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# The Familial Experiences of Malay Adolescents with Conduct Issues: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

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**Abstract**

This research explores how Malay adolescents with behavioural issues make sense of their family life experiences. This research utilised Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This research involved eight (8) Malay male participants, aged between 16 and 18 years. The participants who were selected through purposive sampling were recruited from a rehabilitation centre for young offenders in Malaysia. The participants attended at least two semi-structured interview sessions. Each interview session was conducted in Malay, and each session lasted between 50 and 60 minutes. These interviews, which were digitally audiotaped, were then transcribed, checked and verified accordingly, translated from Malay into English, and analysed using the IPA method. The results suggest that the participants understanding of their family lived experiences is constructed reflective to the complex relationship between the traditional Malay cultures, values, beliefs and practices, which are much influenced by Islamic teaching, the emergent new values and worldviews associated with globalisation and modernisation. Through the emerging themes, the participants pictured that the interactions between family members, parents, in particular, was essential to them. But, their interpretation of such interactions had conflicting values with the normality of the local belief and practices, which played roles in their criminal engagement.Thus, it can be understood that these affected adolescents were not necessarily problematic internally, but they just reacted to the changing context around them, especially to their family institution.

**Keywords:**Adolescents, interpretative phenomenological analysis; globalisation; conduct issues; malay family dynamic; familial lived experiences

## 1.Introduction

In progressing towards becoming a developed nation, Malaysia has participated actively in global economic, social, technological, educational and global culture through the globalisation process. Globalisation as a process is very demanding, requiring a lot of changes in the political, cultural, economic, educational and social landscape of the country (**Martin, Tyler, Storper, Evenhuis, & Glasmeier, 2018**). Many of the changes require adapting commitment and inculcating foreign cultural values that are unlikely consistent with local practices. Without adequate preparation, the potential incommensurability of values likely affects the locally defined well-being among vulnerable groups, especially adolescents (**Hassan, 2005**).

Having said that, it means that a globalised world is not necessarily a fruitful process nor a bad process as it brings both negative and positive effects to the participating nation (**Marsella, 2012:Martin et al., 2018**). This scenario is particularly true in referring to how the changes affect the Malay familial institution in Malaysia. As a part of the family structure, adolescents are among the most affected group (**Hassan, 2005**). Their involvement in crimes, in particular, has been associated with the changing context that happens due to the globalisation process (**Daud, Coombes, Venkateswar, & Ross, 2013**). However, how far these adolescents understand and adapt to the changes remains elusive. Therefore, this research is designed to explore their understanding, specifically their familial experiences. The familial experiences are analysed and interpreted, reflecting the changes in family dynamic among the Malay. Additionally, the present research

attempts to illuminate the connectivity between the changing context and the disfranchised of Malay adolescents from the Malay norms, cultures and values.

***Malay family dynamic***

The changes in family dynamics refer to the changes in family structure and family process within the Malay community. In traditional Malay culture, within which the Malay customary laws (*adat*) and Islamic teaching function as dual principles in describing the Malay family dynamic (**Kling, 1995**), family structure refers to the family system within which the family is established by either a family with two biological parents, a family with single-parent or stepfamily (**Baharudin, Krauss, Yacoob, & Pei, 2011**). In Malaysia, a single-parent family is defined in three ways. Either it is 1) a single mother who is the head of the family. She has been divorced by her husband or has been separated permanently from her husband and has unmarried children staying with her, or 2) she is the head of the family and is married, but because of his poor health, her husband is not able to work, and there are unmarried children in the family, or 3) she is the head of the family and has never been married and has adopted children or children of unconfirmed status (**Bernama, 2015**).

The family process refers to parent-child interaction and the family environment (**Baharudin et al., 2011**). Traditional Malay cultures emphasise patriarchal hierarchy, kinship network and flexible boundaries in the Malay family dynamic (**Baharudin et al., 2011**). Patriarchal systems hold the idea that men, i.e. the father occupy the major role in the family structure and process (**Juhari, Yaacob, &Talib, 2013; Kling, 1995**). This patriarchal system is in unison with both the teaching of Islam and the Malay hegemonic customary laws. Issues emerged for the participants when the father was absent in the family, and his responsibilities were delegated to single mothers, which constitute flexible boundaries in the Malay family system. A flexible boundary is ascribed to facilitate divorce and remarriage, to enable flexible family membership without a fixed boundary in a family circle (**Kling, 1995**). However, when divorce happens, the kinship network between children and the father is maintained even though they may live separately. For example, a daughter needs to get permission from the person who acts as her *wali* (legal guardian) for her to get married even though she lives with her mother. In Islam, *wali* is one of the essential requirements in a marriage contract to determine the validity of the marriage (**Abas, Mohd, &MohdYusof, 2015**). A *wali* must be an adult man who has a blood relationship with the women (e.g. father), a Muslim, being sane and '*adil* (fair) or does not continue to commit minor sins and has never committed a major sin, is not *fasiq* (violates Islamic laws), not absent due to *ihram* (performing the Islamic pilgrimage or *Umrah*) and is a free person (**Abas et al., 2015**).

