

THE PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS OF SOCIALLY ISOLATED CHILDREN

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ABSTRAK

The study aims to explore the psychosocial needs of socially isolated children in a children home. This study uses a qualitative approach where socially isolated children were interviewed face-to-face and their behaviour was observed. The study findings have reported the children's psychosocial needs involve the development of self-concept, attachment, and social interactions. In addressing the case of child social isolation, several stakeholders which include the Department of Social Welfare, non-governmental organisations and educational institutions dealing with child services will have direct access to provide the needed intervention. The study suggests that in order to address the children's psychosocial

needs, a framework which incorporates elements of self-conceptualization of children, strengthening child-parent relationships and enhancing social interaction is imperative.

Keywords: *child social isolation, children, psychosocial needs, and Malaysia.*

INTRODUCTION

Are humans considered humans due to biological factors such as genes or heredity or by their behaviours? Which separates them from other species? Painters, politicians or even alcoholics become so due to inheritance or is it learned socially? Canady (1948) stated that a child is born neither a social nor unsocial being, it simply responds to environmental stimulation. It is further stated that upon birth, the behaviour

of a child is developed, changed, and modified through a process of interactions and gaining of experiences with other individuals, social groups and cultural environments.

Through this process, the child becomes a person and develops its personality. As stated, humans become humans only by active interaction in a society of those who already have become human. Humans are not merely a biological organism, but a social being where their development is so much a biological but also a social development (Canady, 1948). But which aspect, social or biological, is more important in determining the species as humans, setting them apart from other species?

Childhood is considered an important aspect of human development. Children's

principal characteristics are acquired before the age of five years old (Anaya & Perez-Edgar, 2019). Theories on human personality stress the utmost importance of one's childhood. Many theorists such as Freud, Erickson and Piaget highlighted childhood as an important building block in the development of an individual's behaviour in later years of life. Some disorders faced by adults are developed during one's childhood (Kessler, et al., 2010). It is further mentioned that accurate diagnosis and treatment of childhood disorders can resolve problems faced by individuals in later adulthood. Childhood is shaped by the social environment a child experiences (Knauf, 2019).

What are humans when they are not socialized? Can children raised with no socialization and complete isolation be rehabilitated and live a life society intends for them? Phenomenon such as child social isolation are said to be a result of children being raised with little to no human contact or socialization leading them to behave feral-like or unhuman (Lasky, 2016).

BACKGROUND

According to Steinberg and Sciarini (2013), for centuries, numerous reported cases of children being kept in confinement or isolation by their parents or guardians unexposed to the social environment. Socially isolated children have occurred not only in western society but in Malaysia as well. Malaysia also has had reports and findings of child social isolation cases,

though not as many and well documented as compared to western countries.

In June 2014, a boy was found living alone neglected in a flat (Zulkifli, 2014). The boy was discovered by immigration officers inspecting the building. He was 15 years old at the time of rescue. Upon rescue, he was severely malnourished to the point of emaciation and passed away in 2016 at the age of 16 years old due to epilepsy (Mat Kasim, 2015). According to Zulkifli (2014), authorities found him in an empty flat unit that was unkept, filthy and had a stench of urine and faeces. Authorities mentioned that he was like a living corpse, dirty and laying on the floor near faeces and leftover food (Zulkifli, 2014). It was added that he was half naked wearing worn out clothes with a wheelchair and a pillow. After his rescue, he was taken to a welfare institution in Negeri Sembilan for rehabilitation. There, he was quiet, interacted little with his surroundings, had no speech, and could only say "maa...". He needed assistance doing his daily activities such as eating, putting on clothes, bathing, brushing his teeth and managing himself in general. It was stated that this was caused by his condition and that he simply did not know how to do it himself.

He had little interactions with the other children at the institution, where he would only look at them when they approached him. He would only smile to workers close to him, unresponsive to others and whenever people would call to him, it took him time to process

the information and look for the person calling which showed in his facial reaction. He would stare blankly out the window and drool a lot. He could not walk due to his physical condition and could only move by sidling. At times he would become aggressive. Since he could not speak and give proper feedback, it was difficult to conduct any psychological assessment on him as to determine his psychological condition and wellbeing.

