

How I Survived Emotional Abuse: A Narrative Study

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Abstract

Children of divorce are not new to society yet their coping strategies are overlooked. Different abuse histories warrant a unique combination of coping strategies to deal with memories of past abuse. Coping has been put forward as an important element in understanding the long-term functioning of individuals with a history of emotionally abuse. The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by a child of divorced parents, the coping strategies adopted by the child and how these coping strategies affected her level of perceived stress and life satisfaction. By using a narrative study, a female respondent, aged 13 who had been victimised through parental divorce was interviewed. Face-to-face interview was conducted by employing unstructured questions. Thematic analysis was implemented to analyse the data. Major themes found were; internal and external challenges, as well as positive and negative strategies. The results revealed that the child experienced mental health problems such as depression and loneliness during her childhood as a consequence of parental divorce which is perceived as a huge stressor or challenge in her life event. She engaged in both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping – using active emotion-focused coping other than avoidant focused coping – which led to boosting satisfaction in her life. This study contributes to school counsellors in helping school children, as well as for Muslim families with children coping with emotional abuse.

Keywords: coping, challenges, emotionally abused, parental divorce, narrative research

Different abuse histories require unique combinations of coping strategies to deal with memories of past abuse. Coping strategies used vary depending on types of abuse experienced by children (Bal, Van Oost, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Crombez, 2003; Futa, Nash, Hansen, & Calvin, Garbin, 2003; Harris et al., 2016; Levondosky, Huth-Bocks, & Semel, 2002; McDonald, & Tijerino, 2013; Murthi & Espelage, 2005; Powers, Ressler, & Bradley, 2009; Shikai, Uji, Shono, Nagata, & Kitamura, 2008; Steel, Sanna, Hammond, Whipple, & Cross, 2004; Thabet, Tischler, & Vostanis, 2004; Ullman, & Relyea, 2016). Coping helps individuals to manage emotional encounters and balance their mental health through cognitive and behavioural responses to challenging life events. The reason for having different coping strategies is because children are abused in various ways such as physical, emotional, sexual, neglect, substance, as well as domestic abuse.

Literature Review

Coping strategies entail a host of behaviours that serve as regulatory responses, both adaptive and maladaptive in response to psychological stressors, situations, and emotions (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Folkman, 1997), and have been equated with strategies demonstrating emotion regulation (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2012). Adaptive coping strategies, such as positive reframing of situations or seeking emotional support, are associated with positive long-term developmental consequences, whereas maladaptive strategies, such as substance abuse or engaging in self-blame, are associated with a negative developmental impact (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003).

Along this line, coping strategies of abuse by children or young people involve different perspectives depending on types of abuse. It has been extensively studied and there are a range of potential coping strategies of child abuse. Researchers have conducted various studies on potential coping strategies of abused children such as: emotion-oriented (Shikai et al., 2008); problem-oriented (Thabet et al., 2004); self-blaming, self-isolating, and distancing (Futa et al., 2003); and avoidant coping (Bal, et al., 2003; Harris et al., 2016); and the internalization of these coping strategies makes the children less likely to seek support (Steel, et al., 2004). Positive coping strategies (e.g.: attending counselling sessions, having sports as a hobby, and closeness to religion); negative coping strategies (e.g.: disassociation by using alcohol and drugs or keeping busy at work place (McDonald & Tijerino, 2013); and family or network social support such as friends who provide emotional support, advice or guidance, practical assistance, financial assistance, and socializing (Levondosky et al., 2002; Murthi & Espelage, 2005; Powers et al., 2009; Ullman & Relyea, 2016;) serve as a coping mechanism used by children with childhood maltreatment (Sperry & Widom, 2013; Wright & Folger, 2016). Thus, the variety of coping strategies used depend on different abuses on children.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to attempt to fill the gap in the literature by exploring the challenges faced and coping strategies used among emotional children to manage stressful events in their life. Using a case of one child, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the challenges that a child of divorce faces?
- ii. How does a child of divorce cope with the challenges?

Theoretical Framework

Coping is defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). According to Walsh, Fortier, and DiLillo, (2010) coping can denote both to the strategies usually employed in response to a variety of common stressors (i.e. individuals display particular coping styles) as well as to strategies anchored to aspects of a particular stressful event (i.e. individuals modulate the strategies used based on the particular stressor or trauma encountered). The experience of a

child emotionally abused might prompt the use of particular coping strategies across more general domains of functioning as well as in specific stressful situations. This notion is consistent with Folkman and Lazarus (1980) who proposed The Cognitive Transactional Model of Stress and Coping for the manner in which children emotionally abused might influence the development of coping strategies. Lazarus' Cognitive Transactional Model of Stress consists of two types of appraisals; Primary Appraisal and Secondary Appraisal.

