RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS’ MARITAL QUALITY, FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND STUDENTS’ BEHAVIOUR OF SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SELANGOR AND KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

LAI CHOOI SEONG (ANNIE)

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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS’ MARITAL QUALITY, FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND STUDENTS’ BEHAVIOUR OF SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SELANGOR AND KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

By

LAI CHOOI SEONG (ANNIE)

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, University Putra Malaysia, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The objective of this research was to assess the differences and relationships between parents’ marital quality and family environment of two hundred Form 4 delinquent and non-delinquent secondary school students in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A final research model for parents’ marital quality and family environment of students was finally established. Parents’ marital quality was measured by Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier & Lewis, 1976), Family environment of students was assessed by Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1981, 2002), and behaviour of students (delinquent and non-delinquent acts) was assessed by a set of self-report instrument established by Rozumah, Rumaya, Asnarulkhadi, Amna, Mansur, and Tan (2003). Independent-samples t-tests reported significant differences in the family cohesion, family
expressiveness, family conflict, and family achievement orientation of delinquent and non-delinquent students. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient concluded that there were significant positive correlations between parents’ dyadic satisfaction, parents’ marital quality, family cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, relationship dimensions, achievement orientation and active-recreational orientation with students’ behaviour. The final regression model indicated by binary logistic regression analysis showed that the predictor variables which had contributed significantly to the model were firstly, family conflict, followed by family cohesion, family members’ achievement orientation, then parents’ dyadic satisfaction, and lastly family members’ expressiveness. Future studies should focus on parents’ and family communication, conflict resolution, personality, financial management, leisure activities, parenting styles, extended family, and family adaptability. This study reiterated the importance of maintaining positive marital quality in married couples and positive family environment for children’s well-being. Parents must realize that adolescents need their parents’ companionship, care and to be active listeners to their emotions, achievements and problems.
Abstrak tesis ini dikemukakan kepada senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi syarat kelayakan Ijazah Doktor Falsafah.

HUBUNGAN DI ANTARA KUALITI PERKAHWINAN IBU BAPA DAN PERSEKITARAN KELUARGA DENGAN TINGKAH LAKU PELAJAR DI SEKOLAH MENENGAH PILIHAN DI SELANGOR DAN KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Oleh

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September 2008

Pengerusi: Dr. Samsilah bt. Roslan, PhD

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To them I dedicate this thesis.

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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 18 September 2008 to conduct the final examination of Lai Chooi Seong on her Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “The Relationships Between Parents’ Marital Quality, Family Environment And Students’ Behaviour Of Selected Secondary Schools In Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or at any other institution.

_________________________
LAI CHOII SEONG

Date: 13 November 2008
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>KPWKM</td>
<td>Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development</td>
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<td>DAS</td>
<td>Dyadic Adjustment Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FES</td>
<td>Family Environment Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPM</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JPS</td>
<td>Selangor Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JPWP</td>
<td>Federal Territory Kuala Lumpur Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Delinquent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>Non-delinquent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>t-test value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>Pearson Product Moment Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>Sample size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>Probability value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>Degree of freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B values of the Regression Equation</td>
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Today’s adolescents have many pressures to deal with among friends and family. Such pressures may include school academic performance, bully, gangsterism, truancy, fight as well as problems in the parents’ marriage or frequent fighting or hostility among the family members. Any one of these isolated problems at home and school may trigger adolescent problem behaviour if they use delinquent behaviors as appropriate ways to deal with the pressures they experience.

Most parents may feel embarrass, angry, frustrated, or even guilty when they cannot understand and do not know where to seek help for their troubled adolescents and family. Teachers in schools also experience problem managing the classroom and find it impossible to create an environment conducive for effective teaching and learning to take place because of disruptions caused by students’ delinquent behaviour. Effective teachers must find ways to keep their students in the classrooms as a team working together and oriented toward classroom tasks.
Many research conducted in the West indicated that the most effective approach to understand students' delinquent behaviour are programmes and treatments that are family-based. This means treatment that involves the adolescent and his or her family, and focuses on the parts of the adolescents' life that shape how he or she views the world, emphasizing on family and parental support.