Ideally, in the traditional Malay family structure, the dynamic of the relationship is centred on the roles and responsibilities of each family member. Again, the Malay family has always been patriarchal in which primary power lies in the hands of the father (**Juhari et al., 2013**). Younger members of the family are expected to pay full respect to their parents and older family members, and as a reciprocal relationship, elder family members, especially the parents, are expected to place a high value on the proper upbringing of children (**Harun, 2009**). This task is a shared responsibility with other immediate family and kin members. In such a manner, parents are expected to play significant roles in the socialisation process of their offspring. Thus, Malay parents are expected to equip their children with not only worldly knowledge but also religious knowledge leading to a balanced life for the present and future of their children (**Juhari et al., 2013**).

The fact that religion is an important factor in determining peoples' values is maintained in the Malay family functioning and socialisation process (**Mohamed Aslam, Selamah, Ruzita, & Hazizan, 2001**). The extent to which this family dynamic with its emphasis on values is sustainable in the contemporary age has become an important issue in the Malay world as many Malay families are moving away from traditional practices due to various unprecedented life events, particularly globalisation (**Harun & Hasan, 2008; Hassan, 2005; Mohd Abbas, 2011; Peow, 2011**). The processes require them to turn their focus to strengthening their ability to survive in the contemporary and highly competitive world. There are tensions between the obligations of the parents and family towards children, the rights of the children themselves, as well as the struggle to survive in response to the changing context due to globalisation.

Thus, the essence of globalisation has presented immense challenges that have exposed Malay adolescents to conflicting values and aspirations. Also, the essence of globalisation at some points undermines the family and community support in helping them navigate their way through adolescence. As a result, Malay adolescents have become disfranchised from their traditional cultural norms, and they are now rated as the highest ethnic group involved in criminal activity (**Mohamad, Mohammad, Mat Ali, & Zainudin Awang, 2018**). Also, these changes have impacted how Malay adolescents understand and react to the changing world. While prior research has consistently documented the positive association between changes in the family dynamic and delinquency (e.g. **Abdullah, Shahadan, & Bistamam, 2018; Abu Bakar, Abd. Wahab, & Islam, 2016; Noszczyk-Bernasiewicz, 2012; Sharma, Sharma, & Barkataki, 2015; Tan, Osman, & Mahadir, 2017**), but how exactly these Malay adolescents understand and make

sense of the changes are yet to be discovered empirically. Therefore, the present research seeks to explore and understand the affected adolescents' subjective familial experiences and the meaning they attach to the experiences.

## 2.Research Methodology

### *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)*

This research utilised Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a method of analysis. IPA, through its interpretative commitments, provides meaning for the descriptive phenomenology (**Shinebourne, 2011**). In the present research, the 'double hermeneutic' was practised by linking those family lived experiences of the Malay adolescents with the changes that happen in their lived experiences. Those changes were viewed as human resources that people drew upon in making sense of their lived experiences (**Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009**).

Meanwhile, the idiographic element that underpins the development of IPA retains an in-depth focus and detailed examination of particular instances as well as a commitment to the "detailed finely textured analysis" of lived experiences (**Smith et al., 2009**).

### *Participants*

**Table 1**
***Family background of the participants***

| | Family Background | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Participant** | **Bio. Parents are still together** | **Divorced** | **Single parent (divorced)** | **Adoption** | **Inter-parental conflicts** | **Physical Assault** | **Family member involve in crime** | **Intact but live separately** | **Comm. Problems with other family members** |
| Ajam | Y | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Arif | Y | - | - | - | - | Y | - | - | - |
| Madi | Y | - | - | - | Y (often) | Y | Y (S) | - | - |
| Dino | - | - | - | Y | - | - | - | - | - |
| Adib | Y | - | - | - | - | - | - | Y | Y |
| Youp | - | Y | Y (M) | - | Y | - | Y (F & U) | - | Y |
| Sidi | Y | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Usop | - | y | Y (F) | - | Y | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 5 (62.5%) | 2 (25%) | 2 (25%) | 1 (12.5%) | 3 (37.5%) | 2 (25%) | 2 (25%) | 1 (12.5%) | 2 (25%) |

Y = Yes M = Mother F= Father U= Uncle S = Sister

This research involved eight (8) adolescents aged between 16 and 18 years old. They were recruited and interviewed at a rehabilitation centre for young offenders in Malaysia. The participants were selected based on six inclusion criteria, which include: a) Malay male, b) aged between 16 and 18, c) with identified behavioural problems, d) able to read and communicate in Malay or English, e) voluntarily to participate and disclose their personal experiences, f) having no identified psychological deficit that may affect their participation in the research process. The participant sample size was determined on saturation by which the process of recruiting the participants' was continued until sufficient data was obtained and no new information emerged from the interview.

