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**USING LIFE STORIES TO UNDERSTAND THE
DEVELOPMENT OF RESILIENCE IN THE
UNDERPRIVILEGED**

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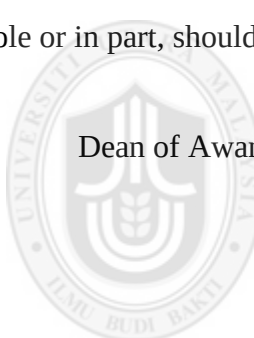
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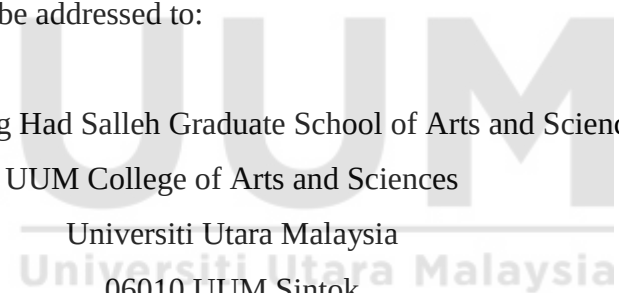
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Abstrak

Para penyelidik berpendapat bahawa kemahiran insaniah adalah lebih penting daripada kemahiran teknikal untuk kebolehpasaran kerja pada abad ke-21. Di Malaysia, kebanyakan graduan yang tidak mendapat pekerjaan dalam tempoh enam bulan adalah mereka yang datang daripada keluarga yang kurang berkemampuan; diklasifikasikan sebegini kerana mereka berpendapatan rendah yang lazimnya dirujuk sebagai golongan bawah 40% (B40). Golongan B40 dianggap mempunyai kekurangan dalam kemahiran insaniah. Kajian kualitatif ini menggunakan kisah hidup yang disarankan oleh kaedah penyiasatan naratif dalam usaha mengkaji faktor pelindung belia daripada keluarga B40. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk memahami cara golongan ini membina daya ketahanan diri dan kemahiran insaniah yang lain, sehingga menerima biasiswa berprestij dan berjaya dalam kehidupan. Data dikutip daripada tiga orang peserta dan enam orang individu lain dengan menggunakan dua belas temu bual separa tersusun. Data dianalisis secara manual pada mulanya, dan kemudian perisian komputer telah digunakan. Memo analitis dan nota lapangan turut digunakan untuk mengumpul data. Analisis individu dan analisis bersilang dilakukan ke atas ketiga-tiga kisah hidup tersebut. Walaupun ketiga-tiga orang peserta berbeza dari segi jantina, tempat tinggal, kebolehan, keperibadian dan status sosioekonomi; didapati kisah hidup mereka mempunyai persamaan dengan tiga faktor pelindung utama, iaitu: (a) persekitaran yang dipenuhi dengan kasih sayang dan sokongan; (b) disiplin dan latihan; dan (c) keagamaan dan kerohanian. Faktor pelindung ini – yang menurut kajian-kajian lain jarang ditemui dalam kalangan keluarga berpendapatan rendah – kebanyakannya datang daripada ibu yang bersikap tegas dan mempunyai daya ketahanan diri. Kajian juga mendapati bahawa ketiga-tiga peserta tersebut: (a) taat dan patuh; (b) diberikan tanggungjawab sejak usia muda; dan (c) berhadapan dengan pelbagai faktor risiko yang berupaya ditampai. Kajian ini menyarankan supaya ibubapa daripada kalangan yang kurang berkemampuan dilibatkan dalam program kesedaran dan dilatih untuk berupaya melindungi kehidupan anak-anak mereka dari awal lagi; dan supaya kanak-kanak dalam golongan ini turut diberikan latihan tentang kemahiran insaniah sebelum mereka mula bersekolah.

Kata kunci: Kisah hidup, Kemahiran insaniah, Golongan kurang berkemampuan, Daya ketahanan diri, Faktor pelindung.

Abstract

Researchers argue that soft skills are more important than hard skills for employability in the 21st century. In Malaysia, most of the graduates who do not secure employment within six months are from underprivileged families; classified as such because of their low income and are commonly referred to as the bottom 40% (B40). The B40 are seen as lacking in soft skills. This qualitative study used life stories as advocated within the narrative inquiry method to examine the protective factors of youths from B40 families. This study is aimed at understanding how they developed resilience and other soft skills, and went on to receive prestigious scholarships and succeed in life. Data were collected from the three participants and six other interviewees using twelve semi-structured interviews. The data were initially analysed manually, after which a computer software was used. Analytical memos and field notes were the other data collection methods. Individual analysis and cross-analysis were done on the three life stories. Although the three participants were different in terms of their gender, home areas, abilities, personalities and socioeconomic status, it was discovered that three main protective factors were similar in their life stories, and they are (a) a warm and supportive environment; (b) discipline and training; and (c) religiosity and spirituality. These protective factors, which according to other studies were unusual in low-income families, were mainly contributed by their authoritative and resilient mothers. It was also found that all three participants: (a) were obedient and compliant; (b) were given responsibilities from young; and (c) experienced different risk factors which were buffered. It is recommended that underprivileged parents are engaged for awareness on, and trained to implement protective factors in their children's lives from very young; and for underprivileged children to be trained on soft skills even before they start school.

Keywords: Life stories, Soft skills, Underprivileged, Resilience, Protective factors.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

I decided to embark on this research journey because I was inspired, and then became curious for an answer. I was moved, energised, encouraged and motivated by a 22 year old man, who despite being completely blind from the age of 14, laughed most of the time during our conversation with him. Firdaus could see the positive side of almost everything, even though he himself could not physically see the beautiful world around him. I wondered how could this blind man be so positive, when we, who have perfect eyesight, are at times so negative? I remember when I was speaking with him for that first time, I was already making a mental note to bring my children to meet with him. I wished for them to experience Firdaus as I had, so that he could share just a fraction of his positivity with them to forever change their outlook on life.

It was on the 7th of May, 2013 when I first met Firdaus. He came for a scholarship interview, and was hoping to successfully secure a Yayasan Sime Darby (YSD) scholarship under the “Special Needs Bursary” category, which is especially for promising students with disabilities. We were a panel of three senior employees of the Sime Darby Group, interviewing him to assess him for suitability to receive the scholarship. And as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the charity foundation offering the scholarship, I chaired the interview panel. The scholarship interview panel was required to ascertain his family background in order to assess his need for the scholarship, and we were also required to assess whether he demonstrated determination and persistence towards excellence, motivation and interest in the field

of study, good communication skills as well as awareness and behaviours of the core values of Sime Darby, which are respect and responsibility, excellence, enterprising and integrity.

Firdaus was in the second year of his Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology and Sociology at University of Malaya, achieving a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 3.28 at the time, which was outstanding for a disabled student. He was hoping to secure a YSD scholarship as he comes from a very underprivileged background; his father is a retired army personnel earning RM725 monthly while his mother is a housewife. He is also the fifth child of eight children in the family, with three still attending school. However, Firdaus brought with him numerous certificates to the scholarship interview, which he had received for his achievements such as “*Anugerah Khas Warga Istimewa*” or “Special Citizen Award” from University of Malaya in 2012. Other achievements in the university included being appointed as the Director of Interaction Day with Volunteers in 2012, winning second place in a team in goalball at national level and being an active member of the College Action Committee for Disabled Students. In school, he held the position of President of the Society of Disabled Students, the Goalball Club and the Inclusive Club. Firdaus was also active in sports during school, participating and winning gold and silver medals in various sprint races at state level.

I was curious about his outstanding achievements and soft skills, especially because Firdaus comes from an extremely underprivileged family. Working in a charity foundation, I had experience dealing with underprivileged children whom I found to usually lack soft skills as they are unable to communicate well, think on their feet or

voice their opinions when asked any questions or provoked. Firdaus, on the other hand, possessed outstanding communication skills. Unfortunately, the only skill he lacked was that he was unable to speak in English during the interview, but we allowed him to speak in Bahasa Malaysia as we do make these types of exceptions for the underprivileged scholarship category interviews.

Overall, Firdaus exuded self-confidence, determination, motivation, passion, intelligence and ambition in his most charismatic way. I was extremely impressed by his strong positive personality and his high level of soft skills, as were the other two scholarship interviewers, which is evidenced by our completed interview forms. I had personally closed my interview form with an asterisk and the words “Outstanding Individual!” complete with exclamation mark, beside it. I had never done this for any other individual I interviewed for a scholarship so far, in my nine years running YSD, except for Firdaus.

And as a second-year degree student in University of Malaya during the scholarship interview, he was already speaking to us about his ambition of setting up a proper unit in the university to look after the interests and welfare of the disabled students there. Fast forward to today, Firdaus had graduated in 2015 with a CGPA of 3.56 and was offered a working position at the university almost immediately upon graduation. When I started this study in 2016, he was the Administration Officer at the Students with Disability Management Unit under the Counselling & Career Section of the Student Affairs and Alumni Division at University of Malaya. Firdaus also got married on the 25th of March, 2017; which indicates another successful milestone in his life. Today, Firdaus is pursuing his postgraduate studies and is currently doing his Masters

in Professional Counselling at University of Malaya under another scholarship term. YSD, as his scholarship provider, has been consistently showcasing Firdaus to other YSD scholars to inspire them, either by conducting presentations about him or arranging for him to physically engage with scholars at various forums.

After interviewing Firdaus in 2013 and awarding him the YSD scholarship, I found that I became more and more curious to understand the special circumstances, factors or occurrences which were present in Firdaus' life, that had resulted in him being as exceptional as he is now. As he came from an extremely underprivileged family, he must have gone through a similar life as others who are underprivileged, and with even more challenges as he was also disabled. He would have received similar family, school and community support as other underprivileged young people. However, the question is why is he exceptionally different from the others? I realised that if we had some of the answers, we could use the knowledge for various initiatives to help other underprivileged children grow up while developing their soft skills; such as with national policy improvements, training programmes or awareness programmes. This knowledge would be beneficial for YSD to achieve its objectives as a caring charity foundation that wishes to make a difference in the lives of others sustainably.

1.2 Importance of Resilience to Build Soft Skills for the Underprivileged

For an underprivileged individual such as Firdaus, having a high level of resilience to develop the various soft skills at a young age is very advantageous for him and his family. Gibb (2014) impressed that the possession of soft skills is strongly associated with life and employment success. Empirical evidence also shows that soft skills

development from a young age directly results in success in adulthood (Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

Unfortunately, research had also shown empirical evidence that there are disparities and gaps in children and youth because of their low socioeconomic status, especially in soft skills which play a large role in determining their future life success (Duncan, Magnuson, & Votruba-drzal, 2017; Garcia, 2015; Heckman & Kautz, 2012). These inequalities are due to underprivileged children mostly living in uncomfortable and crowded houses, in violent and crime-ridden high-risk communities, and studying at low quality schools (Duncan et al., 2017).

The soft skills development gaps may also be due to underprivileged parents experiencing financial problems that may result in daily hostility that affects their children's development; lack of quality care as the parents spend long hours away at work; and abuse, crime or unemployment which are present in underprivileged families (Duncan, Magnuson, & Votruba-drzal, 2014). Heckman (2013) also highlighted that children who grow up in underprivileged homes and environments do not usually experience early development initiatives as compared with children from more privileged families, where more time is allocated to child enrichment activities.

Soft skills are also important to be developed in underprivileged children and adolescents to address behavioural problems and/or reduce life or health risk factors such as smoking, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, sexual activity and suicide (Jegannathan, Dahlblom, & Kullgren, 2014; Kummabutr, Phuphaibul, Suwonnaroop, Villarruel, &

Nityasuddhi, 2013; Pharaoh, Frantz, & Smith, 2011; Tymes, Outlaw, & Hamilton, 2016). Similarly in a Malaysian study, Abdul Kadir et al. (2012) highlighted that underprivileged Malaysian youth are more prone to be involved in risky activities and fail academically, resulting in them dropping out of school.

Underprivileged Malaysian youth who lack important soft skills may not only be faced with the above life risks, but also employability challenges (Abdul Hamid, Islam, & Abd Manaf, 2014; Abdul Karim et al., 2012; Awang Hashim et al., 2015; Pillai, Khan, Ibrahim, & Raphael, 2012; Zaharim, Ahmad, Yusoff, Omar, & Basri, 2012). This is supported with tracer studies undertaken by the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia, according to a press release dated 29 May 2012 published on the website of the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) of the Prime Minister's department, which found that most of the 20% of graduates who were still unemployed within six months of their graduation were underprivileged.

