UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND CHILD WELL-BEING AMONGST URBAN MALAY SINGLE MOTHER FAMILIES INFLUENCE OF RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

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UPM

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FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND CHILD WELL-BEING AMONGST URBAN MALAY SINGLE MOTHER FAMILIES: INFLUENCE OF RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

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A large and growing number of Malaysian families with children are headed by single mothers. Past research has found that single mother families and their children experience more difficulties in the context of family life and well-being than two-parent families. This study was designed to determine the contribution of risk and protective factors in predicting urban Malay single mothers' family functioning and child well-being. In addition, this study examined the moderating role of protective factors (risk x protective factor interaction) on the relationships between risk factors and family functioning and child well-being. Multiple factors in several domains (individual, family and extrafamilial) were identified as risk and protective factors. The risk factors were economic strain, depression, work stress and neighborhood

problems. While, the protective factors were self-esteem, coping competence, parenting behavior and social support. Family functioning was composed of two sub-dimensions; cohesion and adaptability while child well-being consisted of three sub-dimensions, self-regulation, cognitive competence and self-worth. Findings from this study are based on the data collected from 158 urban Malay single mothers who had at least one child between the ages of six to twelve years. The most critical finding was the evidence to support the moderating role of protective factors on the relationships between risk factors and family functioning and child well-being. Overall, the risk and protective factors considered in this study explained between 17-35% of the variance in single mother's family functioning outcomes and 13-21% of the variance in child well-being outcomes. The findings imply that economic strain is the single most important risk factor affecting child well-being. Protective factors account for substantial variance in family functioning; they account for more unique variance (28%) than the risk factor measures (3%). There was evidence that the presence of protective factors was likely to reduce the impact of risk factors. Parenting behavior provided the best protective barrier between risk factors and family functioning. Findings also suggest that urban Malay single mothers with higher levels of protective factors are more likely to have better family functioning and child-well-being outcomes. In addition, results indicate that urban Malay single mother families that have balanced family functioning are more likely to have children with higher levels of child-well-being. The risk factor index (RFI) was found to be significantly related with all the child well-being outcomes but none of the family functioning outcomes.

However, the protective factor index (PFI) was significantly related with both the outcomes. These results highlight the role of protective factors in promoting better family functioning and child well-being and the extent to which protective factors buffer risk factors that might compromise outcomes. Consideration should be given to both risk and protective factors in the design of interventions aimed at strengthening family functioning and enhancing child well-being in urban Malay single mother families.

PERPUSTAKAAN SULTAN ABDUL SAMAD
UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

Abstrak thesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

KESEJAHTERAAN ANAK DAN KEFUNGSIAN KELUARGA IBU TUNGGAL MELAYU DI BANDAR: PENGARUH FAKTOR RISIKO DAN PELINDUNG

Oleh

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Februari 2005

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Di Malaysia jumlah keluarga ibu tunggal yang mempunyai anak sedang meningkat. Kajian lalu telah mendapati bahawa ibu tunggal dan anak-anaknya mengalami lebih banyak masalah dalam kehidupan keluarga berbanding dengan keluarga yang mempunyai kedua-dua ibu bapa. Secara umumnya kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan sumbangan faktor risiko dan pelindung ke atas kesejahteraan anak dan kefungsian keluarga ibu tunggal Melayu di bandar. Disamping itu, kajian ini juga telah memeriksa peranan moderasi (moderating) faktor pelindung (interaksi faktor risiko x faktor pelindung).ke atas perkaitan di antara faktor risiko dengan kesejahteraan anak dan kefungisan keluarga. Pelbagai faktor daripada beberapa domain (individu, keluarga dan luar keluarga iaitu "extrafamilial") telah dikenalpasti sebagai faktor risiko dan pelindung. Dalam kajian ini, faktor risiko ialah kesulitan ekonomi,

