



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***EFFECTS OF PARENTS-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIP, SCHOOL
ENGAGEMENT, AND MALADAPTIVE COPING ON DEPRESSION
AMONG ADOLESCENTS FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES IN MALAYSIA***

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By

FAM JIA YUIN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

October 2016

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

EFFECTS OF PARENTS-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIP, SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT, AND MALADAPTIVE COPING ON DEPRESSION AMONG ADOLESCENTS FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES IN MALAYSIA

By

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October 2016

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It is evidenced that adolescents from divorced families are at greater risk of developing in depression. However, the mechanisms between parental divorce and depression remain unclear. Hence, the present study aimed to determine the relationships between parent-adolescent relationship (mother-adolescent relationship and father-adolescent relationship), school engagement, maladaptive coping, and depression among adolescents from divorced families in Malaysia.

The respondents of the present study consisted of 480 secondary school students aged from 13 to 18 years old. They were located from Selangor, Kedah, Johor, and Pahang through multistage sampling technique. The revisited version of Inventory for Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) was used to measure parent-adolescent relationship. School Engagement Scale (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) was used to measure school engagement. Brief COPE (Yusoff, Low, & Yip, 2010) was used to measure maladaptive coping. The Beck Youth Inventories – Depression Inventory (Beck, Beck, & Jolly, 2001) was used to measure depression. All instruments were tested for reliability and validity. Data were analyzed with Statistical Package for Social Science version 20.0 (SPSS) and Amos 18. All models were evaluated based on chi-square (χ^2), non-normed fit index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of estimation (RMSEA), and relative chi-square (χ^2/df).

The results of Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between mother-adolescent relationship, father-adolescent relationship, school engagement, maladaptive coping, and depression among adolescents. The measurement model was tested and displayed well fit to the data. Given the validated measurement model, structural model was developed and tested with the same sets of fit indices. The model was modified by reviewing the parameter estimates. Consequently, the final model revealed that maladaptive coping partially mediates the relationship between mother-

adolescent relationship and depression. The result also revealed that father-adolescent relationship indirectly influence depression through maladaptive coping. Maladaptive coping fully mediates the relationship between father-adolescent relationship and depression. The current result also revealed that maladaptive coping partially mediates the relationship between school engagement and depression.

The current findings highlight the significant role of family and school contexts in the development of depression among adolescents. Adolescents who failed to maintain close relationship with parents are more likely to employ maladaptive coping in handling stress, which will in turn increase the risk for them to develop in depression. Practically, divorced parents should maintain affectionate relationship with their adolescent-aged children, while educating them for better choice of coping strategy. On the other hand, adolescents who disengage from school are at greater risk to develop depression. Therefore, related authorities and schools should give more attention to students from divorced families; and closely monitor their commitment in school.

Abstrak tesis ini yang dikemukakan kepada senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

KESAN DARIPADA HUBUNGAN IBU BAPA-REMAJA, PENGLIBATAN SEKOLAH, DAN DAYA TINDAK MALADAPTIF KEPADA KEMURUNGAN DI KALANGAN REMAJA DARI KELUARGA BERCERAI DI MALAYSIA

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Bukti menunjukkan bahawa remaja daripada keluarga yang bercerai adalah berisiko lebih tinggi untuk mendapat kemurungan. Walau bagaimanapun, mekanisme antara perceraian ibu bapa dan kemurungan adalah tidak jelas. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan perkaitan antara hubungan ibu bapa-remaja (hubungan ibu-remaja dan hubungan bapa-remaja), penglibatan sekolah, daya tindak maladaptif, dan kemurungan di kalangan remaja dari keluarga bercerai di Malaysia.

Responden kajian ini terdiri daripada 480 pelajar sekolah menengah yang berumur di antara 13 hingga 18 tahun. Responden diperolehi daripada negeri Selangor, Kedah, Johor, dan Pahang melalui teknik persampelan rawak berperingkat. The revisited version of Inventory for Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) telah digunakan untuk mengukur hubungan ibu bapa-remaja. School Engagement Scale (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) telah digunakan untuk mengukur penglibatan sekolah. Brief COPE (Yusoff, Low, & Yip, 2010) telah digunakan untuk mengukur daya tindak maladaptif. The Beck Youth Inventories – Depression Inventory (Beck, Beck, & Jolly, 2001) telah digunakan untuk mengukur kemurungan. Semua instrumen telah diuji untuk kebolehpercayaan dan kesahan. Data dianalisis dengan SPSS versi 20.0 (SPSS) dan Amos 18. Semua model dinilai berdasarkan chi-square (χ^2), non-normed fit index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of estimation (RMSEA), and relative chi-square (χ^2/df).

Keputusan analisis korelasi Pearson menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan antara hubungan ibu-remaja, hubungan bapa-remaja, penglibatan sekolah, daya tindak maladaptif, dan kemurungan di kalangan remaja. Model pengukuran telah diuji dan menunjukkan kesesuaian yang baik dengan data. Dengan model pengukuran yang sah, model struktur telah dibina dan diuji dengan indeks kesesuaian yang sama. Model ini telah diubahsuai dengan meneliti anggaran parameter. Model akhir mendedahkan

bahawa daya tindak maladaptif memediasikan perkaitan antara hubungan ibu-remaja dan kemurungan secara separa. Hasil kajian juga mendedahkan hubungan bapa-remaja mempengaruhi kemurungan secara tidak langsung melalui daya tindak maladaptif. Daya tindak maladaptif memediasi sepenuhnya perhubungan antara bapa-remaja dengan kemurungan. Hasil kajian ini juga mendedahkan bahawa daya tindak maladaptif memediasi perkaitan antara penglibatan sekolah dan kemurungan secara separa.

