

Contributing Factors of Willingness in Families Counseling among Low SES Parents' in Malaysia

Norhayati Mohd Noor¹, Aidah Abdul Karim², Siti Rokiah Mohd Tharin²

¹Pusat GENIUS@Pintar Negara, National Gifted Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi Selangor, ²Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi Selangor

Corresponding Author Email: norhayati@ukm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i9/18320> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i9/18320

Published Date: 05 September 2023

Abstract

The process of family counseling among parents of low SES income groups has been proven to be able to help families deal with crises and conflicts in the family. However, it is often not taken seriously and the awareness to get the service is still lacking among them. This study aims to explore the aspects that encourage the willingness of parents from the low SES group to attend family counseling sessions in dealing with the issue of children dropping out in education. A qualitative approach using this case study design was carried out on 4 parents consisting of three mothers and one father whose household income status is in the low SES category and living around Selangor. Research data was obtained from semi-structured interviews and using thematic analysis methods. The results of the study found that 3 themes have emerged, namely i. want the best for a family, ii. support of family members and iii. admit a lack of knowledge. This theme is discussed by focusing on the importance of family counseling services in helping parents as the main subsystem in the family in order to ensure that there is no dropout of children's education among their families.

Keywords: Family Counseling, Low SES Parents, Readiness Factors, Family Counseling in Education

Introduction

The family is the main ecosystem for the growth process of children and has a direct impact on their self-system as individuals throughout life (Zhang et al., 2020). So basic needs such as love, family acceptance and attention to their development are ignored and not met properly are among the factors that drag these children at risk of being involved in various social problems early in their lives (Nisa, 2021). Kelchner (2020) found that children with disturbed mental and emotional well-being tend to face disciplinary issues at school, are subjected to disciplinary actions such as suspension from school and punishment for various behavioral problems and have a high frequency of skipping school.

A report from the Malaysian Ministry of Education states that 1.40% (67,053) students do not attend class and do not attend school without any notification to the school. Factors to the reported dropout statistics include lack of interest in going to school, family poverty, family members being divided due to various factors, low awareness of the importance of education, peer influence and lack of parental support. Indirectly these factors give an overview of the situation experienced by children who are in low SES families (referring to the lowest household income) who have an income of less than RM2500 or no more than RM4800 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020) are children who have the potential to drop out from getting an education at school and also obtain high academic achievement.

Family Counseling

Family counseling is an intervention that has been implemented for centuries around the world by all countries in improving the well-being of children including academic, attitude, and cognitive aspects (Feinberg et al., 2022). Along with increasing understanding of the importance of mental health care, Norhayati (2014), asserted that family counseling needs to be seen as one of the basic needs of the Malaysian community, especially in efforts to handle the various social and mental health problems that are growing in their respective communities. The issues faced by the client usually appear to be individual in nature, but if explored further, it is possible that the issues experienced by the client are symptoms of root problems that stem from family issues leading to more complicated conflicts (Azmatul et al., 2021).

Basically, family counseling is one of the processes in the helping relationship under the management of a registered counselor who is bound by the principles and code of ethics of the Malaysian Counselor Board. Family counselors need to have skills in the process of helping the structuring of family institutions through systematic methods so that the client's family achieves a prosperous life (Norhayati, 2014). Counselors guide the client as a family to achieve common sense in identifying various forms of interaction and various environmental factors that occur around the family as an influence on the behavior and characteristics of family members (Sapora & Ruhaya, 2020). The family client must be able to balance between the need to be assertive in a matter and be flexible towards mutually agreed upon rules. Counselors need to provide mind and behavior management skills to the head of the family so that after attending family counseling, they are able to independently handle early conflicts that occur in the family and take preventive measures before the conflict becomes more impoverished (Carr, 2018).

