

Exploring the Challenges of Malay-muslim Single Fathers

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ABSTRACT

Based on the implementation, the curriculum is divided into ideal curriculum and real curriculum. The ideal curriculum is a curriculum that is conceptual and contained in official documents. The implementation of this ideal curriculum is called the real curriculum. Good curriculum implementation is determined by good planning. Therefore, this paper attempts to describe the ideal educational curriculum from the perspective of Imam Al Ghazali. According to Al Ghazali himself, there needs to be a dualism of values in the ideal curriculum which includes both material and spiritual aspects. This is also in line with what is expected by the national education goals.



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Introduction

Recently, a newspaper entitled 'Malaysia - a country of widows and widowers' by Kosmo Online had spark a debate among Malaysians. The statistics shows that 1.7% of total Malaysian population are single mothers as many as 235,240 in year 2010 (KPWKM, 2014a). Concurrently, the statistics indicate the rising of single fathers' population in the country. The number shows that the populations of single fathers are expected to grow in the subsequent years. However, study to identify single fathers' issues and challenges is scarce in Malaysia.

Review of previous studies showed that the research focus is more on other parties in family such as single mothers (Addelyan Rasi, Moula, Puddephatt, & Timpka, 2013; Nor Ba'yah & Antonia, 2011) and adolescent children of the single parents (Manning & Lamb, 2003; Nunn, Parish, & Worthing, 1983, as cited in Cakir, 2010). Therefore, this study will explore on the less focus of sub group, the single fathers and their experiences to better understand their needs and struggles.

The research is important especially towards Malaysian counsellor since this study specifically focuses on the challenges of being single fathers and how they cope with the challenges for doing double tasking as mother and father in a family. Other than that, current study helps the single fathers to know the support systems available for them.

Craig (2006) revealed that mothers do more interactive care than fathers, but it is a lower proportion of their total time in child care. Therefore, fathers enjoy relatively more play and talking time with their children than mothers do. As a result of different parenting behaviours among both single-mothers and single fathers,

some studies found distinct differences in the effect of mothering and fathering on developmental outcome (Tamis- LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004) and some studies found few differences (Davidov & Grusec, 2006).

Recent study by Sultan and Kalwal (2013, p. 54) revealed that adolescents living with their fathers had greater emotional intelligence, mental well-being, self-esteem, and academic achievement. On the other hand, adolescents in mothers-headed home generally have better peer relationship. Fathers are said to contribute to their adolescents' emotional development by providing autonomy. Dudak (2012) explained that "fathers are aware of their role in the child's life and of the necessity to improve their knowledge not only to regain custody but also to develop their parental competence" (p. 192).

Rumaya, Siti Nor, and Mansor (2013) in their research of 989 Malay-Muslim fathers with children found out that Muslim fathers see financial provisioning, moral teaching, praying, reciting the Quran, and fasting together with children as their religious duties that God entrusts to them to fulfil both world and after-life purposes. However, they cite lack of time and a common wish to be more involved in their children's life. This shows that majority of the Malay- Muslims fathers have knowledge on the duty to raise the children according to Islamic views, however there are lack of involvement of fathers with the children.

Another study by Quah (2004) in Singapore family found that "parents more likely to consider reasoning and rules (in contrast to physical punishment) as the best method of discipline are found among the Indian and Malay communities and among Muslims" (p. 76). The current study will explore the perspective of single fathers with some reviews of study done on single mothers since not much work on single fathers were available in Malaysian context.

Cakir (2010) studied the stress of single mothers in Turkey found that financial problems, problems related to absence of fathers' in children's lives, role overload, cultural attitudes towards widowhood and concern over effective parenting were the most frequent expressed problems. Faizah et al. (2013) revealed the challenges single mothers face as head of the family are very arduous because they are not only breadwinners, but they are also the managers cum educators of their children. Other than that, among the major challenges faced by single mothers are financial problems, emotional stress, psychological and physical problems in educating and loving the children and also the negative stigma from the society.

