

# **Problem Sharing Tendency among Orphan: Case Study at Wisma Yatim Islam Perempuan, Penang**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Children at orphanage are prone to suffer from depression due to their loss of either one or both of their parents. Services offered to these children at orphanage are commonly to cater their material needs such as financial aid and daily necessities including their daily meals. This study was conducted to observe the orphans' relation with caregivers and the formers' tendency to share their problems with the latter. This study employed qualitative method and the data was gathered from interview with 10 respondents who resided in Wisma Yatim Islam Perempuan, WYP (Muslim Girls Orphanage) in Penang. The study discovered that all respondents as having close relationship with the caregivers but not all were able to share their problem with the latter due to the large number of resident vis-à-vis the caregivers. Sharing problems for orphans is very important because the children experience such a traumatized phase in their developing period. A positive surrounding will help them to enjoy a normal life like children with parents.

**Keywords:** Problem sharing, Orphans, Caregivers, Wisma Yatim Islam Perempuan

## **INTRODUCTION**

Service provided for children at orphanage usually focuses more on physical and material needs of the residents. This form of treatment garners the excitement of donors duly because of their other commitments and time constrain. Orphans on the other hands tend to suffer from depression resulting from their traumatized lost as well as their relocation at an alien environment of a shelter house. This delicate situation must be carefully dealt with in order to vanquish depression and to harness a normal and undamaged child development.

Depression among orphans may occur due to feeling of negligence, lack of support, personality change, feeling of hardship - especially for children below thirteen years old, feeling of lost,

despair, anger, stress and improper education (Howard, Matinhure, McCurdy & Johnson, 2009; Sengendo & Nambi, 1997). Such situation requires a solution which employs a firm and comprehensive support system to make sure no forsaken incidence to occur. Particularly, children who lost their parents are in need of support to accept and adapt with their new environment (Cluver & Gardner, 2006).

There are two main aspects which according to Collings and Davies (2008), must be ascertained upon any discussion about syllabus for child self development at an orphanage. The first is the orphan's right as an orphan and the second is the orphan's individual right as a child. The orphan's right as an orphan clarifies that his or her relocation must comply with his or her needs such as meals, security and proper education which should be attainable at the orphanage entirely. The orphan's right as a child, on the other hand, asserts the child vicinity with his or her relatives or a comfortable suiting environment. Wolf and Fesseha (1998), argue that method by which an orphanage is administered can affect the mental health and cognitive development of the residents. An institution which involves all caregivers in decision making may influence the residents to becoming more independence and less stressful in comparison with an institution which entirely depends on its administrative department to make all decision for the orphanage daily routine. In actual, this is largely influenced by the residents' direct communication with the caregivers.

An orphanage is an institutional shelter which requires cooperation among its caregivers to provide a safe and attentive environment. Direct relationship with the residents is also important to warrant effective emotional support and psychosocial development. The rationale for caregivers' involvement is advocated by Castillo, Sarver, Bettmann, Mortensen and Akuoko (2012), who assume that the caregivers would recognise the institution's flaws or weaknesses. To elaborate, when the caregivers are doing their role as substitutes to parents, their hands on experience enables them to identify the technical factors at the orphanage that may deprive the orphans of their basic needs and emotional support.

In summary, previous studies have recognized the need of action to deal with the emotional aspect among orphans in shelters. Orphans are challenged with the need to adjust themselves with the shelter environment that is different from living in house with parents. They also need to independently manage themselves free of guidance from loving parents but under the purview of caregivers. These may emotionally disturb the orphans. The caregivers, in general, understand their role to deal with the orphans' emotional difficulties by listening to them. However, to enable them to help the orphans, it is of importance for the latter to be willing to share their problem and having a relationship with the caregivers. Thus, this paper aims to study the orphans' attitude towards problem sharing as well as the pattern of their relationship with the caregivers at WYP.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This paper applied qualitative methods presented in a case study made at WYP. The case study was a focused collection and presentation of detailed information related to orphans' attitude towards problem sharing and the pattern of their relationship with caregivers at the orphanage (Bryman, 2012).

### **Data Collections**

The data was collected using semi structured interview. A set of open ended questions was used to obtain thematic answers to meet the research objectives. Every respondent was interviewed separately. The research also utilised observational approach by staying with residents at WYP for two months followed by scheduled visit three times a week for another four months. Observation was also used to obtain additional information and other themes that are not mentioned during interview sessions (Bryman, 2012).