Primary Appraisal determines whether or not an event is stressful. In other words, this appraisal shows whether the event represents a threat to the individual. This results in three outcomes; events regarded as irrelevant; events regarded as positive to well-being, and; events regarded as stressful or negative appraisal leading to a secondary appraisal process. If the event is determined as being stressful, then it must be assessed whether the stressor poses harm or loss, threat or challenge to the individual. Harm or loss refers to loss or damage that has already happened (e.g.: illness or injury). Threat deals with the expectation of future harm. Lastly, challenge denotes to confidence of a person in overcoming difficult demands (Brannon & Feist, 2007).

Secondary Appraisal take places after the initial appraisal of the event and it is the process where the individuals assess their coping resources. The individuals create an impression of their ability to control or cope with the stressor. Some people are prone to feeling stress than others irrespective of event. Appraisals of potentially stressful events are influenced by two factors which are; the controllability and the predictability of events. And events are more stressful when they are uncontrollable and unpredictable. When coping outcomes are positive such as accepting the death of a relative or passing an exam, a psychological adjustment or adaptation takes place. However, unsuccessful or negative coping can lead to anxiety and depression or exacerbate other physical and mental diseases. Maladjustment or maladaptation is more frequently associated with situations when primary and secondary appraisals fail to identify an appropriate course of action.

In a Secondary Appraisal, Folkman and Lazarus (1980) categorised coping strategies into two categories; Problem-focused and Emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is commonly viewed as an adaptive mode of coping that involves actively or engaging in a specific behaviour to overcome the problem causing distress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). This coping aims to remove or reduce the cause of the stressor including solving problems, managing time and using instrumental social support or help such as doctors, counsellors and teachers. While, emotion-focused coping is used to reduce a negative emotional state, or change the appraisal of the demanding situation that is associated with stress such as depression, fear, anxiety, frustration, embarrassment, and excitement. Among emotion-focused coping techniques include distraction (e.g.: keeping busy to take the mind off the issue), praying for guidance and strength, meditation (e.g.: mindfulness), eating more (e.g.: comforting by food), cognitive reappraisal (an attempt to interpret the meaning

of an emotion-eliciting situation in a way that changes its emotional impact), and suppressing (stopping negative thoughts or emotion which if it is extended over a period of time might lead to poor physical health) (Petrie, Booth, & Pennebaker, 1988; Lazarus & Alfert, 1964). Emotion-focused coping strategies are divided into two sub categories; active emotion-focused coping and avoidant emotion-focused coping. Active emotion-focused coping is generally viewed as being an adaptive emotion regulation strategy (such as positive reframing), whereas avoidant focused coping is perceived as trial to avoid the stressor and is seen to be maladaptive (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Holahan & Moos, 1987).

From the explanation, the theory can be summarised in Fig. 1 as follows:

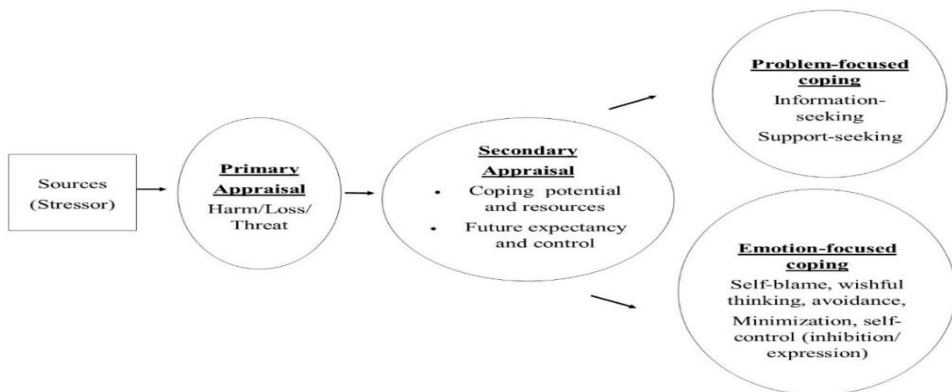


Figure 1: The Cognitive Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a narrative research design. This research design was chosen based on the research problem of the study to explore the experiences of a child having being emotionally abused as a consequence of divorce.