In other research, Yopp and Rosenstein (2012) suggested that single fathers who lost their wives due to death, have to help their children adjusting to their mothers' deaths while confronting their own grief and adapting to the challenges of single parenthood. Boerner and Silverman (2001 , as cited Yopp & Rosenstein, 2012) hypothesized that men traditionally do not play the role of the more nurturing parent; therefore, as widowed parents, fathers may be less likely to employ child-centric or nurturing parenting styles and more likely to feel unprepared than widowed mothers. Hence, it is a challenge for the single fathers to raise the child without any support. Albert (2013) reported that single fathers experience a decrease in income and wages and an increase in weekly hours of housework as compared to married fathers; and their wages remain suppressed after single fatherhood has ended (i.e. after they remarry or their children have left the household).

The Single Parents and Stigma survey in 2014 among 124 participants in Scotland revealed that 74% single parents have experienced negative attitudes or stigma in the last two years (One Parent Families Scotland, 2014). Siti Rafiah and Sakinah (2013) in their study on coping strategies of single parenting process in Malaysia indicated that counselling services can be a platform for understanding, supporting, solving and fulfilling the single working mothers' emotional, psychological and biological needs. Siti Rafiah and Sakinah (2013) reported through their study that coping strategies can be seen in two forms i.e., the utilization of internal and external support systems accessible to them. The internal support can come mainly from members and friends in their neighbourhoods. On the other hand, the external support came from the existing social support system i.e., government agencies, welfare institutions and community networks, individuals, experts as well as counselling services (online and conventional counselling process). Siti Rafiah and Sakinah (2013) study revealed that support systems were significance and helpful to the Malay working single mothers. Through the provision of proper consultations, the working single mothers were found to be more aware, motivated, knowledgeable and well-informed via appropriate guidance from the available support systems.

Methods

There are five participants who were voluntarily participated in current study. They are Malay-Muslim single fathers who were divorced or being single caused by the death of late wives. All of the participants have experienced of being a single father for at least seven years up to 20 years. The themes were generated using the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher tabulated the data which consist of transcribed data, pre-textual analysis and the emerging themes. Firstly, the data were transcribed by using audio recording from the interview sessions. As the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Malaysia, the data were translated into English language and placed in pre-textual analysis columns. After that, the researcher generated the initial codes from the entire transcribed data. Then, the initial codes were collated into potential themes. Both initial codes and potential themes were placed in emerging theme columns. The potential themes were then reviewed and renamed for few times before the actual themes were finalised.

Findings and Discussion

There are three main themes emerged from interview data. The emerging themes are the challenges of single fathers; their coping strategies, and finally the support system relevant for them.

Theme 1: Challenges

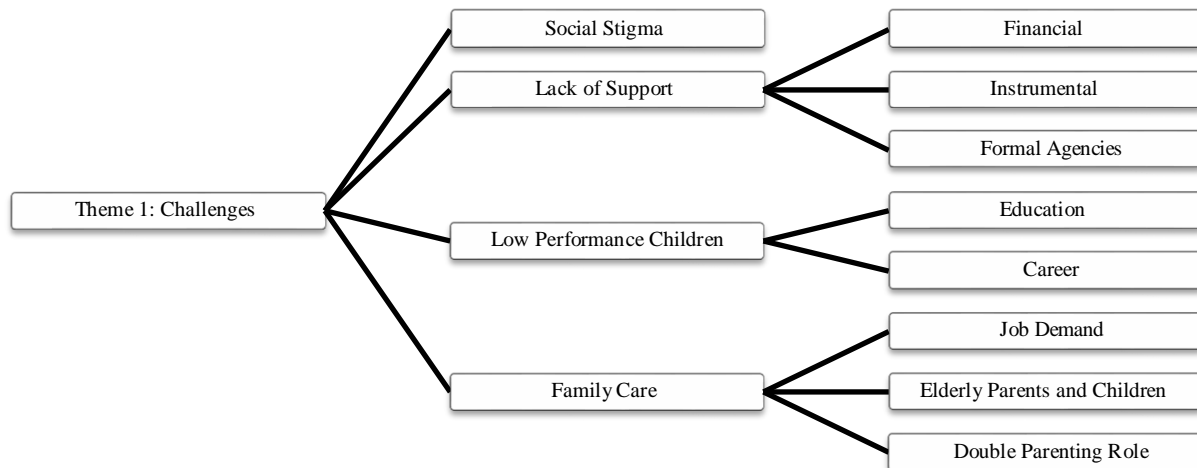


Figure 1. Challenges of Malay-Muslim Single Fathers

Social Stigma

The finding reveals that both Islamic Department and Welfare Department seemed to be biased towards single fathers. Based on Halim's experience, the Islamic department has been biased against him and favoured his wife. Whereas, Razak who seek instrumental help told that the Welfare Department has been unfair for not lending him any support even though he is getting older.