SIGNIFICANT OF STUDY

The significance of this study to the field of social work are as follows. Firstly, this research addresses the issue of child social isolation and child services are a major scope of service in the social work profession (Morales & Sheafor, 2015). Child social isolation is caused by separation or isolation of children from society (Newton, 2002, & McNeil, Polloway, & Smith, 1984). Terr (2003), stated in most cases of child isolation, it was found that the neglect was done by their own family and this led to isolation from the social environment. Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (2018), reports that there has been an increase in cases of children in need of care and protection. In 2014, there has been a total of 4,295 cases of children in need of care and protection and a total of 183 cases in the state of Penang alone. In 2015, the number increased to 4,453 cases with a total of 188 from Penang. In 2016, it was reported that the total number of cases further increased to 4,982 cases whereas in Penang, increased to 247 cases.

The statistics of child cases from the Department of Social Welfare are quite high and little is known regarding child social isolation in Malaysia. There has never been an official documented case of child social isolation in Malaysia due to the lack of knowledge regarding this phenomenon. Many of the cases, research, literature, and theories on child social isolation were based on incidents and findings from different locations, cultures, and experiences throughout the world but not uniquely in the contexts of Malaysia.

Secondly, the objective of this study is to better understand the child social isolation phenomenon specific to the Malaysian context. As mentioned by Turner and Reddick (2015), a lack of socialization during childhood causes the child to face difficulties in adapting to society during adulthood. Furthermore, Lasky (2016) stated that these children face impairment in cognitive abilities, communication skills and lacking in socialization. In short, it can be stated that child social isolation has difficulties in adapting to society. Therefore, upon a better comprehension of this phenomenon, the child can be assisted in adaptation and re-entrance into society.

Thirdly, findings from this study can be implemented in policies, practice and legislation that refer to children welfare. In Malaysia, there are several policies related to the welfare of children such as Adoption Act 1952, Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act 2007 and

Education Act 1996 to name a few. But when it comes to child welfare, the main document commonly referred to is the Child Act 2001 whereas the Department of Social Welfare is the main stakeholder in handling child welfare cases. Therefore, policies, practices and legislations can be further improved with finding from this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Child Social Isolation and Behaviour

As stated by Gould (2014), emotional nurturing is necessary in human development. In a study exploring the relationship between emotional and cognitive stimulation and IQ level, it was questioned why children raised in orphanages had lower IQ's and more trouble establishing relationships than children raised in families. The study examined 13 infants who had been labeled severely retarded out of an orphanage and placed in an institution for mentally retarded women, one child each ward. The children received high level of attention and cuddling from the women and after two years it was found that the infants who had been moved had an average gain of 28 points on their IQ tests while the infants who were left behind lost 30 points.

It was found that when the children reached adulthood, those who had been raised with more emotional and physical stimulation were much more highly educated, more likely to be married, and to hold a job. It was concluded that isolation is a multi-faceted

phenomenon stating that even when children's physical needs are cared for, lack of stimulation and interaction can affect the ability to form bonds and integrate fully into society with negative affect on intelligence (Gould, 2014). This study suggested that children suffering from social isolation affected their emotional and cognitive abilities causing them to have difficulties in relationship, commitment and sustaining jobs.

Another study also found that emotional maltreatment such as chronic parental rejection and social exclusion during childhood have the tendency to affect more sensitively to social exclusion during adulthood (van Harmelen, et al., 2014). In a study by van Harmelen, et al. (2014), on 46 young adults experiencing low to extreme childhood emotional maltreatment reported that social exclusion was associated with increases in posterior anterior cingulate cortex and ventral medial prefrontal cortex. Both of these components are responsible for the overall self-referential processing. The posterior anterior cingulate cortex regulates the integration of autobiographical memory with emotional information about the self and the ventral medial prefrontal cortex plays a role in self-referential processing by coupling the emotional and cognitive processing and emotional appraisal of self-relevant information during self-referential processing (van Harmelen, et al., 2014). This finding again indicated that social exclusion led to negative self and other