Interest in narrative inquiry as an approach to qualitative research has surged in recent years, stoked, perhaps by claiming that stories, both shape and communicate our understanding of personal experience and the meaning we assign to it (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This description of the value of stories is reflected in the design of this study. Narration was viewed as a way to learn about how the child experienced challenges and coped with stressful events in life.

Participant of the Study

The participant was selected based on the purpose of this study which was to explore the experiences of a child emotionally abused.

This study employed purposive sampling, where the participant was intentionally chosen by the researcher due to some characteristics. A female

respondent, aged 13 years, who had experienced emotional abuse. The respondent who participated in this study is a secondary student in a private school in Selangor. Apart from that, this research preserves the validity of the narrative qualitative research as the story is self-described by the survivor of emotional abuse.

Data Collection

According to Creswell (2007), narrative research “begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (p.54). This narrative inquiry allowed the researcher to explore and present an inclusive phenomenon of certain life incidents related to experiences and events that affect the life of a child.

The primary source of data for this study was obtained through in-depth and unstructured interview by focusing on the personal life experiences of the participant. Unstructured interview is defined as an interview in which neither the question nor the answer categories are predetermined. Instead, they rely on social interaction between the researcher and the informant (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990). Patton (2002) described unstructured interviews as a natural extension of participant observation, because they so often occur as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork. He argued that they rely entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction.

In this study, the researcher sought to understand the experiences of being emotionally abused as well as to explore the challenges faced and the coping strategies used. In other words, the information sought was derived according to the real story of the participant. The researcher employed various skills of interviewing such as open-ended questions, follow-up questions, attending behaviour, empathic listening and probing questions to elicit more stories about the child’s experiences as being a victim of parental divorce. Besides, tape and video recording were utilized as instruments in collecting data during the interview session.

Data Collection Procedures

Before conducting interview, an appointment was made between the researcher and the participant. The time and place were set for the meeting. Then, the interview was conducted individually at the participant’s house in the evening upon the parent’s consent. Before the interview session, the participant was asked to fill out a consent letter. During the interview session, the researcher recorded the session by tape and video.

Regarding confidentiality, privacy and anonymity, a clear statement had been made to the parent that data from the study will be treated as confidential, protected, and only to be used for academic purposes. Also, pseudonym was applied where names and other identifying information in this current documentation were removed.

Data Analysis

After collecting data, the next procedure was analysing it. Analysis consists of the challenges faced by the child with divorced parents, and how she copes with those challenges. A qualitative analysis of the child's account was made in several steps using the analytical technique described in qualitative research (Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Robson, 2002).

The first step in this study was a content analysis of the tape-recorded and transcribed interviews followed by thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is "a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes one's data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic" (p.79). When conducting thematic analysis, the researcher went through several phases. At the beginning, the researcher became familiar with the data where each of the written accounts was read several times in order to grasp the content and make initial coding. She then generated initial codes i.e. open coding, searched for themes, reviewed, defined and named emerging themes. Production of report took place last when themes were defined (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

In this study, a female participant, named Afifah (pseudonym) was chosen. She is 13 years old and a secondary school. She is the only child. The consequence of parental divorced had left a profound impact in her life. Her life as a child with divorced parents was an event she had never thought she would experience in her life as she expected to have a complete family like others. This was the most stressful life event that happened in her life since childhood.

Throughout her life as a divorced-parents' child, she has faced a lot of challenges. She had to cope with ongoing challenges for almost ten years since she was at the age of two years. The two types of challenges she faced are expressed in the themes below:

Internal Challenges

Internal challenges in this study refer to the challenges that arose within herself. From the thematic analysis, the internal challenges were divided into four aspects: 1) feeling neglected, 2) emotional instability, 3) acceptance of separation, and 4) adjustment.

Feeling neglected. In this study, feeling neglected is defined as a situation where the ability to receive attention is less. As in the situation experienced by Afifah, she received attention and care from her mother but it was not fully fulfilled due to her mother being busy with work. She said:

Umm... My mother is somehow not really. It depends on the situation. If she's busy maybe not. She still has time for me. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Her father also did not have time for her. She expressed this as below:

No. he doesn't ask about me. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Since both of her parents do not live together, she lives with her mother alone. Living with a single career mother has led her to face negligence when her mother was busy with her career. Whenever her mother got tired, she would be moody. This affects her emotion when she does not feel a sense of belonging in her family support system. This indirectly made her feel lonely. As a result, she would prefer to get the support from her grandparents.