This is made even more challenging due to the high competition resulting from today's globalisation and technological advancements in the 21st century workplace; which requires 21st century skills focused on soft skills, aside from the hard skills in relation to technology and innovation (Mohamad Arsad, Osman, & Tuan Soh, 2011; Boyacı & Atalay, 2016; Fong, Sidhu, & Fook, 2014; Musa, Mufti, Latiff, & Amin, 2012; Osman & Marimuthu, 2010). Therefore, it is even more crucial for soft skills to be developed in underprivileged children and youth for them to succeed due to the disparities they face in life as well as the higher challenges they encounter.

In the face of all these challenges, adversity and vulnerability, it is imperative for soft skills of the underprivileged to be developed for future life achievements. And the most effective method is for the underprivileged to experience positive youth development, focused on the development of resilience (Forrest-Bank, Nicotera, Anthony, & Jenson, 2015; Kuldass, Hashim, & Ismail, 2014; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Ungar (2012) described resilience as when a vulnerable individual develops a higher coping capability, and is less susceptible to risk exposure. Building resilience to adapt positively to life adversities is crucial to develop important soft skills required by the underprivileged to thrive in life.

1.3 Importance of this Study to the Researcher

However, ever since I joined YSD in 2010 doing philanthropic work, it has been frustrating to find that almost all the underprivileged youth whom I met lacked the important soft skills when compared to others from better economic backgrounds, and with a vast difference. Possessing soft skills, including being active in extracurricular activities in school or university and winning various competitions and awards, is the main deciding factor for which a young person would win a prestigious scholarship from YSD, especially when their academic results are similarly outstanding.

I remember a young boy from a privileged family telling me enthusiastically how he had participated in various activities in school, to provide him the required exposure towards his dream of specialising in human anatomy and robotics because he wanted to create life-like limbs for the disabled for them to lead as normal lives as possible. And I compare this to a youngster of about the same age from an underprivileged background who clammed up and looked at his shoes when I asked him the relatively

simple question regarding what he wanted to do in the future. I find this especially disappointing, as one of the main focus areas of the charity foundation is to assist the underprivileged, and I personally wish to help them succeed and bring their families out of poverty sustainably with a good education.

From my own personal experience, I understand how crucial it is to have someone provide me the opportunity to equip myself with a good education to bring my family out of poverty and hardship. This is because I myself am from an underprivileged background, where my mother supported my two brothers and I by working at a handkerchief embroidery factory after my parents got divorced when I was just four. We stayed at my grandparents' house as we could not afford a place of our own, and they also helped us with necessities such as food. All my clothes were donated by other families, and I only received one new dress a year during Christmas, as my grandparents were Catholic. My parents remarried when I was twelve, and we moved out to a small rented house. My father worked as a security guard and thereafter as a personal driver, while my mother helped to make ends meet by babysitting the neighbours' children. It is a clear fact that I would not be where I am today without receiving a government scholarship to study overseas. This is why this current study is personally of utmost importance to me, especially as I am in the position to assist underprivileged youth to gain education opportunities which they could not afford otherwise, to succeed in life.

1.4 Context of Study

1.4.1 Yayasan Sime Darby (YSD)

YSD is the philanthropic arm of the Sime Darby companies, receiving up to a total of RM80 million in donations annually from the three companies. As stated in the charity foundation's Annual Report of 2017, YSD's vision is "To lead and make a sustainable impact, and a difference in the lives of others" (p. 1). The foundation's mission statement is "We are dedicated to enhancing lives and delivering sustainable value through the following five pillars: Education, Environment, Community & Health, Sports, and Arts & Culture. We practise high ethical values and observe good corporate governance" (p. 1).

The YSD Annual Report 2017 states that "Under its Education pillar, the Sime Darby Foundation dedicates itself to promoting the human quest for learning, knowledge, meaning, goodwill and understanding. The foundation endeavours to offer wisdom, expertise and assistance at all levels of education, where these can promote and advance what people believe they can achieve, especially the underprivileged" (p. 24). This study may potentially assist YSD in a critical focus area by investing in the underprivileged to bring them and their families out of the poverty cycle, while addressing the national issue of graduate employability.

In my position heading YSD, my main role is to ensure that the foundation carries out its vision and mission, while being directed and governed by the YSD Governing Council. In my job description updated on 1 January 2017, an important job content is to lead the strategic planning and vision implementation of the foundation by staying abreast with the relevant development of areas to elevate YSD's existence as a leading

foundation; achieving greater benefit for stakeholders; and improving its outreach, visibility and efficiency. Therefore, conducting this study will assist me in filling a knowledge gap for YSD, to understand a critical area requiring much needed support to generate a sustainable impact.

1.4.2 YSD Scholarship Programmes under its Education Pillar

The Education pillar was the original focus area of YSD when it was founded in 1982, and it remains the biggest and most important pillar within YSD today. Throughout the years since its inception, YSD has evolved from offering and awarding only scholarships for study at prestigious Oxbridge universities to holistic scholarship programmes for deserving students from middle to low income families (www.yayasansimedarby.com). Currently, YSD targets to mainly award scholarships and bursaries to the underprivileged to provide the nation with a constant pool of talents via the following three categories i.e. Bursary, Skill Enrichment and Excellence and explained as follows:

- The YSD Bursary programme provides financial assistance to individuals from less fortunate backgrounds with a total monthly household income of RM4,000 and below; as well as disabled students with potential to pursue higher education at diploma or undergraduate levels at local higher education institutions.
- The YSD Skill Enrichment scholarship programme provides scholarships and bursaries to students from low income families with a total monthly household income of RM4,000 and below, who are vocationally inclined for tertiary education.

- The YSD Excellence scholarship programme consists of service-bonded scholarships offered to young individuals with a total monthly household income of RM10,000 and below who possess outstanding academic and other achievements to study locally and abroad.

As at August 2018, YSD had awarded 3,796 scholarships worth RM268.4 million since the foundation was founded in 1982. Out of this, 3,436 scholarships were awarded to Malaysians, and the rest were awarded to Indonesians, Liberians, Papua New Guineans, Chinese nationals and Cambodians.

YSD is also not spared from the nationwide challenge of the lack of soft skills in youth, which is experienced during the recruitment of scholars, especially the underprivileged ones, to be assisted in their tertiary studies. In the past, YSD had encountered situations when scholarships could not be awarded to exceptionally high academic achievers due to unacceptable levels of soft skills. This is because YSD does not only consider high academic achievements in its scholars, but also certain soft skills depending on the scholarship category; such as leadership, communication, critical thinking, teamwork, confidence and persistence (YSD Education Sponsorship Framework, p. 7).

1.4.3 YSD Scholars

Historically under the YSD Excellence scholarship programme, scholars were selected totally on merit, based on the highest academic and extracurricular achievements, including national and international awards won. From 1982 until 2013, the focus of YSD was to secure the best talent to be awarded scholarships to study at the best universities in the world, and for them to return and work at Sime Darby for a number

of years. I observed that the levels of soft skills of these Excellence scholars were relatively high during these years.

The focus of YSD expanded after the merger of Sime Darby, Guthrie and Golden Hope in 2006, and the five pillars were incorporated within the charity foundation. After the merger, YSD was governed by a new independent Governing Council in 2009, who shifted the focus of education from mainly supporting the excellent to providing more support to the needy. In the same year, Bursary categories were introduced to assist the underprivileged i.e. the poor and the disabled, to provide them with an opportunity to improve their lives as well as their families'. Following this shift in focus, for the Excellence category, a mandatory selection criteria of total household income of RM10,000 was introduced in 2014. After this selection criteria revision, it was noted that the levels of soft skills of potential Excellence category scholarship candidates were not as high as before the income limit criteria was introduced, even though their academic achievements were similarly outstanding.

During scholarship interviews, I noted that there were so few underprivileged scholarship candidates who stood out from the rest and possessed exceedingly high levels of soft skills. From my observation, it was noted that having a high level of soft skills is an unusual phenomenon among youth with low socioeconomic backgrounds.

1.4.4 YSD Programmes to Assist the Underprivileged

YSD realises that soft skills development is critical for children and youth coming from underprivileged backgrounds, for them to succeed in this competitive world with

limited resources and opportunities. YSD's previous and current involvement in various programmes such as the "Academic Development Project for Underprivileged Secondary Schools in Gagasan Seberang Perak", "Education City Hostel Programme" and "Tabung Mengubah Destini Anak Bangsa" raised YSD's awareness that underprivileged children and youth are usually quiet, unresponsive, unable to communicate well and have low proficiency levels in English. The programmes were and are carried out with one of the aims being the development of the soft skills of underprivileged children and youth. However, these programme strategies may have been improved with the knowledge gained from this current study focusing on positive youth development.

For new YSD programmes supporting soft skill development of the underprivileged, the outcome from this research would prove beneficial to guide their planning and implementation. For example, the "English Speech and Theatre Boot Camps for Underprivileged Schools" programme which YSD is currently funding covers the cost of the primary school module development on YSD's request, to enable the programmes to be carried out in primary schools instead of secondary schools, for a more long-lasting and sustainable effect. This is because this study was ongoing during the planning of this programme, and it was found from the literature review that the effects of soft skills development is more long-lasting when developed from young.

Therefore, it would be very useful for YSD to understand how special individuals i.e. those from underprivileged backgrounds but with a high level of soft skills, had progressively developed to be different when compared to others from similar low income family backgrounds; by collecting and analysing their life stories. With this

understanding and knowledge, intervention may be done in other underprivileged individual's lives to provide them with the resilience to develop the important soft skills required, despite their challenges and life risks, via future YSD programmes. This would set these underprivileged individuals apart from the rest, and give them that cutting edge to secure a job after tertiary studies and succeed in life, while also addressing the prolonged national graduate employability issue.

1.5 Problem Statement

Globally, there is a need for individuals who possess 21st century skills which are those related to innovation, life and career, as well as information technology (Boyacı & Atalay, 2016). As a competitive developing country, Malaysia aspires to produce high quality and competitive human capital resources who possess 21st century skills, which are focused on both hard and soft skills. Hard skills are in relation to information technology, and soft skills are in relation to critical and creative thinking, with outstanding social and interpersonal skills to face high competition which result from today's globalisation and technological advancements (Mohamad Arsad et al., 2011; Fong et al., 2014; Musa et al., 2012).

Unfortunately in Malaysia, most studies related to employability had referred to the lack of soft skills in the country to meet existing employer demands (Abdul Hamid, Islam, & Hazilah Abd Manaf, 2014; Abdul Karim et al., 2012; Pillai, Khan, Ibrahim, & Raphael, 2012; Zaharim, Ahmad, Yusoff, Omar, & Basri, 2012). Fong et al. (2014) and Musa et al. (2012) expressed that the forces of globalisation and internationalisation have put a critical demand for graduates to be resilient enough to compete in both local and global levels; and therefore, the institutions of higher

learning (IHLs) in Malaysia are constantly challenged to produce graduates with 21st century skills.

In order to improve graduates' soft skills, the Malaysian government had implemented a structured soft skills development module in IHLs in 2006 (Abdul Karim et al., 2012; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2012; Selamat, Ismail, Ahmad, Hussin, & Seliman, 2013; Shakir, 2009), where the Ministry of Higher Education had provided guidance and recommendation of various soft skill development approaches, and had left it up to the IHLs to select which approach suited them best for the biggest influence such as academic or non-academic support programmes; development being embedded in current subjects or as a subject on its own; or within activities at campus.

As this prolonged national problem of unemployed graduates had persisted despite the above, the government had subsequently launched the National Graduate Employability Blueprint (2012-2017) which focused on graduate employability with better soft skills. The government had also launched two national initiatives carried out by corporate organisations i.e. the *Skim Latihan 1Malaysia* (SL1M) in 2011 and the *Program Pembangunan Profesional (PDP) ILTIZAM* in 2012 to train unemployed graduates and develop their soft skills such as English proficiency, confidence, critical thinking and communication skills to increase their employability, focusing on the underprivileged. Unfortunately, these programmes are expensive to run as they involve full-time training of individuals.

To address the shortcomings of the national education system which required reform to provide a balanced education to build both hard and soft skills among children and youth, the Malaysian government launched the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Pre-School to Post-Secondary Education) and the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education). In both these blueprints an individual's education is to be balanced between knowledge and skills, as well as ethics and morality, for students to be all-rounded; while engaging parents and the community for schools. The school education blueprint also acknowledged that it is important to help the underprivileged as they do not perform as well in school as those from more privileged families.

Nevertheless, while the above initiatives were ongoing, the Ministry of Higher Education's issued a tracer study report in 2015 (*Laporan Pengesanan Graduan 2015*) (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016) which indicated that most unemployed graduates come from underprivileged backgrounds. This may be because only the initiatives by the corporate organisations to equip unemployed graduates do focus on the underprivileged. The Graduate Employability Blueprint as well as both the Malaysian Education Blueprints were not drawn up with specific plans to address the underprivileged group. Instead, all three blueprints presented plans and initiatives that focus on all children and youth development; with a "one size fits all" assumption, without having specific customised programmes for the underprivileged.

