

PARENTAL DEPRESSION AND PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of this study is to determine the relationship between parents' depression and children's social-emotional development of the indigenous community. Age and Stage Questionnaire: Social-Emotional was used to examine the social and emotional aspect and the Beck Depression Inventory was used to examine the depression level of the participants. The results show that although the social-emotional development's level of the children was at risk, it was not correlated with the depression level of their parents. Parents were found to be moderately depressed. This study is important in creating the public's awareness on the essential to understand children's wellbeing so that children can grow in a healthy environment.*

Keywords: Indigenous community, children social-emotional, parents' depression, quantitative study

1. INTRODUCTION

Children are the most precious gift to any parent. The early years of a children's life play an important role in shaping their personality and behavior in the future regardless of culture and race. No doubt those physical developments of children are very important to measure their health. When children started to walk or talk, it is obvious that they have a normal physical development. Parents are also able to spot if their child shows a delay in any physical development. However, children's development may vary in a different culture but the basic milestones are the same. The physical and social environment also has a major role in influencing children's development.

Social-emotional development is defined as the acquisition of a set of skills that enable children to learn from others, make friends, cope with anger, and express a thought, and feeling. Social. Emotional skills involve confidence, curiosity, intentionally, self-control, relatedness, capacity to communicate, and cooperativeness [1]. These skills are helping the children in identifying, and understanding their own feeling, accurately read, and understand others' emotional states, able to manage their emotions, and expression in a productive manner, develop empathy for others, and able to establish, and sustain the relationship [2].

One of the most important social-emotional skills that children need to develop is self-regulation. Self-regulation is an ability that enables the children to manage behaviors, maintain focus, handle impulses, and take on tasks. Self-regulation and other social-emotional skills allow children to develop a foundation for later growth or learn more complex skills [1].

In contrast, children who go off-track on social-emotional development will bring a lot of negative impact on later life. For example, the children might show poor social-emotional skills, display difficult or disruptive behavior in a child care center or school setting, less social interaction, and poor academic competence. Teachers tend to provide less positive feedback for those children who are lack social-emotional skills and peers tend to reject or isolate them. As a result, children receive less social and emotional contact and support, at the same time they get fewer opportunities in learning from peers and others. Children tend to exhibit school reluctant, poor academic outcomes, physical aggression, school drop-out, juvenile delinquency, and other antisocial behaviors [2].

The research states that the positive and negative experiences are very important throughout the first five years of a child's life. These experiences enable children in shaping their cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional development [3]. There is an increased nationwide concern for the social and emotional development among young children. some studies stated that 8 to22% of pre-school children are exhibit moderate to clinically significant emotional and behavioral problems [4]. The concern of this issue is being expanded to Indigenous communities as well. Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey found that over a quarter 26% out of 1,200 children of Indigenous children aged 4–11 years were at high risk of clinically significant emotional and behavioral problems, and 21% of those aged 12–17 years were classified at the same risk level [5].

Parenting and caregiving are very important in childhood development. When there is an infant in a family, parents will start to struggle to be a nurturing caregiver where parents are trying to spend equal responsibilities toward work, family, child care, and friendship and these responsibilities will lead parents to be involved in hard times. Nurturing a child will be harder for parents when associated with insufficient income, domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental illness [2]. A poor nurturing environment will bring a negative impact on children's social and emotional development.

Family and household factors are among the highest factors that contribute to this concern [6]. Children who exposed to family and social risk factors such as low family income, low education, single parents and psychological functioning were experienced higher levels of risk as less socially adept, more aggressive, lack of social and emotional skills and more behavioral difficulties compared to children from lower levels of risk [7].

It was found that during the Emergency, 7000 Orang Asli in Malaysia died due to disease, malnutrition, and mental depression [8]. Furthermore, recent news reported that the Indigenous community is the most marginalized and oppressed community [9], and that could lead to depression. Moreover, although the number of Indigenous students who entered the primary level has increased from 27,585 in 2010 to 28,079 in 2014, the number of students who entered the secondary level were only 11,314 in 2010 and 13,7645 in 2014 [10], which indicates that the dropout rate was high [11]. However, according to Tatz [12], many aspects of life, such as unemployment, poor job status, and lack of

promotional opportunity, formal marriage, or divorce are perceived as norms rather than stressors to Indigenous. This is supported by Nor Fariha, Nurul Nadia and Soffian [13] that family income leads to a lack of motivation of indigenous children to go to school. There were also found that they might indeed be physically and socially isolated from mainstream life, but not from each other [12].

