

The Relationship between Parental Skill and Family Functioning to the Psychological Well-Being of Parents and Children

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Abstract. The objective of this paper is to discuss parenting skills and family functioning towards the psychological well-being of a family in Malaysia. A pilot study has been carried out in July 2011 on 73 samples involving parents and children. Inferential statistics, which are *t* test and *Pearson* correlation, were used to observe the difference in psychological well-being between parents and children. It also used to distinguish the relationship between family functioning with psychological well-being, as well as the relationship between parenting skills with psychological well-being. The results show that there is a significant difference in psychological well-being in parents when compared to children, and there is no significant relationship between parenting skills and psychological well-being. This study offers guidelines for the formation of a module addressing to family well-being for the use of governmental and non-governmental bodies that deal with family development.

Keywords: Parenting skill, family functioning, psychological well-being, parents and children, Malaysia

1. Introduction

As a basic unit in a community, the well-being of a family is of crucial importance in reflecting the status of a community, on whether it is in peace and harmony or vice versa. In Malaysia to date, the state of a family well-being is being questioned following various cases that reflect the decline of a harmonious family, which reveals in problematic relationships and neglect in roles and responsibilities (Hassan, 2011). Family violence and problems such as family murder, child rape, injuring family members, leaving home and the family (Johnson, 1998) illustrate the decline of family well-being, thus special attention is important in attaining psychological well-being among its members.

Various psychological elements should be explored in order to identify the main problems in a particular family that shows problematic circumstances. These elements should be treated as major inquiries in understanding fundamental problems. These elements, among others, are parenting skills, family functioning, psychological well-being of the individuals in the family, parenting style, the quality of life, marriage satisfaction, and relationships among family members. These elements influence the foundation of a prosperous family in the long run. Psychological health, which includes emotional, social, physical and mental health, is an important element in improving the quality of human life (Musa, 1992). Psychological health of the individuals is of vital importance in helping the well-being of the individuals to act as a family member. The failure in realizing the importance of individual psychological health would lead the society to leave the responsibility to parents and children for the failure of the family, without analyzing the fundamental problems that cause a particular family to fail in functioning or operating.

Family functioning is an underlying element to the psychological well-being of the members in a particular family. A healthy family is operated on a rational basis, understanding, pressure-free, and free from internal economic crisis, which according to Sabatelli and Bartle (1995) would influence the stability of a family. Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (2007) reported that Malaysian community today is facing

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various familial problems, which can be seen in the increase of divorce rate, child abuse, family murder, domestic violence and juvenile cases. This again revealed the defect in family functioning, and a family that having this default may produce family members that are not psychologically healthy. This defect may affect various aspects in their life, such as in responsibility, relationships, communication, roles, participation, and health, among others. Deterioration and failure in family functioning (family dysfunction) led to individuals from the family find it difficult in finding solutions for life (Evert, 1994).

Statistics released by the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (2010) suggests that there is a significant increase in family dysfunction in Malaysia, which can be analyzed through the increase in domestic violence cases in five years (2005-2010). It was revealed that the domestic violence cases increased from 421 in 2005 to 529 in 2007, and to 695 in 2010 (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, 2010). This proves that Malaysia experiences family dysfunction following the decrease in family values amongst its 6544500 Malaysian households (Malaysia, 2010). As a result an increasing number of family members in Malaysia today do not achieve the appropriate level of psychological well-being and do not reside in a good-quality family. Studies have argued that psychological well-being of an individual is fundamental in affecting one's lifestyle, personality, emotion, attitude, motivation and cognition (Mahamood, 2002), therefore it is vital to ensure a prosperous individual and family for all generations.

2. Research objectives and hypotheses

In relation to the issues discussed above, the objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between parenting skills and family functioning on the psychological well-being of the family members, specifically, parents and children. In addition, this paper will focus on the extent to which the psychological well-being differs between parents and children in evaluating a prosperous and happy family. More specifically, this study has three objectives:

- Objective 1: To examine the relationship of family functioning and psychological well-being;
- Objective 2: To examine the differences in psychological well being among parents and children;
- Objective 3: To examine the relationship between parenting skills and psychological well-being.

The hypothesis of this paper is to examine the relationship and difference in determining the family functioning with psychological well-being and parental behaviour among parents and children. In relation to that, three hypotheses have been developed.