There is empirical evidence that long lasting influence and investment cost-effectiveness would result if human development commences at early childhood for the underprivileged (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Garcia, 2015; Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Therefore, the concern arises whether the government, the IHLs and the

corporate organisations' soft skills development and training initiatives, which are currently focused on life stages during tertiary education and after graduation, are the most effective methods to create the required 21st century human capital workforce with the important soft skills.

In addition, Heckman (2011) highlighted that it is a better decision to invest early and close disparities in soft skill development for the underprivileged, as investing later would prove to be more difficult and expensive. Therefore, there is high potential that soft skills development would be easier and cost-effective if it is emphasised by the government during the early childhood life and schooling years of underprivileged individuals. Garcia (2015) had also emphasised that creating basic, foundational knowledge makes it much easier to acquire skills in the future. Thus, this may also cascade into more effective continuous soft skill development during the tertiary education years and beyond, for the individual to successfully secure and subsequently maintain employment upon graduation.

As the underprivileged differ from other children and youth due to their challenging lives filled with adversity and vulnerability, the government may consider to first and foremost have strategies to focus on building their resilience. Positive youth development for underprivileged, at-risk or vulnerable youth mainly highlight the importance of developing the soft skill of resilience, as it enables youth to cope with adversity and adapt positively to challenges in their lives (Forrest-Bank et al., 2015; Sanders, Munford, Thimasarn-Anwar, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2015; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012) before other skills may be developed. This soft skill of resilience is important for the underprivileged to not only develop other necessary soft skills, but

to also thrive and flourish from an early stage in their lives (Zimmerman et al., 2013). Unfortunately, there appears to be no programmes in the government blueprints which focus on the soft skill of resilience, which would be most beneficial for the underprivileged to have before they may develop other important soft skills.

It is important for the Malaysian government to place more emphasis on customised approaches and efforts to develop soft skills of the underprivileged commencing with the soft skill of resilience, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, these skills would help them prevent risky and unhealthy behaviours which they are more exposed to, due to their socioeconomic backgrounds (Jegannathan, et al., 2014; Kummabutr et al., 2013; Pharaoh et al., 2011; Tymes et al., 2016). Secondly, the skill gap requires to be narrowed or closed for the underprivileged. It was found from empirical evidence that both hard and soft skills are the least developed in the underprivileged from a very young age, due to their upbringing and exposure (Duncan et al., 2014; Garcia, 2015).

A different outlook and strategic approach needs to be identified to address the graduate employability issue of the nation due to lack of soft skills despite these graduates having the required credentials and technical skills, which predominantly occurs among the underprivileged of Malaysia. To undertake this, understanding the resilience development process for the underprivileged would greatly assist in designing influential development and intervention programmes for them. According to the theory of resilience, positive youth development is focused on enhancing protective factors or developmental assets (Zimmerman et al., 2013). Therefore, to design and create a focused and influential programme for the underprivileged to build resilience and other soft skills, it is critical to identify important developmental assets

or resources that may be promoted within the life of an underprivileged individual. This study seeks to understand the experiences, which include protective factors and developmental assets, of certain underprivileged individuals that may have developed their resilience and other soft skills to thrive in life.

Aside from this gap, there is a dearth of study on soft skills development among the underprivileged focusing on resilience, especially in Malaysia. The most similar study was carried out by Kuldass et al. (2015) who performed a narrative research which referred to global literature. The author's study was on academic resilience that could be achieved by certain adolescents who were underprivileged, despite the risk factor of low socioeconomic backgrounds leading to failure or academic performance underachievement. Their study had focused on underprivileged students facing life challenges that prevent the majority of them from succeeding, and had concluded that "How Malaysian adolescent students are able to have academic resilience is unclear. Empirical data concerning how the students construct academic resilience have yet to be provided" (p. 42).

Other Malaysian studies carried out were focused on internal and external development assets for at-risk or underprivileged youth. Abdul Kadir et al. (2012) reported on a new instrument in the form of a self-report to measure positive attitudes and behaviour among at-risk youth to facilitate intervention programmes. Abdul Kadir et al. (2012) performed a cross-sectional quantitative study on external assets as predictors of positive emotions among at-risk youth and found that support, positive peer influence, family boundaries and a caring neighbourhood are to be present for positive youth development. Following this, Abdul Kadir, Mustapha, Abdul Mutalib,

and Rahim (2014) conducted another cross-sectional quantitative study but on internal development assets, and found that school engagement, self-esteem, interpersonal competence and motivation are important for positive youth development; and at least four predictors of internal assets are required to produce positive emotions. Although these studies dwell into the positive development in underprivileged youth, they do not focus on resilience and other soft skill development among the underprivileged to succeed.

Aside from filling the knowledge gap of resilience and other soft skills development among the underprivileged, it is imperative that a new strategic and practical approach is taken to address the graduate employability issue which remains a growing national challenge, especially among the underprivileged. This qualitative study seeks to explore the reasons why certain underprivileged individuals could develop resilience, that enabled other soft skills to be developed, to thrive and flourish. It guided the methodology design with the identified focus area of positive youth development for the underprivileged, from a young age for a more cost-effective and long lasting influence.

1.6 Research Objectives

The purpose of this qualitative research study using life stories within the narrative inquiry method is to understand the life stories of selected former YSD scholars, who were underprivileged at the time of their YSD scholarship interview, to discover their experiences and the turning points in their lives which may be the reasons for their resilience, resulting in them overcoming life challenges and obstacles to develop various other soft skills.

To achieve the purpose stated, the main objective of this study is to explore and analyse how an underprivileged individual can develop resilience, and thereafter other soft skills to thrive, despite being exposed to risks earlier in life that could have hindered the development of abilities and skills.

In order for the study to achieve the above main objective, the following objectives were sought to be met, which are to explore the life stories of young underprivileged individuals and discover:

- the protective factors or developmental assets in their lives that had significant influence on developing resilience and other soft skills,
- the life experiences that had significant influence on developing resilience and other soft skills,
- whether there were turning points in their lives, and if yes, how did these affect their outlook on life and influence the development of resilience and other soft skills.

1.7 Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following main question: How can an underprivileged individual develop resilience and other soft skills to thrive, despite being exposed to risks earlier in life that could have hindered the development of abilities and skills?

To answer the above main question, the following questions are sought to be answered in relation to a young underprivileged individual's life with this study:

- What were the protective factors or developmental assets in his or her life which had significant influence on developing resilience and other soft skills?
- What were his or her life experiences which had significant influence on developing resilience and other soft skills?
- Were there turning points in his or her life, and if yes, how did these affect their outlook on life and influence the development of resilience and other soft skills?

1.8 Significance of the Study

This exploratory qualitative study is important to be carried out to provide a fresh outlook and strategic approach to address the prolonged issue of graduate employability due to the lack of soft skills required by employers, especially among the underprivileged in Malaysia. When the underprivileged group is discussed, the soft skill of resilience is important to be focused on, as it is concerning positive human development in the face of adversity (Carlisle, 2011; Felner & DeVries, 2013; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Forrest-Bank et al., 2015; Holliday, Cimetta, Cutshaw, Yaden, & Marx, 2014; Kuldass et al., 2014; Lee, Cheung, & Kwong, 2012; Naglieri, LeBuffe, & Ross, 2013; Sesma et al., 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2013; Vimont, 2012; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Once resilience is developed, only can other soft skills development happen more easily and cost-effectively.

This study seeks to provide evidence to support the importance of customising soft skill development strategies and plans for the underprivileged, instead of having a “one size fits all” understanding as demonstrated in the Malaysian education blueprints. Duncan et al. (2014) stated that families who live in poverty and face the various challenges of the underprivileged encounter difficulties in developing their children, when compared to other higher income families. As the underprivileged families struggle to get by and face economic stress, lack the resources to invest in enriched learning experiences for their children and have less time to spend in nurturing them, children from these underprivileged families require a different approach for effective development of soft skills at school. This is coupled with the argument that ability and soft skills gaps exist for underprivileged children even before they enter pre-school, and there is potential that these gaps would persist and widen over time if they are left unaddressed (Garcia, 2015).

Underprivileged children should first and foremost be provided with customised training and exposure to build their soft skill of resilience, which Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) highlighted to be positively adapting to adversities in life. Using the theory of resilience, the resilience building initiatives should have specific focus on sufficient protective factors to buffer against life adversities and stressors (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013) and modify the risk effects interactively (Zimmerman et al., 2013), as well as on promotive factors to counteract exposure to risk factors (Zimmerman et al., 2013). This study aims to identify the types of factors in the lives of underprivileged individuals which may be used in these customised resilience development initiatives.

For more than a decade, the nation has been mainly investing resources into soft skills development during tertiary study years and after graduation. However, intervention which only commences during tertiary levels has proven not to be as effective as expected, as employers remain dissatisfied with the soft skills level of graduates and have difficulty to employ them (Abdul Hamid, Islam, & Hazilah Abd Manaf, 2014; Omar, Manaf, Mohd, Kassim, & Aziz, 2012; Shakir, 2009; Syed Ahmad, 2013). In addition, mass soft skills on-the-job training carried out by employers appointed by the government, albeit having about 80% success in eventual recruitment (Bernama, September 2015), have proven to be highly expensive. There is also a lack of assessment reports on whether these expensive employer-led programmes, albeit assisting in securing employment, facilitate sustainable long-term employability of the graduates.

From the theoretical perspective, the Bronfenbrenner ecological human development theory states that intervention should happen early during childhood for the underprivileged (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In addition, there is empirical evidence which has proven that earlier intervention in the underprivileged had produced cost-effective and long lasting positive outcomes for the underprivileged (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Garcia, 2015; Heckman, 2011; Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Therefore, this study's results seek to support the theory that soft skills development may be more influential and cost-effective for a nation when it commences from a very young age, and then consistently carried out throughout schooling and tertiary education years. If this theory is supported by the study's findings, a shift of focus of when soft skills development should be focused on may be recommended to the Malaysian government. From the study results, the recommendation may be for the soft skills

development to be mainly implemented during the pre-school and primary school years, and then subsequently the secondary school years. This strategy may replace the current government's focus of implementing soft skills development programmes during the tertiary study years at the IHLs or after graduation to address employability issues, which is not only more difficult and less sustainable but is also incurring more costs.

From the practical perspective, the study may potentially facilitate YSD to conduct programmes and initiatives for the development of resilience towards soft skills building for Malaysian underprivileged children such as awareness programmes to highlight the importance of family and community support to develop resilience and other soft skills in children and adolescents, as well as training programmes for parents of the underprivileged. YSD may also collaborate with rural public schools to carry out awareness programmes through engagement with schoolchildren's teachers and parents. In addition, YSD may collaborate with rural and underprivileged pre, primary and secondary schools to carry out resilience and other soft skills development programmes; with the content of these programmes and engagements potentially being developed from the results of this study.

YSD may also subsequently engage with the Malaysian government to present the outcomes from the programmes and engagements conducted, of which content was guided by the study results. Discussions may be held with the relevant government agencies to consider the alternative strategies of developing resilience to facilitate other soft skills development by having most focus during preschool years, as well as primary and secondary school years, by using customised approaches specifically for

underprivileged children and youth; for the Malaysian government's consideration to review national policies and implement them across the nation.

1.9 Definitions of the Key Terms

The following are the definitions for the important terms used in this study:

Underprivileged is the term used for people are poor, disadvantaged, at-risk and vulnerable and have less opportunities than the rest of the society. In Malaysia, the bottom 40% of households (B40) are considered underprivileged (Patel, 2014). YSD considers scholars to be underprivileged when their monthly household incomes are RM4,000 and below, which is the maximum income level of the B40 group.

Resilience is present when an individual has succeeded in achieving acceptable or thriving behaviours and outcomes in his or her life, in the presence of risk and adversity (Naglieri et al., 2013). It is a set of behaviours which are adaptive in nature during adversity (Ungar, 2012). Resilience is an individual's capability to adapt and cope to adversities healthily, while being supported by protective factors with positive outcomes as the result (Lee et al., 2012). According to Scales, Roehlkepartain, and Shramko (2016), the Search Institute's Development Asset framework shows that development assets or protective factors may be used to predict various soft skills, one of which is resilience.

Soft Skills are termed differently across the world and differently by various authors, but they all agree that it is important to possess soft skills to succeed in career and life.

Soft skills are survival skills such as communication, interpersonal, emotional intelligence, leadership, teamwork, negotiation, time management and stress management skills (Seth & Seth, 2013); being traits, attitudes and behaviours that are intangible, non-technical, and personality-specific, which determine an individual's strength (Robles, 2012). The Malaysia Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 also states that soft skills are inter and intra-personal skills that include decision-making, integrity, honesty, ethics, self-motivation, independence, critical thinking, reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Soft Skills Development is the process of fostering soft skills which are intended to enable and enhance personal development, participation in learning and success in employment (Gibb, 2014). The development process may be informal nurturing by close family and the surrounding community to formal programmes implemented in schools, colleges, universities and companies.