The analysis of participants' demographic background, as presented in Table 1, revealed that out of the eight participants, five still have both biological parents, but one participant reported that his parents have to live separately due to work reason. The parents of the other two participants have been divorced, leaving the participants to live with either mother or father. One participant is adopted. Apart from that, three participants reported that they experienced inter-parental conflict. One participant experienced physical assault. Two participants reported that they have family

members involved in crime, and three participants reported having communication problems with family members. Thus, each participant presented with family issues of various circumstances. Two participants reported that they also had communication issues with their family members.

***Research procedures***

Ethical approval was sought from the Massey University Human Ethics Committees (HEC: Southern A Application – 13/23). The ethics was concerned about the privacy and confidentiality of the interviews and data management procedures, security measures to both the participants and the interviewer, and funding.

As for recruitment procedures, the authorities of identified rehabilitation centres were responsible for selecting potential participants. Negotiating participation with the institution was a requirement of the research procedures as access to participation depending on their regulations because some of the young people were not permitted to have contact with persons outside of the centre due to their sentence. The agreement between the researchers and the institution maintained voluntary participation, and the facilities imposed no pressure to ensure participation. Upon consenting, each respondent was requested to complete at least two semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted at the rehabilitation centres where the participants were placed. The duration of each interview session ranged from 50 to 60 minutes per session. All interviews were digitally recorded. An interview schedule was used to guide the researchers in exploring the participants lived experiences.

During the interviews, the participants were asked to share their family lived experiences. Open questions such as "can you tell me about your family background" were asked. More questions relevant to the topic being discussed were used to probe to encourage these participants. The probing questions remained broad and general to allow the participants concerned to lead the conversation, so their psychological and social world could be explored in depth (**Smith & Osborn, 2008**). While all interview sessions were conducted in a way that satisfied the participants' ways of expressing their experiences, the research objectives and principles were maintained alongside the IPA commitment.

All recordings were then transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy. Because the interviews were conducted in the Malay language, all transcripts were then translated from Malay into English. The translation process was done by the researchers. The translation was then checked and verified by an independent translator who was fluent in both Malay and English. To respond to ethical issues about the verification of transcription procedure as suggested by (**Hagens, Dobrow & Chafe, 2009**), at the end of the data collection process, the participants were given the opportunity to review and verify their transcripts, respectively. This procedure was aimed to increase the accuracy of the transcripts. The participants were also assured that their transcripts would not include confidential information such as their name and their identifying information (**Eatough, & Smith, 2017**).

***Data analysis***

The transcripts were analysed using IPA. The analysis process was guided by the analysis stages, as suggested by **Smith et al. (2009)**. The analysis began with the researcher carefully reading and re-reading each transcript to become familiar with the data and to generate a general perspective about the data. The researchers wrote some relevant notes in the margins while reading the transcripts as they explored the content. Upon completing this initial analysis stage, researchers came to understand that the participants lived experiences were very much affected by the changing context of their life circumstances. For example, the engagement in criminal behaviour was seen as a response to their missing of a role model in their family institution and as an effect of economic insecurity.

All the extracted statements were then organised into boxes alongside the researcher comments, reflections, the initial idea of themes and possible emerging superordinate and subordinate themes, which were consistent with step three of IPA analysis, the development of emergent themes. At this stage, the analysis process was conducted case by case. In keeping with IPA's idiographic commitment, each case was considered and examined in its own terms (**Smith et al., 2009**). The emerging themes in each case were examined and clustered together with the remaining cases, according to their conceptual similarities. The researchers then started clustering the themes into more precise superordinate and subordinate themes, also noting idiosyncratic instances. The final superordinate and subordinate themes were then described and interpreted in a more meaningful way according to research objectives in a continuous process of referring to the demographic data and the individual cases.

**3.Results**

For the purpose of reflecting on the contextual analysis, the general theoretical assumptions about the ideal Malay family or parental approach in dealing with children (as discussed in **Baharudin et al., 2011; Harun, 1996, 2009;**

**Juhari et al., 2013**) are distinguished from the perspective of the affected Malay adolescents. For example, as found in the analysis of this research, while the parents are understood as having the power to nurture their children (**Harun, 2009**), which include imposing traditional Malay nurturing practices in the contemporary climate, the children in this research believe that they have limited voice or maybe none to question their parents' rights. The rights of the parents give them the authority to impose both mental and physical punishment on the children. As Malay adolescents have been subjected to globalisation processes, they have learned many new values that contradict the traditional Malay culture. They have learned about autonomy, independence and individual rights, which have been disseminated through the globalisation process. Malaysia's participation in globalisation requires adhering to international human rights guidelines, and Malay children have begun to question traditional family values through knowledge of children's rights in ways that have never before been questioned (**Al-Attas, 1977**).

