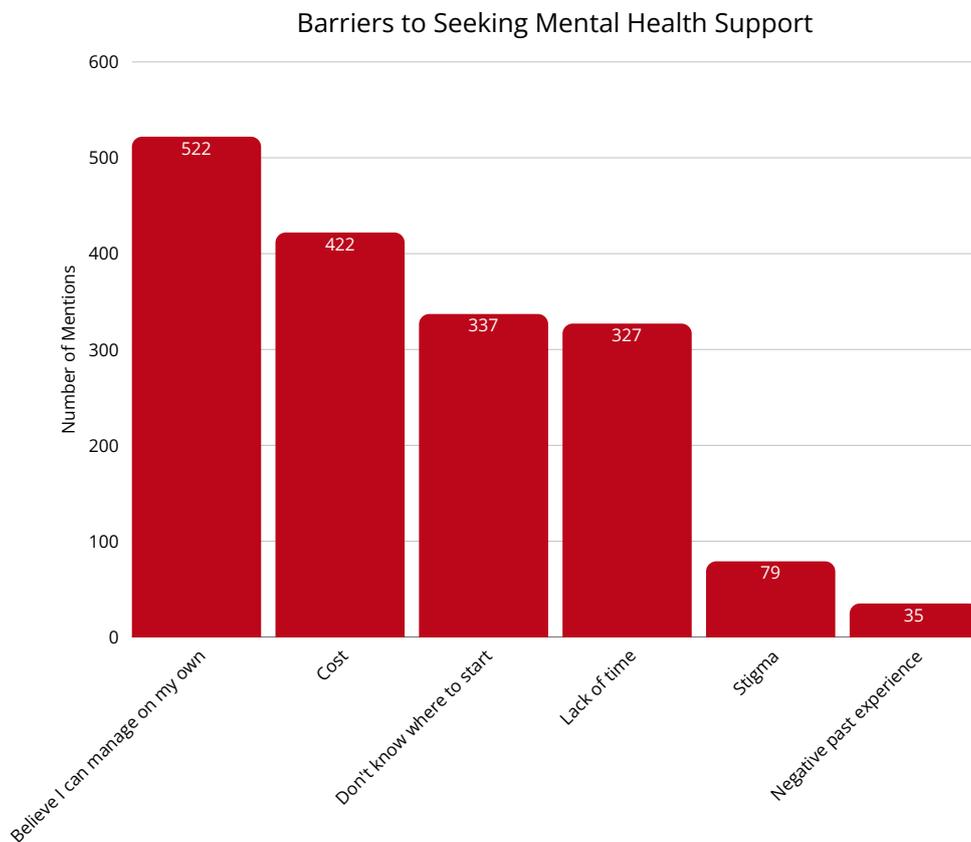


Chart 2: “What prevents you from seeking mental health support? (Select all that apply)”



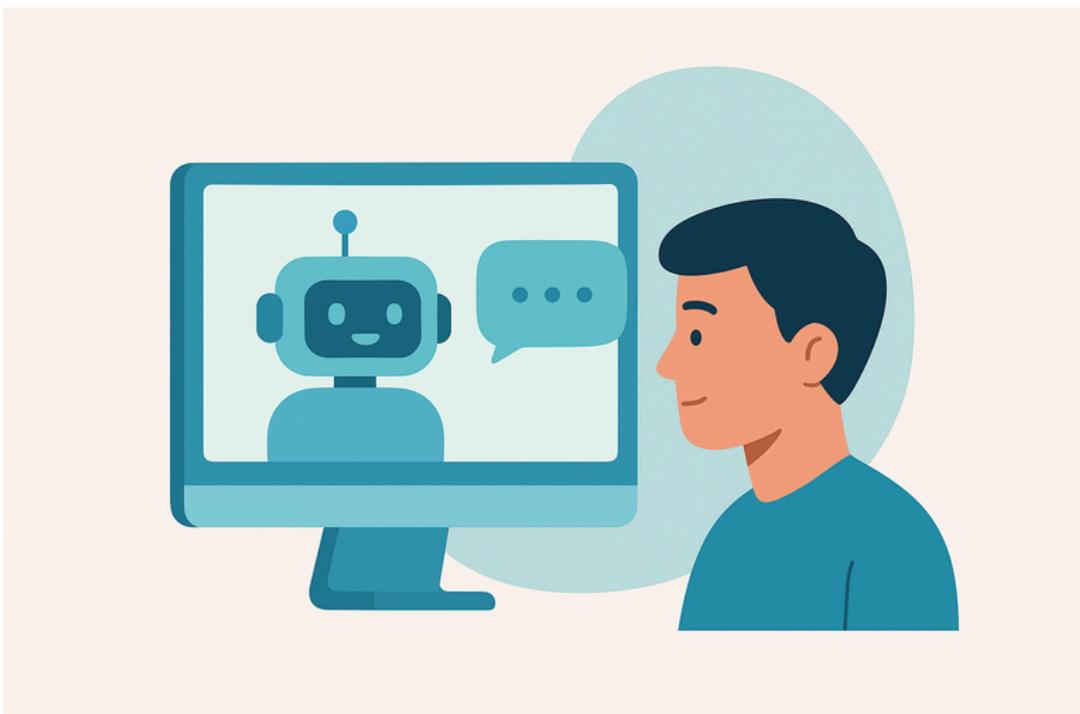
For those who can manage on their own, their preferred coping methods include finding distractions, talking to family or friends, exercising or meditating or withdrawing altogether. Some of these strategies are healthy, while others risk masking deeper issues. Such a self-reliant culture may be both a strength and a blind spot—helping Malaysians stay resilient but discouraging them from seeking expert care when it is most needed.