kemurungan, tekanan kerja dan masalah kawasan kejiranan. Manakala, faktor pelindung ialah harga diri, kecekapan mengendalikan tekanan, tingkahlaku keibubapaan dan sokongan sosial. Kefungsian keluarga mempunyai dua sub-dimensi, iaitu kohesi dan adaptability/penyesuaian. Manakala kesejahteraan anak terdiri daripada tiga sub-dimensi, iaitu, regulasi diri anak, kebolehan kognitif anak dan nilai diri anak. Hasil kajian ini berasaskan data yang dikumpul daripada 158 ibu tunggal Melayu di bandar yang mempunyai sekurang-kurangnya seorang anak yang berumur antara enam hingga12 tahun. Penemuan yang paling kritikal kajian ini adalah peranan "moderating" faktor pelindung ke atas perkaitan antara faktor risiko dengan kesejahteraan anak dan kefungisan keluarga. Pada keseluruhannya faktor risiko dan pelindung menerangkan sebanyak antara 17 hingga 35% varian dalam kefungsian keluarga ibu tunggal dan antara 13 hingga 21% varian dalam kesejahteraan anak. Hasil kajian memberi implikasi bahawa kesulitan ekonomi merupakan faktor risiko yang paling penting memberi kesan ke atas kesejahteraan anak. Faktor pelindung telah menyumbang varian yang lebih besar (28%) untuk kesejahteraan keluarga berbanding dengan faktor risiko (3%). Terdapat bukti bahawa kehadiran faktor pelindung berkecendurungan untuk mengurangkan impak faktor riziko. Tingkah laku keibubapaan memberikan perlindungan yang terbaik antara faktor risiko dan kefungsian keluarga, Penemuan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa ibu tunggal yang mempunyai tahap faktor pelindung yang lebih tinggi lebih berkecendurungan mempunyai tahap kefungsiaan keluarga dan kesejahteraan anak yang lebih tinggi. Hasil kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa ibu tunggal Melayu di bandar yang

mempunyai kefungsian keluarga yang seimbang akan mempunyai anak yang mempunyai tahap kesejahteraan yang lebih tinggi. Indeks faktor risiko mempunyai perkaitan signifikan dengan kesejahteraan anak tetapi tidak mempunyai perkaitan dengan kefungsiaan keluarga. Walau bagaimanapun, indeks faktor pelindung didapati mempunyai perkaitan dengan kefungsian keluarga dan kesejahteraan anak. Hasil kajian ini mengenengahkan peranan faktor pelindung dalam meningkatkan kefungsian keluarga dan kesejahteraan anak, dan sejauhmana peranannya untuk meredakan kesan negatif faktor risiko yang boleh mengkompromi kefungsian dan kesejahteraan. Pertimbangan perlu diberikan kepada faktor risiko dan pelindung dalam merancang intervensi yang bertujuan untuk memperkukuhkan kesejahteraan anak dan kefungsian keluarga ibu tungga Melayu di bandar.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. 1ntroduction

Families have always been the basic unit of society but the current family landscape has changed significantly in terms of composition, size, structure, functions and relationships. The predominant family structure in the past consisted of a heterosexual couple and their children. However, families these days are characterized by greater diversity such as single-parent families, blended families, cohabiting families and step-families (Bigner, 1994; McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson, Han & Allen, 1997; Strong, DeVault, Sayad & Cohen, 2001). In Malaysia, as in other countries too, one of the most significant demographic changes in recent years has been an increase in the number of single mother families. There is growing interest in single mother families due to their increased occurrence and evidence that single mothers and their children may be exposed to numerous environmental stressors that place them at risk for poor outcomes (Martin, Emery & Peris, 2004).

Marital disruption due to widowhood, divorce or separation is a stressful and traumatic experience and may create an emotional vulnerability to role stresses (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993). The most consequential of these factors are: (a) changes in social support/relationships; (b) changes in finances; (c) changes in child-care, housework and work demands; and (d) changes in residence (Cotten, 1999). Single mothers are

also assumed to have poor mental health because of the stresses and strains associated with role changes and transitions. They had a lower standard of living, possessed less wealth and experienced greater economic hardship than married individuals (Hao, 1996; Marks, 1996; Teachman & Paasch, 1994).

It is estimated that more than 50% of children in the United States will spend time in a single parent home before reaching the age of 18 (Strong et al., 2001). Children from single parent families have been found to exhibit more health, behavioral and emotional problems, are more frequently involved in crime and drug abuse, and demonstrate a diminished learning capacity (Downey, 1994; Fagan & Rector, 2000).

The focus of this chapter was on an overview of the topic, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, theoretical perspectives and conceptual framework, definition of terms, study limitations, significance of the study, organization of the thesis and chapter summary. The organization of this chapter is depicted in Figure 1.1.