In the participants' personal accounts, the relationships and the interactions between family members, particularly with their parents, do matter to them. The absence of parents or other family members due to work or other reasons shows how the highly competitive contemporary economic system has forced family members to focus more on survival rather than their primary responsibilities to their children. Within this context, the participants often associated their criminal engagement with issues pertaining to their family relationships, which included a lack of quality family involvement, feeling disconnected from a family emotionally, inter-parental conflicts, negative feelings about family life and parenting issues.

***Lack of quality family involvement***

Several participants showed a strong tendency to blame their family members, especially their parents, for not providing them with proper guidance and support. In other words, they talk about a lack of quality parental involvement. The participants' experiences resonate with **Bosco, Renk, Dinger, Epstein, and Phares (2003**) claim that children need direct interaction with their parents, need their parents to be accessible to children when they need them, and need guidance from parents to fulfil their responsibilities. The participants felt that it was impossible to gain support from their family due to the unavailability and unresponsiveness of their parents, especially in helping them cope with their difficult life circumstances. For instance, Arif attributed his criminal problems to the lack of advice from his family. In the interview, he stated that he rarely communicated with his parents and other siblings. He did not like to share his thoughts and activities with his family. As such, he spent very minimum quality time together with his parents and family. Due to the lack of communication, rather than taking responsibility for his behaviour, he explained his involvement in crimes as:

> *"Probably (because of) lack of advice from family too."(Arif, p. 1).*

Youp also attributed his behaviour to his parents' failure, who did not try to correct his mistakes in his understanding. But analysis of Youp's family history revealed that his parents themselves had some serious relationship issues that ended up in divorce just before the police detained him. As a result of the family unit breakdown, Youp understood his mother's limited ability to spend time with her children because she had to take on the responsibility for earning.

According to Youp, both his father and uncle were involved with drugs. So when his father was unable to play roles as a father, his uncle, who within a traditional family structure, was expected to take up the responsibilities to give appropriate advice and support to family members. But, this expectation was not materialised as his uncle himself was a criminal. Therefore, for Youp, within a Malay traditional family system, he did not have a positive role model that has left him feeling unsupported.

> *"I would blame my family. They never taught me. They never corrected my mistakes."(Youp, p. 23)*

> *"My parents are not concerned about me. My mum opened a wedding boutique. My mum and my dad have already divorced. I lived with my mum." (Youp, p.7)*

Usop also felt that he could not rely on his family for the moral support he needed during his difficult time or specifically when he was being bullied by his peers and when he had no money. Usop also felt that he could not rely on his family for the moral support he needed during his difficult time, specifically when his peers bullied him, and he had no money. While Usop's parents were still together, he stated that their relationship was problematic, and he attributed their problems to the financial issue. His father used to engage in multiple jobs to support the family financially, and so did his mother, who works as a tailor from home. Both his parents always busy with their respective work and left Usop and his other siblings to survive with what he felt was little support. Usop shared that his family frequently left him alone from a young age. According to attachment theory (**Kobak, 1999; Steele, Bate, Nikitiades, & Buhl-Nielsen, 2015**), Usop's feelings of lack of 'security and 'care' in his relationship with his parents meant that he was expected to care for himself. He felt disconnected from his parents and did not trust that his parents would help. Usop asserted:

*"My parents would not be able to help me if anything happens to me. I don't think I would ask for sympathy from them. To me, it seems that they are not helping."(Usop, p. 20)*

Other participants indicated that poor family involvement was due to parents having poor knowledge of adolescents' contemporary issues. This notion was raised by Dino, who had been passionately involved in illegal motorcycle racing. While his mother had to take on many responsibilities that his absent father, according to traditional values should have been responsible for, Dino took advantage of his mothers' limitations. He thought that his mother was not knowledgeable about anything related to motorcycle racing, and therefore believed that his mother would not realise the seriousness of his criminal activities:

*"My mum was not good (not knowledgeable) at anything related to motorcycles. So, she just take it for granted."(Usop, p. 24)*

Sidi also felt his mother did not care about his behaviour as she did not react to his stealing from her. He stated his mother had never set up clear boundaries to moderate his behaviours. Therefore, with the lack of boundaries and consequences from his mother, Sidi simply concluded that his mother did not care about him. It seemed to him that his mother practised a high tolerance for deviance:

