

Key Challenges Contributing to the Survival of Single Mothers

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the role of single mother is challenging especially when the single mother are head of households and who are having children. In Malaysia, the challenges of single mother are related with the definition of single mother, children, financial, education, healthcare, legal assistance as well as registration with e-Kasih. The increase in the numbers of divorced women and widows has created a zone of illnesses after being a single mother and it became worse when their life are at greater risk of poverty. This study is using literature review for further discussion. Ultimately, this study will discuss about what are the factors to the issues and the impact on their life.

KEYWORDS: Single Mothers, Divorced, Widow.

INTRODUCTION

The single parent families are increasing and causing a great concern for the government, resulting from a death of one parent, divorce, separation and desertion [1]. In Malaysia, the main events that lead to single motherhood are divorce or separation and widowhood. Throughout the years, Statistics show rising incidence of divorce in Malaysia from 2011 to 2013. According to Department of Syariah Judiciary Malaysia reported that more than 274,000 Muslim marriages divorce within the last 6 years with most cases of divorce were young couples last than five years of marriage [2]. Malaysian statistics revealed the existence of nearly 235,240 single mothers equals to 1.7% from the Malaysian total population. The increasing case of divorce and widowhood in Malaysia has become a serious concerned that will affect their life and children.

Last July 2016, a sad story in Kota Samarahan Sarawak, murder of two boys aged by 7 and 4 years by their own mother who later committed suicide by hanging herself in the toilet shows the dangerous scenario the single mothers are going through. During the cause of investigation, it shows that they children have been forced to drink detergent before the mother committed to suicide. This situation happened to a broken family and single mother who feel depressed after been left by her irresponsible husband [3]. Similarly a case in Kedah, a Chinese mother allegedly kills two children by slaughtering them at their home who is believed to be a mentally unsound [4]. A 36 year-old Malay housewives charged with murder of a five-year-old stepdaughter at Bandar Puncak Alam. This was a sad ending happened to the family. A case on depression is not only in Malaysia but throughout other countries. For example, a mother kills her own son tragically happened at Bandar Lampung, Indonesia before she committed suicide. She suffered a breast cancer and feel depressed according to her close family. A Texas, America mother who reportedly having a history of mental health problems killed her two daughters aged 17 and 22 just to punish her husband [5]. According to National Mental Health Status states that depression is defined by feelings of sadness and helplessness. Housewives can develop depression especially when they experience sadness from time to time. The changing life events such as divorce and death will leads to depression. The cases revealed medical treatment should be emphasized to those patients. The question arises how far our government NGOs agencies are playing their role in setting up the body or survives in responses to the cases so that it won't happened again?

A study by [6] revealed that divorced women have a higher susceptibility to chronic illness, especially over a period of time compared with married women. A stressful life event has also shown to have affected the psychological health of these women after the divorce. Research shows divorced mothers experienced a greater number of stressful events such as demotions, layoffs, accidents, critical illnesses and problems with their own parents than did married women. Apart of that, depression is also linked with widowhood. Widowhood is associated with decreased psychological, physical, social functioning and increased risk for mortality [7]. Therefore, divorced and widowhood mothers are opened to stressful situations that might threaten their life and children. There are

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certain incidences, we use to hear about parent abusing and killing own children in the mass media such as a father committed on sexual abusing the kids and the mother committed on murdering the kids too. Instinctively, men's are develop on sexual disorders but women are about on children and develop some disorders. The disorders are certainty towards children as a victim. As a result, mother who are depressed will project their sadness to the children.

This paper has come to the turning point to study the factor contributing to these issues and the challenges of the single mother in Malaysia. Although, our government and non-government organization are very much concerned of the problems facing the single mothers particularly on the financial aspect. Is it enough to cover the critical aspect of the single mothers such as issues on their mental health? How, we shall expect the single mother to perform better if this understanding are still negative to discuss and have a tendency to a bad consequences?