Hasil kajian ini mengenengahkan peranan signifikan konteks keluarga dan sekolah kepada perkembangan kemurungan di kalangan remaja. Remaja yang gagal untuk mengekalkan hubungan yang rapat dengan ibu bapa adalah lebih cenderung untuk menggunakan daya tindak maladaptif dalam mengendalikan tekanan, di mana seterusnya akan meningkatkan risiko bagi mereka untuk berkembang di dalam kemurungan. Secara praktikal, ibu bapa bercerai perlu mengekalkan hubungan yang mesra dengan anak-anak remaja mereka, semasa mendidik mereka untuk membuat pilihan strategi daya tindak yang lebih baik. Remaja yang tidak melibatkan diri dengan sekolah adalah berisiko lebih tinggi untuk mengalami kemurungan. Oleh itu, pihak berkuasa yang berkaitan dan pihak sekolah perlu memberikan lebih perhatian kepada pelajar daripada keluarga bercerai; dan memantau dengan rapi komitmen mereka di sekolah.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank all participants who participate in the current study. Thank you for sparing our precious time and provide honest response for the present study.

APPROVAL

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on (17 October 2016) to conduct the final examination of Fam Jia Yuin on his thesis entitled " Effects of Parents-Adolescent Relationship, School Engagement and Maladaptive Coping on Depression among Adolescents from Divorced Families in Malaysia" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BYI	Beck Youth Inventories
BYI-D	Beck Youth Inventories: Depression Inventory
EDA	Exploratory data analysis
VIF	Variance inflation factor
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
TLI	Non-normed fit index
CFI	Comparative fit index
RMSEA	Root mean square error of estimation





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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Taking family as the basic unit in a community, this most basic social structure plays an essential role in adolescents' development (Naomee, 2013). Previous studies demonstrated that a family can greatly influences adolescents' mental health (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003), occupational aspirations (Jodl, Michael, Malanchuk, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2001), and alcoholism (Jacob & Johnson, 1997). Thus, divorce, the dissolution of marriage through legal process (Chan & Mustaffa, 2008), can be a threatening event for adolescents' development due to dysfunction of the family role.

Modern studies often view divorce as a continual process rather than a single event (Bryner, 2001; Morrison & Cherlin, 1995). In other words, divorce is being viewed as a sequence of potentially stressful experiences before and after marital separation (Morrison & Cherlin, 1995). Many problems caused by parental divorce often have their roots before the divorce, and have an on-going effect even after years (Bryner, 2001).

As mentioned in the definition by Chan and Mustaffa (2008), the divorcees are required to go through some legal processes in order to be legally divorced. In general, there are two separate laws concerning divorce issues in Malaysia, which are Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976 (LRA) and the Islamic Family Law Act (Federal Territory) 1984 (IFLA). The LRA regulates the marriage and divorce issues among non-Muslim families. On the other hand, the IFLA was enacted to regulate the Muslims marriage and divorce issues in Kuala Lumpur. The IFLA works as the model law for developing similar law in other states in Malaysia. Under IFLA, there are various forms of divorce, such as *talaq*, *khul*, *fasakh*, *ta'liq*, *zihar*, *ila*, and *li'an* (Kamaruddin, 1998). Referring to the section 81 of IFLA, divorced mothers have absolute right on the custody of children. In other words, most mothers will take the full responsibilities of the guardianship of children after divorce, unless under some exceptions which are discussed in section 83 of IFLA, such as open immorality of the mothers.

Unfortunately, it is noteworthy that the divorce rate is increasing all around the world during recent decades. While only five percent of the first marriages in United States end up with divorce during the past century, almost half of the first marriages in recent years will divorce in later years (Amato, 2000; Preston & McDonald, 1979). A similar case was found in Malaysia, where the divorce rate had increased from 2008 to 2012. According to the State/District Social Statistics Malaysia 2013 conducted by Department of Statistics Malaysia (2013b), total divorce in Malaysia during year 2012 (38,273 cases) is far higher than total divorce in 2008 (29,373 cases). The statistics

clearly illustrates the escalating rate of divorce in Malaysia, implying adolescents in Malaysia are at great risk to suffer from the detrimental effects of parental divorce. Hence, the current study put the main focus on adolescents from divorced families in Malaysia.

Conceivably, research consistently demonstrated the detrimental impacts of parental divorce on adolescent-aged offspring (Amato, 2000; Fagan & Churchill, 2012), including psychosocial maladjustment (Roustit, Chaix, & Chauvin, 2007), academic achievement, delinquency behaviours (Mooney, Oliver, & Smith, 2009), religious activities involvement (Tanaka, 2009), emotional adjustment, gender-role orientation, and antisocial behaviour (Demo & Acock, 1988). Unfortunately, children of divorced families tend to be more involved in criminal activities (homicide, robbery, and juvenile robbery) than their intact counterparts (Sampson, 1986). Therefore, past research had sufficiently confirmed the high risk for various maladjustments among children from divorced families.