*"Yes, I had (taken my mother's money), but my mum did not care."(Sidi, p.3)*

In Sidi's case, I prefer to describe his meaning-making processes through a broader context. He still lives together with both his biological parents as well as his other siblings. However, his aunt had brought him up from a young age before he returned to his biological parents at age 12. When he was with his aunt, he reported that his aunt imposed a very rigid 'parenting style' which he could not stand. He decided to run away from his aunt's house and went back to his biological parents' house. Hence, a sense of belongingness to his biological parents and family, who were supposed to provide primary protection, was affected. As a result, he felt as if he had no obligations as a son and assumed no moral responsibility toward his biological parents and family due to failure in a reciprocal relationship as described in the traditional Malay family dynamic. Also, his father and mother were working. So the quality time spent together may have been affected as well. Therefore, his understanding that his mother 'did not care' was complicated by his return to the already working family. Sidi had returned home with a drug addiction, suggesting that his normal functioning and relationships were already problematic.

The claims made by the participants concerning their relationships with their parents indicate that they were able to recognise that they required guidance from the family. This notion is consistent with the developmental theory that suggests at their young age, they may experience a lack of ability to think ahead as their brain development, particularly the prefrontal cortex, may not yet well developed (**Beckman, 2004; Juvenile Justice Center, 2004**). Thus, they need appropriate guidance from parents or their caregivers as protective factors so that their psychological and behavioural well-being is secure.

***Feeling disconnected to the family emotionally***

Feeling disconnected from the family emotionally emerges as a theme in the participants' accounts and showed the degree to which the participants felt disengaged from other family members. Regular meetings and communication between family members were always seen as a sign of strong connection to one and another. On the contrary, when there was a failure in communication, especially when the failure tears apart the bond between each family member, the participants felt estranged from other family members, either behaviourally or emotionally. For instance, Arif, who went to a boarding school from the beginning of his secondary school, rarely stayed home. When he was home, such as during school holidays, he preferred to spend his spare time alone in his bedroom or went to a cyber cafe or mingle with his friends outside the home. As such, he spent little time interacting with his family members. As a housewife, his mother was at home most of the time, but it seemed that Arif established his own boundaries as he preferred to stay alone in his bedroom or hang out at a cyber cafe that distanced himself from his family members. As a result, he developed non-intimate relationships with his family members:

*"We are not really close, and rarely communicate with each other." (Arif, p. 1)*

Adib was disconnected from other family members because his parents lived apart for work reasons. Therefore, he somehow has an understandable reason he was not regularly contacted with his parents and family. Adib reported that because of work commitments away from home, family interactions were limited. The lack of interaction led to feeling emotionally disconnected from his siblings, and he felt isolated in the family:

*"I rarely met them (other siblings), I am not really close to them."(Adib, p. 10)*

Youp also shared similar feelings of not being connected with family members due to a lack of communication between family members:

*"Before I was arrested, I was not close to them (The National Population and Family Dynamic Board). We rarely talked to each other. Sometimes, they ignored me, but I just ignored them (too)."(Youp, p. 9)*

The theme of lack of connection was also apparent in Madi and Dino's account. They felt like when they need a connection with family, no one paid attention to them as all family members were busy with their respective affairs. They felt neglected by their family members, insecure, unprotected and unable to survive. Thus, in the absence of clear boundaries and communication, which should be set by the family, Madi and Dino were searching of connection elsewhere, which include their peers in particular:

*"I feel sad, stress. I was quite close to my family previously, we used to go for shopping together. But not now, everything has changed. everyone busy with their own affairs.(I hope) my family will be back together. But, I am not sure about this. It was ok before this. But once I was at secondary school level, I started to feel uncomfortable to stay with my family. It was in 2010, at that time I was in form 1. My family started to have problems. So, I prefer to stay outside (home). Sometimes both my parents fought to each other." (Madi, p. 31)*

*"My friends were more important than my family. The family was always unable to stay with us for 24 hours a day. They were always busy." (Dino, p. 23)*

In sum, the participants who were feeling disconnected from family emotionally were searching for connection. But, they spoke that it was not possible in their family. Therefore, they looked for the connection elsewhere, such as friends who were very important during adolescence (**Shumaker, Deutsch, & Brenninkmeyer, 2009**).

