

SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE LOW INCOME SINGLE PARENTS IN A RURAL AREA

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ABSTRACT-The main purpose of this study is to determine the social support for single parents in the villages of Mukim Lepai, Kedah, Malaysia. The objectives of this study are to identify the type of the problems that they face, to identify the ways that the single parents do in solving their problems and to determine the resources and the method of the social support among of them. The sources of the social support consist of formal and informal social support. The formal social support primarily comes from the government, while the informal social support were from family members, friends, neighbours and others. Ten single mothers and ten single fathers were selected in this purposive sampling study. They are single parents who were divorced. The data which collected from in-depth interview and analysed using the content analysis indicated that there were six main forms of problems such as financial, transportation, health, discipline, interpersonal relationship with their son and the labelling from the community. The ways that they use to cope with their problems includes using their own effort, primary support, secondary support, formal institution and sometimes depending on luck. They gained the social support from the formal and informal sources, whilst the forms include financial, advises and others. Future research can be improved by looking at single parents from different state or district.

Keywords: Single mother, single father, social support, single parents.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the New Economic Policy was launched in 1971, Malaysia has moving a lot towards progress. It has made progress in many areas, as in the year 2020 the country is expected to achieve developed nation status. As a result of this rapid development, the standard of living has also increased. Many other indicators, including literacy rate, infant mortality rate, the number of doctors per 1000 of the population and per capita income has increased substantially since after the country gained independence in 1957 [1].

Besides the positive effects mentioned, there are variety of negative effects which cannot be avoided. One of these negative effects can be seen in the context of marital stability. There are various reasons which can make someone a 'single family'; such as divorce and death. The scholars who have studied the case of divorcement have found that the divorcement or marriage instability is a direct consequence of the process of modernization, in particular the socio-economic development that occurs in the community [1]. The average divorce rate for ten years (2002-2012) is about 19,712 pairs. The four states with the highest divorce rate in the same timelength is Selangor, (34,302), followed by Kelantan (20,880), Johor (19,946) and Kedah (18,954).

II. SOCIAL SUPPORT

This concept can be referred as social support, social care

and social services. The concepts referred to a concept that leads to the same meaning and can be used interchangeably [5]. Support can be defined in many ways. It can be defined based on the subjective approach that defines individual perception based on social support. Researchers also define support by type, category, behaviour or action. There are also researchers who define it based on the effects or outcomes of such support. Support in the context of the subjective approach was defined as whatever course of action or behaviour which helps individuals who need it [7].

Caplan (1974) in [2] have linked the role of support systems with pressure especially on the community's mental health. He has defined social support as follows : "...attachments among individuals or between individuals and groups that serve to improve adaptive competence in dealing with short-term crises and life transitions as well as long-term challenges, stresses and privations through; a) Promoting emotional mastery, b) Offering guidance regarding the field of relevant forces involve in expectable problems and methods of dealing with them and c) Profiting feedback about an individual's behaviour that validates his conception of his own identity and improved performances based on adequate self-evaluation (pg 30)".

Based on the meaning given above, in this study, it is concluded that social support is any form of assistance provided by family members, relatives, friends and neighbours and so on to the single parents. In general, social support is to provide some sort of emotional resources, knowledge or real help; also as a social network to individuals who are in trouble. In this study, the Author used four approaches in studying aspects of social support. Also, the Author will focus on the forms of social support such as financial, emotional, equipment or practical help, socializing and guides or advice received by single parents in the study area.

III. TYPE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

A. Formal Support

Such support can be expressed as a voluntary service. Typically it was shaped either by initiatives of a group of individuals or associations, and some was set up by the government itself. However formal support refers to the support provided by bodies or formal organization such as the government (State's Islamic Religious Department, Social Welfare Department (JKM), Community Development Department (KEMAS), National Population and Family Development (LPPKN), State's District Offices, Department

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village is in rural area which is about 25 kilometers outskirts of Alor Setar. The villages in Mukim Lepai were selected since the number of single parents in the area is about 300 peoples compared to other area which is lower. These factors will help the Author to make selection of respondents according to the characteristics specified. Total population of the village is 2,628 peoples, where the majority are ethnic Malay (100%). The majority of single parents' age is between 20 to 65 years. In addition, the majority (75%) of single mothers and fathers are those with low income and work as farmers, rubber tappers and laborers.