Among the various negative consequences of parental divorce, depression is the most notable outcome among adolescents (Aseltine, 1996; Oldehinkel, Ormel, Veenstra, De Winter, & Verhulst, 2008; Petersen et al., 1993). Adolescents from divorced families are more likely to display depressive symptoms than adolescents from intact families (Cherlin et al., 1991). In short, depression refers to persistent experiences of sad feelings and bad moods (Ralph, 2004). From the perspective of developmental psychology, the onset of depression in early years is very harmful for adolescents' future development (Glieb & Pine, 2002; Jaycox et al., 2009). For instance, depression among adolescents can lead to poor school performance (McPherson, 2004), disruptive behaviour, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse (Ralph, 2004). Hence, the elevation of depression after parental divorce among adolescents may develop into more severe problems in later years.

Indeed, the prevalence rate of depression is alarming around the globe. Depression is frequently being cited as one of the most prevalent mental illness among adolescents (Fletcher, 2008; Murphey, Barry, & Vaughn, 2013). World Health Organization (WHO) predicts that depression will become the second most disabling clinical diagnoses in the world by 2020 (Marcus, Yasamy, Ommeren, Chisholm, & Saxena, 2012). In general, WHO estimated around 350 million sufferers of depression globally. Based on a literature review conducted by Hankin (2006), the prevalence rate of depression among adolescents ranged between 20 percent and 50 percent.

In Malaysian context, it is not unexpected that depression had become the most common mental illness in Malaysia (Mukhtar & Oei, 2011). For example, the National Health Morbidity Survey 2011 showed that around one million children and adolescents (20 percent) in Malaysia suffered from mental health problems (Institute for Public Health, 2011). More recently, using the data from Malaysia Global School-based Health Survey (GSHS) and Mental Health Survey, Kaur et al. (2014) found the prevalence of depression symptoms among 28,738 Malaysian secondary school students was 17.7 percent.

Given the high prevalence rate of depression among adolescents, there is growing concerns on depression globally. However, research on depression in Malaysia context remains rudimentary (Chiu, 2004; Mukhtar & Oei, 2011). The battle to reduce depression rate in Malaysia is tough due to the shortage of empirical research under this field. Further research on depression in Malaysia context is highly beneficial in combating the high prevalence of depression among adolescents in Malaysia.

Indeed, previous studies consistently demonstrated that the interpersonal context of the adolescents will greatly affect the development of depression. One of the most notable interpersonal context among adolescents is mother-adolescent relationship. Past studies indicated that positive mother-adolescent relationship is the key for adolescents to develop positively (Moretti & Peled, 2004; Xu et al., 2014), such as higher social involvement and lower perceive stress (Koerner, Kenyon, & Rankin, 2006; Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2013). However, it is noteworthy that the mother-adolescent relationship is expected to be weakened following parental divorce (Fagan & Churchill, 2012). This is due to divorced mothers tend to provide lower quality of home environment and less emotional support for their children (Miller & Davis, 1997). In addition, divorce will reduce the social control from parents on children, such as lower supervision (Sampson, 1986). Put succinctly, parental divorce might loosen the mother-adolescent relationship and put the adolescents at higher risk for maladjustment.

While the empirical studies generally focus on the maternal influence on adolescents' depression, the influence from fathers is frequently being overlooked. Similar to mother-adolescent relationship, maintaining close relationship with non-custodial father may be tough for adolescents after parental divorce. As this point, it is important to keep note that Malaysian mothers have absolute right on the custody of children. In other words, most mothers will take the full responsibilities of the guardianship of their children after divorce, unless under some exceptions which discussed in section 83 of the Islamic Family Law Act (Federal Territory) 1984 (IFLA), such as open immorality of the mothers. Therefore, most of the children are expected to stay with their mothers and contact or meet their father less frequently after parental divorce (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008). Unfortunately, distancing from non-custodial father can negatively affect the relationship between adolescents and non-custodial father (Fagan & Churchill, 2012). The reduction of father involvement in adolescents' daily life is harmful for adolescents' well-being. For instance, past research indicated that less father involvement can cause more internalizing and externalizing problems among adolescents (King & Sobolewski, 2006). Thus, the loss of paternal role can be a great challenge for adolescents to adjust from parental divorce.

Another important interpersonal context for adolescents is school context. Besides family, school context is another important influencing environment for adolescents (Resnick et al., 1997). The adolescents' feelings and engagement in school will greatly affect their development from various aspects, which include psychological, mental, and social development (Awang Hashim & Murad Sani, 2008; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). The disengagement from school will put the adolescents at greater risk for depression (Bond et al., 2007). Yet, recent research in Malaysia found that the level school engagement will decline gradually during adolescence (Amir, Saleha, Jelas, & Ahmad, 2014). Further, research also indicated

that adolescents from divorced families are more likely to disengage from school (Fagan, 2013). In light of this consideration, it is plausible that adolescents of divorced families are at risk for school disengagement. Unfortunately, research on the relationship between school engagement and depression remain rudimentary, where few attentions had been given in literature to confirm the relationship (Li & Lerner, 2011). Hence, further research on the relationships between school engagement and depression among adolescents from divorced families is highly needed.

On the other hand, the choice of coping strategy in time of stress might affect how adolescents adjust from parental divorce (Sandler, Tein, & West, 1994). For example, previous study found that the adolescents who apply avoidance coping strategy tend to display more internalizing, externalizing, and physical problems (Armistead et al., 1990). Yet, adolescents from divorced families are more likely to implement maladaptive coping than their intact counterparts (Kurtz, 1994).

Nonetheless, it is important to note that not all adolescents from divorced family will misbehave or become depressed (Amato, 1994, 2000). In fact, many adolescents are able to adjust positively from parental divorce. For this reason, Amato (1994) suggested that parental divorce will not directly cause the adolescents to poor well-being, but, parental divorce will increase the risk for adolescents' maladjustment. On this account, several factors were pointed as potential contributors for adjustment problems among adolescents of divorced families.