Most of them are like support because when I was a bit younger, my mom is like very busy woman; she is a lawyer and she has done all the work, when she comes back home she gonna get tired, and then, when she is sad she got moody. And I wouldn't have support or maybe I would feel alone. And when I feel alone my mom tires of it, I would always go to my grandparents. That why I love them so much. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Emotional instability. This is one of the internal challenges that gives a deep impact on her life. Emotional instability manifests itself as psychological problems such as feeling of void or loneliness, depression and jealousy. In the beginning of her life, she felt a void when she was small and grew up alone with her mother. She tended to copy the act of crying when she saw her mother crying at that time. She said:

I feel sad. I feel the void. At that time, I was quite small; I was quite young. I didn't know much. But, I saw my mom crying, I saw everyone crying. I saw my family torn down apart. (Afifah, 13 years old).

In facing challenges, she felt that the harder part was dealing with void or loneliness. She felt something was missing in her life, and she did not feel she had a complete family but she knew there is someone who can support her in whatever she faces. The assumption of the person who would support her was, undeniably, her mother. She said:

Umm... I face hardly in term of void. Umm... I kind of feel like I have something missing in me. I don't feel complete but, just knowing that there's someone with me facing, well, not exactly the same thing, but being with me for the whole time and I don't know that we meant to support each other which is my mom. (Afifah, 13 years old).

The challenge that she faced became worse when she was diagnosed with depression. It worsened because not only did she have it, but her mother who she relied upon was also having this kind of psychological problem. They both went for treatment. She said:

I got very depress and I felt alone. My mom also got depress. So, both of us, my mother and I went to treatment. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Just like a small child, during that time she also felt jealous when she saw her friends being fetched by their fathers. Like others, she wanted love from a father.

Well...when I see a father pickup his children sometime I feel jealous because I never felt that kind of loving in some sort of way. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Acceptance of separation. As a young child, it was hard for her to accept the fact that her parents do not live together. From looking at others spending time together with parents, this issue had triggered her acceptance as a person. This is one way the acceptance of separation manifested itself.

No. It's quite hard for me to accept the fact because when you see other people with both of their parents like spending time with their father. While it's hard for me but it takes some time for me to actually to accept the fact. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Adjustment. Finally, when time passed, she succeeded in adjusting herself with the situation. It took almost ten years for her to feel good with her life. This can be understood; it is not easy to deal with the most stressful event of her life.

Hahaha I'm okay. I'm perfectly okay. Oh...umm... one decade, 10 years. (Afifah, 13 years old).

The internal challenges faced by Afifah can be described in Fig. 2 as follows:

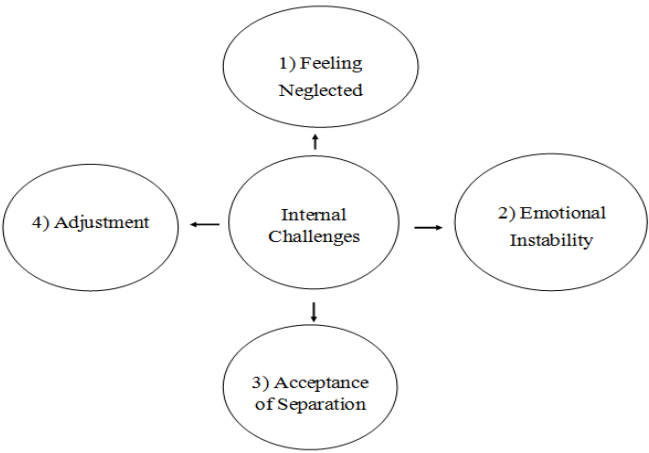


Figure 2. Internal challenges

External Challenges

External challenges denotes the challenges risen from outside herself as a contributor. There are four sub-themes that emerged from these challenges. The

sub-themes consists of: 1) threat of mental illness, 2) study disturbance, 3) lack of peer support, and 4) stigma of society.