Stigma occurs when most people in a society have a strong feeling of disapproval about something, especially when there is unfairness ("Stigma", 2016). Single fathers in current research reported the feeling of disapproval from the formal agencies especially when they were seeking for the assistance. This finding is consistent to Chapman (2014) who found that the society associates the views of single parenthood with laziness and an unwillingness to work. The society as well as the formal agencies need to review few considerations with regard to the age and ability of the single fathers before deciding not to give them any support. In this particular study, one of the participants is getting older and loss the strength to work due to illness. Hence, the single fathers loss the ability to do extra work to gain more income. Thus, the children would be affected for not receiving the basic need of life such as shelter, cloth and enough foods. The stigma towards them would be challenging for them as if they were denied from receiving any support. As this happened, the single fathers would be discouraged for asking help or not be able to fulfil the need of their children due to the social stigma.

Lack of Support

Based on analysis, it was found that the single fathers had experienced a major change in their financial management. The single fathers reported that the source of income for the family changed from dual-earn parents into a single-earn parent. Thus, the burden to bring financial resources into the family is accountable by only the remaining parents as breadwinner. The finding on financial support is similar to the report by The US National Alliance for Caregiving (2009) that the single parent caregiver not only limits the time spent with their children, but also limits the ability to bring financial resources into the household (Bureau of Labour Statistics 2008, National Women's Law Centre 2008, Institute for Women's Policy Research 2008, as cited in The US National Alliance for Caregiving, 2009).

Current research also found that the instrumental supports are scarce for single fathers. It was said that there are no such support from any agencies. There are insufficient of instrumental support for the single fathers. Instrumental support refers to the various types of tangible help that others may provide (e.g., help with childcare/housekeeping, provision of transportation or money (Teresa, 2008). As there was lack of support from Welfare Department due to social stigma, the single fathers gain insufficient instrumental support from the formal agencies. In response to the finding of current research, the single fathers who lack instrumental aid from formal agencies facing difficulties to do their permanent work as there are no instrumental supports provided for them as the appeal was not approved. However, it is undeniable that they gained the support from the neighbourhood.

In addition, it was reported by Halim that the Islamic Department in his residential area gave less support for him in dealing with his divorce case. According to Razak, he seeks help from the Welfare Department, yet there is no positive response so far even though it has been about 20 years living as single father. There are insufficient supports from formal agency. Islamic Department and Welfare Department are the only agencies that were expressed by the participants. The support from the agencies whether in government or non-government organization is crucial for the single fathers as a source to get the instrumental aid, financial planning, emotional and psychological support as well as social support. It is recommended to form an association for single fathers to provide them educational and guidance support with the involvement of counsellor, motivator, psychologist or even finance consultant to assist on financial management. As this reflect to finding of current research that, the single fathers need the support from the formal agencies to perform life continuation. The finding is parallel to the study in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on Single mothers' experience to raise their children that suggested both government and non-governmental organizations to help these groups of the society to cope with the psychological, financial and emotional problems (Rahel, 2014).

Low Performance Children

For the majority of participants, children in the families have low academic performance and later in life career. According to Razak, he never forces the children to stop schooling, but the children decided to dropout from school and chose to marry or find a job. Another participant, Johan said that he took care one of his daughters while another daughter is cared by his ex-wife. It was found that there are differences in the achievement of the daughters where his daughter worked as school cleaner while another daughter work as a nurse. The next challenge to be addressed is that, the children of single fathers were found to have low performance in education or career. It is a challenge for single father because the children are involved in the family system. Children with low performance in education or career tend to minimize the opportunity to level up the socioeconomic status of the family as well as to resolve the financial problems. In this particular study, there are no in-depth exploration on the children achievement since the focus of study is to determine the challenges of single fathers. However, few factors that contribute to low performance of the children need to be taken into consideration. This may happens when the family problem (i.e divorce parents or the death of mother) causes low achievement on education and career of the children. They might struggle with emotional problems and grieving due to the loss of their mother or else, the children got insufficient support as others. Current research finding is consistent with the previous study as reviewed by Amato (2014) that many research shows that children with divorced parents have high tendency to face problems such as emotional problems, obtain lower academic test scores and school grades, and have more problems with social relationships. Hence, the single fathers are facing challenges to raise children with low performance as they are the one to rely on and thus increase the burden on financial and family care.