### **Participant**

10 orphans from various backgrounds and age between seven (7) to seventeen (17) years old at Wisma Yatim Perempuan Islam, Penang were selected in this study. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on their ability to provide information to researchers (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

### **Data analysis**

The interviews were transcribed and classified according to identified themes. By using descriptive analysis, the themes were described into text. According to Miles and Huberman (1992) in Agusta (2003), data can be analyzed in three levels, namely data classification, data presentation and conclusion. The data obtained in the study was classified according to the themes of responses, presented in the form of arrangement that can be understood and finally analyzed.

## **THEORY**

The effect of problem sharing on orphans can be explained through Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1896-1934). It suggested that social interaction is the foundation for cognitive shaping in the orphans occurring in two levels as follow:

### **1. The individual- social level**

Orphans especially of very young age initiate their self-development as soon as they enrol in an orphanage. They observe the surrounding and start to shape their logical mind based on their self justification. The relationship with the staff and residents also influence their behavioural development (Social Development Theory, 2012).

## 2. Cognitive Development Potential Level

The potential for the orphans’ cognitive developments relies on the proximal development zone at which the orphans involve in social behaviours. A balanced development can only happen if there is a balanced social interaction. Likewise the orphans can develop their multi-cognitive skills with proper guidance from the orphanage adult caregivers. This is later supported by the orphans’ collaboration with peers and other residents at the orphanage (Social Development Theory, 2012).

When an orphan is placed in an institution, the ability to independently self-managing is crucial. Whenever the child experiences hardship or hurdle, through problem sharing with the caregivers or other residence mates, the child can learn and eventually can execute his or her task properly. Hence the adoption of Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory is very suitable to explain the effect of problem sharing on orphans who seek shelter at orphanages .

### RESEARCH FINDING

#### Problem Sharing

For the residents, especially the children of a very young age, adapting to a new environment and its routines were challenging. Consequently, residents adopted a sense of inner conflict which disturbed their emotion and affected their development and potential.

**Table 1: Attitude of Problem Sharing**

	Respondent	Age	Attitude in Problem Sharing
<b>1</b>	Respondent 4	11 years old	
<b>2</b>	Respondent 6	13 years old	Share problem with the caregivers and residence mates
<b>3</b>	Respondent 7	14 years old	
<b>4</b>	Respondent 8	15 years old	
<b>5</b>	Respondent 9	16 years old	
<b>6</b>	Respondent 1	7 years old	
<b>7</b>	Respondent 2	9 years old	
<b>8</b>	Respondent 3	10 years old	Share problem with residence mates
<b>9</b>	Respondent 5	12 years old	
<b>10</b>	Respondent 10	17 years old	

Table 1 illustrates the respondents’ attitude towards problem sharing. Five respondents or 50% designated as R4, R6, R7, R8 and R9 agreed that they would share their problem with the caregivers at WYP and their residence mates alike. They inclined to consult their problem with close friends at the residence and caregivers whom they were attached more to and communicated a lot with. The majority of the respondents had a group of close friends that they would call as “gang”. The “gang” as fraternity circles usually adopted a group name.

Members of a “gang” were unlikely to befriend others than their circle members. The members would consult their “gang mates” for problem sharing and solution finding. Besides the “gang” circles, some respondents were recognised to create sisterhood bond with other girls in the residence, a condition similar to having foster sister. The foster sisters took some roles by emotionally helping the respondents whenever the latter needed advice or place to share their problem.

Respondent 4 (R4) told that she would tell her problem to her foster sister but not her biological sister whom she described as hot-headed. Besides her foster sister, R4 would talk to her “gang mates” and to a caregiver who was very dear to her. Respondent 6 (R6) said that initially she preferred to keep her problem to herself. Later she found out that problem sharing with “gang mates” gave her relief. To share her problem with the caregivers would only be her last resort saying that she might only share it with a selected few. Fear of embarrassment was the factor behind her not sharing attitude.