B. Survey Instruments

Given this qualitative study, the Author will use in-depth interviews as an instrument to get more in-depth information from samples involved. Interviews were conducted "face-to-face" and on an individual basis between the Author and the sample. Interview with the samples were also carried out to unearth the themes which fulfill all questions and research objectives. The themes are very important; it is a guidelines to the Author during interviews to ensure the data collection process is smooth, error-free and focus more on the variables.

Furthermore, the Author also conducted interviews using open-ended questions to encourage and give liberty to the respondent to raise their views, suggestions and expressions of their feelings. Among the focus or interview guide used by the Author in understanding the challenges of single mothers are as follows:

- Information on sosiodemografi
- Information on household
- Socio-economic
- Residential background information,
- Daily form of problems or challenges
- Way or method performed by a single mother in overcoming the problems experienced
- Social support received.

Data Analysis Study

All raw data that were collected by the Author will be processed manually using content analysis. This is a method that will encode from interviews, communication process or the secondary information obtained from magazines, journals, books, print, audio or recording to certain variables [3].

All data will be analyzed according to the themes available or appear each time after interviews with respondents. At this time, there will be a 'constant comparative method' where all the gathered information will then be screened to meet certain themes or criteria that have been raised by the respondent and the Author will differentiate it with certain themes raised by other respondents. After that, each category of data will be horizontally analyzed to determine the themes which common to each other and will be grouping as a same theme. When any themes that emerged are obtained, it will be then analyzed according to the study questions and objectives set earlier.

In addition, quantitative data analysis also requires thorough scrutiny and commitment of the Author in-depth understanding of the respondents' statements, whether it is expressed or implied. Therefore, the Author needs to read the statements made by each respondent repeatedly. The Author also has to do data analysis in stages and repeatedly checks the data to get a research which have high reliability and validity.

of Women Development (JPW), State's Zakat Centres, hospital, etc.), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private sector (Ahmad, 2004). According to Brandwein, Brown and Fox (1974), support and help from the communities, including from formal government agencies is important to single mothers. According to [6], the formal care delivered to single mothers and widows will help them to continue to live together with their children.

B. Informal support

Informal support is any form of support provided by family members, friends, and neighbours and so on. Therefore, it is described as an aid derived from one or more individuals who do not receive any benefits such as salary to provide assistance to those who need it [5]. In the context of informal support sources, it can be divided into two: primary support and secondary support. Primary support was obtained from the spouse, children and relatives. Whilst the secondary support is obtained from friends, acquaintances, neighbours and so on [1].

IV. METHOD

For research sampling, this Author used method of purposive sampling or convenience sampling. The samplings were done to single families living in the villages in Mukim Lepai, Kedah.

Next, the Author chooses single family from Malay races only as samples because most of the single fathers or mothers are Malay. The Author also choose single mothers and fathers as sample from this village only partially because high number of single mother and aid in sample selection to the Author. The research was conducted at the village only because this is a case study in which the main purpose is to identify the type of social support that received by the single family concerned. The Author also lacks time and financial constraints to do it in other villages.

In addition, the number of respondents who were selected by the Author does have to be many since this study use qualitative method and it involves only in-depth interviews. It is important for in-depth information digging particularly on the emotional and other elements. As a consequence, the Author has selected a total of 20 single mothers and fathers who lives in the districts of the study. The 20 respondents which have been selected by the Author, based on the following features:

1. Single father or mother who have separated (divorced, living) or the husband who have dead (divorced, dead);
2. The sample can understand basic spoken in Malay language or English to facilitate the two-way communication between the parties
3. Single father or mother who selected as the sample aged between 32 years to 46 years.

High number of sample is not necessary since the qualitative method was used and its main goal is not for the purpose of generalization, but to pursue the case data through in-depth interviews. The number of samples is sufficient enough to identify the study themes such as problem or challenges, how to overcome the challenges and any social support received include in what forms and the sources.