In a nutshell, the current study put the main focus on adolescents from divorced families due to the alarming rate of divorce in Malaysia. One notable outcome of parental divorce is depression, where adolescents of divorced families are at greater risk to develop in depression. For this reason, the current study hypothesized that the adolescents' perceived interpersonal context (family and school context) will influence their development of depression. Specifically, the current study aimed to examine the relationships between parent-adolescent relationship, school engagement, maladaptive coping, and depression among adolescents from divorced families. In addition, the current study further examined the mediating role of maladaptive coping in the relationship between interpersonal relationship and depression.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Having acknowledged the rise of divorce rate and prevalence rate of depression among adolescents in Malaysia, it is plausible that there is a direct link between parental divorce and depression among adolescents. Parental divorce was pointed as one of the contributing factors for depression among adolescents, indicating that adolescents from divorced families are more vulnerable to depression than adolescents from non-divorced families (Oldehinkel et al., 2008). The influence of parental divorce towards depression among adolescents is also documented in population-based research (Pálmarsdóttir, 2015) and longitudinal study (Strohschein, 2005). That is, adolescents whose parents were married and live together had lower possibilities to suffer from depressive symptoms as compared with other parental marital status (which include

married and living apart, divorced, widow/widower, separated, and unknown; Kaur et al., 2014). Thus, this study investigated the relationships between mother-adolescent relationship, father-adolescent relationship, and school engagement with depression among adolescents from divorced families in Malaysia.

Alarmed by the adjustment problems among adolescents from divorce families, various studies were conducted to identify factors contributing to adjustment problems among adolescents (Amato, 2000; Fagan & Churchill, 2012). Yet, it is noteworthy that the evidence in this issue is insufficient to explain the phenomena globally (Newton et al., 2010). This is due to many of the past research were conducted in the Western countries and focused on certain targeted populations. The relationship between parental divorce and depression among early adolescents (Oldehinkel et al., 2008) and late adolescents (Zeratsion et al., 2013) from Western countries. For this reason, the relationship between mother-adolescent relationship, father-adolescent relationship, school engagement, and depression among adolescents from divorced families in Malaysia context remains undiscovered. Therefore, further study on such relationship in Malaysia context is highly needed. Besides, the mediating effects of maladaptive coping in the aforementioned relationship were further investigated.

Following the above rationale, four research questions were addressed in this present study:

1. What is the level of mother-adolescent relationship, father-adolescent relationship, school engagement, maladaptive coping, and depression of the adolescents from divorced families?
2. Are there any significant relationships between mother-adolescent relationship, father-adolescent relationship, school engagement, maladaptive coping, and depression of the respondents?
3. What are the factors that uniquely predict depression among the respondents?
4. Do maladaptive coping mediates the relationship between mother-adolescent relationship, father-adolescent relationship, school engagement, and depression among the respondents?

1.3 Significance of Study

The present study is significant for knowledge and practical advancement. As for current, there are very limited evidences for the linkage between interpersonal context and depression among adolescents from divorced families. Indeed, family and school context plays a significant role to promote successive development for adolescents of divorced families. Thus, the current study will provide strong empirical evidence to enrich knowledge in the literature of developmental psychology. Specifically, the current study examined the influential power of family and school context towards depression among adolescents of divorced families.

On the other hand, most of the similar studies were conducted in Western countries, where there are very limited studies which conducted in Malaysia to investigate on these relationships. The applicability of Western findings in Malaysia context is highly

questionable due to wide cultural differences. Therefore, the present study examined this issue under Malaysia context, which will provide support on this issue in local context. Findings of the current study may be useful in mitigating the negative consequences escalating divorce rate in Malaysia.

Practically, findings of the current study can help divorced parents to understand their role after getting divorced. Indeed, the detrimental effects of parental divorce on adolescent-aged children may be greater than they expected. For this reason, the current study will serve as a guide for divorced parents to understand their role in leading their children to successful post-divorced adaptation, while minimizing the risk for maladjustment.

In addition, findings of the present study might have practical implications for the counsellors. Based on the findings of this study, the counsellors can understand better on the problems faced by adolescents from divorced families. Hence, findings of the current study can be an input for counsellors to develop interventions that can guide adolescents for better adjustment. For example, counsellors can motivate the adolescents from divorced families to be more engaged in school, which might in turn promote them for better development.

On the other hand, the present study can serve as a guideline for the educators to plan for related program. In order to enhance adolescents' well-being, especially those from divorced families, the educators can implement ideas from the current study in planning programs to enhance the family strength and family bond. Even if the family divorce in later years, strong parent-adolescent relationship might at least reduce some risk level for adolescent to misbehave.

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective

This study aimed to determine the relationships between mother-adolescent relationship, father-adolescent relationship, school engagement, maladaptive coping, and depression among adolescents from divorced families.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To describe mother-adolescent relationship, father-adolescent relationship, school engagement, maladaptive coping, and depression among adolescents from divorced families.
2. To determine the relationships between mother-adolescent relationship, father-adolescent relationship, school engagement, maladaptive coping, and depression among the respondents.
3. To determine the factors that uniquely predicts depression among the respondents.

4. To determine the mediating role of maladaptive coping on the relationship between mother-adolescent relationship, father-adolescent relationship, school engagement, and depression among the respondents.