What next?

Encouraging Malaysians to seek help means addressing when and how they choose to do so—and ensuring services are affordable, visible and trustworthy. Community-based and tech-assisted support systems should be explored, together with policies that help to promote a supportive environment, such as “Mental Health Days” in the workplace.

3. TECH THERAPY AS AN ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION

When it comes to mental health, **anonymity** to avoid stigma and **affordability** are powerful motivators. Over 700 respondents said they were open to mental wellness apps and AI- or chatbot-based support, valuing their privacy and 24/7 availability. Of this, 341 respondents prefer apps like Calm and Headspace, while 360 prefer AI- or chat-based support. This finding mirrors global trends. Governments and tech companies are testing AI-driven counselling tools that simulate empathetic conversations or deliver guided wellness modules.



Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has already launched AI Menyantuni Insan (AIMI), an AI system to support student mental health. This suggests **growing institutional interest** in digital mental wellness and public readiness to use such tools. Nonetheless, caution is key. AI chatbots **cannot replace trained professionals**. Cases abroad have shown that unsupervised systems can deliver harmful advice. The responsible approach lies in integrating human expertise with AI scalability.

What now?

AI can expand access to mental health services, but it risks amplifying harm without oversight. AI is meant to complement, not replace, human therapists due to the risks of over-reliance and the need for professional human care in serious cases or those that require a diagnosis or prescribed medication. The future of care lies in human-AI partnerships that balance empathy, safety and scale. While AIMI remains the only government-led AI mental health initiative, similar tools could be extended to workplaces, primary healthcare and schools to make early support more accessible and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help.

4. LOOKING AHEAD

Versa's data points to a clear direction: Malaysians **feel pressured**, are **cost-conscious** and ready for **innovative support options**. For policymakers, this means exploring public-private initiatives – such as AI mental health awareness campaigns and pilots – to encourage help-seeking behaviour and make services more accessible. For the private sector, it signals a growing demand for care economy, especially in the mental wellness sector, where partnerships between fintechs and licensed therapists should be encouraged.

Our analysis suggests that Malaysia's mental health challenge is also a market opportunity: to design policies, technologies and workplaces that prioritise and protect mental wellbeing in sustainable ways.



ABOUT THIS STUDY

Versa is a Malaysian digital wealth management app that makes saving and investing easy and accessible, so you can achieve financial wellness.

stratsea an online platform that showcases analyses and insights from Southeast Asian experts on regional and global issues.

This analysis was conducted by stratsea, based on an internal survey by Versa on 6 May 2025, to explore possible collaborations with mental health advocates on potential app features. Versa collected the data, and stratsea provided the analytical framework and interpretation to draw broader social and policy insights.

The survey, consisting of 17 questions, gained responses from 1,500 respondents over 24 hours. The gender divide is split almost evenly between male (50.2%) and female (49.8%) respondents. Around 48.5% of respondents are aged 30 and above, while the remaining 51.5% are between 18 and 29 years old.

HELPLINES

Befrienders (emotional support and suicide prevention helpline)

1. Klang Valley: +603 7627 2929 (24 hours)
2. Penang: +604 2910 100 / WhatsApp +601156706261 (3pm to midnight)
3. Ipoh: +605 5477 933 / +605 5477 955 (1pm to 10pm)
4. Seremban: +606 6321 772 / +606 6321 773 / WhatsApp +60189691772 (7pm to 10pm)
5. Melaka: +606 2250 791 (7pm to midnight)
6. Muar: +606 9520 313 or +606 9540 313 (8pm to 11pm)
7. Johor Bahru: +607 331 2300 / WhatsApp +6073312300 (4pm to 10pm)
8. Kota Kinabalu: +6088 255 788 / +6088 259 788 / WhatsApp +6016 803 6945 (7pm to 10pm)
9. Kuching: +6082 242 800 (6:30pm to 9pm)

Talian Kasih (24-hour nationwide helpline and counselling)

15999 / WhatsApp +6019 261 5999

Malaysian Mental Health Association (psychological therapy and support services)

+603 2780 6803