referential processing such as reduced self-esteem, sense of belonging, meaningful existence and control. It was further found that the severity of childhood emotional maltreatment was positively associated with increased dorsal medial prefrontal cortex, involved in self and other referential processing, and social exclusion. Researchers stated these findings suggested that the more individual experienced childhood emotional maltreatment, the more self and other processing is elicited by social exclusion in adulthood. It was also stated that negative self-referential thinking enhances cognitive vulnerability for the development of psychiatric disorders. Hence, findings from this study suggest the possibility of underlining emotional and behavioural difficulties faced by adult with childhood emotional maltreatment. This study also suggests possible future behavioural dysfunctions faced by socially isolated children as experiences of social isolated during childhood years may result in possible emotional and behavioural difficulties in later adulthood.

Child Social Isolation and the Social Environment

Environmental factors should be considered in rehabilitation processes with socially isolated children. Extreme emotional isolation, harsh and hostile environment, usually brought upon by individuals that were interperated by children as loving and nurturing, acting in inhumane ways towards them, causing them to withdraw from society leading to further

psychosocial developmental delays (Felitti, et al., 2019). Bettelheim (1959), presents a case study of several children resembling characteristics extreme isolation comparing them to children with infantile autism. It was found that both groups of children showcased similar behaviour such as irregular locomotion, odd or inappropriate social behavior and the lack of speech but the distinct difference was that infantile autistic children was caused by biological abnormalities where as socially isolated children was caused by harsh and cruel societal factors.

McNeil, Polloway, and Smith, (1984), also agrees that social environment is highly involved in the overall development of children and further stated that the degree and quality of social interaction during isolated period plays an important role in the recovery of these children. In their study, groups of children reared by animals, in wilderness, confined with no or limited human contact, all had suffered similar problems such as absences of speech, lack of social skills and having to adapt to new environment different from to the one they grow up with or had known. Furthermore, it was found that the ability to recover and adapt to society was linked to the degree and quality of interaction during their isolated period. It was stated that children who spent time isolated with minimal human contact such as that of Isabella with her deaf-mute mother had a better recovery chance due to the fact that interaction needs, even though relatively little, had been stimulated.

On the other hand, if the child could see the caretaker but is prohibited to interact or punished when attempting to interact, or if children is given inconsistent care and left deprived, children then becomes conditioned to mistrust the environment causing damage and interfering in later recovery processes (McNeil, Polloway, & Smith, 1984). The hostile and cruel environment with the children's unattended needs left them with emotional harm in turns affected their recovery process causing them to reject and permanently be lost from society (Puetz, et al., 2019).

In another study, Mohanty, Edvardsson, Abello, dan Eldridge (2016), investigated the relationship between child health outcomes and the key components of child social exclusion (socioeconomic background, education, connectedness, health services and housing) in Australia. The study found an association between the Child Social Exclusion Index and child health outcomes. It was found that children aged 1-14 years old living in areas with high risk of child social exclusion have higher rates of both potentially preventable hospitalisations and avoidable deaths. It was concluded that there are high associations between children's health outcomes and the composite Child Social Exclusion Index and the domains of socioeconomic, education, connectedness and housing domains. This study suggests that the Child Social Exclusion Index may provide vital information on children's health outcomes,

socioeconomic, education, connectedness and housing in areas with high risk of child social exclusion. Therefore, it can also be suggested that the Child Social Exclusion Index can measure areas with high risk of child social exclusion and children's health outcomes. As socially isolated children and social exclusion are parallel, it is possible that this index may also identify areas at risk of developing child social isolation in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

The methods used in this study include in-depth interviews, systemic observation, and archival records to obtain data. This research was conducted at a registered children's home designed to provide care for children rescued from abuse and neglect as stated in the Child (Amendment) Act 2015.