The Effectiveness of Family Counseling in Education

The entire family system of the client such as the form of family organization, relationship patterns, communication patterns and interactions among family members should be explored to get a comprehensive picture of the root of the problem faced by the client in order to plan his treatment (Norhayati, 2014). For example, the importance of exposing the concept of rules at home was emphasized by Azmatul et al (2021) because his study found that children who are not taught the values of discipline early in their growth at home, find it difficult to follow discipline at school. Children who grow up with irregular family rules and culture tend to rebel against the rules at school (Azmatul et al., 2021). This scenario reinforces the importance of family counseling as an early step to help families prepare these children to face the real world.

Studies related to the development and upbringing of good children usually emphasize the importance of the active involvement of parents as a basic element and supporter for children's self-development (Nisa, 2021; Hasri & Hasriza, 2021; Azmatul et al., 2021). Children who are still of school age are directly responsible to their parents as legal guardians and have authority over them as stated in the Child Protection Act 1991 and later updated to Act 611 (Zabdi & Zulazhar, 2005). However, there are very little research that details the step-by-step action form of low SES parents' involvement to effectively encourage them to participate in the role. The family counseling approach in particular that aims to guide and develop the mental and emotional well-being of the parents and children involved needs to be offered as one form of solution. Therefore, this study aims to explore the willingness of parents from low SES families to attend family counseling sessions.

Methodology

This qualitative approach study uses a case study design to explore for parents' low SES. Qualitative methods refer to the extension of the design class of empirical procedures to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a specific environmental context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The study participants consisted of citizens living around Selangor. Participants were selected based on the case studied, which is a low SES family that has the issue of children dropping out of school due to truancy and often not attending the learning sessions in full. The Participant of the First Study (KP1) is a single mother who has three teenage children and works as a school clerk. The second study participant (KP2) is the wife of a teacher at a private school, a housewife and has 3 primary school children and 2 teenage children. The third study participant (PK3) is an online cake entrepreneur, has a self-employed husband and has 2 teenage children. Participant of the Fourth Study (PK4) is a trader at the farmer's market, wife as a housewife and 2 children in primary school.

In this study, researchers used interview data as the main data while observations and analysis documents as supporting data. The interview data is transcribed into verbatim writing each time after the interview is completed to allow researchers to identify questions that are still unanswered by study participants and will be re-interviewed during the second round of interview sessions and researchers can know the level of data saturation. In-depth interviews were conducted guided by a semi-structured question protocol prepared by the researcher based on the researcher's reading from literature reviews such as journals and book publications. To ensure the validity of the study data, the interview question method was validated by three experts in the field of family counseling and qualitative experts.

The data analysis process in this study is based on thematic analysis. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study data, the transcribed data in verbatim form was sent back to all study subjects, reviewed by fellow researchers and expert evaluation in the qualitative and field of study. The formation of themes and sub-themes is based on library reading and reading transcripts repeatedly from line to line. Researchers have extracted themes through keywords generated from the data and extracted themes through sentence descriptions of specific keywords. The researchers used NVivo 12 software as a tool to manage the transcribed data. To ensure that the resulting themes are accurate, the researcher has read repeatedly to give meaning to the sentences in verbatim.

Findings

Confidence in one's own ability to make changes is one of the main elements that must be present for individuals in the process of improving their quality of life and self. A total of three

sub-themes were identified to increase their confidence to make changes in their families. The sub-theme i. welfare and well-being for self and family, ii. improve the support system of family members and lack of knowledge.

Welfare and well-being for self and family

All study participants said they are ready and able to make changes if it brings good effects to themselves and the important people in their lives. PK1 admits that as children grow up, the importance of children having good morals becomes a necessity and encourages him to work on changes in the family.

"It's really hard, because we've settled with our own habits...but we really want to change, especially when the children grow up...sometimes I think, I want to see the children's morals become like other people's good children..."

Indeep interview/PK 1

Whereas, for PK2, the feeling of shame for the children because of their partner's bad behavior makes them want changes to happen so that the children can get a good example from their own parents.

"It's important to always improve yourself, because the children look at us, it's embarrassing when the eldest child reprimands why you can scold me...but mom doesn't scold my sister...it's sad because I know what she did was wrong"

Indeep interview/PK 2

For PK3, he linked the confidence factor to change with religious motivation and the role of children for parents according to Islam.