- Hypothesis 1: There is no relationship between family functioning and psychological well being.
- Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in psychological well-being among parents and children.
- Hypothesis 3: There are is relationship between parenting skills and psychological well-being.

3. Research Methodology

By facilitating quantitative design of cross-sectional study, this research have collected the data using survey method held in various locations of Malaysia, which involved the northern states of Malaysia (the states of Kedah and Penang), the eastern part (the states of Pahang and Terengganu), the southern part (the states of Negeri Sembilan and Johor), and the western part of Malaysia (the states of Selangor and Perak). For the parents group, this survey has gathered 73 samples of parents of the age 30-45 years who attended the Counselling Skills Enhancement Course organized by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia in July 2011. Meanwhile for the children's group, this study has involved the children of the age of 12 to 18 years, who attended a Youth Leadership Course organized by the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development Malaysia in July 2011. Both parents and the children were purposively selected respondents, in which at the time of survey their attendance to the courses were compulsory as a condition for them to qualify as members of the department (for parents), and to pass the youth leadership courses (for the children).

The limitations of this study are, firstly, it does not separate the gender differences of parents and children. This is because the purpose of this study is to compare differences of parents as one group and children as another group, regardless of their genders. Further limitation is that the parents and children in this study do not necessarily have relationship as parent-children, in other words, they were from a different family. This is because we would like to treat parents and children in terms of themselves, without the need

that they must be originated from the same family. More importantly such limitations do not affect the ability of this study to achieve the research objectives.

Three sets of questionnaires were used in the data collection. They were (1) Parenting Behaviour Scale (Voydanooof and Donnelly, 1998) which aims at observing parenting behaviour with their children; (2) Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales (FACES III) (Olson & Gorell, 2003), which measures the functioning of a family, and (3) Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale (Ryff, 1995), which were used in examining the psychological well-being of the individuals in the family. Statistical Packages for Social Sciences .14 were used in the analysis of data, in which inferential analyses of correlation and t-test were calculated. The validity of the questionnaires was tested using Pearson correlation validity criterion (interrelated) between each subconstructs in each questionnaires, at the significance level of .01 and .05. For Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales questionnaire (FACES III) (Olson & Gorell, 2003) the validity involving cohesion and adaptability show a significant correlation values ranged between .234 to .453. Meanwhile, for Ryff's (1995) Psychological Well-being Scale, which involved six main subconstructs – autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance - the value of correlation ranged between .244 to .759. For Parenting Behaviour Scale questionnaire (Voydanooof and Donnelly, 1998) which involves four main subconstructs - parent-adolescent discussions, parent-adolescent activities, parental involvement and parental monitoring - the correlation values ranged from .208 to .710.

.....Construct validity were used in examining the differences between parents and children by using t test. Therefore t test was carried out to observe the psychological well-being of parents and children. It was found that the difference is significant and valid. On the contrary, the validity between parents and children in terms of family functioning shows no difference. Reliability on the three tests used is very high since it involves the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales (FACES III) with the Cronbach alpha values .73, Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scales questionnaires with Cronbach alpha values .83, and Parenting Behavior Scale with Cronbach alpha values .89.

4. Research Findings and Discussions

This section discusses the results of the statistical analyses, which will conclude to whether the hypothesis of the study is accepted or rejected.

4.1. The Relationship between Family Funtioning and Psychological Well-Being

The first hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between family functioning and psychological well-being. Hypothesis testing has been carried out between family functioning subcontract, which is cohesion, with psychological well-being subconstruct, which is autonomy. Correlation analysis between these two variables shows a very weak positive correlation, which records $r(73) = .19, p > .05$. This proves that the relationship between cohesion subconstruct and autonomy is not significant, and therefore the hypothesis is accepted. However, there is a weak positive relationship between cohesion subcontract and personal growth ($r(73) = .39, p < .01$), positive relationships with others ($r(73) = .45, p < .01$), purpose in life ($r(73) = .33, p < .01$), environmental mastery ($r(73) = .35, p < .01$), and self-acceptance ($r(73) = .25, p < .01$). Thus, the hypothesis is rejected and it can be conclude that there is a positive relationship between cohesion and these particular subconstructs.