Overview Single Mothers in Malaysia

In Malaysia, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development are responsible on strengthening the family institution. Uniquely, this is the only Ministry handling the tasks on single mother participation. The Department of Women Development under the Ministry has play a role on addressing the problem faced by the single mother. Single father has not been emphasized as compared to single mother. This is due on the hard work of poor single mother that take into account to focus on their needs. Many studies have highlighted different definitions of the term single mother adopted by researcher and policy makers. However, no acceptable definition yet that defined the term single mother. The definition of single mother have brought the discussion on finding the right standard definition as women without children and grandparents who look after the grandchildren also considered as single mother. Before the standardized definition, the number of single mothers released by the Malaysian Census were around 800,000 single mothers.

Definition on single mothers in Malaysia now recognized by the government and already getting the Cabinet approval. After due recognition of single mothers in Malaysia, the 2010 Malaysian Census indicated that the number has been reduced to 235,000 single mothers. The definition on single mothers has been characterized and those who fulfil the criteria will be acknowledged as single mothers i) Women who are widowed or divorced, separated from their husbands; and are the main providers of their households; and having children who are not married and living in the same households ii) Women who are the main providers for the family but the husband are not capable to work because of terrible sickness having children who are not married and living in the same households iii) Single women who are main providers, obtain custody of someone else's children or having child out of wedlock. The acknowledgement of the single mother given by the Ministry of Women Family will perhaps give a clear understanding who is exactly known as single mother.

CHALLENGES ON SINGLE MOTHERS

Single Mothers Emotional and Behavioural Challenges

Divorce or separation and widowhood are two main reasons lead to single motherhood in Malaysia [8]. Divorce comes about as a result of conflict in the families that eventually disrupt the tranquillity and mutual understanding at house. The happiness in the families has been taken away with the abnormalities of life, cracked, sadness and pain in the children's mind. In Malaysia, there are students who need to be help such as professional help due to psychological trauma of divorce family[9]. The most prevailing are emotional help where nobody would be interested to listen to them. The scenario becoming worse such as a bullying case. Last April 2016 in Pengkalan Chepa Kelantan, the victim sustained a fractured neck following the bullying incident at school. One case at Johor Bahru, a video recording of bullying incident involving a student have been uploaded on the Facebook showed a male student's slapping the victim while the other student recorded the scene. Research indicated that [10] sources of children behaviour problems comes from marital conflict and interruption. It indicates that family is the key system for the children behaviours. If this children are coming from a broken family, how this children going are these behave accordingly?

According to [11], children from single families were at significant risks for antisocial behaviour problems. Both teachers and parents reported a high problems for the children of divorce, single mother families including temper tantrums, fighting, bullying, cheating, lying and stealing. In Malaysia, single mothers have reported that their children have discipline problems those this indicate whether this has to do with their children being affected by single parenthood?

In [12] associated poor parenting with delinquent behaviours as the parents childrearing behaviour change to become less affectionate, less supervision and less able to control their children development. In [13] single mothers had a poor parenting skills compared to their married counterparts as a children become more dependent,

disobedient, aggressive in the year following divorce. As mentioned in [14], separated or divorced mothers lived with loss of resources that as a result affected their life such as loss of partners, loss of wealth and loss of income. Those mothers who are living in poverty and no other resources. Therefore, there are other several departments offering several financial assistance to single mothers to alleviate their sufferings. Without this help, how would this single mother and children survive with a very challenging high costs of living? No support from the father to monitor the children behaviour this could be one of the result of children misbehaviour. A father attachment on the children will leads to a greater parenting styles to the children such as being the hero and role model in the family. As a result of this, children are becoming aggressive and no one could ever controlling them contrary to the father's support, children would become more aggressive in such away that they could not be controlled.

Research has shown that divorced parents are at greater risk for symptoms of depression than married parents [15-17]. Parental depressive have a greater risks for children to have an adjustment problems. The bad model parenting skills such as showing negative affect and poor coping strategies will generate a bad emotional transition to the children. A few cases in Malaysia revealed a poor living and strategies on handling depression by committing suicide and killing own family was a terrible conditions where people fails to face the difficulties in life. Moreover, lack of social interaction, no appetite, sleeping problems, mood changes, impairment in thinking and attempts suicidal [18]. Therefore, children are the most nearest to their family to get affected by these emotional disturbances.