The sampling method used was non-probability sampling. As stated by Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, and Zechmeister (2015), non-probability sampling does not guarantee that every respondent in the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. Therefore, sampling method was chosen because although all children are qualified, but only specific children can become respondent. For this study, children suffering from social isolation are the main characteristic focused.

The specific non-probability sampling method that was used is purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria for respondent include children under 18 years as stated in the

Child (Amendment) Act 2016. To fully capture the broad range of experiences among children of different backgrounds, children of any race, culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education, or other demographic factors were considered as participants. Furthermore, only children located within the institution was eligible. Lastly, only children that are victims of social isolation were selected. Exclusion criteria were individuals above 18 years and only children located in the institution are eligible for the study. Therefore, children outside of the institution are not considered eligible candidates. Lastly, children who are not victims of social isolation shall not be interviewed.

To achieve the objectives of this study, two data collection method were used which involve in-depth interview with the respondents and informants and systemic observation. Respondents were interviewed to collect raw data of their experiences of social isolation. In-depth interviews with informants were conducted to add further richness to the data. Informants include staffs from the welfare institutions and personnel from the Department of Social Welfare. The question was divided into themes which guided the interview. These themes focused on answering the research question related to the psychosocial needs of socially isolated children. Furthermore, each theme had questions which recaptured the psychosocial needs of socially isolated children. These themes were created based on literature review of child social

isolation. The interview was conducted in Bahasa Melayu and later translated to English. This method of data collection was suitable for this study as it gathers information on behaviours of socially isolated children in their natural setting.

As the objective of the study is to explore the psychosocial needs of socially isolated children, a clear understanding of their behaviours is needed. For this study, a systematic observation of children was conducted. The observation observed the overall behaviour of the child focusing on their social behaviour such as their behaviour when interacting with other individuals. Signs of inappropriate or awkward social behaviour were also focused such as the inability to interact with others, the inability to eat meals properly, and/ or the inability to walk upwards properly. For the purpose of recording the observation, a table recording two categories of behaviour was used. Two sets of behaviours were recorded which correspond to the behaviours that should be presented by the children according to developmental stages and a set of socially inappropriate behaviours as presented by previous cases of socially isolated children. The item in the table was gathered from literature review of child development (Owens, 2002, Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2007 & Parke & Gauvain, 2009) and socially isolated children (Davis, 1947; Bettelheim, 1959; Sprehe, 1961; McNeil, Polloway, & Smith, 1984 & Lasky, 2016).

Data Analysis

RESULTS

According to Song (2008), thematic analysis refers to analysing recurrent ideational clusters of organization in the respondent's narratives. O'Reilly, Ronzoni, and Dogra, (2013), stated that thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyse, and report patterns within a data set, allowing the organisation of data in a way that describes it in detail. It was further stated that thematic analysis makes simple interpretations about the data by describing what is going on within it. Therefore, in this study, thematic analysis was used in the analysis of data. The data from audio recording was transcribed and translated from Bahasa Malaysia to English. The data was analysed and transcribed into meaningful themes (Aronson, 1994). The themes that were recognized reflected the respondent's experiences and the coding categories.

As mentioned by Aronson (1994), themes that are gathered are then combined to form a comprehensive understanding of the respondent's collective experiences. Triangulation was also used to analyse the data so that it made sense and coherent. Triangulation refers to bringing together different types of data, or sometimes different ways of looking at data to answer the research question (Denzin, 1989). The main purpose of triangulation is that of adding richness, depth and significant meaning to this study (Denzin, 1989, 1997, & Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Drawing together different perspective and types of information will provide more persist understanding.

There were 12 open-ended questions asked during the interview session with the children. These questions overall are focused at achieving the research objective to explore the psychosocial needs of socially isolated children. It was concluded that **self-concept development, improved attachment, and improved social interactions** are the main themes found.

When asked regarding their feelings about their own self or their self concept, all respondents reported feelings of distorted self-concept indicating that a psychosocial need for socially isolated children is the development of a positive self concept. It was found from narratives from the children, observation and informant, that the children were like an empty vessel not showing much emotions or interest with his surroundings. Respondent (2017, March 3). In-depth Interview:

"ummm sometimes I'm happy, sometimes I'm not."