"Changed to build a family that is kind, loving, because I married to have offspring, so if my offspring are not righteous children, how will they pray for me when I die later."

Indeep interview/PK 3

While PK4, is a father who expresses concern with the lifestyle of the latest teenagers who often get stuck in bad things due to the influence of their peers.

"Oh, I'm quite worried about the atmosphere of today's teenagers, children are very quickly influenced by nonsense, follow friends and don't listen to what mom and dad say... I have to find a way for the children to respect mom and dad... mom and dad have to change too, can't handle like before..."

Indeep interview/PK 4

Improve the Support System of family members.

All study participants said the need for support from family members is important to increase their confidence in making personal and family changes. PK1 describes the determination to do the change process to be more motivated with the involvement of all family members.

"more enthusiasm if a family is involved, like a family project... everyone shares and understands how we want to be, can spend time together and think for everyone... we both understand, we support each other..."

Indeep interview/PK 1

PK2 expressed his desire to see the quality of the relationship between children and fathers increase. He also expects support from his partner to achieve that hope.

'it's best if everyone joins in, right...especially the children and their fathers, they can understand each other's thoughts...yes, even if it's hard to talk, how can we improve the relationship...I really want them to be able to spend time listening to the children'

Indeep interview/PK 2

PK3 relates the Islamic lifestyle that is practiced in his life as a family, strengthening his belief in the togetherness of each family member capable of making good changes in the family.

"We do pray in congregation, eat together as long as there is a chance... because I also believe in the importance of togetherness that will strengthen the bonds of the heart... so it is important that everyone understands, can support... especially between me and my husband, we have to set an example."

Indeep interview/PK 3

For PK4, he admits that the role of a partner in raising children is much greater than the role he plays. The support of this couple is a great relief for PK4.

"...the child is close to his mother, but later the mother does not tell me... the wife really knows a lot about the child, because she is close... I am relieved when the wife updates about the children"

Indeep interview/PK 4

Lack of Knowledge

All study participants admitted that they lacked awareness and exposure, especially parenting knowledge and the skills to manage emotions and mentally when faced with stress. PK1 sought references in parenting knowledge through growing up experiences, social media sharing and office colleagues. He admits that it feels like fumbling if there is no proper guide to refer to.

"...always read the tips or tips on Facebook...like lectures on YouTube...ask your friends in the office, exchange views...it's actually important to have the right knowledge, if you don't feel like you're not sure of the direction "

Indeep interview/PK 1

For PK2 he took the experience of his older sisters to raise children. However, he experienced difficulty in applying theory and experience in the form of action.

"There are also readings on Facebook about children, teenagers, marriage... I like to chat with my sisters about children but it's also difficult when I don't even know how to put everything into practice... it's really stressful"

Indeep interview/PK 2

PK3 chooses parenting and family inputs from religious sources and the advice of figures he admires. However, PK3 shows that he lacks understanding of how to manage healthy emotions.

Alhamdulillah, I diligently listen to IKIM radio, so it's like following Prof Muhaya, Ustaz Kazim...it used to be like the one on TV, Semanis Kurma,...there are times when I can do it, there are times when I can't do it...like we know we have to be patient, but the heart is still sick... had to hide, for a long time it felt like I didn't have any feelings... like it subsided"

Indeep interview/PK3

PK4 admits his weakness in proper parenting knowledge and only exchanges ideas with colleagues a lot.

"... if you want to say knowledge to educate, I actually don't even know the right knowledge... but always when I chat with friends at the market, I don't talk about children..."

PK 4

The findings of the interviews with the four participants of this study show that all the study participants have a desire to give a good life to their family, hope for a strong bond between all family members and strive to improve parenting knowledge.