With the situation of marginalized among the Indigenous community, it is crucial to understand the level of depressions among parents in relation to their children's social-emotional development.

The purpose of conducting this research is to examine the relationship between preschool children's social-emotional development with the parental depression level in the Indigenous community since the rate of school dropout is high, with the depression of the parents that might come from the factors mentioned.

It has been found that a huge number of researches done on the non-Indigenous community. In a study conducted by Mistry, Benner, Biesanz, Clark and Howes [7] found that children who exposed to family and social risk factors such as low family income, low education, single parents and psychological functioning were experienced higher levels of risk as less socially adept, more aggressive, lack of social and emotional skills and more behavioral difficulties compared to children from lower levels of risk. However, there is a limited study done on the Indigenous people and there is no literature evidence found by the researchers on the issue related to this community. Furthermore, the Indigenous community in Malaysia has been neglected in many areas, such as health, education, and rights. It is important to highlight one issue out of them in order to narrow down the community gap.

Besides, variables such as gender, parental income level, and parental education level, which are considered to have differences in children's social-emotional development also being examined.

The research question that examined within this research is as the following:

- Is there any significant relationship between children's social-emotional development and their parent's depression in the indigenous community?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Early childhood is started on three to six years old which is a critical period in social and emotional development. During this period, preschool children started to learn to distinguish between positive and negative emotions, at the same time they learn how to regulate their own emotions [14]. However, children's social and emotional competencies are not unfolded automatically, while they are learning and building up the social and emotional skills through early learning environment and experiences [15]. However, physical and social environments such as a variety of cultures, lifestyles, and traditions may influence this development.

Social and emotional development is a set of skills that help the children to develop the ability to identify and understand their own and other's feeling. These skills help the children to build up a sense of empathy and establish relationships. Besides, children with social-emotional skills are able to manage and express their emotions, regulate behaviors, and

take initiative in order to learn the ways to make decisions give opinions, and also develop self-concept [16].

Numerous researchers supported that children who exhibited negative influences such as inattentive during the early experiences were more likely to experience difficulties in the classroom, which affected their ability to develop normal peer relationships and to behave in ways conducive to learning [15]. Besides, they tend to be involved in externalizing behaviors and poor frustration, angry reactivity, affective intensity, and situationally inappropriate displays of negative emotions [16]. Therefore, children are less likely to be socially and academically prepared for school [19].

The offspring of parents who were experiencing several clinical characteristics and severity of depression have a greater risk in affected by their parents compared to the offspring of parents without depression. Offspring of depressed parents reported that they were involved in higher persistence, more depressive episodes, an increase of treatment-seeking rates, and higher impairments in social contacts and leisure activities [20].

Besides, children of depressed parents were at higher risk of inexperienced early anxiety disorder (35.0%) and depression (19.5%), and predicted later nicotine dependence [21].

According to Landman-Peeters, Hartman, Pompe, Boer, Minderaa, and Ormel [21], due to the symptoms of depression, the interaction between parents and children will be affected. Parents with depression tend to interact negatively, inattentiveness, criticism, irritability, dissatisfaction, over-control, and lack of expressing warmth toward their children. Furthermore, depressed parents perceived themselves as inadequate and as having little control over their children's development. They also are critical to their children and perceived their children negatively. In addition, a depressed parent reacts to anger and hostility when they encounter frustration [21].

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [5], children from Indigenous communities also showed that their parents' psychological wellbeing has a great impact on their social-emotional development. When these children grow up, they tend to involve in health risk behaviors and suicidal behavior. They also have low self-esteem and self-regulation.

Having reviewed the literature, the relationship between children's social-emotional and parents' depression among the Indigenous community is still left unclear. Thus, it is hoped that through this study, the gap of knowledge could be filled.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research is aimed at examining the relationship between preschool children's social-emotional development and parent's depression level, income level along with the parent's educational level in the Indigenous community.

The survey method is a self-report measure with the Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional (ASQ: SE) and Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). Through this self-report measure, there is more control over the survey is administered. When the respondents have difficulty understanding the question, an explanation will be provided [22].

A set of questionnaires was provided to the respondents during the research. The questionnaire consists of three

sections. Section one is the demographic part, which requires the respondents to fill in their basic information such as age, gender, income range, and education level. Section two is the Ages and stages questionnaire: social-emotional (ASQ: SE) and it consists of 33 questions while section three is the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) which consists of 21 questions. In this research, the researchers employed a cross-sectional design in which one or more samples were drawn from the populations at a particular period. Besides, it allows the researchers to describe the characteristics of a population or the differences between two or more populations and correlational findings. Lastly, the cross-sectional design allows the researcher to makes predictions [22]. In this study, the cross-sectional design is appropriate to attain the goal in descriptive research and able to test the hypothesis that there is a relationship between children's social-emotional development and parent's depression level, income level, and education level among Indigenous people in their community. A self-report survey method was used to obtain the data from the respondents in this research. The samples were selected from two national preschools which are Pra Sekolah Kebangsaan Sungai Pusu and Pra Sekolah Kebangsaan Gombak Utara.