When asked regarding their attachments with their family, the institution, friends and the social environment in general, all respondents reported negatively. It was found that they had parents without a job or their parents had difficulties in holding a stable job. Due to this fact, these children came from families of low economic status. It was found substance abuse was a recurrent theme by their parents. Furthermore, that these children had cases of neglect by their parents. They

had no nurturing trait leading multilevel of abused including physical, sexual and emotional abuse. In some cases, an absent father was a common theme as well. These elements manifested in how the child behaved by showing no family relationship. In terms of their attachment with the institution, they also showed no sense of belonging and by observation, indicated that they prefer to be alone. They had limited to no friends, are uncomfortable with others, upon further investigations, it was found that this was due to traumatic past experiences. Some respondents are comfortable with other but is restricted to limited amount of people. These findings further support that notion of their difficulties of building personal attachments with their social environment. Informant (2017, March 13). In-depth Interview:

"When they were rescued they were being locked up in the room and had been unmanaged for some time without having been changed their diapers, in dirty condition. Maybe more than four hours later. So when they were locked up it was found that their parents are under the influence of drugs."

When investigating regarding their interactions with others it was found that these children had trouble with their social interactions. Therefore it was concluded that improving social interaction was a psychosocial need for socially isolated children. From interview sessions, observations and informants, it was found that these children dislike disturbance and rarely converse

with others. Even when engaging in conversations, it was found that they limit their conversations or tend to have short conversations only. It was also found that at times, they try to avoid engaging in conversation all together. From observations, it was found that these children had language difficulties and this caused them to be unwilling to approach others to engage in conversations or any form of interactions. Informants indicated that, at times, they are seen to be in groups with other children but left alone to do their own activities. Respondent. (2017, March 3). In-depth Interview:

"Do you always talk with your friends?", and replied "No".

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the themes that were obtained with regards to the psychosocial needs of socially isolated children, it could be concluded into three aspects which are **self-concept, attachment, and social interactions**. Self-concept refers to how children see and feel about themselves. It was found that all respondents who had issues with their self-concept showed distorted self-concept. Even though self-concept is developed throughout the life span, but it is during childhood which has the most impact on the lives of individuals. Respondents reported facing abuse, neglect, lacking basic needs, constant fear and stress from their surrounding had a big effect on them and their self-concept. This has led to a development

of a negative self-concept. Therefore, improving these children's self-concept would be one of the psychosocial needs of socially isolated children.

Furthermore, it was found that respondents reported having difficulties with attachment. All respondents reported having attachment issues with family, peers, and the institution. In general, they had difficulties in having attachment with their social environment. As reported by most respondents, they had no family relationship, low family socioeconomic status, was neglected by parents, had parents dealing with substance abuse, had no parental nurturing, had been abused by their parents, had jobless parents and absent father. These issues negatively affected their attachment with family members. But not all respondents had attachment issues with their family. Some respondents had positive bonds with their families. This was so because these respondents did not experience abuse or neglect by their parents but faced stressful living conditions, they had a close and strong family relationship.

Another attachment issue faced by these children was with peers. Respondents reported issues such as avoid engaging in conversation with others, unwilling to approach others, wanting to being with others but left alone, having limited to no friends, not comfortable with others because of traumatic past and being comfortable with limited individuals because of familiarity. This was

because they had experienced isolation which caused them to have difficulties with peer attachment. It was also found that these children had attachment issues with the institution. All respondents reported no sense of belonging towards the institution and did not want to be there. It seemed like they did not have any attachment to any place they could call home or no feelings of belonging. Hence, assisting in building attachments with family members, peers and their social environment would be another psychosocial need of these children.