1.5 Hypothesis

Based on the specific objectives, the present study proposed the following alternative hypothesis:

- H_{a1}: There is a significant relationship between mother-adolescent relationship and depression among respondents.
- H_{a2}: There is a significant relationship between father-adolescent relationship and depression among respondents.
- H_{a3}: There is a significant relationship between school engagement and depression among respondents.
- H_{a4}: There is a significant relationship between maladaptive coping and depression among respondents.
- H_{a5}: Mother-adolescent relationship, father-adolescent relationship, school engagement, and maladaptive coping are significant predictors of depression among respondents.
- H_{a6}: Maladaptive coping mediates the relationship between mother-adolescent relationship and depression among the respondents.
- H_{a7}: Maladaptive coping mediates the relationship between father-adolescent relationship and depression among the respondents.
- H_{a8}: Maladaptive coping mediates the relationship between school engagement and depression among the respondents.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This section explains the theoretical framework for the present study. In general, the present study is based on Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The following section will further discuss both of these theories in greater detail. Following that is a brief discussion on theory integration.

1.6.1 Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression

Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression (Beck, 1967, 1987) was developed to explain how negative life events predict the elevation of depressive symptoms. In a nutshell, Beck's theory suggests that negative early experiences will lead individuals to develop maladaptive schemas, which will ultimately lead them to depression. Beck's theory is widely studied in adult populations, where the evidence generally support the arguments of the theory (Lakdawalla, Hankin, & Mermelstein, 2007). However, implication of this theory in adolescent populations remains scarce (Hankin, Wetter, Cheely, & Oppenheimer, 2008; Lakdawalla et al., 2007). Hence, more research in Beck's theory focusing on adolescent population is highly needed.

A graphical presentation of Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression was displayed as Figure 1.1. The most essential building block of Beck's theory is the concept of schemas. Referring to Clark, Beck, and Alford (1999), schemas are the key in selecting, encoding, organization, storage, and retrieval of information. In general, schemas can be categorized into three levels of generality. The first and most basic level of schemas refers to simple schemas, which mainly deal with single object in physical and social world. Examples of simple schemas are the identification of single objects, such as laptop, lamp, key, and money. Given the simplistic nature of simple schemas, it is expected to have minimal relation to personal values and goals. Hence, simple schemas have very limited influence over the production of depression.

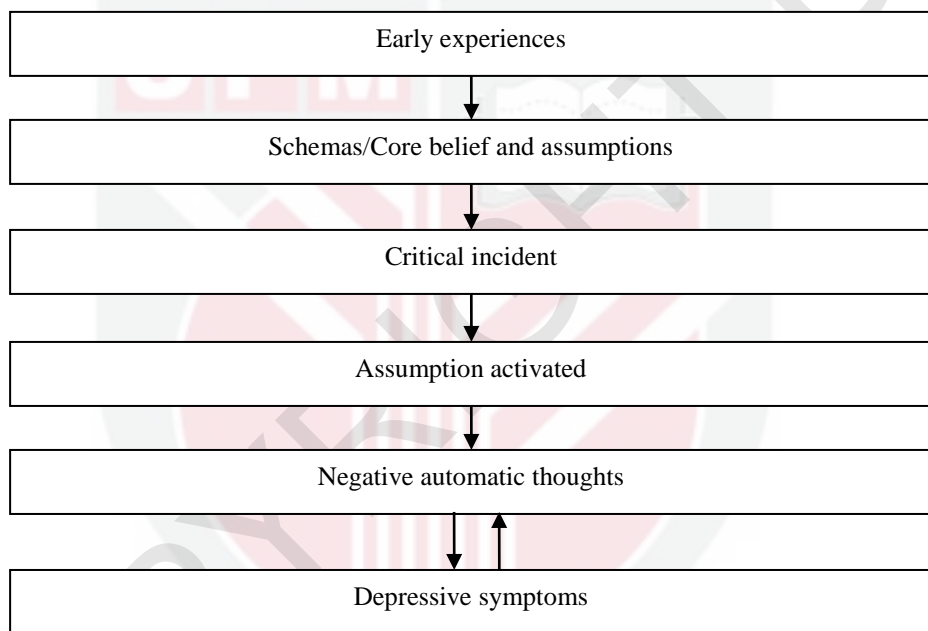


Figure 1.1: Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression

The second level of schemas is intermediary schemas, which is sets of rules which guide the individuals to evaluate themselves, other people, and experiences. Given the less concrete nature of intermediary schemas, individuals often apply intermediary schemas to a broad range of experiences. An important class of intermediary schemas is conditional rules, which mainly take the form in "if...then" statement. Example of conditional schemas is "If I am a good boy, then my parents will not divorce". Another class of intermediary schemas is imperative belief, which often involved the term "should" or "must" in the statement. Examples of imperative schemas are "I should never disappoint my parents" and "I must work hard to impress my parents". The third class of intermediary schemas is compensatory beliefs, which refers to various strategies in response to other intermediary schemas. It is noteworthy that compensatory beliefs are generally autonomic and maladaptive. Example of

compensatory beliefs is “If I follow all instruction from the others, I will gain better acceptance from them”.

The third and broadest schema is core beliefs, which generally take the form of absolute statement reflecting on self's attributes. The core belief usually refers to issues of survival and attachment. Examples of core beliefs are “I am helpless” (survival) and “I am unloved” (attachment).