Threat of mental illness. The threat of mental illness refers to mental illness that her father had. As her father has bipolar disorder, he had an intention to kill her during her childhood. In other words, her life had been threatened due to her father's mental illness. This was the reason for her parents' separation. She also understood how the illness works. She said:

Yes, that mental illness can be harmful. Because... Umm... Bipolar disorder that actually can control the brain and feeling which mean they will have mood disorder and they can suddenly get so down or so angry. When they are angry they can get very violent. It is harmful to the point that our parents had to separate, yes. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Study disturbance. During her school days, her father always came to school. He would disturb or bother her at school. Due to her father's action, her study was affected because she could not focus on her school work. This can be shown as below:

When I was six-year-old, when I was in standard one, yes it kind affected me because my father would come to my school and bother me at school and I couldn't do my work. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Lack of peer support. Besides that, she lacked peer support. Peer support refers to the acceptance of the friends around her. She knew most of her friends were faking in front of her. As a result of the mean behaviour of her classmates, she became depressed. This situation made her give up on her life. There was no reciprocal exchange in her relationship with them. She hardly conformed to the accepted norms of the group. Fortunately, the support from her family enabled her to overcome her depression. She said:

Oh my god... (laughing) Most of them are so fake. And the whole batch from form one are like the meanest people ever because they make me so depressed and I basically give up on my life. But then my family came from this house to support me. They helped me go through out of this drama... (laughing) I hate it but, well, I went through it well. (Afifah, 13 years old).

The lack of peer support made her comfort herself in whatever situation she faced. She also said it was understandable that her friends would avoid her when they knew what kind of family she has. Her friends may not want to get involved with a person who has a broken family like she had. She said:

No, usually I comfort myself.

I think if they ever get to know what my family really is, they wouldn't want to be in my situation. They wouldn't want to be in my life, because

it's so hard, it's literally like a horror movie. And I bet they would like to avoid their life. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Stigma of society. Having a different background stigmatises the perception of people. People have their own stigma on other people around them. By having a low background, it made people have a stigma on her life. Because of this, she does not want to get involved with her friends.

Some of them are close but another half just go away. Because they feel... You know like... my background is low. They didn't like it. It's fine. They don't want come to me, I don't want to talk to you. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Then, again she said:

Yeah, they have bad reaction. Even some of them when I was in standard four, they even called me an orphan. I know, I am used to that, but I don't care anymore. (Afifah, 13 years old).

She knew some of her friends had called her an orphan. She was quite offended at first, but it does not affect her anymore.

All the challenges, either internal or external, have encouraged her to cope with the arising problems in her life. There are two types of coping strategies that have emerged from the thematic analysis, which are positive coping strategies, and negative coping strategies.

The external challenges that faced by Afifah can be summarised in Fig. 3 as below:

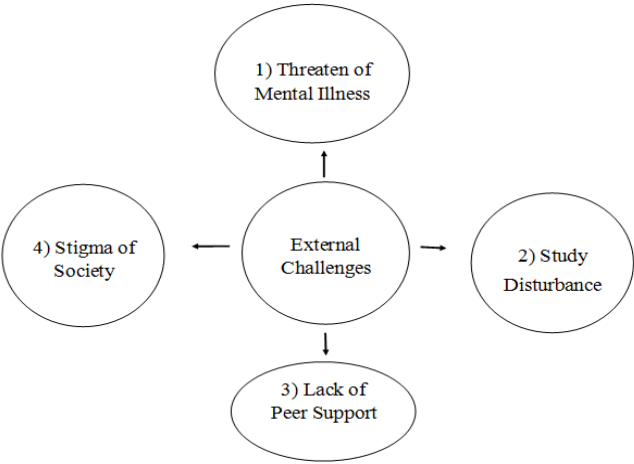


Figure 3. External challenges

Positive Coping Strategies

Positive coping strategies represent how the participant deals with the arising challenges in a good way without harming herself. There are seven sub-themes of positive coping strategies which are internal support, external support, being positive, being protective, having good relationship between parents and daughter, having good spiritual practice and having strong belief.

Internal support. Internal support refers to where the support is given within her context environment such as having family, cousins, and relatives. In dealing with stressful events, she got countless support from her family, cousins, aunts and uncles. The support given is a good and motivational advices for her to rely on.

Umm... my cousins, my family who always give me advice. (Afifah, 13 year old).

By having internal support from her cousins, she was able to go through the life well. She also felt good having cousins, aunts, uncle and grandparents who could support her unconditionally. It was expressed as below:

I actually feel good, because I know that have my cousins, I have my aunts I have my uncles, I have my grandparents, I know they'll support me in any condition. (Afifah, 13 years old).