The first instrument that was being used in this research is the Ages & Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional (ASQ: SE). ASQ: SE is created to gain information on the development of seven behavioral aspects among children. The aspects include self-regulation, compliance, communication, adaptive functioning, autonomy, affect, and interaction with others. The age range suitable for this instrument is between six to 60 months. The questionnaires are divided into eight sets according to different ages in months. There are 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 48, 60 months [23]. The questionnaire used in this study is 60 months, which is five years old.

The second instrument which was used in this research is BDI. BDI was introduced by Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, and Erbaugh in 1961 and was revised in 1971 (Beck, Rush, Shaw & Emery as cited in [24]). Both versions were found to have a correlation of 0.94 (Lightfoot & Oliver as cited in [24]). In the year 1996, the latest revised of BDI- II has been presented with a wide range of symptoms (Beck et al. as cited in [24]).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive table below shows that the male respondents were more than female respondents, (55% and 45% respectively) and 63% of them have only finished the primary level of schooling. The income level of 80% of respondents was found to below.

Table 1: DEMOGRAPHIC

	Items	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	55
	Female	45
Level of education	Primary	63
	Secondary	37
Income	Low	80
	Middle	20

Results indicated that 60% of preschool children were at risk level in the indicated in the social-emotional development scale whereas only

40% were in the 'okay' level, whereas parents to be found at a moderate level of depression (62%).

Table 2: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Items	Percentages (%)
Social-emotional level At the risk	
Okay	40
Depression level	
Low	22
Moderate	62
Significant	17

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the depression level of parents and the social-emotional level of their preschool children. There was no correlation between the two variables, $r = 0.99$, $n = 101$, $p = 0.326$ as shown in Table 3 below. Therefore, it was found that the level of depression among parents does not contribute to the social-emotional development of their children.

Table 3: CORRELATIONS

		Social-emotional	Depression level
Social-emotional	Pearson Correlation	1	.099
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.326
	N	101	101
Depression level	Pearson Correlation	.099	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.326	
	N	101	101

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study was to examine the relationship between preschool children's social-emotional development and parent's depression level of Indigenous people in Gombak. Parents who have children in preschools were asked to answer the questionnaires about their depression levels and their children's level of social-emotional. The results found that there is no relationship between the two variables. This it believed due to the reason that parents of Indigenous want what is best for their children, but they are not always clear what this is [25]. Although parents were found to be at a moderate level of depression, children were surprised to be at a risk level of social-emotional. This might anticipate to other reasons than parents' depression level. As Mistry, Benner, Biesanz, Clark, and Howes [7] discovered low family income, low education, single parents, and psychological functioning are the reasons for children experiencing higher levels of risk. They were found to be as less socially adept, more aggressive, lack of social and emotional skills, and more behavioral difficulties compared to children from lower levels of risk. This result also suggested supporting the high school dropouts' findings by Mariam [11] that although the number of Indigenous students who entered the primary level has increased from 25,354 in 2004 to 26,990 in 2009, yet a number of students who entered the secondary level were only 7,554 in 2004 and 10,725 in 2009. Tremblay, Gokiart, Georgis, Edwards, and Skrypnek [26] also found that Indigenous children required an additional set of social-emotional skills to successfully adapt in different cultural contexts during development.

Moreover, results revealed that 80% of the respondents gained a low level of income, on the contrary, this was

assumed to not contribute to their depression levels as it was only at a moderate level. This seemed to be congruent with Tatz [12], who suggested that many aspects of life, such as unemployment, poor job status, and lack of promotional opportunity, formal marriage, or divorce are perceived as norms rather than stressors to Indigenous. They do not find these points as stressors that made them depressed. Even unwanted pregnancies were also not perceived as an issue since Indigenous girls, as young as 13, seek pregnancy as a pathway to independent income, from the supporting or single-parent benefit [12]. This is contrary to Shen *et.al.*[27] who found that Indigenous adults will suffer from depression at an older age.

In conclusion, it is recommended that for future research, reasons for Indigenous children to be at risk factors in their social-emotional development should be put into focus so that the number of school dropouts may perhaps be decreased.

6. REFERENCES

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