In line with these research results from the West, our Malaysian government in fact has long placed emphasis on the importance of stable and resilient family life because our Eastern values recognize the fact that family plays an important role in inculcating moral values in society, such as respecting the elders, be creative, innovative, capable and has self-discipline for the future generations to follow.

Malaysian government also recognizes the fact that marriage is not just a family institution, but also a social institution where it is centered to nurture and raise children. Marriage also contributes to the physical, emotional and economic health of the society, which consists of men, women, children and finally the nation as a whole.
This is illustrated in the theme “Family First – Bring Your Heart Home” with its ten principles launched by the Ministry Of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKMM) in 2006. The ten principles are shown in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 Ten Principles of “Family First – Bring Your Heart Home”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAMILY FIRST PRINCIPLES</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Love And Affection</td>
<td>To shower love and understand each other’s emotional needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Family Fun Time</td>
<td>To spend quality time and to spread joy of being a family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Effective Communication</td>
<td>To interact and to communicate actively and effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Noble Family Values</td>
<td>To inculcate and practice noble family values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Parenting Excellence</td>
<td>To be a shining example and to bear responsibilities together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Balancing Career And Family Life</td>
<td>To strike a balance between career and family life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Security And Health</td>
<td>To provide a safe and comfortable environment and to practice a healthy lifestyle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Family Economics</td>
<td>To plan, organise and manage family resources wisely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Education And Skills</td>
<td>To promote life-long learning and acquiring of skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Family Friendly Policies</td>
<td>To put family as top priority in planning for family programmes and services.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Most young Malaysian married couples moved out of their parents’ home after marriage and set-up their own household. This has led to lesser and lesser traditional extended families within our society. Lesser extended families caused the new nuclear households to feel increasingly isolated as they have to manage their lives and families without the extended family and friends’ supports, which in the past were a primary resource in raising children and meeting families’ needs.

Malaysia multiracial society has also become more complex and diverse over the last two decades of rapid economic growth. Hence, the family as a social institution has also undergone rapid transformation in its structure such as getting married and divorced, and more females receiving education to the tertiary levels.

This resulted in increasing number of mothers entering the labour market and thus, increased number of dual-career families. Consequently, the time spent with children has decreased, as well as parent-child interactions. Therefore, children are left largely unsupervised.
This explains why despite the emphasis by the Malaysian government on the importance of stable and resilient family in nurturing and raising mentally and physically healthy children, there were still increasing reports of adolescents’ problem behaviours received over the last decade.

There are also increasing newspaper reports on marital conflicts ending in suicides involving innocent children and on tug-of-war between separated husbands and wives on custody of their children.

Adolescents are especially influenced by their parents’ marital satisfaction because of the long-term exposure to the cumulative effects of the quality of their parents’ marital relations. This is also because adolescence is a period of time when teenagers are dealing with many challenges such as hormonal fluctuations, changes in school structure, higher achievement expectations, expanded peer relations and influence, pressures from dating, and emergent sexuality (Ellickson & McGuigan, 2000).

Since marital dyad plays a pivotal role in providing cohesiveness and stability for the entire family, the quality of the marriage can have a pervasive effect on family life as a whole, as well as on the adaptation of individual family members
(Feldman, Fisher & Seitel, 1997). Consequently, the family environment is an influential factor in the development and maintenance of both conduct disorder and depression in children and adolescents (Teeter, 1998).

According to Byrne (1986), the family represents a basic human support system within which various needs are met, or go unmet. Thus, the degree of family happiness has been found to be significantly related to individuals’ subsequent level of self-esteem, as well as regard for others within and out of the family (Parish & Nunn, 1988).

Hence, in this study, the researcher will concentrate on the family etiology aspects of adolescents’ behaviours, namely delinquent and non-delinquent.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

From the years 2001 to 2004, consecutively 4160, 4493, 4189, and 4715 cases of delinquency were committed by adolescents ranging from offences against property, against persons, sex delinquencies, and drugs-related were recorded (Malaysia Social Welfare Department, 2005).