She was impression by her cousins and gave compliment to them continuously. Not even stopping at that, she also loves them like her siblings. It is because to her cousins had never left her, instead always lending a shoulder when she was moody. For instance, her cousins would come to comfort her when she felt moody regardless of how far they were. They would also buy her food to make her happy.

My cousins...oh my God... I love them so much. They are literally like my siblings. I hate them but at the same time I love them... (Laughing). Whenever I'm down they would literally drive their car for two hours. They don't care how far they are, they would come to me and comfort me, and they would send me to school. They would make me happy. They would buy me like food because who doesn't love food. (Afifah, 13 years old).

She was much regarded warm kindness of her cousins on her. It could be seen when she did not immediately told her mother instead of her cousins. She do not want to burden her mother with the problems.

If I have a problem I would go to my cousins because I don't really prefer telling it to my mom immediately because I know sometimes she is in bad mood. And when she in bad mood then that problem would be bigger. So no. (Laughing). (Afifah, 13 years old).

External support. External support refers to where the support given is from outside of her context which include doctors, teachers and friends. She needed help from a doctor for her depression so she went for treatment. Also, she got advises from the teachers. For example, she got home tuition to improve in Mathematics subject. Furthermore, she had a good friend with whom she always spent time together. It can be shown from the excerpts:

I needed extra help. I went to treatment I didn't only need help from the family. I also need help from doctors. And I had many appointments with the doctor like a lot usually.

Umm... if I am at school then I would study with my friends. But, if I'm at home, or if it's weekend then (shaking her head).

Umm... just home. It is home tuition for Mathematics. Yes. A lot. It's helping me umm... it's actually a very good tuition because my Math was C from standard five and eventually I got straight A's. And I'm very happy.

Yes, my teachers encourage me to study. They do a lot. They give me advice. They make me happy. Sometimes like my tuition teacher she would bring me out... (Laughing) for ice cream whatever just made me happy. I also spent time with my true friend, the only friend, well, we would have a very good time. I went to her house. If I go to her house, then we would literally go everywhere... (Laughing). Her mom, her family, they all know me. And if they know I'm coming they would bring me out immediately and we would play and it's really fun. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Being positive. Being positive refers to the ability to think of something positively. In this study, Affifah had positive thinking on what happened in her life. For her, life journey is far and she cannot end her journey life just because of the challenges that she had faced. It can be shown as follow:

I just think positively because I know if I think negatively then everything will be that way. So just think positively. I continue my life because I know that my life doesn't end just there, I have a long way I'm still young. And I want to be a successful person. I want to get good grades I want make both of them proud. And I want to move on. It was hard and it is still hard. But, I think well... These things don't really bother me much anymore because I went through it so long ago. And I think I just don't know what to say anymore. It's just something I have to cope with. To have a better life I just have to keep going and don't give up. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Being protective. Being protective means the capability to protect self with using defence mechanism. She narrated that she would be offended if people

talked badly about her family. She dealt with this situation by protecting the name of her family. It can be shown as below:

It depends. If it is good, I don't mind. If it is bad I'm going to get offended, then very defensive. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Good Relationship between parent and daughter. Having a good relationship between parents and daughter gives meaning that the participant had good quality time spent with her mother. They went out and spent time together. They supported each other. It can be seen as below:

When I spend time with her on the weekend, then we would usually go out of the house, maybe go to the park, go swimming or just go to the mall. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Good spiritual practice. This element became one of coping strategies used by Afifah to deal with her problems. When she externalized her behaviour through prayer and reciting the Qur'an, she had good spiritual practices. By prayer, it soothed her heart.

I would immediately take my ablution and pray because I believe that when I pray I imagine that it's only me and Allah, it's only between me and Allah and it really soothes my heart.

Yes. I do. I would recite the Qur'an every day. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Strong belief. Strong belief refers to having strong faith on something. Like Afifah, she had strong belief when she relied on Allah alone. She prayed to get happiness, be a successful person, and all matters were eased. Also, she believed in herself to face it as it was a reality. In order to obtain a better life, she was moving forward in her life by refusing to give up.

I pray that Allah would ease what is going on. I pray that Allah will make me happy again. I pray that Allah will make me and my mother successful people. I pray that everything will be okay.