Family Care

Analysis of the interviews revealed that majority of participants reported the challenges in terms of family care. According to Halim and Razak, both of them need to juggle between their job and the family care. This is a challenge regardless of the age of the children. Another participant, Amin faced the challenges of family care when dealing with his own family. It is a challenge for single fathers to focus on job and family care at the same time. As a single breadwinner, the single fathers have to deal with both child care and go to work. Hence, it is considered as a challenge for them to deal with such motivation, time allocation, commitment to family and job, as well as job performance. The finding is supported by Chapman (2014) who found that financial hardship often accompanies single parenthood, it is typically not an option for single parents to forgo employment; thus, child care must be negotiated around a parent's work schedule.

As he mentioned, he needs to allocate the financial source for his own as well as for his mum. He added that, as he stays with his mother, he is responsible to take care of his mother who is getting older. There are single fathers who need to support the parents as well as their own children as they stayed together. For some single fathers who engage in family care with both the parents and children, they need to commit extra effort to fulfil them. The finding is consistent to the report by The US National Alliance for Caregiving (2009) that, the single parent caregiver has additional challenges common to all caregivers to support elderly parents and children or a relative with a disability.

Razak added the challenges of being a single father that he has double role of parenting as father and mother at the same time. The single fathers commit to double parenting role as mother and father. As they act as a solo parent, the single fathers serve to be a caregiver for children without the assistance of the partner. This finding indirectly supported by another research done by Craig (2006) that mothers perform more than four times as much child-related travel and communication as fathers.

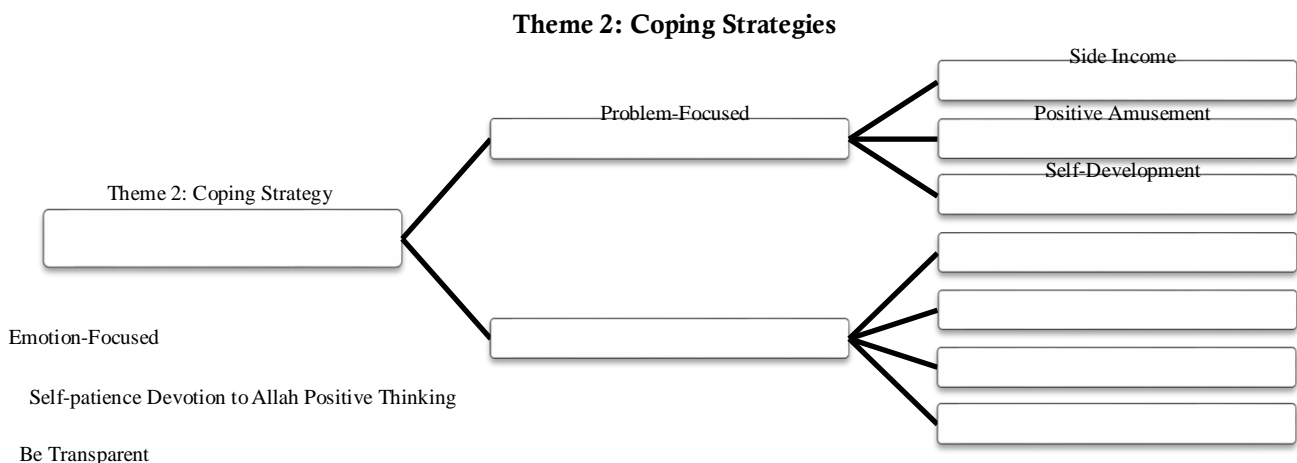


Figure 2. Coping Strategies for Malay-Muslim Single Fathers

There are two sub-themes found on coping strategies for single fathers which are problem-focused and emotion- focused coping strategies as according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984, as cited in Lian & Tam, 2014). As coping strategy is unique to each individual, hence the tendency for single fathers to apply different strategy. Current research finding is parallel to Lian and Tam (2014, p. 41) who said that the “adopted coping strategies may vary depending on the type of problems being dealt with”.