***Inter-parental conflicts***

Some of the participants attributed their problems to inter-parental conflicts. In their accounts, the participants suggested that the intolerance that emerged in the inter-parental relationships indirectly affected their lived experiences. The participants indicated that they were the victims of the conflict between their parents. Literature shows that children who witness parental conflict have a tendency to commit crimes to show their disappointment over the issue (**Edleson, Ellerton, Seagren,Kirchberg, Schmidt & Ambrose, 2007**). Madi talked about the inability of his mother to confront his father's violence to protect herself from being physically hurt. In addition, no one in the family had the "guts" to confront the father. This issue might have a connection to the patriarchal culture in the Malay family system through which the father has the power to rule the family. In this sense, the mother is granted minimal rights to overrule the power of the father or the mother herself as a woman was physically incapable of confronting the father. Madi tried to express his feeling of hopelessness, specifically in passing through his lived experiences:

*"My mother could do nothing about my father. (well) My father is a man. My mother was afraid that she would be beaten by my father if she dared to interfere with my father's life." (Madi, p. 11)*

On certain occasions, Madi demonstrated that he could not take it anymore to see his parents continuously arguing, especially when the father often physically assaulted his mother. He tried to align himself with his mother against his father.

*"I fought my father. I wanted to protect my mother. (I could not take it anymore) to see my mother was beaten by my father."(Madi, p. 12)*

Usop's response to parental conflict was to run away from home rather than watching his parents fight with each other.

*"Both my mum and my dad were in a bad relationship. I do not know why. I could not watch them fight. So, I decided to run away from home. (After I run away from home) I stayed at the prayer place, a mosque, at any vacant house. I slept at the back of the house. If I desperate for money or food, I'd break into a shop and I'd steal some money and foods. I ate at the mosque. During fasting month, I used to break the kitchen at the mosque and ate whatever available in the kitchen."(Usop, p. 5)*

Usops crimes could serve the purpose of distracting his parents from the conflict and uniting the parents in a common goal which was to intervene in their children's issues. It was a scapegoating whereby Usop had to sacrifice by becoming a victim in the conflict between both his parents. Thus, it was hoped that by engaging in crime, their parents could forget the conflict between them but focus on Usop problems.

***Negative feelings about family life***

'Feeling' in this category represents the expression of emotion by the participants concerning their family lives. This theme emerged as the participants attempted to build a connection between their family circumstances and their emotional response. Multiple family issues were highlighted by the participants. Instead of perceiving family as a source of comfort and support, the participants perceived family as the source of emotional issues for them. I would phrase this relationship as 'family life as a stressor' in the experiences of the participants. In a normal life circle, when an individual suffers from stress or any psychological issues, coping strategies are essential. Hence, engagement in a particular behaviour can be considered a means to ease the psychological pain. In the participants' case, staying away from family and participating in crimes would serve as their coping strategies.

Accordingly, when the participants claim that they felt relieved when they were outside hanging out with their friends or spending time in certain places such as a cyber cafe, it somehow indicates that family life was psychologically such a burden to the participants because they did not receive emotional support from their families. Owing to that, they were looking for an alternative 'family' and a place of acceptance and belongingness as a coping strategy.

Madi, who consistently highlighted the conflict between his parents expressed his discomfort when talking about his parents. His parents often fought at home. Madi himself discovered that his father had an affair with another woman behind his mother's back. It was difficult for Madi and his mother to move away from his father as they were highly dependent on him, especially for financial support. According to Madi, even though they depended on his father's financial support, it was never enough. Madi took responsibility to find alternative ways to get extra money. He struggled emotionally with the conflict at home and sought comfort in other places to relieve the emotional tension.

> *"It started because of my family. (I mean) family problems. Both my parents used to fight, my sister was rarely at home. So, I started spending most of my time outside. I was wild outside, I took drugs." (Madi, p.1)*

> *"Tension! I don't feel like going home. I just want to stay outside. It made me feel better."(Madi, p.17)*

The participants in this research talked about spending more and more time away from home. From a Malay cultural perspective, reaching adulthood does not mean leaving home is necessary, and the family structure often accommodates multiple relationships. However, these participants had experienced problems in their family relationships and increasingly spent time away from home. They began forming new identities as they explored interests with their friends. This scenario can be associated with the changes in their psychological needs as they became less connected to their families. As such, Madi asserted that he stopped enjoying life with his family once he progressed to secondary school where he met new peers and learned about new lifestyles. It seems that his desires and interests synchronised well with the outside world but not his family values.

> *"Yes (my parents used to do something nice to my family and me). It happened when we returned to my grandma's house to celebrate Hari Raya. But when I was in secondary school, I no longer felt comfortable (to stay with my family)." (Madi, p. 13)*

Dino experiences feelings of stress, which he stated originated from the way his family treated him. As an adopted child, he had no knowledge of his biological parents, and while as a child he adapted to living with strangers, he increasingly became detached. The feeling of detachment from adoptive parents is well reported in the psychological literature on adoption and challenges an adoptees sense of belonging and continuity (Blake & Coombes, 2016), and the disconnection often marks a site of conflict. He became self-contained and did not trust family members. At one point, the disappointment over his family life was also because his foster parents upheld strict rules in the family that prevented him from doing what he likes to do. Furthermore, the unavailability of things that Dino could appreciate and enjoy in the familial environment became a stressor in his life. In this way, he rebelled against the boundaries that were set for him.