To have a better life I just have to keep going and don't give up. It's complicated. But, I believe that I can face it because it's reality. About my family it's hard to cope with the change. Without my father it was tough, I always developed a character. I'm not very sure what type of character. But, it's quite tough. When people ask me oh how you go through things so fast, how do you be so strong? How can you get so strong? How can you be so happy when you have problems? Umm... I don't know it just something in my heart that tells me that it's nothing to be worried. It's just reality. I just have to get it done with. Life is a lot easier, and happier, when I am with my mother, my aunties, my cousins and also my grandparents. Actually... I just take it. I don't know how. Maybe because it's over the years. I just gave up on feeling sad, and I just thought of being happy. (Afifah, 13 years old).

The positive coping strategies employed by Afifah can be summarised in Fig. 4 as below:

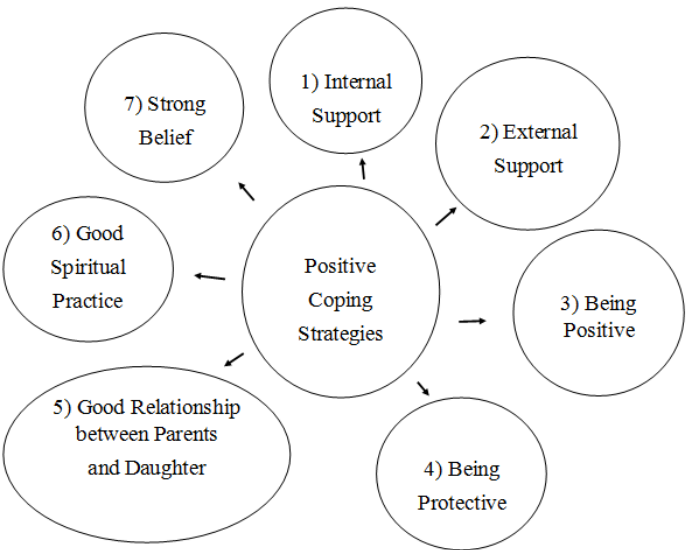


Figure 4. Positive coping strategies

Negative Coping Strategies

In the negative coping strategies, two sub-themes were developed comprising of: 1) self-reluctant, and 2) self-blaming.

Self-reluctant. This is one of the types of negative coping strategies that employs the unwillingness of the self to get involved with other people.

Umm.... Well... They often ask me to join. But, sometime I don't feel comforted around them. I don't feel I'm worth it with them. So, I just push it away. (Afifah, 13 years old).

Self-blaming. As to cope with the stressful life, she had sometime blamed herself as cause of separation. It can be displayed as below:

Sometime I blame myself as the cause of their separation. I just feel bad. I don't know. I just feel I am the reason why everything happens. Sometime I feel depressed about everything in mind and I don't want to think about it (Afifah, 13 years old).

Afifah's negative coping strategies are summarised in Fig. 5 as below:

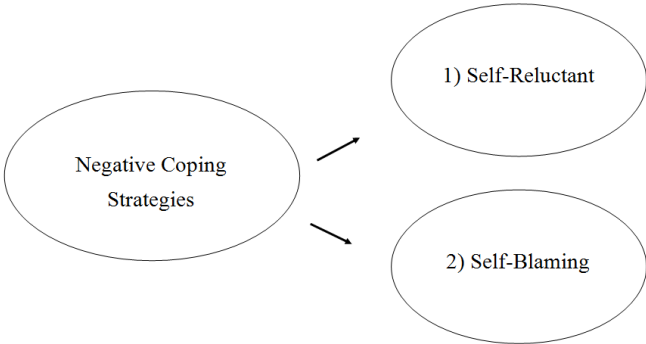


Figure 5. Negative Coping Strategies

To recapitulate, there are two challenges and coping strategies respectively used by the child. A summary of the challenges and coping strategies is presented in Fig. 6 as follows:

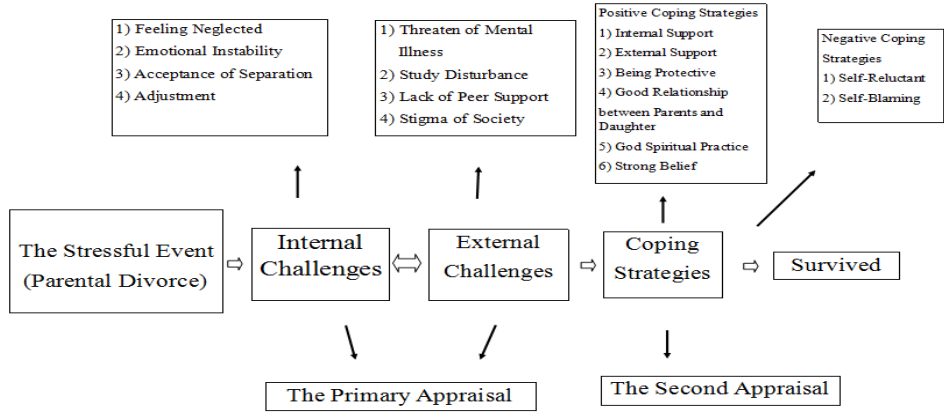


Figure 6. The cognitive transactional model of stress. Adapted from (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

Discussion

Folkman and Lazarus (1980) proposed the Cognitive Transactional Model of Stress and Coping comprising two types of appraisals: Primary Appraisal and Secondary Appraisal.

This study contributes to theory in a way that the experiences of being a child of divorce became one of her major stressors in life and the child coped with the challenges by using the theory. Based on the theory, the internal and external challenges are regarded as a primary appraisal which represent a threat to the individual while positive and negative coping strategies are regarded as a secondary appraisal which refers to the ability of individuals to control or cope with the stressor in this study.

The second appraisal suggested two types of coping strategies which are problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is that kind of coping aimed at resolving the stressful situation or event or altering the source of the stress (Carroll, 2013). Whereas, the emotion-focused coping is one aimed at managing the emotions associated with the situation, rather than changing the situation itself (Carroll, 2013). In this study, the child used problem-focused coping such as getting internal and external support, as well as having good relationship between parents and daughter. On the other hand, the child utilized emotion-focused coping such as being protective and having strong belief, which is known as positive coping strategies and having self-reluctance and self-blaming which is referred to as negative coping strategies in this study. Surprisingly, in this study, there is an integration of an element of spirituality where the child used it as a coping strategy. This finding gives new contribution to future research.

Research has still not established a reliable method for differentiating effective and non-effective coping strategies (Sesar, Simic, & Barisic, 2010). Some studies indicate that emotion-oriented coping is associated with emotional and behavioral difficulties in children (Compas, Ey, Worsham, & Howell, 1996; Compas, Malcarne, Fondacaro, 1988). At the same time, other researchers have failed to show that problem-oriented and active strategies contribute to the success of psychological adaptation (Rogers, & Holmbeck, 1997; Wertlieb, Weigel, & Feldstein, 1987). Indeed, the effectiveness of coping strategies depends on the specifics of the stressful situation. Strategies effective for one type of stress are not necessarily effective for other types (Lutter, 2000).

Furthermore, depending on the developmental stage of the child, divorce can be experienced in several ways. Children respond to this change differently. One particular area that the children are forced to restructure is their relationship with the parents, especially a noncustodial parent. Some children tolerate this change well, whereas others exhibit maladaptive behaviours, including contact refusal (Freeman, 2011). The post-divorce relationship continues to have a profound effect on the mental health of children (Freeman, 2011). Adolescents and young adults growing up in post-divorce families display more internalizing and externalizing problem behaviour than youngsters of intact families (VanderValk, Spruijt, Goede, Maas, & Meeus, 2005).

Conclusion

In summary, the results of the current study suggest that children from Muslim families can employ the spiritual practice as a good way to cope with problems. Muslims indeed cannot put the Qur'an as the second place in dealing with problems. Instead, they need to return to the Qur'anic teachings in dealing with challenges or problems. The Qur'an is regarded as a primary source of knowledge and as a mean to get closer to Allah. In other words, it is a guidance to its practitioners.

In Islam, there is concept of *tawakkul* or concept of reliance on God or trusting in God's plan. It is also referred to as perfect trust in God and reliance on

Him alone. Muslims need Allah to rely on everything. What they have gone through or will go through is because of Allah's will. Putting the highest level of trust in Him because He knows everything. Bearing in mind, He said that by remembering Him, our hearts will be at peace.

“Only in remembrance of Allah (SWT) will your heart find peace.” In line with that, the finding of this study is parallel with this concept. (Qur'an 13:28).

Besides, this study also contributes to the school counsellors by planning programmes with the integration of Islamic values or spirituality to cope with the stressful events in students' life.

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