Problem-focused

There are three problem-focused coping strategies found in current research which were used by the participants such as side income, positive amusement and finally, self-development. Problem-focused coping strategy was utilised to enable the single fathers to resolve the problems. In other words, they would be able to find solution to the problems that occur. It was found that Amin did extra work to get side income to support his financial problem. As he is dealing with financial problem at early stage of being single father, he managed to cope

to resolve the problem. In this study, the participants used the specific behaviour to overcome the problems that causes the distress as being single fathers. This strategy enables them to gain more income and reduce the dependency to seek financial support from other sources like formal agencies or from unofficial sources. The single fathers cope with the financial problems by having extra time of working, do extra job that related to the current job or even get involve in different job area to enable them earn for money. As this happened, the single fathers developed to be more creative in earning money as well as reducing the dependency towards others.

Other than that, another participant; Adam avoids the feeling of loneliness by turning on the radio in his house. This is a positive amusement as one of coping style to resolve his problem. The single fathers engage themselves to have positive amusement. As they are responsible to take care of the family alone, the single fathers would have the tendency to experience loneliness. Thus, the strategy to overcome the problem found in current research is by having positive amusement. For instance, the single fathers listen to song, socialise with the neighbourhood as well as get involved in activities in the society. These are the strategies to overcome the loneliness as single parents. They get amused positively to avoid them overthinking of the problems. Current research found that this strategy was used by the husband with the loss of wife. Hence, this may be useful as an intervention for the grieving process for the loss of late wife.

Current research found that there are positive changes of single fathers. As they are accountable to do the adaptation of being single fathers, they begin to develop the skills and learn new things in managing the family. As for Halim, he managed his time wisely so that he could spend time with the children. As for Adam, he developed his skills to repair house and do the renovation since there are not much support available for him. The single fathers developed self-skills and self-ability as their problem-focused coping strategy. As they raised the children alone without the assistance of a partner, they were having difficulty to take up the duty of mothering and fathering at the same time. In order to cope with the challenges of family care as well as the job demand, the single fathers enhance self- development simultaneously in terms of skills and abilities. There are single fathers who developed the skills and abilities to reduce the stressor. For instance, they developed the skills to repair and renovate house due to financial problems as the cost to hire the worker is high. Some of the single fathers who are not used to do the mothering parenting style, they improved and able to do the family care as the mothers do. Other than that, the single fathers polish the skills to reduce the dependency towards other sources as they reported scarce supports available to them.

Emotion-focused

There are four emotion-focused coping strategies found in current research which were used by the participants such as self-patience, positive thinking, devotion to Allah, and be transparent. The emotion-focused coping strategy enable the single fathers to deal with their own feeling in order to relieve the distress or any emotion-related issues in a way that is acceptable. This strategy focuses on emotion rather than the actual problems that occur. According to participants, they keep themselves patience in dealing with the challenges and issues of being a single father. As for Halim, he did not consider his problems as burden and by doing so he can avoid the stress. As for Razak, he can be patient by comparing his condition with many other people who are suffering much more greater challenges. This enables them to be patience and develop inner strength in dealing with emotion-related issues. As this happen, they developed the feeling of thankfulness and keep themselves motivated to face the challenges. Other than that, there are single fathers who consider the challenge as an opportunity to do self-improvement rather than problems. They keep away from the negative feeling so that the single fathers are not demotivated.

According to Halim, he seeks for Allah when he was given the test. He started to devote to Allah and accepting the fate that was planned for him. As for Amin, he started to get involved with the activities in the mosque. As for Johan, he relied on Allah for anything that happened. According to Amin, he admitted that his past life is different as for today. Now, he could feel the changes in himself. The single fathers cope emotionally by devoting to Allah. It is classified as emotion-focused coping strategy as the single fathers reported that they felt calm by remembrance of Allah. The single fathers devoted to Allah in order to stabilize their emotion in dealing with challenges. Current study found that single fathers used few ways of getting closer to Allah such as accepting the fate, getting involved in activities at the mosque and relying on Allah. They used these methods as an effort to cleanse their self and give faith in Allah. This eventually helps them to improve on emotion stability and hence balance the life.