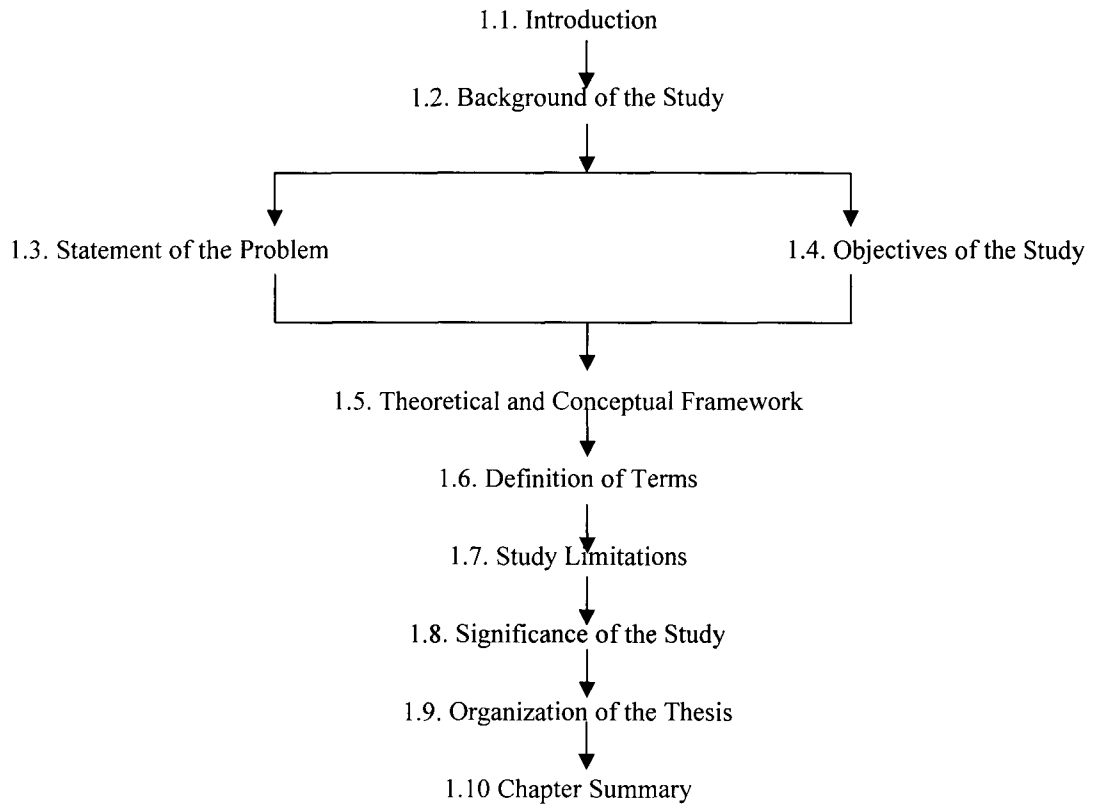

Figure 1.1: Brief Outline of Chapter 1

1.2. Background of the Study

Disruptions in the family system are likely to upset relationships in almost all areas of life; necessitating adaptations and changes to old patterns of behavior and interaction. Parents and children need support and assistance when marriages are dissolved or there is a death of a spouse, as it can be extremely difficult for single parents to function effectively. Although the number of single mothers in Malaysia is comparatively less than those in the United States and other Western countries, it

should be viewed with concern as its impact on the family, society and nation is far reaching

The Population and Housing Census (Department of Statistics, 2000) states that there are 126,810 single mothers among the 11.4 million women in Malaysia. The state of Selangor has the highest number of single mothers (16,748) in the country while Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory has 8,536 single mothers. The Census 2000 defines single mothers as females who are head of households; widowed, divorced or permanently separated; and having an unmarried child under the age of 18 years living in the same household. Thus, this implies that the number of single mothers may be much larger because those who are not head of households would be unaccounted. It must also be noted that the census definition of single mothers excludes elderly women with grown-up children. If this group is included, there are about 620,389 women who are widowed, divorced or permanently separated (Department of Statistics, 2000). Previously, most single mother families were created by the death of a spouse. However, a new trend can be observed; there is an increase in single parent families created by separation and divorce.

A study by the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) Malaysia, in 1992, revealed that of 26,877 families studied, about 2,537 families or 9.4% consisted of single parent families (Raj Karim, 1993). Another study titled