Graduate Employability is the possession of skills, abilities and personal attributes that enhance graduates' capability to secure rewarding and satisfying outcomes in their economic and social lives by obtaining and maintaining long term employment (Nickson, Warhurst, Commander, Hurrell, & Cullen, 2012). The Malaysia Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 defines employability as the ability to be marketable in the industry, and of being adept at securing and keeping a fulfilling job.

Life Stories began to be used for research in the 1980s when personality psychologists began to turn to individuals' lives to find coherence and meanings to their lives, and

found that ‘stories’ and ‘narratives’ were important. Life stories tie together important theoretical and empirical trends in developmental, cognitive, personality and cultural psychology (McAdams, 2001). Life stories are integral within the narrative inquiry research approach which studies experience, inspired by Dewey (Clandinin, 2013).

1.10 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six specific chapters. Chapter One presents the background of the study, highlighting the reasons why the study was undertaken and why the results would be important to solve a problem. The background information also supports the problem statement, research objective and question of the study that builds into the study’s significance. In addition, the study’s scope and limitations as well as the definition of key terms are also presented.

In Chapter Two, the literature from journal articles and national policies are critically reviewed to search for knowledge and practical gaps of the phenomenon under study. The theories and findings from the initial literature review guided the development of research questions towards achieving the research objectives. More literature review was done to analyse the unexpected themes that emerged from data analysis, for discussion. Chapter Three examines the research methodology using the qualitative research method, explaining the simultaneous process of collection and analysis of life story narratives as data. The important subjects of participant selection, role of the researcher, ethical considerations and data validity of the methodology are also presented.

Chapter Four provides the findings from the analysis of three participants' individual life stories narratives. Building from this, Chapter Five cross analyses the three participants' life stories findings to explore for similarities and differences in their life experiences which may have contributed to the phenomenon under study. Chapter Six discusses the findings from the individual life stories as well as the cross-analysis, and provides the conclusion and the significance of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature reviewed, which begins by highlighting the importance of soft skills on employability while emphasising the challenges faced in the Malaysian context. The importance of soft skills development for the underprivileged and the value of its early development are then elaborated. Following this, resilience is focused on as a crucial soft skill to be developed for the underprivileged to succeed in adapting to adversities, by highlighting positive youth development which emphasise on protective factors and developmental assets. The subsequent section presents the various literature which were reviewed, upon unexpected themes being identified from exploratory data analysis. The last section presents the overall conceptual framework of the study.

2.2 Soft Skills and its Importance on Employability

Robles (2012) provided an interesting analogy which explains the differences between hard skills and soft skills. A doctor's hard skills would be the understanding of illnesses and anatomy, as well as the ability to interpret symptoms and test results, which are essentially the technical skills he requires to be a qualified doctor. However, in addition to the hard skills, the required soft skills of a doctor would be empathy, with active listening and good bedside manners, which are essentially character traits that makes him or her an overall effective doctor. Therefore, hard and soft skills would have to go hand in hand for the best performance.

It is therefore not surprising that Robles (2012) stated that a job applicant's soft skills is very important to be considered, justifying employers' wish for new employees to not only have hard skills but also strong soft skills. In addition, Seth and Seth (2013) highlighted that soft skills are crucial at the workplace and its training is to be part of the curriculum during education to facilitate soft skills development.

Many authors argued that soft skills are in fact even more important than hard or technical skills for long term employability. Nickson et al. (2012) declared that employers perceive soft skills to be more important than an individual's qualifications for employability. Robles (2012) highlighted that a Harvard University survey showed that 80% of career achievements are determined by soft skills and only 20% by hard skills, while Seth and Seth (2013) stated that providing students with soft skills could determine whether they are able to secure a job, and the lack of soft skills may jeopardise a highly technically-skilled individual's career. This is further bolstered by a research conducted among Fortune 500 CEOs by Stanford Research Institute and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation, which indicated that 75% of job success in the long term depended on soft skills and only 25% on hard or technical skills (Seth & Seth, 2013).

The next section reviews literature on both soft skills and employability in the Malaysian context.

2.3 Soft Skills and Employability : The Malaysian Context

2.3.1 Soft Skills of Graduates

In Malaysia, the literature similarly focuses on the importance of soft skills for employability but highlights that there is lack of graduates with adequate soft skills, which negatively affects their employability in the country (Abdul Hamid, Islam, & Abd Manaf, 2014; Abdul Karim et al., 2012; Awang Hashim et al., 2015; Pillai, Khan, Ibrahim, & Raphael, 2012; Puteh-Behak, Darmi, & Mohamed, 2015; Zaharim, Ahmad, Md Yusoff, Omar, & Basri, 2012). Abdul Hamid et al. (2014) and Abdul Karim et al. (2012) mentioned that employers are unable to fill vacancies with suitable candidates with the right skills, and Omar, Abdul Manaf, Mohd, Che Kassim, and Abd. Aziz (2012) highlighted that graduates leave universities without sufficient soft skills which affects the employability of graduates.

Pillai et al. (2012) and Shakir (2009) emphasise that it is important to strengthen soft skills in graduates in order to contribute to graduate employability. Zaharim et al. (2012) conducted a survey on 301 employers who employed engineers from 12 different kinds of businesses in the Klang Valley and deduced that overall, these employers were more interested in the level of soft skills among engineering graduates when recruiting employees, as they believe that hard skills may be garnered from on-the-job training.

As it is highlighted in the literature that there is an issue of employability due to graduates' lack of soft skills in Malaysia, the next section reviews literature about the possible reasons for graduates' lack of soft skills.

2.3.2 Graduate Employability

The National Education Statistic: Higher Education Sector 2013 Report stated that about 200,000 students graduate annually from institutions of higher learning (IHLs) (pp. 2-3) in Malaysia, out of which 25% remain unemployed (p. 172) within six months of graduation, with the majority being degree holders (p. 174) and from public universities (p. 172) (Malaysian Education Ministry, 2013).

Tracer studies by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) found that most of the 20% of graduates who did not secure employment within six months of graduation are underprivileged (Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, 2012).

According to the *Laporan Kajian Pengesanan Graduan 2015* or the 2015 Graduate Tracer Research Report, the unemployment rate for undergraduates in 2015 indicated that 42% were from families earning a monthly household income of RM1,000 and below, followed by 34.8% from families with a monthly income of between RM1,001 and RM2,000, and 27.1% from families with a monthly income of between RM2,001 and RM3,000 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016).

To address the issue of employability specifically amongst underprivileged graduates, the former Prime Minister had launched the Skim Latihan 1Malaysia (SL1M) under the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) on 1 June 2011 as a private sector-led Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, where companies sponsor soft skills training for two months, with six to ten months on-job-training for the participating graduates. "The YAB Prime Minister called upon all companies and industry players to actively participate in the CSR initiatives to train and enhance the employability of Malaysian graduates, especially those from rural areas and low income families." (p. 1). He went

on to announce that effective 1 June 2012, all companies participating in the SL1M programme would be entitled to double tax deductions on training expenses and allowances incurred for the programme, in order to increase participation among companies (Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, 2012).

Another programme carried out to address this issue is the government-owned private equity company Ekuiti Nasional Berhad (Ekuinas) *Program Pembangunan Profesional (PDP) ILTIZAM*. The programme commenced in 2012 to upskill and improve employability of Bumiputeras, focusing on the underprivileged. 80% of the programme's participants managed to secure jobs upon completion of the training programme. Participants are required to go through a 12-month intensive training programme involving business and management skills, leadership skills, English proficiency as well as communication skills aside from physical resilience, with guidance and mentorship. All participants are paid a monthly salary of RM2,500. In 2017, the offer was extended to 75 participants who failed to secure a job after more than six months from graduation (Basaruddin, 2017). Ekuinas had allocated RM28 million for this programme over the course of six years, which is an expensive initiative (Harian Metro, 2017).

In addition to the SL1M and ILTIZAM programmes, MOHE launched the National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 where the IHLs continue to be the cornerstone for the supply of employable graduates. As employers have increasingly voiced their dissatisfaction to MOHE about the employability of graduates, claiming that there is a mismatch of supply and demand, MOHE had collaborated with industries to reach a consensus on the matter, resulting in a coherent Graduate

Employability Blueprint to address the issue more responsively and sustainably (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). The former Prime Minister had mentioned in his Budget Speech 2013 that a Graduate Employability Taskforce would be established with an allocation of RM200 million, underlining the government's high degree of concern on graduate employability in the nation.

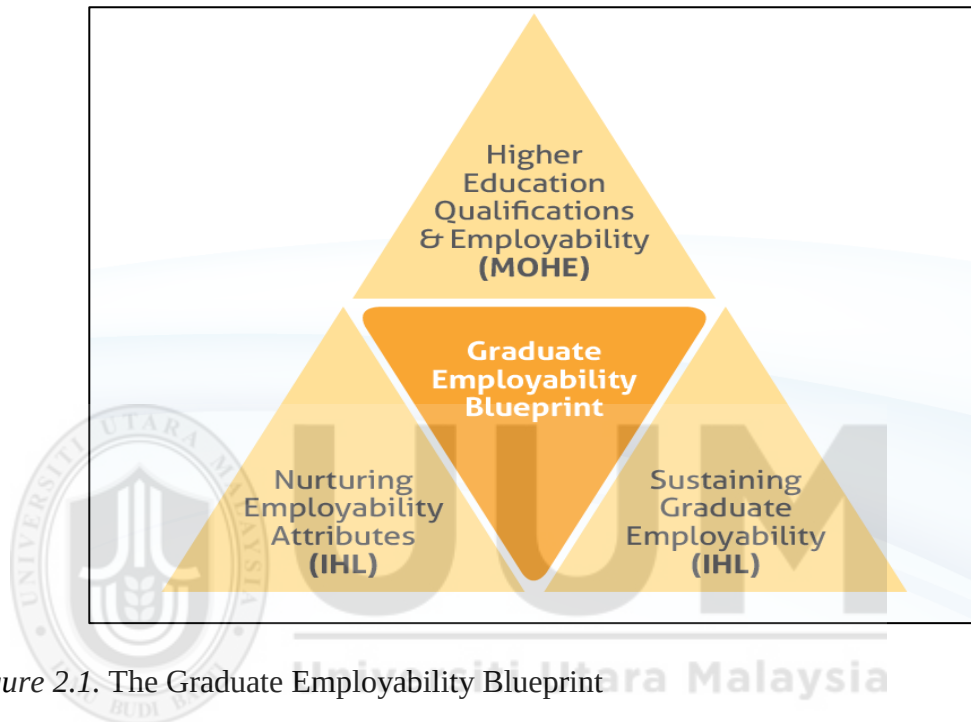


Figure 2.1. The Graduate Employability Blueprint

The Graduate Employability Blueprint's three core components shown in Figure 2.1 are designed to address MOHE's strategies to foster a higher education system which encourages human capital growth in Malaysia, and IHLs' strategies to produce employable graduates who are the right workforce to meet the nation's economic demands and changing competency landscapes. The blueprint's plans, if implemented well, appear to have the potential to address employability issues by improving initiatives developed to address these issues while youth are studying at IHLs.

Although the government had identified employability issues to lie mainly with the underprivileged, the Graduate Employability Blueprint does not present targeted, strategic plans to address the issues faced by underprivileged youths. Instead, the blueprint focuses on a general, overarching theme of youth development studying at IHLs. In addition, the government's focus to increase employability is mainly focused on the life stages of youths during and after tertiary studies.

However, Heckman (2011) highlighted that soft skills development should be conducted from a very young age for a more sustainable and cost-effective influence. "We can invest early to close disparities and prevent achievement gaps, or we can pay to remediate disparities when they are harder and more expensive to close. Either way we are going to pay. And, we'll have to do both for a while. But, there is an important difference between the two approaches. Investing early allows us to shape the future; investing later chains us to fixing the missed opportunities of the past" (p. 47). From empirical evidence, Heckman (2011) believes that investment in soft skills development should commence as early as possible in the life of an individual as closing achievement gaps at a later life stage is more difficult to be done. In addition, Christensen (2010) states that various human development theories, including Bronfenbrenner's Development Ecology Theory, demonstrate that the most significant changes in an individual's life occur from infancy through to adolescence.

Therefore, it is critical for the government to implement policies to develop soft skills and increase employability in pre, primary and secondary school stages for the underprivileged, with more focus provided in the earlier stages. The next section

reviews the literature to ascertain whether this is being carried out by the national education system.

2.3.3 The Education System Reform to Develop Soft Skills

The Malaysian education system is divided into pre-tertiary i.e. pre-school, primary school, secondary school; post-secondary education; and tertiary education at IHLs.