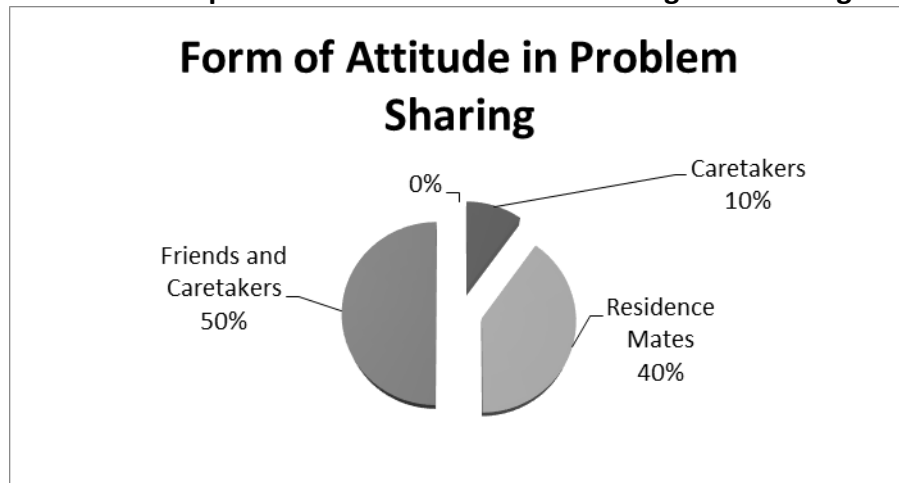
On the other hand, Respondent 7 (R7) preferred the caregivers to her residence mates especially when embroiled in quarrel with some of the residents. However, R7 had a friend that she would talk to about her problem. Respondent 8 (R8) said that she previously felt comfortable to share her problem with senior mates who hold position at the orphanage such as the residents leader or heads of bureaus. As their relation eventually turned sour, R8 chose to share her problem with the caregivers instead. She would however reveal certain issues to them while keeping most to herself. The interview with respondent 9 (R9) found that she shared her problem with a senior whom she called “elder sister”. When the senior left the residence, R9 shared her problem with the caregivers.

Meanwhile, 10% or a respondent agreed that she would only tell her problem to the caregivers at the orphanage. Respondent 1 (R1) of the age 7, exerted that only if it was necessary, she would tell her problem to the caregivers but not to her residence mates. By necessary she meant health related issues. R1 admitted that occasionally she would share her problem with her school mate who was not a resident at the orphanage at all.

Four respondents or 40% affirmed that they only shared problems with their residence mates. Respondent 2 (R2) refused to share her problems with the caregivers for not having good relationship with them. Respondent 3 (R3) would only share her problems with her close friend. Sometimes R3 just ignored her problem. Respondent 5 (R5) was comfortable to share her problems with her good friend or residents of her age or her sibling who also lived at the orphanage. R5 felt intimidated to share her problem with the caregivers thus her disapproval. For respondent 10 (R10), problem sharing can only be with her best friend. And for that reason, she had never shared her issues with anyone from the caregivers. R10 was afraid that caregivers would have the opposite opinion from of hers.

It could be inferred that there were three forms of attitude in problem sharing among the respondents i.e. to share with friends only, with caregivers only or sharing with both; the friends and the caregivers. The preference in selecting the individual for problem sharing depends on proximity in relationship and the residents’ convenience. The following chart briefly portrays what previously explained.

**Chart 1: Proportion of Form of Problem Sharing in Percentage**



**Relationship between the Residents and the Caregivers**

Good relationship between the caregivers and the residents is of importance to ensure a smooth and effective communication. The relationship between the caregivers and the residents at the orphanage was rated as good since nine out of ten respondents or 90% admitted to have close relationship with the caregivers.

**Table 2 : Form of Relationship Between Caregivers and Residents**

Bil	Respondent	Age	Form of Relationship
1	Respondent 1	7 year old	Good, firm and friendly
2	Respondent 2	9 year old	
3	Respondent 3	10 year old	
4	Respondent 5	12 year old	
5	Respondent 6	13 year old	
6	Respondent 7	14 year old	
7	Respondent 8	15 year old	
8	Respondent 9	16 year old	
9	Respondent 10	17 year old	
10	Respondent 4	11 year old	Remote

Referring to table 2, R1 was pleased with the caregivers whom she described as not frightening and nicely entertaining. A caregiver even offered her to come for problem consultation at

anytime. According to R2 and R3, all caregivers were very concern and never failed to entertain their requests. The attention they latter offered was adequate. R3 liked the way the caregivers nicely chatting with the residents and joking around at leisure time. The same opinion was given by R5 and R6 who admitted that the caregivers had never neglected them although the caregivers' attention could never be the same with what they got from their parents. R6 who also had good relation with the caregivers and were happy with their attention hoped that the communication between the residents and the caregivers to be less formal.