The analysis from current study revealed that Halim managed to think positively about the challenges happened to him. As for Razak, he has a positive thinking in order to let his last son to get a proper education for the future. Razak also added that he understand the struggle by his children, hence, he never ask them for anything. Amin shared his coping strategy by being genuine and be transparent to other people. The single fathers think positively as the key to practice emotion-focused coping strategy. There are interrelation between cognitive (thinking), emotion (feeling), and behaviour. Generally, a positive thinking would result in stable feeling so that an individual can behave in well mannered. Hence, the positive thinking is categorised under the emotion-focused coping strategy for current study. The single fathers could feel the changes in life as being single. In current research, it is found that the fathers who are divorced face a better life as they get improved to do the adaptation, whereas the fathers whom wives died face a greater challenge as they feel lonely and put an extra effort to accept the fate of the loss. However, the single fathers cope to balance the emotion by positive thinking. For instance, they manage to provide a better education for the younger generation of their children as they care for their future. Besides that, they do not blame themselves or others as the causes of the divorce, yet they take it positively and commit to develop the self.

Finally, current research found that the ability to be transparent to other people helps in emotion-focused coping strategy. Amin shared his coping strategy by being genuine and be transparent to other people. Being transparent of the actual occurrence event helps the single fathers to avoid negative feeling. Hence, it reduces the level of distress they might face as they are dealing with social stigma about the marriage especially for the single fathers who are divorced. This coping strategy helps to relieve the burden in their mind and hence promote a better life.

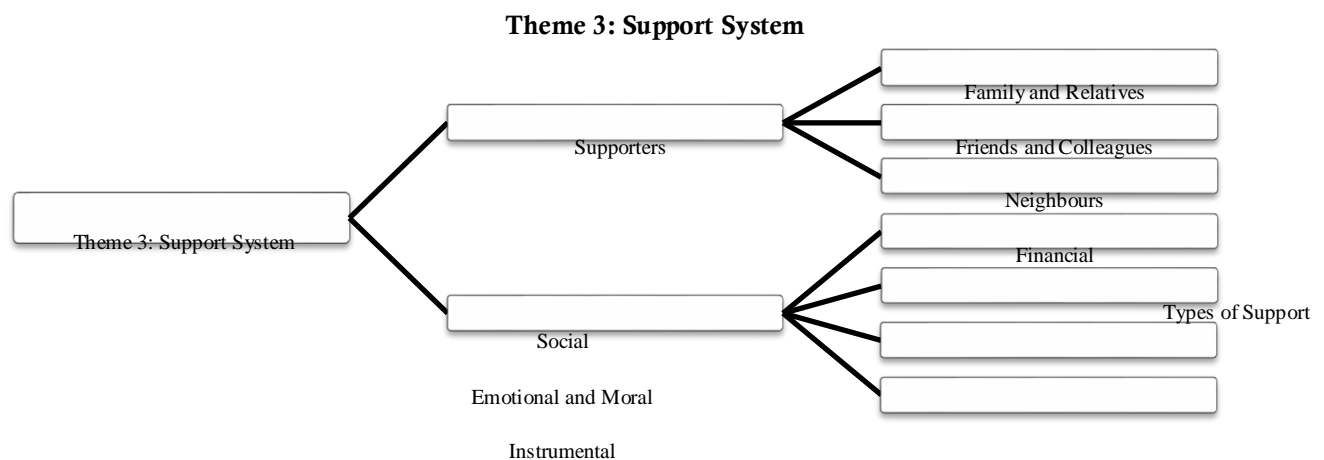


Figure 3. Support System available for Malay-Muslim Single Fathers

Supporters and Their Support

Current research finding on support system is supported by Siti Rafiah and Sakinah (2013) in their study on coping strategies of single parenting process in Malaysia who revealed that some single parents preferred to share their problems with their family members and friends opposed to counselling service. Majority participants shared that they were supported by family and relatives, friends and colleagues, and the neighbours. As for Halim, he has an adopted brother who is always concern on him. As for Razak, his children are the source of support. As for Amin both his own family and his family-in-law are the supporters. As for Amin, his friends from residential area and his colleagues at the workplace always give him words of advice. As for Adam, the officer at his workplace also is his source of support. As for Razak, his support comes from the neighbourhood.

There are four types of support received by the fathers in current research which are financial support, social support, emotional and moral support, and lastly the instrumental support. As for Halim, he was once financially supported by his colleague. According to Razak, the children would spend some amount of money for the ceremony of his late wife. Razak added that, he asked for financial support from the Welfare Department to lend a help for a three month-money scheme. As for Johan, he got financial support by his nephew regularly. In terms of emotional and moral support, Amin mentioned that his mother in law is being supportive and allowing him to talk to his children. In terms of instrumental support, Razak seeks for the help from formal agencies to enable him to

fishing. Razak also added that the neighbour supported his son to further his study in secondary school. The neighbour gives anything that is relevant to be used for his son at school.