A. Location

The study was conducted in the villages located in Mukim Lepai Kedah Darul Aman on northern part of Malaysia. The

V. RESULTS

A. Problems

The Author was able to identify some of the problems faced daily by the respondents in the study area. Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents are in financial difficulty as a major daily problems; there are 10 single mother and 9 single father. One single mother said:

It's always financial. I am the only one who working in this house. My mother is paralyzed; I need money for her medicine and my children's school expenses.

This is followed by the roles and strain as single parent which affected four single mothers and 10 single fathers. One single father even said:

I would have to say that I tended to be more lenient than I should have been simply because I just did not have the energy after I worked all day. Cooking is a painful task for me.

The next problem is the difficulties in social living in which 9 out of single father and 5 single mothers facing it. Other problems are children's health, child disciplinary issues in schools, labeling from the local community and others.

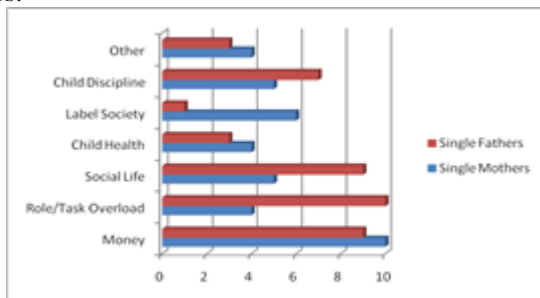


Table 1: Number of Respondents Who Identified Each Problem

B. Methods of Overcoming Problems

Among the key strategies which are done by almost all respondents if they faced with the daily problem is, by means of their own efforts. One respondent stated:

If I want to solve financial problems my own first attempt is to search for any odd job. Then I will work at the paddy field.

Furthermore, respondents added that, they will seek their immediate family members or primary support in helping them if their own efforts do not solve the problem. One single mother said:

But if there is not enough money, I will borrow from my brother who lives nearby. Others they live farther from here.

In addition, the Author also found out that respondents would use middlemen or individual on the secondary support in helping them solve their problem. There are also amongst surveyed respondents, who will submit entirely to fate. The last stride used by the respondents used if all previous efforts failed is by asking help from formal institutions. An respondents (a single mother) said:

The helps is there, such as from JKM, AIM or loan from Zakat centre. I ask for it because of financial problems, just in case they could help...

C. Sources And Forms Of Formal Social Support Received

Based on this research finding, the Author found that there were several sources of social support to the respondents surveyed in the study area. The resources comprise of both government and non-government departments. Amongst the government bodies which provide social support to the respondent are such as the Social Welfare Department (JKM), State's Zakat Centre, District Office, the respondent child's school, hospital, Kedah Regional Development Authority (KEDA) etc. Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) is an example of non-governmental organizations (NGO) that provide support to the respondents. Such government-related and NGO organization provides informal social support in term of financial, advice, equipment and many more.

This study shows that, most of the support provided by government bodies and NGOs concerned is in the form of financial support. One single mother stated that:

JKM help my three children by giving RM300 a month. Then State's Zakat Centre gives RM250 on every 10th end-of-month-of-year for school fee assistance. My 2nd and 3rd son received KWAMP assistance of RM700 each a year. They could draw out the money only three times a year. Then the school helps with new clothes every year. Both my primary school children receives RMT (Additional Food Aid), it really eased my financial burden a little. I also apply loans from AIM; I use the money to start a small cookies business. I pay the loan on weekly basis.

This study found that single father less received social support in formal.

D. Sources And Forms Of Informal Social Support Received

Based on the research findings, the researcher found that there were some resources which provide assistance or social support to the respondent. The resources are such as their immediate family members - mother, father, brother and others. Besides from family members, their neighbours, relatives, friends which of single parents themselves and their family ex-husband / ex-wife also provided social support to them.

Forms of informal social support provided by these sources are in the form of financial, advice, equipment, practical help, socialization and information. The results also show that the biggest contribution of support to the respondent is from their own immediate family. Among the forms of support provided are such as financial, practical assistance, guidance and advice as well as socialization.