Another family functioning subconstruct, adaptability, has also shown a very weak positive correlation with psychological well-being subcontracts, that are autonomy, ($r(73) = .16, p > .01$), environmental mastery ($r(73) = .09, p > .01$), personal growth ($r(73) = .165, p > .01$), and positive relationship with others ($r(73) = .071, p > .01$). Therefore the hypothesis is accepted, in which there is no significant relationship between adaptability and these subconstructs. Meanwhile, adaptability shows a strong negative correlation with purpose of life ($r(73) = -.023, p > .01$), and also with self-acceptance ($r(73) = -.032, P > .01$). This shows the adaptability does not affect the psychological well-being than cohesion (in the form of emotion), which significantly influence the psychological well-being of parents and children. Refer to Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation between Family Functioning and Psychological Well-Being

Psychological	Autonomy	Environmental	Personal	Positive	Purpose in	Self-acceptance
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Well-being:	Mastery	Growth	Relationship	Life		
Family Functioning:						
Cohesion	.18	.35**	.39**	.45*	.33**	.25**
Adaptability	.16	.09	.16	.55	-.02	-.03

**p = .01, *p = .05

These findings are consistent with those of Alonso et. al. (2008), which states that the quality of life - that refers to physical, mental and psychological health, significantly influence the well-being of family members. Such conditions of family functioning affect the well-being of family members more evidently and thus led to a positive relationship between family members. Similarly, Bizarro (2001) claims that the family functioning from the aspects of physical, cognitive, social, emotional changes and adaptation during teenage years stimulate the development of teenagers' internal psychology. The emotion of children/teenagers are fragile and in need of attention from parents (Bizarro, 2001; see also Shek, 1999; Hornberger et. al. 2009). The relationship for psychological well-being such as this exists when the situation in a family insititution (home) is pleasant, and is applicated somewhere other than home. To conclude, family functioning strongly influences the psychological well-being of parents and children in achieving happiness at all time.

4.2. The difference in Psychological Well-Being between Parents and Children

The second hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in psychological well-being of parents and children. Levene test was used to test this hypothesis. The result shows vice versa, in which there is a significant correlation between these two variables, and therefore the hypothesis is rejected. The detailed results are as follows: Autonomy subconstruct ($t = 3.42$, $df=71$, $p<.05$), personal growth ($t = .3.29$, $df=71$, $p<.05$), environment mastery ($t = 2.76$, $df=71$, $p<.05$), positive relation with others ($t = 4.68$, $df=71$, $p<.05$), purpose in life ($t = 3.39$, $df=71$, $p<.05$) and self-acceptance ($t = 6.39$, $df=71$, $p<.05$) (Table 2). The results of psychological well-being show a relatively significant difference between the parents and children. The reasons for this include the maturity of parents, which allow them to think of achieving well-being for themselves and for the children. Parents are considered to be more mature in the aspects of social, psychological, and environmental relations when compared to the children, who are younger and emotionally vulnerable, and are unlikely to successfully evaluate psychological well-being at their age.

This study is similar to those of Cripps and Zyromski (2009) which suggest that teenagers's psychological well-being is different from those of their parents. This reveals that children needs parent's complete involvement in order to allow them achieve their psychological well-being. A positive or negative involvement of parents are able to make a difference in a teenager's life, on whether they choose to live in prosperity or otherwise. The role of parents in terms of psychological well-being at an early stage can be applied to children through character building, self-assessment, and the relationships with peers. The emotional and psychological exchange such as these helps in the development of the teenagers in terms of their long term psychological well-being.

Table 2: The Difference in Psychological Well-Being Between Parents and Children

Psychological Well-Being	Category	Min	Standard deviation	df	t
Autonomy	Parents	54.6	10.2	71	3.42
	Children	48.5	4.47		
Environmental Mastery	Parents	62.9	7.11	71	3.29
	Children	57.4	7.11		
Personal Growth	Parents	64.6	6.91	71	2.76
	Children	59.4	8.78		
Positive Relationship	Parents	65.3	7.68	71	4.68
	Children	56.7	8.00		
Purpose in Life	Parents	63.1	8.71	71	3.39
	Children	56.6	7.82		
Self-acceptance	Parents	55.8	4.62	71	6.39
	Children	48.9	4.52		

**p = .01, *p = .05

4.3. The Relationship between Parenting Skills Psychological Well-Being

The third hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between parenting skills and psychological well-being. However our data analysis shows that there is a significant relationship but with weak correlation between parent-adolescent discussions with positive relationships with others ($r(73)=.24, p<.05$). Meanwhile there is no significant relationship with strong correlation between other subconstruct, that are parent-adolescent discussions with autonomy ($r(73)=.59, p>.05$), with environmental mastery ($r(73)=.18, p>.05$), with personal growth ($r(73)=.21, p>.05$), with purpose in life ($r(73)=.16, p>.05$) and with self-acceptance ($r(73)=.16, p>.05$). It can be concluded that frequent parent-adolescent discussions will lead to positive relationship between parents and adolescent in a family, whereas, parent-adolescent discussions do not relate in bringing psychological well-being to other subconstructs.