Discussion

The low SES family in this study did not reject the need for family counseling services to help improve the quality of their family's well-being. In fact, they are confident in family counseling services and are ready if given the opportunity to attend. As in Carr's (2018), study, family counseling is one of the alternative steps that are systematic as a support to the process of individuals and family members changing to achieve the goal of well-being in family life. Kelchner et al (2020), also provided an example of the school's success in improving academic performance and building the character of students when the school implements family counseling in the school setting. Family counseling that is able to affect the internal changes of a family system is definitely able to give a consistent reaction to changes in behavior, environment and overall sub-system action choices in the family system (Johnson & Ray, 2016).

As a result of the interviews with all the participants in this study, they as the parent subsystem expressed the desire to change because they want to be a better self and hope that their children (child subsystem) become better human beings. Their willingness to make changes is further strengthened by the belief that they get support from family members in making the desired changes based on the practices and behaviors of family members over the years (Johnson & Ray, 2016). The lack of knowledge in carrying out the responsibilities and role of parenting makes them admit that it is difficult to take the right decisions and actions, especially when dealing with the problems of children and spouses. In this regard, guidance from counselors is expected to be the main form of social support for them.

Conclusion

The low SES family were the majority group in the Malaysian population cycle. Therefore, the culture, values, and lifestyle of the low SES family group must be a big issue and indirectly dominate the identity of Malaysian society. The social issues that occur among low SES families are also becoming more complicated, not to mention that the cost of living is increasing and the currency is shrinking, becoming an increasingly painful challenge to face.

The need for family counseling services cannot be denied. Parents, especially from the low SES family group, need guidance to help them form more prosperous family values.

The results of this study suggest that the Malaysian government can increase the number of local centers that offer family counseling sessions, especially to low-income families. Skill training in family counseling is also improved for counselors so that the counseling process carried out is of higher quality.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the Faculty of Education, National University of Malaysia for their support in the publication of this article.

References

- Sari, A. K., Neviyarni, S., Syukur, Y. (2021). Family Counseling Anticipating Bullying Behavior in Children. *Journal of Education and Teaching Learning (JETL)*. Vol 3, No 2.
- Carr, A. (2018). Family therapy and systemic interventions for child-focused problems: The current evidence base. *Journal of Family Therapy*.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rded). Sage Publication.
- Haruna, H., & Alib, H. M. (2021). The Father's Role in Building a Prosperous Family: Analyze the Issues and Challenges in the Digital. *Online Journal Research in Islamic Studies, UM*. Vol.8. P 57-66.
- Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia. (2020). Household Income and Expenditure M40 and B40 by state. https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/uploads/files/6_Newsletter/Newsletter%202020/DOSM_BPHPP_3-2020_Siri_28.pdf
- Yusoff, J. Z. M., & Tahir, Z. (2005). Children Act 2001: Re-Enforcement Duties and Responsibilities of Parents or Guardians? *Journal of Malaysian and Comparative Laws*. JMCL 6.
- Johnson, B., E., & Ray, W., (2016). *Family Systems Theory*. The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Family Studies New York.
- Kelchner V. P., Campbell L. O., Howard C. C., Bensinger J., & Lambie G. W. (2020). The Influence of School-Based Family Counseling on Elementary Students and Their Families. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*. Vol. 28(3) 273-282.
- Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia. (2017). Laporan Tahunan 2016 PPPM 2013-2025. Development Plan Malaysian Education 2013-2015, 1, 100–108.
- Isa, K. N. B. M., & Abu Bakar, K. (2021). Relationship between Parents' Emotions and Children's children and their importance to early childhood development. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*. Volume 6, Issue 7, p258 – 266.
- Noor, N. M. (2014). Family Counseling in Malaysia: Current Issues and Practices. *International Education Studies; Vol. 7, No. 13*.
- Sipon, S., & Hussin, R. (2020). Counseling and Psychotherapy Theory. 5 Ed. pp310-314. Publish USIM, Bandar Baru Nilai.
- Zhang, F., Jiang, Y., Hua Ming, H., Yi Ren, Y., Wang, W., & Huang, S. (2020). Family socio-economic status and children's academic achievement: The different roles of parental

academic involvement and subjective social mobility. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90, 561–579.