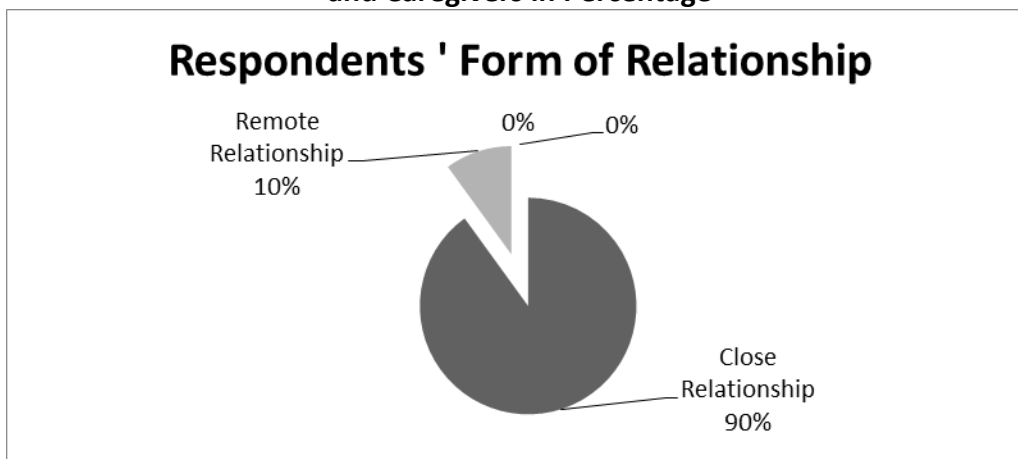
R8 admitted that caregivers had attended to her when she was sick, needed support and motivation in her learning issues as well as other issues. R8 acknowledged that the caregivers at the orphanage were insufficient and they were always busy. Accordingly, she would only come to them when there was a need. R9 informed that when she first walked into the orphanage she found that the caregivers were understanding and supportive especially when she had problem to fit in her new school. R9 did not wish for any special treatment from the caregivers as her basic needs were already fulfilled. R10 admitted in her interview that she was close with certain caregivers. She described the current caregivers' approach and relationship as better and acceptable compared to previous caregivers who were stern and not so friendly. R10 added that as the current caregivers adopted educating approach in the residence, the ambiance at the orphanage also changed. R10 disclosed that some caregivers would send SMS to check if she was fine when they sensed that she was having problem.

Nevertheless, a resident or 10% of the respondents expressed her displeasure with one of the caregivers whom she depicted as constantly giving excuses when asked for assistance and barely offered any solution when referred to for certain matter. R4 also revealed that some caregivers would meet the residents by groups. This approach had annoyed her. R4 personally disliked to be approached merely for a chat by the caregivers when she was not having any problem.

The form of relationship between the residents and the caregivers could be classified into two, namely, close and remote. The caregivers' approach and the ways residents view the approach influenced the form of relationship between caregivers and residents. The proportion of form of relationship is briefly described in the following chart:



**Chart 2: Distribution of Form of Relationship between Respondents and Caregivers in Percentage**



## DISCUSSION

The respondents' inclination in selecting individuals for problem sharing was influenced by the form of relationship built between the respondents and the caregivers. Relationship as a form of social interaction, according to Vygotsky played a foundational role for cognitive development of the residents at the orphanage. At an individual level, the cognitive development initiated as the residents shared their problems and attempted to solve their issues through self-communicating e.g. to confine the problem to oneself, to avoid from thinking about the problem or to personally solve the problem independently. Such approach cognitively was a self-learning method employed by the orphanage residents for problem solving and independency.

At the social level, problem sharing with caregivers or other residents was a way to learn problem-solving skills in daily life. This two-way interaction allowed the residents to feel cared after and guided. It helped to reduce emotional distress. The positive experience which the children went through while at the orphanage lifted their confidence and motivated them residents to enjoy a successful life similar to children brought up by parents.

To summarise, all respondents chose to share their problems instead of harbouring negative emotions in themselves. This matter was of importance because orphans at this stage were in their cognitive shaping realm that required guidance to get over pressures and hurdles properly. Close relationship between the respondents and the caregivers enabled the respondents to communicate and consult freely whenever a problem arises during their stay at the orphanage.

Amiable relationship between the caregivers and the respondents was determine by the approach and treatment catered by the caregivers. A harmonious relationship was crucial since the residents and the caregivers' co-dependency and frequent met on daily basis. This good



relationship motivated the shaping of joyful environment and made their stay at the orphanage more convince.

## **CONCLUSION**

The close and amicable form of relationship between the residents and the caregivers enable the residents to share their feelings and discuss the problems they are facing in their life. The caregivers' attentive attitude and willingness to solve problems make the residents feel appreciated and secured. Basically, a transparent and close form of relationship builds a comfortable atmosphere for the residents to disclose and discuss the problems they are dealing with. This good surrounding gives positive effect on the orphans thus they are able to pursue a normal life like kids with parents.

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