> *"Just Ok. At first, I was not comfortable to stay with them (adopted family). I felt so much pressure living in my house because my parents stopped me from doing anything I wanted to do. They (my parents) did not allow me to go out at night. Then, if my friends asked me to join them, my mum would not allow me to do so. That is why I felt so distressed. I had nothing to do at home." (Dino, p.5)*

Ajam talked about his understanding of the issues that adolescents face when there are problems within the family. When family relationships are experienced as inadequate, and they feel emotionally challenged, they turn away from their families.

> *"Actually, they (the adolescents with behavioural problems) have been trapped (in a bad situation). As a result, they (the adolescents) would easily feel as if they are being challenged. That is why some of them run away from home."(Ajam, p.25)*

Therefore, externalising the causes of their offending behaviour by blaming family members was a common theme shared by the participants. Their family histories suggested they had lost the family structure and roles of the Malay family system that should have protected them. For example, Usop firmly located his criminal offending as a result of his fathers violence. In this account, Usop has an understanding of his own behaviour through social learning theory and the intergenerational cycle of violence (**Ardelt & Day, 2002; Ormrod, 2016**):

> *"I hate my dad whenever he speaks to me. I strongly believe that my father is the main reason why all these have happene. People always say that the children will follow their fathers' (attitude)."(Madi, p.33)*

***Parenting issues***

Another distressing issue that emerged in the participants' talk about family life was how they understood the parenting styles exercised by their parents. Traditional Malay parenting styles are often associated with authoritarian parenting styles (**Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009**). This parenting style tends to be strict, harsh and has an absolute set of standards that children must conform to. What these firm boundaries demand culturally is that children must respect the authority of their parents, and do not challenge that authority. During the interviews, several participants expressed their concern over this parenting style that was exercised by their parents. The participants used the word 'control' to describe the parenting styles exercised by their parents. For them, the act of preventing them from doing what they wanted to do was perceived as their parents' attempt to interfere with their lives. They were not comfortable when their parents limited their movements and their intolerance when deciding what they could and could not do. Therefore, instead of perceiving their parents' parenting styles as nurturing, they preferred to use the word 'controlling' to reflect the feeling of losing freedom of choice in undertaking their life endeavours. The participants felt that the parenting styles were unresponsive to their personal needs and expectations.

> *"I felt like my family had exerted too much control over my activities." (Dino p. 24)*

> *"My aunt controlled my activities." (Sidi, p. 15)*

> *"I felt like I was controlled. I felt like my parents were exerting too much control over my life." (Nuar, p. 31)*

> *"My dad always controlled my activities." (Usop, p. 8)*

Thus, from the participants' experiences, there were no shifting boundaries in their parents' parenting process as participants reached adolescence. As the participants had been exposed to many emerging new values due to globalisation processes, such as tolerance, independence and individual rights, instead of rigidity, they were expecting some flexibility in parenting styles to be exercised by their parents.

Furthermore, parents practising over-indulgence was an issue for one participant. For instance, pleasant childhood experiences through which the parents give too much (anything asked for by the children) was also perceived as the cause for Tapa's involvement in criminal behaviour. Literature suggests that spoiling children potentially contributes to developing a sense of irresponsible in young adults. They are unable to understand the concept of boundaries and lack consideration of others (**Mcintosh, 1989**).

> *"My parents spoiled me. Whatever I asked for, they would fulfil it. Usually, I asked for toys." (Tapa, p.11)*

While some participants resisted strict boundaries, Tapa expected his parents to continue with meeting his needs as they had in his childhood. When he was faced with boundaries, he expressed his disappointment at the failure of his parents to fulfil his needs through delinquent behaviour. Tapas experience reflects the message of an old Malay saying that 'spoiling your children is harmful to them'. In this case, it can be understood that boundaries need to be set early in growing the children. But in setting the boundaries, rather than rigidity or spoiling, they need to flexible enough to adapt to the developmental stages and embrace the changing contexts of modern Malaysia.

**4.Discussion and conclusion**

Consistent with the present research objectives, IPA methodology was utilised to enable the contextualisation of the participants' familial experiences so that a sense of how the participants perceived the world through their own stories could be sought.

The analysis on family experiences indicates that the central issue concerning the participants' family life experiences are that there have been changes in Malay family dynamics. While Malay traditions offer a unique conception of family dynamics (**Harun, 2009**), the changing context as an effect of contemporary life events, including the globalisation and modernisation process (**Daud et al., 2013; Martin et al., & Glasmeier, 2018**) has transformed the traditional conception of the family dynamic. As an effect of the transformation, the adolescents have established their own modern understanding of family life, which differs from adults'. Through the emerging themes that are rooted in the participants' descriptions, the participants reflected on what their family had to offer compared to their expectations and needs.