Findings from this study support the social identity theory regarding an individual's sense of who they are based on their group members. It was found that these children faced issues related to self-concept and making attachments with their family, peers, and institution. According to the social identity theory, social groups such as social class, family, friends, school and so on which children belong to have an important influence on an individual's self-esteem, providing them a sense of social identity or a sense of belonging to the social world (McLeod, 2008). A major aspect of social identity is the social groups that individuals are exposed to, having this exposure, individuals can build, manage and develop their identity and based on the identity of others. This exposure also assists in building attachment between children and those social groups. It was obtained from respondents that they experienced isolation and limited human contact making it impossible for them

to categorize, identify and compare. Social isolation from other individuals, limited social interactions and negative social interaction experienced by these children cause them to have issues in identifying with groups. This then makes these children withdraw from others, hence making them have difficulties with developing their self-concept and building attachments with their social environment.

A study conducted by Makinodan, Rosen, Ito, and Corfas (2012), found that early social isolation resulted in behavioral and cognitive dysfunction that correlates with white matter alterations. It was stated that these alterations, which occur only during this critical period, are phenocopied by loss of oligodendrocyte ErbB3 receptors, and social isolation leads to reduced expression of the ErbB3 ligand neuregulin-1. These findings indicate that social experience regulates prefrontal cortex myelination through neuregulin-1/ErbB3 signalling and that this is essential for normal cognitive function, thus providing a cellular and molecular context to understand the consequences of social isolation (Makinodan, Rosen, Ito, & Corfas, 2012). This finding supports that of the current study stating that child isolation leads to issues related to self-concept. In the current study, respondents reported having distorted self-concept and issues with social interaction with other individuals. This suggests that respondents may develop abnormalities in the structure of the brain mainly related to

white matter as it directly links with behavioural and cognitive function.

Findings from van Harmelen, et al., (2014), supports that of the current study agreeing that social exclusion leads to negative self and other referential processing such as reduced self-esteem, sense of belonging, meaningful existence, and control. It was further found that the severity of childhood emotional maltreatment was positively associated with increased dorsal medial prefrontal cortex, involved in self and other referential processing, and social exclusion. Researchers suggested that the more individuals experienced childhood emotional maltreatment, the more self and other processing is elicited by social exclusion in adulthood. It was also stated that negative self-referential thinking enhances cognitive vulnerability for the development of psychiatric disorders. Hence, findings from this study suggest the possibility of underlining emotional and behavioural difficulties faced by adult with childhood emotional maltreatment (van Harmelen, et al., 2014). In the current study, respondents also reported similar experience of emotional maltreatment, physical abuse and neglect which affected their self-concept, self-esteem, attachment, and sense of belonging with family, peers, and institution. These indicators suggest that respondents may face abnormalities regarding dorsal medial prefrontal cortex as well.

The current study also parallels

with that of Gould (2014), which found that even when children's physical needs are cared for, lack of stimulation and interaction can affect the ability to form bonds and integrate fully into society with negative affect on intelligence. This study suggested that children suffering from social isolation affected their emotional and cognitive abilities causing them to have difficulties in relationship, commitment and the abilities to sustain a job in the future (Gould, 2014). In the current study, respondents also reported having difficulties in building attachments with others such as family, peers and the institution that they are currently residing in. This study suggests that the respondents might face difficulties in sustaining a job in their future.

Lastly, all respondents reported facing issues regarding social interactions which includes dislike disturbance, rarely converse and short conversation with others, avoid engaging in conversation with others, language difficulties, unwillingness to approach others, being with others but left alone, having limited to no friends, not comfortable with others because of traumatic past and comfortable with limited individuals because of familiarity. One of the reasons for these issues was due to the fact the these children had experienced social isolation. Even though it was not reported that they experienced total isolation from human interaction but the limited social interaction that they had been exposed to was negative in nature. Regardless whether the negative interaction came

from the family or from the environment, it was traumatizing enough to have had affected their social interactions with other individuals. Therefore, it could be concluded that improving social interaction abilities with other individuals is another psychosocial needs of socially isolated children.