Based on Beck's theory, negative schemas were formed following early experiences. The negative schemas will remain inactive until the happening of certain critical incidents. In other words, the negative schemas will not produce elevation in depressive symptoms without the occurrence of critical incidents. In the same vein, without negative schemas, the presence of critical incidents will not directly result in depression.

When the negative schemas were activated, negative automatic thoughts will be generated, such as negative thoughts about oneself (self-blaming). The negative automatic thoughts will then lead the individuals to perform several maladaptive coping strategies in handling stresses, which will ultimately lead them to depression.

Following the core tenets of Beck's theory, Clark et al. (1999) further introduced the relationship hypothesis which highlights the importance of interpersonal context in the development of depression. More precisely, relationship hypothesis suggests that negative schemas formed by early experiences will affect the individual's: (1) social perception and evaluation, (2) development of interpersonal skills, and (3) relationship quality. On this account, as the result of early negative events involving loss (particularly within valued relationships), depression-prone individuals tend to show negative-bias in evaluating their relationships with others. Such negative-bias will lead them to perceive their interpersonal relationships as less satisfying, which will eventually lead them to elevation in depression.

On the other hand, Beck (1987) also suggested that the experience of aversive interaction in valued relationships could produce maladaptive coping responses among the depression-prone individuals. Indeed, the maladaptive coping responses will encourage further negative behaviour by the partner. As the result, the negative interaction cycle will worsen the relationship quality and further exacerbate the depression among the individuals. Therefore, the relationship hypothesis clearly shed light on the importance of interpersonal context on the elevation of depression.

Following the core concept of Beck's theory, it is reasonable that the negative schemas were formed inside the adolescents following parental divorce. Based on relationship hypothesis, these negative schemas will work as a guide for adolescents to interpret their relationships with others in later years, which most probably is negative-bias. Hence, the adolescents are more likely to perceive their relationship as unsatisfying, which will steer them to implement maladaptive coping. For an illustration, in response

to the parental divorce, the core belief of “I am unlovable” might develop among the adolescents. With the negative core belief, they tend to be overly sensitive to any relationship issues with others, where they might magnify minor interpersonal conflicts and perceive the relationships with others as broken. The unsatisfied relationships will trigger maladaptive coping responses among them (such as denial and self-blame), and put them at greater risk to develop in depression.

Therefore, in line with Beck’s Cognitive Theory of Depression, the current study hypothesized that the interpersonal context will influence the usage of maladaptive coping among adolescents. Then, the implication of maladaptive coping will further exacerbate the depressive symptoms among adolescents.

1.6.2 Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

To further understand the role of interpersonal context in explaining depression among adolescents of divorced families, the Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory was used to complement Beck’s theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualized complex layers of environment surrounding an adolescent, with each layer having a strong effect on adolescent’s development. Based on Bronfenbrenner’s theory, adolescent lives in a nested environment, where the adolescent is at the centre of the nest. Furthermore, there are four systems in the environment, namely microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner further added chronosystem as the fifth system in later years (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In general, microsystem and mesosystem will have proximal influence on adolescents’ development, which means that both of these environments have direct effects on adolescents (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). In contrast, exosystem and macrosystem will have distal influence on adolescents’ development. Unlike the proximal influence, distal influence will have indirect influences on adolescents’ development.

The microsystem is the closest environment of the adolescent, where the adolescent has direct contact with it (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Basically, the most common microsystem for adolescents is family and school. The interaction between adolescents and these contexts will directly drive the adolescent to grow and develop. Breakdown in the immediate environment can greatly affect adolescent’s development. For example, as the consequences of breakdown of family context, adolescents from divorced families might face more adjustment problems than adolescents from intact families, such as aggressive behaviour, antisocial behaviour, depression, and stress (Amato, 2000).

The mesosystem can directly foster adolescents’ development as well. Mesosystem is a system comprising connections between children’s immediate environments and surrounding. Examples for mesosystem are the relationship between parent and teacher or parental involvement in school. The two-way interactions between these settings have developmental impacts on adolescents (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). For instance, Shumow and Miller (2001) had showed that parental involvement in school will help adolescents to achieve better academic grades.

The exosystem refers to external environmental settings which the adolescents do not directly involve. Exosystem will indirectly affect adolescents' development. A good example for exosystem is parents' career. Although adolescents do not directly involve in parents' career, but parents' career do influence how adolescents develop. Parents who are too busy for their career might have lower interaction and less supportive to their adolescents, which will lead the adolescents to higher stress and depression (Cheng, 2010).

The macrosystem is the large cultural context in the adolescents' environment, which includes culture, values, norms, laws, national economy, political culture, and subculture. This system influences adolescents' development as well as the micro-, meso-, and exosystem. For example, adolescents' development is generally shape by the culture. Adolescents from collectivistic countries tend to value more on interpersonal relationship, while adolescents from individualistic countries tend to put more merit on personal achievement.

Lastly, chronosystem encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to a child's environments. For example, a longitudinal study proposed that the timing of parental death can give impact on adolescents' mental health problems (Zeratsion et al., 2013).

In sum, the greatest strength of the Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory is that it examines various influences from the external environments on adolescents' development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory emphasizes the contextual influences on adolescents' development rather than genetic influences. The quality of adolescents' environment is significantly affecting their development. Instability environment can be a destructive force for adolescents' development. Failure in providing healthy environment will lead adolescents to poor development. As family breakdown due to parental divorce will significantly affect adolescents' environment, it is most probably that adolescents from divorced families are more vulnerable to suffer poor development as compared with adolescents from intact families.