2.3.3.1 System Reform

In 2012, the Report on Education Reform and Process of Consultation was published. It is an overall evaluation of the national education system, conducted since the Razak Report 1956 was published, to improve the education system to be at par with other developed countries. Several main issues were highlighted relating to the Malaysian education system in schools and education institutions which include a drop in English proficiency among students and graduates, the rote-learning and exam-oriented system which does not facilitate the development of creativity and critical thinking, poor school funding and facilities, the overwhelming role of school teachers, and the need for more student empowerment as well as meritocracy and autonomy in the selection of school heads and school management. Therefore, it was acknowledged that the education system hinders the development of soft skills such as critical thinking, creativity and English proficiency in schools.

It was also reported that education should be customised to fit the needs of rural and Orang Asli children, as they may be different from urban children. This recommendation would address the critical need of the nation's soft skills development

among youth, especially with underprivileged youths who are acutely affected by the issue. The next section reviews literature to ascertain whether this customisation is included as part of the reformed education system.

2.3.3.2 The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Pre-School to Post-Secondary Education)

Following the 2012 Education Reform Report, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Pre-School to Post-Secondary Education) was launched. It included indications that the Malaysian government recognised that the command of soft skills among children and youth are important for today's labour market and economy. It was also highlighted that it is important to close future income gaps among the underprivileged, after stating that Malaysian students do not possess the soft skills required by employers. The Executive Summary states that:

The foundation for the success of a school system lies in its definition of what its students must know, understand, and be able to do — Malaysian students have historically always excelled at reproducing subject content. However, this skill is less valuable in today's ever-changing economy. Instead, students need to be able to reason, to extrapolate, and to creatively apply their knowledge in novel and unfamiliar settings. They also need attributes such as leadership to be globally competitive. As the TIMSS and PISA international assessments have demonstrated, our students struggle with higher-order thinking skills. Surveys of Malaysian and multinational companies also suggest that our students fall short on the soft skills looked for by prospective employers. At the same time, education is often seen as

an enabler for social mobility, enabling children born in poor families to earn higher incomes as adults. As long as socio-economic status remains the greatest predictor of academic success, and the factor behind the largest of all student outcome gaps in Malaysia, this promise will remain elusive for many Malaysians. (p. E-21).

The blueprint stated that using the three proxies of the: (a) parents' highest level of education, (b) states' average household income, and (c) percentage of students receiving assistance under the Poor Students' Trust Fund or *Kumpulan Wang Amanah Pelajar Miskin*; the evidence consistently shows that students from underprivileged backgrounds do not perform as well as those from middle and high income families. A study shows that only 7% of Band 1 and 2 schools have more than two-thirds receiving the assistance from the trust fund, as compared to 52% in the underperforming Band 6 and 7 schools.

It is enlightening to note that the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013 to 2025) (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education) contains plans for initiatives to be undertaken at the school level to inculcate the required aptitudes for a student to not only be an academic high achiever but also to excel outside of academics by having relevant skills. This aspiration indicates that the development of soft skills from a young age is recognised to be an important factor.

Nevertheless, the blueprint accords the same focus to all students irrespective of their family socioeconomic status, and this is an important issue to consider as there should be customised intervention initiatives and deeper emphasis for underprivileged

children, considering research by Duncan, Magnuson, and Votruba-drzal (2014, 2017) which shows that the development of underprivileged children are hindered in various ways, and their development levels are different from others. Unfortunately, there seems to be a dearth of initiatives and specialised programmes which target underprivileged schools which require more care and attention. Instead, certain initiatives in the blueprint were targeted to benefit more privileged schools; such as the best 10 schools chosen after a thorough selection to pilot the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme to explore alternative approaches to learning.

Instead, for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the Ministry of Education's focus appears to be towards achieving equity by improving the enrolment and completion rate, even though there is currently lack of comprehensive data to effectively assess equity in the system. The government is targeting for a 50% reduction in achievement gaps among urban and rural students by 2020, among the poor and others, as well as among girls and boys. Another action plan by the Ministry is to provide additional support to Orang Asli students and other minority groups including those with physical and learning disabilities; in the form of equipment, facilities and trained teachers with an expanded network of counsellors, therapists and teaching assistants as required by 2025. Nevertheless, these two action plans, albeit important to be implemented with achieved targets, will not address the soft skills gap between the underprivileged and other students when they first start school.

The blueprint impresses on the importance of engaging with parents and the community, as learning occurs well beyond school walls. 'School learning' is to be shifted to 'system learning' by partnering with parents, the community as well as

private and social sectors to support student learning. Regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds, evidence from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicates that certain parent-child activities can significantly raise student outcomes. The blueprint also states that every parent will be equipped with a parent engagement toolkit to support their child's learning, as well as being an active partner in their child's learning through a strengthened parent-teacher association (*Persatuan Ibu Bapa dan Guru* [PIBG]). Parents will also be supported with initiatives that promote adult literacy, ICT and parenting skills.

However, parents from lower income households should be engaged differently for effectiveness. A research was performed by the national think tank, Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) in 2014 on the education needs of the bottom 40% of households in Malaysia, with more than 1,200 households surveyed in six states including Sabah and Sarawak. It was found that a majority of the poor parents i.e. about 67% trust that the teachers know better than themselves about educating their own children, and do not wish to have more interactions with teachers and headmasters (Patel, 2014). This shows that most underprivileged parents place trust in the knowledge and skills of teachers for their children's education, and may not allocate time to care about their children's education at home. This issue should be taken into consideration when implementing the parents' engagement initiatives in the blueprint, especially for underprivileged parents as their outlook is different from the other parents and may affect the success of the engagement initiatives.

2.3.3.3 The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015 to 2025) (Higher Education)

More than 10 years ago in 2006, the Ministry of Higher Education introduced the teaching of soft skills in IHLs with the implementation of the Malaysian Soft Skills Development Module (MSSDM). The module focused on seven soft skills which are communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, lifelong learning and information management, teamwork, leadership skills, entrepreneurship skills, and professional ethics and morals (Abdul Karim et al., 2012; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2012; Selamat, Ismail, Ahmad, Hussin, & Seliman, 2013; Shakir, 2009). The soft skills development approaches were to be decided by the IHLs according to what they felt was best among academic support programmes, campus life activities, embedded subject model, non-academic support programmes, stand-alone subject model and work-integrated learning (Selamat et al., 2013; Shakir, 2009).

Currently, the new Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015 to 2025) (Higher Education) shares the same vision as the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013 to 2025) (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education); which is of a balanced education, where an individual's education would be balanced between hard and soft skills i.e. knowledge and skills, as well as ethics and morality. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015 to 2025) (Higher Education) is anchored on the same six attributes built into the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013 to 2025) (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education) which are ethics and spirituality, leadership skills, national identity, language proficiency, thinking skills, and knowledge. It also focuses on five aspirations which are access, quality, equity, unity and efficiency.

The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015 to 2025) (Higher Education) also states that IHLs are advised to develop and implement an Integrated Cumulative Grade Point Average (iCGPA) system that is not focused solely on academic outcomes, but also reflects holistic soft skills namely thinking skills and knowledge culture, language proficiency (such as in Malay, English, and a global language), national identity, national unity, leadership skills, problem-solving skills, ethics and spirituality, as well as entrepreneurial mindset and readiness.

On quality, it is stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015 to 2025) (Higher Education) that the Ministry of Education aspires to increase the current 75% graduate employability rate to be more than 80% by the year 2025. The blueprint acknowledged that employers reported graduates' lack of soft skills such as critical thinking, communication skills and English proficiency, which are important in the 21st century, and therefore these gaps would have to be addressed to increase employability.

The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015 to 2025) (Higher Education) Executive Summary mentions that “As with the reform of the preschool to post-secondary education system outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint, the transformation of the higher education system will lead to a collective set of desirable benefits, rights, and corresponding responsibilities for each stakeholder group” (p. 1-25) in order for students to graduate with a balance of hard and soft skills that better prepares them for employability in today's global economy, and for grappling with the complexities and new challenges of the 21st century” (p. 1-25).

This shows that both the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013 to 2025) (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education) and the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015 to 2025) (Higher Education) strive to improve soft skills as well as hard skills with a balanced methodology. However, although both blueprints acknowledge that more efforts should be concentrated on underprivileged children and youth as they are the group who need it more than others, there is no customised action plans for the underprivileged.

In summary, despite the high investment in soft skills development by both the government and corporate sector to increase graduate employability, more effective strategies are required to address the issue. It may be argued that the education blueprints will take some time to show results, as they are still newly implemented and barely a few years old. However, as there are no customised plans for the underprivileged in both the blueprints, and the responsibility for soft skills development lies with IHLs and corporate organisations; there is a concern whether this focus is most effective to solve the national issue of lack of graduate employability. Heckman (2011) had highlighted that even though soft skills development is empirically proven to be an important factor to drive life success, it is a neglected factor especially when it comes to the underprivileged. The next section reviews the literature on the importance of soft skills development for the underprivileged.

2.4 Soft Skills and its Importance to be Developed for the Underprivileged

An underprivileged student starting school is lower in school readiness, especially in abilities and skills when compared with a student from a better socioeconomic

background. An underprivileged student would not be competing at a level playing field with a student from a privileged background, even with planned programmes consistently in place in schools, and may be left behind. For the underprivileged, both hard and soft skills were least developed, and these skills increased exponentially as one's socioeconomic status increased (Duncan, Magnuson & Votruba-drzal, 2014; Garcia, 2015).

Garcia (2015) impressed upon the importance for national policies and support programmes to be designed by taking into account that the underprivileged do not start their schooling life with soft skills at the levels possessed by other students who are from better backgrounds. However, she went on to highlight that education policies alone are insufficient to address the issue as the inequalities develop even before children enter school.

Duncan et al. (2014) highlighted that according to three theoretical frameworks, low income and poverty hinders a child's development. The first framework is family and environmental stress, where it is explained that low income families experience more stress in their everyday lives compared to better-off families, and this affects their development. Economic pressure and stress, which are more prevalent in poor parents' lives, result in depression and hostility, which cause them to be less nurturing, harsh and inconsistent, thereby affecting the development of their children. The second framework is resources and investment, which demonstrates that low income parents are less able to provide resources such as books and educational materials at home, high quality care and a safe neighbourhood. Low income parents are also more likely to have less time to invest in their children as they are single parents or would need to

work long hours. The third framework is on culture, where poverty, criminal activity, abuse, joblessness among the poor are traits likely to be passed down from parent to children. Circumstances of economic marginalisation cause parents in low income households to have difficulty in moving up and out of their current life situation for a better one. Therefore, soft skills development for the underprivileged would have to be approached differently due to the various factors which hinder development in their lives.

Heckman (2013) articulated that children who grow up in disadvantaged environments; which mainly relate to the level of quality of life rather than the number of parents, their income and education levels; do not typically receive the amount of early enrichment that children from middle-class and upper-class families receive. Heckman went on to mention that from an American study, it was found that college educated mothers devote more time to child enrichment activities during child rearing compared to less educated mothers. As an example, educated mothers spend more time reading to their children rather than watching television with them.

Heckman (2011) explained about the importance to provide equal opportunities to underprivileged children by providing them with resources, such as pre-school training of soft skills, in order to prepare them to achieve social and economic success. As part of the Perry Preschool Programme, he tracked the lives of the three-year old underprivileged participants until adulthood, and found that intervention improved the outcomes for both genders by around 7% to 10% per annum. He used this finding, as well as empirical evidence from other studies, to push for national policy improvements to provide intervention to the underprivileged as it improved their life

outcomes and increased productivity in the national economy. However, he also impressed upon the importance of good parenting, as there is empirical evidence to prove that an underprivileged child with good parenting would have a higher level of soft skills than an underprivileged child with low-quality parenting.

The importance to develop soft skills in the Malaysian underprivileged was also found in the literature. According to Kuldas, Hashim, and Ismail (2015), the risk factors present in the lives of underprivileged individuals in Malaysia increase the likelihood of a negative life outcome, and are related to the individuals themselves (such as drug and sexual abuse), their family background (such as low socioeconomic status and neglect), their school exposure (such as a feeling of detachment and misunderstanding by teachers) and their community environment (such as discrimination and lacking in social support). These risk factors usually lead to social issues and crime, as well as failure or poor performance in cognitive or academic tasks. However, despite the life challenges that prevent the majority of these students from succeeding, it was found that certain students with similar backgrounds are able to possess academic resilience. It is unclear how these underprivileged Malaysian adolescent students are able to have this skill, and empirical data showing how these students develop this skill are yet to be provided (Kuldas et al., 2015).

Similarly, Abdul Kadir et al. (2012) stated that at-risk or poor youth in Malaysia are those in a disadvantaged environment and face the risk of being involved in delinquent activities and dropping out of school due to educational failure. The authors assessed developmental assets among at-risk youth in Malaysia with self-report measures, to

identify preventive support programmes for them to reduce their risk behaviours by increasing the protective factors in their lives.