On the one hand, the participants were reluctant to acknowledge the active involvement of their parents and family in their lives as a way of shaping them to become a better person. Instead, parents were perceived as attempting to control their lives. The participants saw the traditional protective parenting styles as authoritative and practised by their parents as an attempt to control them. They did not perceive the protective elements in the traditional parenting styles as appropriate to their upbringing as they preferred the freedom of making decisions for themselves. Thus, traditional Malay parenting styles, as outlined by (**Harun, 2009**) may need to be revisited to cater for the developmental and lifestyle complexities of contemporary adolescents. On the other hand, lack of family involvement, particularly parents perceived as unresponsive to their physical and emotional needs were experienced as a sign of parental neglect. Thus, the parenting styles exercised by their parents are seen as unreliable and outdated. The issue is worsened by the fact that some of the participants have to face multiple familial conflicts and problems with some of them feeling that they were victimised by those problems. All these issues have led the participants to perceive family life as emotionally stressful.

Furthermore, the analysis of the participants' responses suggested that they have a strong tendency to frame their personal family experiences into individual rights discourse. This tendency was realised through their talk about experiencing a lack of engagement and attachment to the religion, family and society. People who perpetrate culturally improper conduct have a high tendency to justify their conduct by employing an individually correct discourse (**Bernama, 2014**). Even in Malaysia, lately, fighting for individual rights has become a new trend for its people to circumvent their certain unfamiliar and culturally indecent conduct to the Malaysian people (**Bernama, 2014**). The active dissemination of knowledge through avenues such as mass media has contributed to the enthusiastic espousal of new approaches in informing, shaping and framing the individual experiences concerning social issues. Thus, contemporary Malay adolescents prefer to structure their offending behaviour through private frames. It seems that human rights discourse dominates the options in approaching issues about conduct problems.

The participants were concerned with their right to behave the way they do and locating the blame for their behaviour external to themselves. However, with individual rights discourse, there is also individual responsibility. This does not explain their behaviour fully, as the effects of parental conflict and family violence on children who witness it is well discussed in the literature. It seems that seeking connections with their peers rather than family members has also impacted their criminal offending. In family systems theory, it is suggested that all parts of the system are connected to each other, and the correct understanding is not possible if considering the parts in isolation. Thus, the emerging conduct problems can be understood as a result of interrelationships, mutual influences and the changes in the dynamics of Malay family structures and processes. As the boundaries of the family system is opened to external influences, it is also exposed to various external stressors that potentially affect family wellbeing. Therefore, apart from focusing on the connection between problematic adolescent behaviour and familial conflict, it is also important to direct our focus on how the behavioural patterns emerge and how they can be adjusted in various contextual changes. Blaming the adolescent for their criminal conduct may not be useful if the issue is approached in isolation from other parts of the system.

The analysis further specifies the need for inculcating changes in designing intervention programs for adolescents. Instead of one-way communication that used to be practised in the traditional Malay family system, the participants seemingly prefer two-way communication by which they are implicitly requesting an opportunity to be heard. They were unlikely to accept the rigidity of parenting styles practised by their parents, which they persistently termed 'control' to portray the intense protective parenting exercised by their parents. They reacted against the traditional patriarchal Malay family structure and processes by which the father holds the absolute right to nurture his children. In return, the children are expected to obey their parents without questioning their rights (**Harun, 2009**).

Based on this analysis, we would contend that such an authoritarian approach might have been acceptable for raising children decades ago, appropriate to the time and the place of tradition. What is needed to meet the needs of adolescents in a rapidly changing context is parenting and family values that are both culturally meaningful but also consistent with the psychological development of the adolescents (**Daud et al., 2013**)

While this analysis draws attention to the family structure and processes through the participants' stories, it does not necessarily mean that families are unresponsive to their adolescent children. Some of the issues faces by the families are connected to their access to resources, especially where parents are required to work. Most of the families were struggling with the low economic status that made them vulnerable to inequality, and in the participants' accounts, this was often associated with parental conflict.

In sum, the present research findings suggest that the social and cultural values of the Malay family system are under pressure as they respond to changing context in the current globalised and modernised world. The Malay family values and cultures have to be compromised from the adolescents' perspectives as they were trying to confirm to the new life context. These pressures have impacted the well-being of the Malay family system and eventually contribute to the involvement of Malay adolescents in conduct issues. Thus, it can be understood that these affected adolescents were not necessarily problematic internally, but they just reacted to the changing context around them, especially to their family institution.

## 5.Declarations of Interest

None

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