1.6.3 Integration of Theories

This section explains the integration of theories used in the present study. In general, the present study refers to Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory in explaining why adolescents from divorced families are more vulnerable towards depression than adolescents from intact families. A graphical presentation for the integration of theories was displayed as Figure 1.2. Following the rationale of Beck's theory, the onset of negative schema as the result of parental divorce will guide the adolescents to interpret their relationship quality in their interpersonal context. Consequently, the adolescents are more likely to perceive their relationship quality as unsatisfying. The disappointing relationship quality will trigger the negative schema, and steer the adolescents towards more frequent application of maladaptive coping in handling stress. Given that maladaptive

coping is unfruitful in most cases, the adolescents are at higher risk to develop in depression.

To further complement the arguments of Beck’s theory, the current study extracts the ideas from Bronfenbrenner’s theory to guide the selection of specific interpersonal context. As the microsystem is the most influential environment that can give significant impacts on adolescents’ development, the present study put the main focus on the microsystem. On the other hand, while many early studies focused only on the family setting while studying adolescents’ behaviour, Bronfenbrenner (1994) suggested to include some other key developmental settings in the future research. Therefore, the current study will include another context where the adolescents closely attach, which is the school context. In sum, the current study will examine how parents-adolescent relationship and school engagement will influence maladaptive coping among adolescents from divorced families, which will further influence the development of depression.

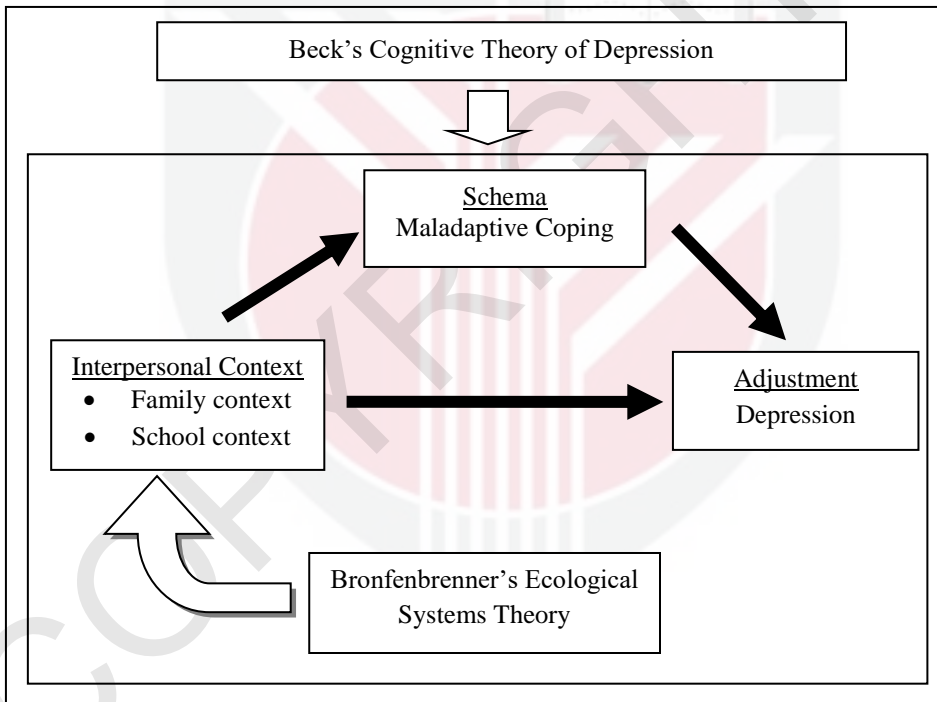


Figure 1.2: Integration of Theories

1.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is adapted from the ideas of Beck’s Cognitive Theory of Depression and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory. Figure 1.3 illustrated the conceptual framework for the present study.

Having established the pivotal role of negative schemas introduced in Beck’s Cognitive Theory of Depression, the present study hypothesized that the unsatisfying interpersonal context will steer more frequent implication of maladaptive coping strategies among adolescents, which will then lead them to elevation of depression. That is, maladaptive coping is expected to have mediating effect on the relationship between interpersonal context and depression among the respondents.

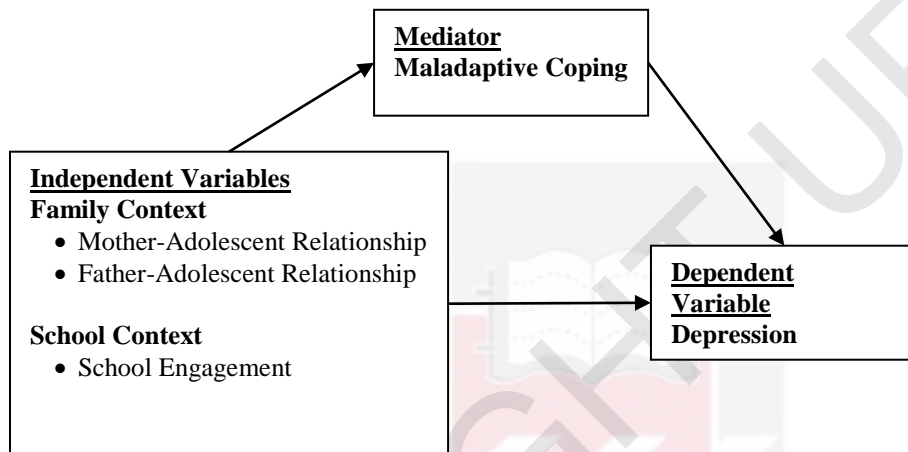


Figure 1.3: Conceptual Framework for the study of “Effects of Parents-Adolescent Relationship, School Engagement, and Maladaptive Coping on Depression among Adolescents from Divorced Families in Malaysia”

To be more specific, the interpersonal contexts included in the present study are the interactions between adolescents and their microsystem, namely family (mother-adolescent relationship and father-adolescent relationship) and school context (school engagement). The present study hypothesized that poor person-environment interaction will increase the risk for development in depression among adolescents. In other words, adolescents with poor mother-adolescent relationship, poor relationship with non-custodial father, and low school engagement are expected to display higher depression as compared with their counterparts.