The next section is on literature indicating that not only is it important to focus on soft skills development for the underprivileged, but it is also critical to start the intervention at a very young age for the most influential results.

2.5 The Value of Early Soft Skill Development for the Underprivileged

The importance of developing soft skills earlier on in life for higher impact as well as cost-effectiveness (Heckman & Kautz, 2012) is in line with the fact that most human development theories state that the most significant developments happen during infancy, childhood and adolescence (Christensen, 2010). Duncan and Magnuson (2013) found from their meta-analysis of 84 early childhood education programmes that the most impactful period for effective educational intervention appears to be during early childhood, as developing these skills early in life appears to produce lasting effects, and could potentially generate long term benefits well in excess of the costs incurred.

In addition, Heckman and Kautz (2012) found that early education intervention for soft skills development among underprivileged children from birth to the age of five years reduces the need for special education and subsequently, overall social costs as they would be living healthier lifestyles resulting in a lower crime rate. This is because evidence shows that the soft skills gap occurs before schooling starts, and continues on throughout childhood and into adulthood. The authors argue that it would be wiser

to address the gap for the underprivileged early, rather than pay for the intervention later in life when the gaps are harder and more expensive to close. “Investing early allows us to shape the future; investing later chains us to fixing the missed opportunities of the past” (Heckman, 2011, p. 47). National policies should allocate for early childhood educational resources to the underprivileged for greater social and economic equity (Garcia, 2015; Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory on Human Development also impresses on the criticality of development being commenced at a young age. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), ‘proximal processes’ are the enduring forms of interaction in the child’s immediate environment such as parent-child and child-child activities which encourage learning new skills, and are to be carried out fairly regularly and over extended periods of time to be effective. Bronfenbrenner stressed that proximal processes should primarily happen during childhood.

Christensen (2010) concurred that to a large extent, human development theories state that the most significant developments occur from infancy through to adolescence. Christensen demonstrated that aside from Bronfenbrenner’s theory, the other most prominent theories which support that significant developments should happen in the earlier stages of life are Erikson’s Psycho-Social theory (1950), Piaget’s Cognitive Developmental theory (2004) and Vygotsky’s Cognitive-mediation theory (1978).

To commence development as early as possible, these early childhood education programmes may encompass more than pre-school programmes for the

underprivileged, as intervention or training programmes for their parents to boost parents' capacity to provide the suitable education should also be considered (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Garcia, 2015; Heckman, 2011).

On the other hand, Kummabutr et al. (2013) pointed out that certain studies had demonstrated that the schooling period in a child's life is not an effective time for intervention programmes, even though the pre-school and adolescent life period shows effectiveness. However, the authors go on to mention that certain studies concluded that the schooling period is when children experiment with risky behaviours and they are therefore more receptive to intervention during this time in their life.

In Malaysia, most related literature was observed to be on the lack of graduates' soft skills while describing tertiary education as the last level of education in the graduates' lives before they enter the workplace, underlying the belief that it is up to these institutions to develop the youth's soft skills so that they are employable (Abdul Karim et al., 2012; Esa, Padil, Selamat, & Idris, 2015; Idrus, Dahan, & Abdullah, 2009 & 2014; Musa, Mufti, Latiff, & Amin, 2012; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2012; Pillai et al., 2012; Riam, 2012; Selamat, Ismail, Ahmad, Hussin, & Seliman, 2013; Syed Ahmad, 2013). The literature review also indicated that there was more research done in Malaysia on soft skills development for youth during tertiary education; rather than research focused on underprivileged children and adolescents in pre-school, primary or secondary school stages to ascertain whether the development during these early life stages would be more influential and effective.

After reviewing literature which confirm the importance of developing soft skills at a young age for the underprivileged, the next section reviews literature on how the soft skill of resilience which is crucial for the underprivileged to adapt positively to adversities, is developed to enable thriving. Resilience development is also reviewed in the Malaysian practical and theoretical contexts, which identified gaps to be closed.

2.6 Resilience Development in the Underprivileged to Enable Thriving

During the literature review, it was found that various studies in relation to positive youth development in underprivileged, at-risk or vulnerable youth highlight on the soft skill of resilience as it concerns positive human development in the face of adversity (Carlisle, 2011; Felner & DeVries, 2013; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Forrest-Bank et al., 2015; Holliday, Cimetta, Cutshaw, Yaden, & Marx, 2014; Kuldas et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2012; Naglieri, LeBuffe, & Ross, 2013; Sesma et al., 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2013; Vimont, 2012; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

2.6.1 Resilience Defined

Ungar (2012) described resilience as “a set of observable behaviours associated with adaptive outcomes in contexts of adversity” (p. 20). Ungar explained that resilience is demonstrated by functional behaviours or other soft skills that can be observed such as a high school graduation, having close relationships with positive peers and displaying high levels of self-esteem; which are indications that an individual is successfully coping with adversity in his or her life. He pointed out that resilience is when the vulnerable individual develops a higher coping capacity and displays invulnerability to later risk exposure. Ungar went on to provide an analogy to explain resilience by referring to the quality of material, where a steel trestle is resilient when

it displays the ability to recover from load bearing and return to its original state. Resilience is present when an individual has succeeded in achieving acceptable or thriving behaviours and outcomes in his or her life, in the presence of risk and adversity (Naglieri et al., 2013).

Ungar, Ghazinour, and Richter (2013) stated that the definition of resilience places importance on “the psychological, social and physical resources that make human development more likely to succeed in contexts of adversity” (p. 348). The authors highlighted that over Ungar’s four decades of resilience research, it was found that the study of resilience had moved away from the study of the invulnerable child to focus on his/her social-ecological factors i.e., a shift from an individual’s internal factors to his/her external factors. Ungar and his colleagues went on to stress that this shift is parallel with Bronfenbrenner’s bio-social-ecological systems model of human development work, which facilitated the shift of focus on human development from the individual child to his/her environment interactions, and that this advances the theory of resilience.

However, Heckman (2013) observed that there are still researchers who are of the opinion that the soft skill gap in the underprivileged primarily lie in internal factors such as genes. Unfortunately, this does not facilitate research to uncover the efficacy of any interventions that may develop their skills. Heckman went on to state that epigenetic studies results show that this opinion is obsolete in the context of skills inequality research. He explained that even twins grow up with different skill sets developed, by citing that “Geneticist Mario Fraga and his colleagues have shown how

life experience substantially differentiates the genetic expression of adult identical twins: their experiences get under their skin, and stay there” (p. 16).

Rutter (2012) demonstrated that resilience studies also focus on the effects of turning points in a life course, and stated that turning points are experiences that are not only “pleasurable happenings but, rather, experiences that create a helpful discontinuity with the past, and increase opportunities and enhance coping” (p. 341). Rutter explained that in a study involving disadvantaged individuals living in the 1930s Great Depression, the turning points of marriage and early Armed Forces service provided beneficial life-turning effects. In addition, both Creswell (2013) as well as Marshall and Rossman (2016) highlighted that life stories should be analysed for the turning points that could be important for the phenomenon being researched, indicating the criticality of turning points in a life course.

Lee et al. (2012) highlighted that resilience is an individual’s capability to adapt and cope to adversities healthily, while being supported by protective factors with positive outcomes as the result. In addition, Naglieri et al. (2013) stated that resilience is more of an outcome rather than a psychological construct, and it is difficult to be measured. Therefore, instead of measuring the outcome, efforts are directed towards identifying the protective factors that may be used to predict resilience. These protective factors are processes and characteristics from their family background, school or community environment that moderate or buffer the existing risk factors to produce a much positive life outcome. Similarly, Forrest-Bank et al. (2015) pointed out that over time, studies found that certain at-risk youth never participated in problematic behaviours because they were protected from risk, and they appeared to have assets or protective

factors which helped them prevail over adversities and become resilient. These protective factors are the positive attributes to the individuals, families, communities and societies they lived in.

This is also in tandem with the Search Institute's Development Asset framework which shows that development assets or protective factors may be used to predict soft skills, of which one is resilience; and that external development assets or the experience, support and opportunity received by the youth from the people around them play the main role in resilience development (Scales et al., 2016).

According to Zimmerman et al. (2013), the resilience theory focuses on positive youth development and provides a conceptual framework for studying and understanding why certain underprivileged, at-risk and vulnerable youth grow up to be successful and thriving adults despite being exposed to risk in their early lives. This theory focuses on enhancing protective factors rather than reducing exposure to risk, and is done by promoting participation in positive activities to develop cognitive assets and soft skills to assist youth in building their inner strength to overcome adversity. Vanderbilt-Adriance et al. (2015) agreed that the resilience concept focuses on the study of various protective factors, which are external and internal assets, that may result in positive outcomes despite exposure to risk factors.

In relation to Bronfenbrenner's human development theory, Christensen (2010) highlighted that the theory should include the element of 'resilience' as it facilitates the understanding of an individual's ability to have persistence, hopefulness,

optimism, aspirations and purpose in life to have a bright future; and overcome extreme difficulties and trauma. In contrast, Ungar (2013) states that resilience is “a process resulting from interactions between individuals and their environments, and depends upon individual characteristics (temperament and personality), the social determinants of health that affect children and children’s families, formal interventions by multiple service providers (child welfare, special education, mental health, addictions, public health, and juvenile corrections), and the social policies that influence service provision to vulnerable populations” (p. 110). Ungar went on to point out that studies on interactions between individuals and their social ecologies assisted researchers to understand the resulting resilience. This is in line with Bronfenbrenner’s theory on human development. In his book, Ungar had presented an ecological approach to the study of resilience as well as its application to practice and policy (Ungar, 2012).

The next section reviews the literature on positive youth development that includes the discussion on protective factors and developmental assets, which assist to build resilience in the underprivileged.

2.6.2 Positive Youth Development, Developmental Assets and Protective Factors

Lewis et al. (2016) referred to positive youth development as an outcome which results in protection against various risky behaviours, as well as assets or strengths that may be built and developed by various types of experiences. Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) stated that resilience is prevented by risk factors and developed by protective factors.

To facilitate underprivileged, at-risk or vulnerable children and youth development, it is critical to prevent risky behaviours, such as substance abuse, violence, teenage pregnancies and dropping out of school; because these individuals are more exposed to risky behaviours when compared to other more privileged children and youth. Only with this prevention can positive youth development occur, which can eventually lead to thriving children and youth with the presence of the right developmental assets (Sesma et al., 2013). However, Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) highlighted that it is important for interventions to be carried out for youth facing significant adversities in life, as it is more likely that they will be encountering problems as they develop. For youth exposed to risk, it is important for interventions to be focused on developing assets or protective factors, rather than on reducing risk. Similarly, Lopez et al. (2015) highlighted that positive youth development is a framework which is based on resilience and focuses on enhancing children and adolescent positive attributes.

In various literature, developmental assets are at times referred to as protective factors, especially when referring to those of underprivileged, at-risk or vulnerable youth. According to Sesma et al. (2013), protective factors are developmental assets which are important to reduce risks to develop life skills. Zimmerman et al. (2013) pointed out that protective factors are those developmental assets or promotive factors which reduce the effect of negative outcomes due to risks which are present in the lives of the underprivileged and vulnerable. In their study to find out whether supportive relationships, high expectations and opportunities had built emotional resilience directly or indirectly via interaction with risk, Jain, Buka, Subramanian, and Molnar (2012) stated that developmental assets are stage-salient protective factors which are critical for positive youth development.

Ungar (2012) also articulated that certain developmental assets in underprivileged children have a disproportionately large impact on the outcome of the child's early experience. Ungar found that if a child is exposed to more risk, the more beneficial and impactful a positive relationship will be later in his or her life.

Sanders et al. (2015) carried out a quantitative study on 605 adolescents aged 12 to 17 years old who were involved in more than two welfare services such as child welfare, juvenile justice, additional education and mental health by using a self-report questionnaire to collect data, and found that those welfare services adopting a positive youth development approach of enhancing developmental assets were most impactful, as they resulted in increased resilience and better outcomes.

Vimont (2012) highlighted that developmental assets prevent high-risk behaviour such as sexual activity and substance abuse, enhance thriving outcomes such as increased soft skills, and help build resilience in youth during their second decade of life. These developmental assets are present within the family, school, peer groups, community (external) as well as within individuals (internal). The positive youth developmental framework is guided by the Developmental Systems Theory, which is very much inspired by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, as the Developmental Systems Theory refers to development within the different environments of an individual, and the individual him or herself. The theory states that when it comes to human development, individuals are themselves complex systems sitting within other complex systems. Positive change can happen in behaviour due to change in any part of this intricate system, whether external or internal to the individual, and their relationship to one another after taking into consideration time or location.

As mentioned, the above is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's theory which touches on proximal processes, especially for the underprivileged. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), it is important to consider the ecological system in which the children grew up in, as the theory focuses on an ecological paradigm that explains how a child's environment influences his or her development. His theory is about the "processes and conditions that govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 37).