I am very close to my younger sister. Then with my brother and mother. They help me a lot; they always visit me in afternoon after work. They always pass information to me if there is assistance from any parties. They also help to fix my house if there is any wrecked equipment. They are the only one whom I always look helps for. I rarely asked help from friends because I shy.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The study of social support for single mothers and single fathers in rural areas was carried out in the villages of Mukim Lepai, Alor Star, Kedah. This study aims to identify problems faced by single parents, identify ways or methodology adopted by a single mother in overcoming the difficulties

encountered and identify resources and frequent forms of social support received by single mothers. A total of 10 single mothers and 10 single fathers from ethnic Malays who have been chosen as easy sampling where, sampling involves the selection of respondents within easy reach and is limited to the population that has the same characteristics (homogeneous) and represent sample of phenomenon of interest. Purpose of this study is qualitative in which the study was conducted through in-depth interviews between the researcher and the respondent.

Respondents who have been studied consist of single mothers and single fathers who are aged between 32 years to 46 years old. For distribution within marriage before becoming single mothers, the majority of respondents (six people) stated that 10 to 15 years is the duration of the marriage before they become a single family. The results also showed 18 to 25 years old is the age of first marriage of the respondents. In addition, the average distribution of the number of children belonging to the respondents is four children and the total numbers of school-going children were respondents ranged from one to five children. The findings also revealed that only three respondents who have children which are already working adults.

On the socio-economic background of the respondents, this study showed that the majority of respondents (14 peoples) stated that rubber tapping and paddy planting is among the types of work they are currently doing. The majority of respondents (50 %) had a monthly income between RM200 to RM350 per month. On the home ownership, the respondents stated that there are currently live in their own house and duration of stay in the village ranged from 8 years to 37 years.

Based on the difficulties faced by the respondents, the Author was able to identify a number of glitches faced by single mothers, which includes financial and children's health problems. Of the entire problem set, the Author found that daily expenses inadequacy or financial problems are the main problems which were listed by the respondents surveyed. In addition, through this study, the Author could identify some methods used by a single mother in solving problems. It is such as using own efforts such as finding odd job, immediate family (son, mother, father and brother), using the middleman (friends, neighbours, relatives and families of ex-husband), using formal institutions and subsequently succumb to the fate.

Further, the study also showed that single mothers surveyed in this study received support and assistance from a variety of formal and informal sources. In example, they receive funding of monetary and equipment from Social Welfare Department (JKM), State's Zakat Centre, District Office, Kedah Regional Development Authority (KEDA), Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) and their child's school. Guidance and spiritual advice were received from the school headmaster, village headman and priest etc. For the informal support, the immediate family (primary sources) and the middleman (secondary sources) also provide support to this group. Among the forms or assistance and support received by single parents in the study area are financial support, practical assistance, advice and guidance. Therefore, this study aims to improve the quality in social work education by expanding the curriculum that touches on the issue of social support for single mothers. In addition, this study also aims to help the profession of social work, especially single parents

and the Alor Star City Council and also other profession services to devise and improve their programs and activities to be more robust and effective in helping the single parents in the study area. Through this study, it is recommended that the relevant parties such as the City Council, parishes headman and all related parties could plan and provide training and skill courses such as sewing, cooking, ICT, make-up, handicraft and many more at no charge to single mothers and fathers since they are the in the low-income group and is in a state of poverty. Hopefully with the knowledge and skills that they could grab from the courses, it could help them to apply it to improve their living. In addition, it is recommended to establish an association such as the association of single parents in the localities concerned so that it could become a platform for single parents to channel as well as highlight the problems faced by them in daily life.

In addition, the findings of the study also aims to be guidance in helping future researcher who are interested in doing research on social support for single mothers and thus further improve the study administration, so that the issue of social support can be understood and examined by carefully. The ultimate goal is to get all parties attention in order to help lessen the difficulties faced by single parents and furthermore enhancing their well-being. This study will also help the relevant authorities to make enhancements to current policies.

Finally, the findings are also useful in suggesting recommendations to the responsible parties which directly and indirectly involved in the social support and service to single mothers and fathers. The problems that occur among single mothers and fathers nowadays could be solved by various parties through a joint effort of mobilization or integrative, collaborative and cohesive approach. It is believed it will be more effective than the approaches used nowadays when each agency implements its own program in their own way. Thus, the involvement of social workers in a holistic manner in order to address difficulties among single mothers and single fathers is highly desirable and it is coincide with the social work profession itself.

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