1.8 Definition of Terminology

This study involves the use of certain terminologies which are of importance. These terms will be defined and explained further in this section.

1.8.1 Divorced family

Conceptual Definition:

Divorced family refers to couples who filed for marital separation or divorce through legal process (Gardner & Oswald, 2006).

Operational Definition:

Divorced family refers to adolescent who stay in single-mother family after legalized parental divorce. In addition, the single-mother is not remarried or cohabiting with new partner.

1.8.2 Adolescent

Conceptual Definition:

Adolescent refers to person ages from 10 to 19 years (World Health Organization, 2012). Adolescence is a stage between childhood and adulthood. This unique characteristic makes adolescence stage become more complex.

Operational Definition:

Adolescent refers to secondary schools' students in Malaysia which age from 13 to 18 years old.

1.8.3 Depression

Conceptual Definition:

Depression refers to people who persistently experiencing sad or irritable mood, and loss of the ability to experience pleasure in nearly all activities (Ralph, 2004).

Operational Definition:

Depression refers to adolescent's score on The Beck Youth Inventories – Depression Inventory (BYI-D, Beck, Beck, & Jolly, 2001), where higher score indicates more severe depression.

1.8.4 Mother-adolescent relationship

Conceptual Definition:

Mother-adolescent relationship refers to the relationship between mother and children, which consists of behaviours, feelings, and expectations. Mother-adolescent relationship is more conflicted in adolescence stage than child stage (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

Operational Definition:

Mother-adolescent relationship refers to adolescent's score on the mother scale of Inventory for Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), where higher score indicates more positive mother-adolescent relationship.

1.8.5 Father-adolescent relationship

Conceptual Definition:

Father-adolescent relationship refers to affective quality of fathering, satisfaction of father's involvement, and frequency of contact with father (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008).

Operational Definition:

Father-adolescent relationship refers to adolescent's score on the father scale of Inventory for Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), where higher score indicates more positive relationship with non-custodial father.

1.8.6 School engagement

Conceptual Definition:

School engagement refers to students' commitment and involvement in learning at school (Bear & Yang, 2011).

Operational Definition:

School engagement refers to adolescent's score on School Engagement Scale (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004), where higher score indicates higher engagement in school.

1.8.7 Maladaptive coping

Conceptual Definition:

Coping strategy refers to a set of technique which an individual use to handle internal and external stressors, where the stressors have exceeded the individual's capabilities to handle (Ubiem, 2010). In addition, maladaptive coping is a subcategory of coping strategy which allows the individual to retreat or avoid from distress (Webb Hooper, McNutt, & Baker, 2015). However, maladaptive coping is often unfruitful and failed to lead to proper resolution.

Operational Definition:

Maladaptive coping refer to adolescent's score on the maladaptive coping subscales from the Malay version of Brief COPE (Yusoff, Low, & Yip, 2010), where higher score indicates more frequent use of maladjustment coping.

1.9 Limitation

The present study has several limitations. First, there are several criteria for the respondents of the current study, which are 1) Muslims, (2) come from divorced families, and (3) live with single mother (where the mother does not remarried). Hence, only Muslim adolescents were participated in the current study. Findings of the present study should not be over generalized beyond this scope. Second, the present study was designed as a cross-sectional study. Thus, the present study provides limited knowledge on the causal relationships between the variables. For instance, the finding of present study is unable to explain if school engagement influence depression or vice versa. Third, all data of this study are collected by self-report questionnaire. Some respondents might prone to select the "correct" answer instead of what they actually do.

Hence, respondents' bias is inevitable. Forth, the present study focused only on the secondary stressors from the microsystem of the adolescents. There might have other factors from other systems that can affect adolescents' development, such as parents' career, parental involvement in school, and social norms. Further, the current study does not take gender difference into account. Indeed, there are past studies which suggested that adolescents of different gender tend to perceive the event of parental divorce differently (Amato, 2000). Lastly, the timing of divorce is not considered in the current study. While previous study suggested that the timing of parental divorce will influence the magnitude of its negative consequences. That is, research indicated that early parental divorce will greatly affect the mental health of the adolescents, while parental divorce in late adolescence does not lead to mental health problems (Zeratsion et al., 2013). Given the limitations of the present study, interpretation of the current findings beyond the scope should proceed with care.

1.10 Summary

Parental divorce can be a traumatic event for adolescent-aged children. Concerns about the skyrocketing divorce rate have been raised by educators, which is being blamed as one of the root cause for depression among adolescents. Attempting to understand how parental divorce can influence depression among adolescents, the present study integrated the idea from Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory by examining the relationship between interpersonal context and depression among adolescents. That is, the present study identified how family (mother-adolescent relationship and father-adolescent relationship) and school context (school engagement) can influence the development of depression among adolescents from divorced families in Malaysia. In addition, the present study further examined the mediating effects of maladaptive coping in the aforementioned relationships.

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