A study by [29] revealed that the mother's sadness can make the children experience the same feelings. If the mother is happy, the children will also experience happiness. But if the mother is not happy, the children will also be affected. Children who are having conflict in life since they were kids their minds and behaviour will affected as well. Their emotional disturbances produced the unfinished business [19] family conflict, having history of abusive family, bad experience will shaped an insecure emotional feelings on the children's development. This is common on children's from single mothers families, for example the Muslim family in Kelantan reported that children from single families are prefer to stay with the grandparents as they received attention and love. The overwhelmed love and attention have spoiled the children. As a result, children are stubborn, being rude and wildly behave as they grows.

In [27] declared that depression is the 2nd cause of disability by the year 2020. Thus, the depression symptoms are more prevalence among women twice than men [20]. As a result, less of supervision and monitoring towards children may have an effect on parenting styles such as withdrawal by not giving so much attention and love or ignoring the existence of the children. Withdrawal of love and attention may affect the children development as the mothers have less attention and motivation to interact with their children than the mothers who are not experiencing symptoms of depression [21]. Depression symptoms would derive from this parental withdrawal. Therefore, children are feel abandoned and will find other ways to gain their life without the involvement of the mothers as the mothers were less involved with the children in divorced families rather than in 2-parent families. Less involvement, less supervision and less monitoring of the children may affect the way children's behave in class, school and probably involved with delinquency behaviour and discipline problems compared to children with two parents [22]. Delinquency behaviour is a negative attention produced by the children for getting the attention from the depressive mothers. Therefore, the depressive symptoms would affect the children being affected by single parenthood as higher the depressive symptom is associated with the quality of parenting.

Single Mothers School Performance Challenges

It is well known that single mothers are synonym living in poverty, financial hardships, social isolation when there is no social support and social stigma given by the society which in turn tense to be a negative impact on the social and academic adjustment [23]. For example; living the children without proper foods conditions and proper care will influences the child outcomes, especially their health. Taking less proper food will contribute to their poor school performance. There are poor families who just only survive with eating porridge and salts everyday because no money to buy a good food. It is sad to hear that some of this kids only eat chicken or meat once a year when comes to festive season. How we expect them to eat and live proper life if they lived in this difficulties conditions?

Most of the single parent families experience financial crises in their life. As for single mother, it turn out to be difficult situation after the death of the husband's especially to fulfil the basic needs. Moreover, single mothers considered to be poor compared to any other group which leads their children to stress [29]. As a result on this challenges, going to school needs finance to buy shoes, school uniform, bags, to pay school fees etc. Research shown that family income appears to be more strongly related to children's ability and achievement than to their emotional outcomes. With limited resource how would the single mother to fulfil all those needs? They cannot afford to buy and get what they want if they compare with their friends who able to get from their families. This would allow them less motivate to study and go to school because might feel inferior on themselves.

Single Mothers Communications with Children Challenges

A healthy parent should free from emotionally and physically sickness. Emotionally disturbances would be difficult to consult and to interact with their children properly. As a result into this, they would spend their time with their friends and peers would understand them more. Moreover, children and adolescents spending time in the after-school hours has become a central concern of parents, researchers and policy makers to overcome these issues [25-26]. It makes sense that when the children feels that they were not belongs to family and feels abandoned, they will spend more time with their peers. Therefore, they would go to other place find alternatives to release their stress and got potential risks they committed to immoral activities. If this single mother are not aware on this changes, it is going to be a serious illness among their children and to society as well?

CONCLUSION

This paper emphasizes on the factor contributing to issues and the challenges of the single mother. Raising the children alone without any proper guardians give an impact to the children development. The scenario on the issue of single mother has to be evaluated holistically by the government, researchers, mass media and our society. There are many ways for the single mother to participate and to be involved with the society such as Single Mother Association, the registered and active society in Malaysia. Being in a group shows the sense of belongingness and this would help them to encounter their life into difficulties. Furthermore, a support group in collaboration with NGOs and single mother associations also can help the married couples in distress particularly those who are poor. The proper parenting and teaching styles should be applied and practice among single mothers, so that it will add the values to their life and children.

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