Bronfenbrenner (1994) explains that the entire ecological system in which growth occurs must be considered in order to understand human development. To support his theory, he demonstrates that Lewin's theory of psychological fields shows that the ecological environment models is a set of nested structures, each one being inside each other, like a set of Russian dolls. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), these five models are the Microsystems, Mesosystems, Exosystems, Macrosystems and Chronosystems. The Microsystem would be the immediate environment a child lives in such as family, peer group and school. The Mesosystem is the relationship between two immediate environments such as the relationship between a parent and a teacher. The Exosystem comprises of the relationship between an immediate environment and a non-immediate but related environment such as the relationship between the school and the community. The Macrosystem consists of the Microsystem, Mesosystem and Exosystem characteristics of a culture, with reference to belief systems and lifestyles embedded in these environments. The Chronosystem encompasses changes that happen over time in the environment the child lives in, such as changes in family structure, socioeconomic status and place of residence (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Various studies had used the Developmental Asset approach to research on various angles of positive youth development. Forneris et al. (2012) studied the expectations and perceived experiences of athletes and their external assets which were referred to as the parents, coaches and administrators; resulting in the development of the athletes' internal assets. These assets are referred to as life skills and values, within high school sports that was perceived to foster youth development.

Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) highlighted that protective factors which develop resilience include family conditions such as family cohesion, stimulating environments, family support and responsive parents who are warm and loving yet firm, rational and consistent but not overbearing or controlling; and community support such as having role models outside the family who may be teachers, coaches, school counsellors, after-school programme supervisors, community centre workers and good neighbours. Zimmerman et al. (2013) added that organised activities and initiatives at school, religious vicinities and community settings provide a platform for this support and these relationships to happen, as these programmes would occur in safe environments while connecting young individuals to mentors and role models, to help them develop a sense of community and provide them with soft skills.

Similarly, Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, and Yehuda (2014) found that childhood protective factors are critical for developing resilience, and they include a healthy relationship with family and good parenting, ability to control emotions, self-awareness, the ability to visualise the future, and motivation to learn, grow and adapt to their environment. Holliday et al. (2014) also agree that a critical protective factor to develop resilience is close relationships with a parent or caregiver.

In a Malaysian study, Kuldass et al. (2014) agreed that caring relationships are external resilience assets when they are with caregiving important individuals in their family like parents and siblings; in school like teachers, coaches and peers; as well as in the community such as friends or neighbours. Another Malaysian study by Zeldin, Krauss, Kim, Collura, and Abdullah (2016) found that programmes initiated after school hours or within the community for positive youth development resulted in various outcomes with different levels of effectiveness, even among those with the same objectives. This is due to the different qualities of the experience and the youth-adult relationships within the programmes. The study found that the quality of empowerment which result in a louder youth voice, as well as the quality of relationships developed with supportive adults which are experienced in the programmes, determine the outcomes.

In another Malaysian study, by using quantitative studies which analyse data from self-reports, Abdul Kadir et al. (2012) examined external assets, while Abdul Kadir, Mustapha, Abdul Mutalib, and Rahim (2014) examined internal assets as predictors for positive emotions among 403 low-income and at risk youth aged between 13 and 21 years old in Malaysia. In both studies, community developmental programmes were implemented to cultivate positive experiences resulting in positive emotions, which in turn is believed to increase protective factors that effectively increases resilience in at-risk youth. Abdul Kadir et al. (2014) found that aside from self-esteem, school engagement and achievement motivation; interpersonal competence was one of the significant predictors of internal assets on positive emotions.

For protective factors that successfully help children adapt and cope with life adversities, their individual cultures and developmental stages must be considered. For

example, faith works as a stronger protective factor in some cultures than in others (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

Unfortunately, it is also important to note that the factors which are usually protective may become risk factors, which may result in a higher probability of risky behaviour, depending on the factor's positive or negative condition. For example, an important integral developmental asset is family support, which is a protective factor when the family provides support and opportunity. However, it would be a risk factor when there is a high level of family conflict and no interaction among family members (Forrest-Bank et al., 2015; Sesma et al., 2013). The risk and protective factors for the same assets for children and adolescents are shown in Figure 2.2.

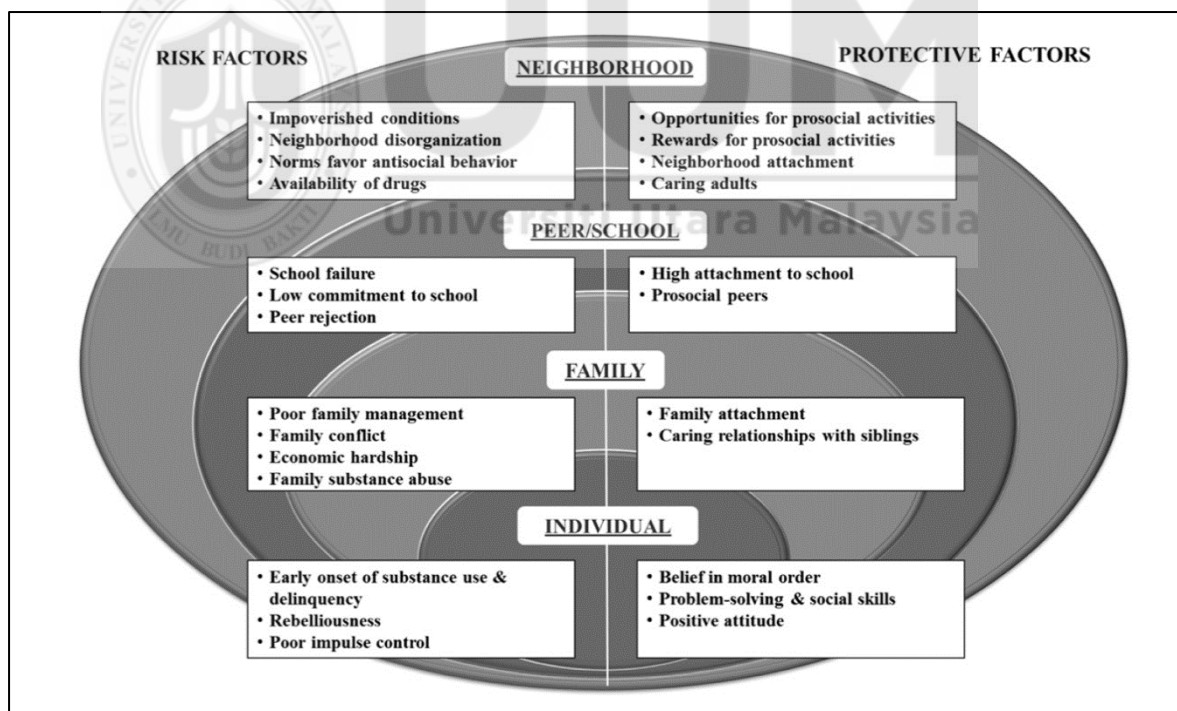


Figure 2.2. Risk and Protective Factors in the Context of Child and Social Ecology (Forrest-Bank et al., 2015)

In order to provide a broad measure of positive youth development to assist in the development, operations and validation of practice-focused measures; Scales, Roehlkepartain, and Shramko (2016) carried out a case study involving 31 countries involving 25,000 young individuals who were aged 9 to 31 years old using the Search Institute's Developmental Assets approach, one of the most widely used frameworks for positive youth development over the last 25 years. The quantitative study concluded that the Search Institute Developmental Assets Profile is highly reliable and stable in measuring developmental relationships, opportunities and soft skills; and that support and opportunity are important to be invested in young people to develop critical soft skills to advance human wellbeing.

This recent approach was built based on the last three decades of research on the combined effects of person (soft skills) and ecology (relationships and other environment support). According to the Developmental Asset approach, children and youth wellbeing is highly related to the three assets of relationships, opportunities and soft skills organised into 40 external and internal assets; which are (a) 20 external assets of relationships, support, experiences and opportunities provided by individuals within the child's or youth's family, school, peer network or community; and (b) 20 internal assets which are mainly soft skills or beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (see Table 2.1 for the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets). Both internal and external assets must be nurtured for positive youth development outcomes (Scales et al., 2016).

Table 2.1

Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets

External Assets			Internal Assets		
Main Asset		Sub Asset	Main asset		Sub Asset
Support:	1	Family support	Commitment to Learning:	1	Achievement Motivation
	2	Positive family communication		2	Learning Engagement
	3	Other adult relationships		3	Homework
	4	Caring neighbourhood		4	Bonding to School
	5	Caring school climate		5	Reading for Pleasure
	6	Parent involvement in schooling	Positive Values:	6	Caring
Empowerment:	7	Community values children or youth		7	Equality and Social Justice
	8	Children or Youth as Resources		8	Integrity
	9	Service to Others		9	Honesty
Boundaries & Expectations:	10	Safety		10	Responsibility
	11	Family Boundaries	Social Competencies:	11	Self-Regulation
	12	School Boundaries		12	Planning and Decision Making
	13	Neighbourhood Boundaries		13	Interpersonal Competence
	14	Adult Role Models		14	Cultural Competence
	15	Positive Peer Influence		15	Resistance Skills
Constructive Use of Time:	16	High Expectations	Positive Identity:	16	Peaceful conflict resolution
	17	Creative Activities		17	Personal power
	18	Child Programmes		18	Self-esteem
	19	Religious Community		19	Sense of purpose
	20	Time at Home		20	Positive view of personal future

Note. Adapted from Search Institute (2006) : 40 Developmental Assets for Children Grades K-3 (ages 5-9), 40 Developmental Assets for Middle Childhood (ages 8-12), and 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents (ages 12-18).

Scales et al. (2016) mentioned that in their future study, focus will be given to the specific ways that children and youth experience truly developmental relationships across their personal ecologies, by measuring how much they experience adults showing care, empowering and providing support to them, actions which are found to be strongly linked to them developing soft skills and wellbeing.

Although using a different methodology, the knowledge gap of how much children and youth experience truly developmental relationships to develop resilience and other soft skills is attempted to be narrowed in the current study, and with research mainly focused on the underprivileged. The next few sections review literature on various types of developmental assets which may assist children and youth develop resilience and other soft skills, guided by Developmental Assets framework.

2.6.2.1 Family

Various literature reviewed agree that parenting is a crucial aspect of positive youth development (Bowers et al., 2011; Harvey et al., 2016; Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Krauss et al., 2014; Kummabutr et al., 2013; Meunier et al., 2011; Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012; Napolitano et al., 2011; Schofield et al., 2012; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012), and this potentially develops the soft skills required for a young person's success, which is most critical to positively impact the lives of the underprivileged, at-risk and vulnerable.

Kummabutr et al. (2013) highlighted that the major cause of child behavioural problems is the parents' lack of child-rearing skills especially during their children's

young schooling age, which has a significant impact on a child's beliefs and influences their actions. Abdul Kadir, Rahim, Mustapha, et al. (2012) stated that parental warmth, the rules they set within the family and the extent of monitoring their children's whereabouts are ways of preventing risky and antisocial behaviour.

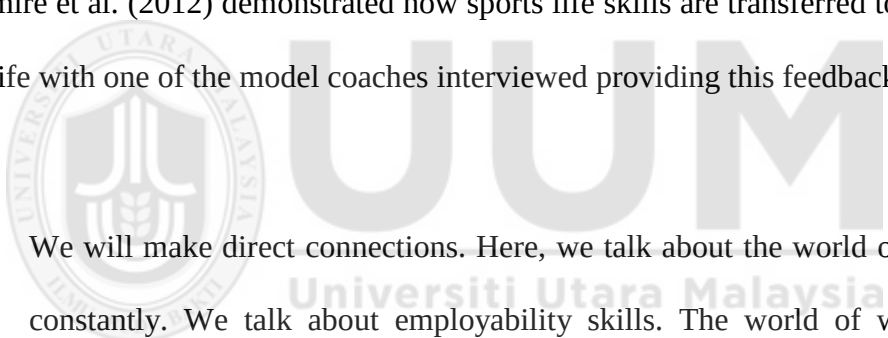
Similarly, Schofield et al. (2012) found that a high amount of parental warmth, with very minimal or no hostility would result in adolescents with positive character and soft skills. Krauss et al. (2014) also confirmed that parenting is the most crucial protective factor to prevent risk behaviour in children and adolescents.

Aside from parents, siblings are also considered important individuals in the family to promote positive youth development. Yucel (2014) stated that sibling relationships are very important as they have a sustainable impact on a child or adolescent's character and relationship-building skills. Dai & Heckman (2013) stressed that the attributes of older siblings are as important, or even more, than parenting for the development of children.