Based on analysis in current study, majority of the single fathers gained support mainly from family members and close relatives. Across the participants, this particular group of supporters includes the family members such as parents and children, ex-family in-law, nephew and adopted siblings. In current study, the single fathers were supported in terms of financial as well as emotional and moral support. As the single fathers are close to the family, they were easily supported financially especially from the children and nephew who already have stable source of income. The amount of financial support from family members and close relatives are not fixed, and not often. Next, majority of the single fathers gained emotional and moral support from these particular supporters. For instance, the children and family in-law indirectly motivate the single fathers by being supportive and understanding. It is thus help the single fathers to balance the feelings and give them moral support to face the challenges. However, there is no social and instrumental support being reported for single fathers from family members and close relatives.

Based on the analysed interview data, there are also supports for single fathers received from friends and colleagues. According to the research finding, the friends include old friends and those in the same housing area, whereas the colleagues are those who work at the same workplace. This particular group of supporters support single fathers in terms of financial as well as emotional and moral support. The friends and colleagues were reported to support the single fathers directly and indirectly in terms of financial. For instance, the fathers were treated for meal by the colleagues. It is indirectly reduce the financial burden faced by the single fathers even though the treat is not regular. As friends, they assisted the single fathers by lending an ears or giving advices when needed. Hence, these kinds of supports from friends and colleagues create a convenience environment for single fathers who seek for emotional and moral support.

Other than that, current study had identified that neighbours as the source of support for single fathers in terms of social and instrumental support. Instrumental supports from neighbourhood were found lack for the single fathers across the participants. However, there is support for their children to go to school as reported in the research finding. This particular support at least helps the single fathers to get the instrumental aid such as books, clothes and used stuff and hence reduces the dependency of single fathers on financial support. Indirectly, such help from the neighbour provide social support for the single fathers who seem to really care about their welfare.

There are lacks of supports from formal agencies especially in instrumental support for the single fathers. The formal agencies include the Welfare Department. This may cause the fathers to loss the source of basic income and hence increase the dependency on the financial, social, emotional and moral support. Thus, there is an idea from participant who proposes to form an association for single fathers. The association could provide these supports as an alternative against the existing formal agencies. In addition, the association may be useful as the centre for research and development regarding the single parents especially for single fathers that may be considered marginalized group in Malaysia.

Apart from that, Islamic Department has always been assumed by the participants as counselling agency. It is hence support the previous finding that the single parents opposed to counselling service (Siti Rafiah & Sakinah, 2013) and tend to share problems with close family members and friend as narrated by the participants. It is also found across the data analysis that different supporters contribute to different type of support for single fathers.

Conclusion

There are three main themes emerged from this research. The first theme is on the challenges of single fathers. The single fathers faced various challenges such as stigma from the social; lack of support in financial, instrumental and formal agencies; low performance children in academic and future career; and family care. Second theme generated is on the coping strategies. Based on the analysis, the coping strategies involved two main focuses which are on problems and emotions. Problem-focused coping strategy include the effort of single fathers to do extra job for side income, positive amusement, and self-development. Apart from that, emotion-focused coping strategy engage the single fathers with self-patience, devotion to Allah, positive thinking and being transparent. The third theme generated is the support system available for single fathers. Across the interviews, the supporters for single fathers include the families and relatives, friends and colleagues, and neighbours. It is

identified in analysis that there are few types of support available for the single fathers including financial, social, emotional and moral, as well as instrumental support.

It is recommended for future study to involve other races or religion of single fathers in exploring their issues and challenges so that the findings can benefit single fathers in Malaysia regardless of their background. It is also recommended for future study to do comparison research between two groups of single fathers where the cause of being single is either by the death of his wife; or by divorce factor on the issues and challenges, coping strategies and available support system as there is major differences of single fathers among these two groups. It is recommended to interview the counsellors who had the experience in dealing with single fathers in order to study the counselling intervention techniques for them. The future study may also look into the social perception towards the single fathers and the psycho-emotional effects on the fathers who are single.

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