Findings from this study support the social learning theory's notion that there is a triadic reciprocal interaction between the environment; personal factors including memories, beliefs, preferences, predictions, anticipations and self-perceptions; and behavioural actions (Sharf, 2008). This situation was present in the children's social interaction with other individuals. All respondents had difficulties conversing with others, to the extent that they did not know how to initiate and maintain proper conversations. According to social learning theory, conversation, or language usage, is a learned behaviour. Language develops through the reinforcement process where parents, adults or caregivers reinforce children's babbling or the sounds they make which are similar to speech (Parke & Gauvain, 2009). Furthermore, respondents had difficulties with other aspect of behaviour, mainly when interacting with other individuals. According to Parke and Guavain (2009), human behaviour can be developed through association and imitation. Classical and operant conditioning describes learning of behaviour through association of stimulus and responds to develop behaviour. Whereas, observational or

cognitive social describes learning as a form of imitation of other people's behaviour (Parke & Gauvain, 2009). Since these children faced social isolation from other individuals, they did not have the opportunity to learn the appropriate social behaviours from their surroundings. Hence, causing them to not know how to converse and interact with the people around them.

In a study by Salzinger et. al. (1993), it was found that abused children had lower peer status and less positive reciprocity with peers chosen as friends; they were rated by peers as more aggressive and less cooperative and by parents and teachers as more disturbed; and their social network showed more insularity, atypicality and negativity. It was stated that social behaviour as perceived by peers accounted for a significant portion of the variance in social status; global disturbance measure did not add to this association. This findings support that of the current study where respondents reported facing difficulties with social interactions such as engaging and maintaining conversation, dislike disturbance from others and having limited to no friends. In studies conducted by Bowlby (1982), Harlow and Suomi (1970), and Spitz (1945), it was found that separation or neglect had an impact on children's behaviour leading to emotional and social disorders. Spitz studied the effect of isolation on institutionalized children such as orphanage and hospitalism. Whereas, Harlow and Suomi studied isolation and maternal separation on

infant monkeys and Bowlby studied attachment and loss in children. In their studies, children who experience isolation during early years of their lives become less playful, develop maternal deprivation syndrome, disturbing behaviour, have trouble connecting with their peers and slowed language development. Findings from the current study is consistent with these studies where respondents reported facing difficulties in interactions with others; attachment with surrounding including family, peers and instituion, no sense of belonging, and limited friend which they feeling comfortable with.

In a study by Fries et. al. (2005), found differences in two brain-derived neuropeptides, oxytocin and vasopressin, between children raised with family and children raised in orphanage. As stated, oxytocin and vasopressin neuropeptide systems are associated in the establishment of social bonds, parental care, stress regulation, social communication and the regulation of emotional behaviours. In their study, it was found that these neuropeptides are affected by early social experiences. It was also stated that the level of these peptides are increased by socially pleasant sensory experiences such as comforting touches and smells. As stated, increasing levels of these peptides in animals showed increased positive social interactions such as social bonds, displayed selective infant-parent attachments and formed memories of these social interactions. It was suggested that a potential mechanism of

atypical function may explain the pervasive social and emotional difficulties observed in many children who have experienced aberrant nurturing. Results from the study suggest that a failure to receive species-typical care disrupts the normal development of the oxytocin and vasopressin system in young children. As stated, perturbations in this system may interfere with the calming and comforting effects that typically emerge between young children and familiar adults who provide care and protection (Fries, et. al., 2005). Although respondents from the current study had not

undergone any assessments regarding their oxytocin and vasopressin levels but atypical social and emotional behaviour was reported such as difficulties with social bonds, parental care, stress regulation, social communication and the regulation of emotional behaviours. These indicators suggest that there might be abnormalities regarding oxytocin and vasopressin levels in these children.

Children suffering from social isolation have been growing in numbers and findings from this study can be implied to develop an intervention plan to assist

these children. It was found that children suffering from social isolation have difficulties with the self-concept, social bonds with families and other individuals and social interaction in general. A framework incorporating all these elements can be developed for working with socially isolated children in institutions particularly homes under the purview of the Department of Social Welfare and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) offering child services and educational institutions with socially isolated children as students.

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