Analysis on parent-adolescent activities subconstruct shows that there is a significant relationship but with very weak correlation between parent-adolescent activities and environmental mastery ($r(73)=.26, p<.05$). Meanwhile there is no significant relation but with weak correlation between parent-adolescent activities with autonomy ($r(73)=.19, p>.05$), personal growth ($r(73)=.21, p>.05$), positive relationship with others ($r(73)=.14, p>.05$), purpose in life ($r(73)=.19, p>.05$), and self-acceptance ($r(73)=.08, p>.05$). This view explains that frequent activities performed together by parents and children/adolescent will bring fruitful result, especially for the children, in which, they may control, manage, and dominate the environment, especially when they are outside the home. In contrast, parent-adolescent activities do not contribute to psychological well-being in other subconstructs.

Another parenting skills subconstruct - parental involvement - has also shown a significant but very weak correlation with autonomy ($r(73)=.25, p<.05$), environmental mastery ($r(73)=.35, p<.01$), personal growth ($r(73)=.35, p<.01$) and purpose in life ($r(73)=.28, p<.05$). Subconstructs that show no significance but with weak correlation are parental involvement with positive relation with others ($r(73)=.22, p>.05$) and parental involvement with self-acceptance ($r(73)=.18, p>.05$). This fact shows that higher parental-children involvement will lead to the formation of positive attitude in terms of autonomy, personal growth, and purpose in life, especially at times when the children is growing up, whereas, parental involvement do not show an important contribution in the well-being of the children, in terms of positive relation with others and self-acceptance.

In terms of parental monitoring subconstruct, there is a weak significant correlation between parental monitoring with environmental mastery ($r(73)=.34, p<.01$), personal growth ($r(73)=.25, p<.05$), and purpose in life ($r(73)=.34, p<.01$) (Table 3). On the other hand, there is no significant relation, with strong correlation for autonomy ($r(73)=.17, p>.05$), positive relation with others ($r(73)=.23, p>.05$), and self-acceptance ($r(73)=.13, p>.05$). This shows that a better parental monitoring may assist in achieving psychological well-being of the family members in terms of environmental mastery, personal growth and purpose in life. However, parental monitoring does not help in contributing to autonomy, positive relation with others, and self-acceptance to family members.

Table 3: The Relationship of Parental Skills with Psychological Well-Being

Parental Skills	Autonomy	Environmental Mastery	Personal Growth	Positive Relationship	Purpose in Life	Self-acceptance
Parent-adolescent Discussion	.19	.17	.21	.24	.16	-.01
Parent-adolescent Activities	.19	.26*	.21	.14	.19	.08
Parent-adolescent Involvement	.25*	.34**	.35**	.22	.27*	.18
Parental Monitoring	.17	.34**	.25*	.23	.34**	.13

** $p = .01$, * $p = .05$

The study strengthens those of Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch and Ungar's (2005) argument which states that parenting skills affect psychological well-being of the family members, even if only in some specific aspects. Parenting skills is the key element to the formation of personality and psychological well-being of the children, which are built based on the relationship of parents and children in every aspects, through

interaction, character and significant behaviour relating to parent-child involvement and parent-child monitoring.

5. Conclusion

This study proved that the elements of parenting skills and family functioning significantly influence the psychological well-being of parents and children. More prominently, the psychological well-being achieved by a family will bring opportunity for parents and children to enjoy a happy and prosperous family and life in the near future. Thus, the society of a country with younger populations such as Malaysia should adopt the concept that a happy family is a special asset that must be achieved and maintained in order to obtain success for the future generation. The implication of this study is to assist governmental and non-governmental bodies in Malaysia to assess the elements of family relationships that functions to attain a prosperous family. This study can be used as a reference for researchers in familial studies, and for the development of family well-being module that works to obtain the internal well-being of the family, and to develop a survey on parenting skills, family functioning and psychological well-being.

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7. References

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