2.6.2.2 Teachers or Coaches

Aside from close family members, favourite teachers were among the most frequently mentioned mentors, role models and at times, play the role of the confidant in the lives of children and adolescents to facilitate academic and soft skills development (Carlisle, 2011). For example, close positive teacher relationships in early adolescence play a big role as a protective factor against fighting, a risky behaviour which may lead to other risky behaviours (Vassallo, Edwards, & Forrest, 2016).

Camiré et al. (2012) found that sports coaches promote the development of student-athletes by designing strategies to coach life skills, and play a motivational and influential role in teaching these student-athletes the methods of transferring life skills learnt in sporting activities to other areas in their lives such as in school or at work, via demonstration and practice. To facilitate life skill development coaching, coaches create an environment such as having consistent and clear rules as well as providing opportunities for soft skills (e.g. leadership and decision-making) development. Other indirect strategies coaches implement would be creating a sporting environment to entice youth to safe and positive activities and prevent them from engagement in risky behaviours, while acting as a role model who displays positive attitudes and character. Camiré et al. (2012) demonstrated how sports life skills are transferred to other areas of life with one of the model coaches interviewed providing this feedback:



We will make direct connections. Here, we talk about the world of work constantly. We talk about employability skills. The world of work is everything we do. In the extracurricular program, making those direct references when we talk about skills such as dedication, being on time, being prepared, being able to get along with others, being able to compromise. That is the reality [of our student-athletes] so we talk about those skills all the time. I try to make those references. (p. 250).

Life skills training programmes carried out in addition to school curriculum at a young age are important in the development of a child, especially with continued enforcement as the child grows (Tymes et al., 2016).

2.6.2.3 Friends or Peers

Young individuals who are engaged with peers who share positive objectives and goals in their lives and have positive peer affiliation are more self-reliant and are more likely to have prosocial behaviour. These would be youth who are involved in community engagements and activities such as with extended family, school and religious centres (Smith, Faulk, & Sizer, 2016).

Friends or peers may act as protective factors, especially when they display positive attitudes which bring happiness to young individuals who have relationships with them (Abdul Kadir et al., 2012). Having positive peers increases the likelihood of youth resilience, and it is important for youth to have positive friends particularly during the adolescent life stage (Jain et al., 2012).

2.6.2.4 Community or Neighbourhood

When adolescents are involved in community activities, they are more likely to have parents and friends who know and have good relationships with one another, and more parent-peer closeness would increase family functioning in a youth's life thus increasing his or her developmental assets. In addition to this, getting adolescents to be more involved in community initiatives is a way in which poor and underprivileged families ensure that their children are not exposed to other delinquent and risky peers, and engage them with more positive role models (Smith et al., 2016).

According to Smith et al. (2016), communities and neighbourhoods where youth feel supported in places such as schools, religious centres, recreational centres and

workplaces would result in increased developmental assets such as positive parenting, family cohesion, academic achievement and reduced risk behaviour. Aside from youth skill development, programmes run in communities and neighbourhoods reduce parental stress and concern about where their children are when they are not in school.

In another Malaysian quantitative study using surveys for data collection, Zeldin et al. (2016) found that community programmes and extra co-curricular activities at school provide opportunities for youth to be empowered to manage and lead programmes, as well as make decisions alongside their adult counterparts, thus giving youth a voice and developing their soft skills. The quality of these programmes depend on the closeness of positive engagement with the adults and the safety of the environment. These programmes are more important to be carried out now, as Malaysia plans to achieve a “developed” country status and various initiatives are happening such as increased industrialisation, thus causing increased alienation of youth and adults in the community, resulting in conflicts being reported in homes, schools and communities. Therefore, the challenge is to provide opportunities for youth empowerment and to give them a voice, and to encourage adults to be more involved in youth community programmes to facilitate this.

2.6.2.5 School

Students perceive the school environment as a significant development asset and protective factor which is able to not only enhance academic performance but also promote healthy development. With support from teachers and peers, interventions may be carried out in schools to address students’ goal settings and perceptions of autonomy, as well as inculcate academic achievement, engagement, belongingness

and hope (Van Ryzin, 2011). An example would be that community service learning provided at schools allows adolescents to develop the sense of responsibility while working with others, using critical thinking and problem-solving skills, in order to make a difference in their school communities (Carlisle, 2011).

According to Boyacı and Atalay (2016), the function of schools is mainly to improve young individuals' quality of life by providing developmental assets and soft skills towards 21st century skills. Soft skills such as creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, communication and cooperation may be included in the curriculum or be included in school co-curricular activities or programmes.

Aside from this, Jegannathan et al. (2014) found that in a Cambodian case study, developmental assets or life skills promotion in schools may enhance the overall mental health of young people, specifically in self-esteem, social and problem solving skills. These soft skills development influences the occurrence of suicide in youth, especially among at-risk boys, the group with the highest suicide occurrences.

In Malaysia, studies carried out indicated that schools were used to build developmental assets or soft skills (Abdullah, Tarmizi, & Abu, 2010; Elias, Syed Mustafa, Roslan, & Mohd Noah, 2010; Mohd Ishak, Zainal Abidin, & Abu Bakar, 2014; Mohd Meerah & Mohamad Arsad, 2010; Osman, Tuan Soh, & Mohamad Arsad, 2010; Tang, Nair, & Prachak, 2014; Tuan Soh, Mohamad Arsad, & Osman, 2010). For Malaysian research on developmental assets being promoted in schools, the focus was on soft skills which would help students with academic achievements such as creative

and critical thinking (Arsad et al., 2011; Etemadzadeh, Seifi, & Far, 2013), research skills (Mohd Meerah & Mohamad Arsad, 2010), motivation (Elias, Syed Mustafa, Roslan, & Mohd Noah, 2011; Elias et al., 2010; Syed Mustafa, Elias, Mohd Noah, & Roslan, 2010), as well as thinking and problem solving skills (Tang et al., 2014).

2.6.2.6 Pre-school

According to Duncan and Magnuson (2013), social science theories and empirical evidence argue that early childhood is most likely the best time to provide education, especially for underprivileged children. Building cognitive and soft skills early in life may produce a more sustainable effect, in order for these children to be succeeding in school, be more employable as well as succeed in the workplace later in life. Therefore, investing in high quality early childhood education to support low socio-economic status children is critical.

Schindler et al. (2015) carried out a meta-analysis of 31 early childhood education programmes over the last several decades to examine the overall effect of the programmes on externalising behaviour problems such as arguing, fighting, throwing tantrums or disturbing and harming others. The research argues that a reduction of these aggressive and disruptive behaviours is critical to prevent children from continuing to have increased risky behaviours until adulthood, as well as to promote success in school and life. This meta-analytic study also recommends asset development programmes that are focused on social and emotional development for the highest impact, which include interaction skills such as making friends, accepting others while expressing needs; as well as social problem-solving skills such as self-control.

In a Malaysian research, Abbas, Othman, and Rahman (2012) studied the relationship between the quality of the public pre-school physical environment and the development of students' internal assets, or their emotional, social and physical needs. Their study indicated that the external asset quality i.e. the pre-school physical environment does affect the development of internal assets such as prosocial skills.

In summary, positive youth development with protective factors and developmental assets are important to build resilience, and other soft skills. However, Sesma et al. (2013) pointed out that research and intervention programmes are now beginning to focus on not only just acceptable youth development, but also optimally successful development or 'thriving', which has the core principals of positive psychology, resilience, positive youth development and the development assets framework. When children and youth thrive, they do not only do well for themselves but also provide impactful contribution to the society. The next section reviews literature on the soft skill of resilience resulting in the attribute of 'thriving'.

2.6.3 Developing Resilience to Become Thriving Individuals

Certain studies in the literature highlighted that there were instances when underprivileged and vulnerable individuals succeeded in coping with the challenges and hardships in their lives and developed resilience, and who also went on to become thriving individuals (Alvarado & Ricard, 2013). Ungar (2012) studied 16 underprivileged individuals aged 13 to 16 years old from five countries who faced adversities in their lives and who not only survived them, but also thrived.

Alvarado and Ricard (2013) described thriving as “a positive developmental trajectory focused on adaptive goals beyond survival” (p. 511) and “may be characterised as functionally adaptability through active engagement in a variety of sociocultural contexts” (p. 512). A thriving individual makes choices and commitments to activities and initiatives that maximise success and wellbeing, while minimising risk behaviours. Thriving, with 15 theoretical markers in adolescents such as soft skills (e.g. openness, prosocial qualities) and external assets (e.g. friend, peer and family support), facilitates an individual in supporting the individual’s self, family, school and community.

Gestsdottir, Urban, Bowers, Lerner, and Lerner (2011) stated that within positive youth development, thriving may be promoted by aligning youths’ strengths with external developmental assets. A young individual is thriving when he or she displays clear development in the five ‘Cs’ of positive youth development i.e. soft skills such as competence, confidence, caring, character and connection across the adolescent years. Similarly, Lee et al. (2012) agreed that a key influence of positive youth development is the attribute of confidence, which indicates that an individual is thriving or that he or she is ‘flourishing’.

The Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets were utilised in various cross-sectional and longitudinal research studying diverse samples, to be related to more positive developmental results among adolescents such as reduced high risk behaviours and increased thriving behaviour indicators. These thriving indicators include attributes like resilience itself, as well as behaviours such as good school grades, informal helping of others, valuing of diversity, leadership and other healthy behaviours. The 40 developmental assets which comprise of the experiences,

opportunities, relationships, values and skills young individuals require to potentially improve themselves; involve themselves and the people around them as the collaborators in creating the conditions for the mutual thriving of youth and their societies (Scales, 2011; Scales et al., 2016).

Jain et al. (2012) highlighted that it was found from previous research that at-risk youth with more developmental assets were seven times or 33% less likely to have high-risk behaviour when compared to those with an average number of developmental assets when it was 5% less likely. In addition, previous research also found that having all 40 developmental assets explained 47% to 54% of the 'thriving' for all youth, which is over and above others of the same age, background and exposure to risk.

A specific asset or positive influence which is found to be singled out in the literature to be related to developing resilience and thriving behaviours is 'religiosity and spirituality' (Krauss et al., 2014; Scales, Syvertsen, Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Arturo Sesma, 2014). Higher levels of thriving behaviours and reduced risk behaviours were found to be related to youth's religious and spiritual commitments (Scales et al., 2014).

Krauss et al. (2014) in their study using hierarchical regression found that religiosity is the most significant promotive factor of prosocial behaviours. Even though religion was thought of as a control or prevention tool in reducing youth engagement with negative and risky behaviours for decades, it is more recently seen as a life intervention to provide values, support, encouragement, meaning, satisfaction, coping and resilience. Scales et al. (2014) also found from their research that actively religious

youth were about 39% less likely to engage in high-risk behaviours such as drug abuse and violence, and about 26% more likely to display thriving behaviours such as leadership and high achievers.

Upon reviewing literature on the importance of resilience development in the underprivileged to enable an individual to thrive, the next section focuses on Malaysian scholarly literature on resilience development.

2.6.4 Resilience in the Malaysian Context

2.6.4.1 Practical

Even though the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013 to 2025) (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education) and the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015 to 2025) (Higher Education) both acknowledge that the underprivileged face more challenges and adversities in life (Duncan et al., 2014) therefore requiring more focus and assistance as there is evidence that they have lower competencies than others in academic and soft skills (Garcia, 2015; Heckman & Kautz, 2012), there are no customised trainings or development programmes in the blueprint to assist the underprivileged to build resilience.

The government focuses on soft skill development programmes only during tertiary education stage (Abdul Hamid et al., 2014; Abdul Karim et al., 2012; Pillai et al., 2012; Puteh-Behak et al., 2015; Shakir, 2009; Zaharim et al., 2012) and after graduation (Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, 2012; Basaruddin, 2017), when there is empirical evidence that development programmes are more sustainable

and cost-effective when implemented at a young age (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Garcia, 2015; Heckman, 2011; Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

2.6.4.2 Theoretical

There is empirical evidence that underprivileged Malaysian adolescent students experience low academic performance due to their disadvantaged backgrounds. However, it was found that certain underprivileged adolescent students are able to cognitively or academically perform well despite being from underprivileged backgrounds, which indicates resilience on their part. Unfortunately, the factors which caused this resilience is unknown. This does not facilitate intervention programmes to be designed and implemented for the same result in other underprivileged youth. Therefore, this knowledge gap should be closed by gathering empirical evidence to hypothesise how these challenged Malaysian adolescents or at-risk youth are able to have academic resilience (Kuldas et al., 2015). To fill this knowledge gap, the current study attempts to gather evidence to hypothesise how certain underprivileged youth had become resilient sometime in their lives, enabling them to thrive by not only having academic resilience but also possessing the relevant soft skills to achieve certain important milestones in their lives.

Reviewing relevant research, it was found that Abdul Kadir et al. (2012) performed a study on 744 at-risk and underprivileged youth aged 13 to 25 years old who stay at Malaysian public housing projects, to find out the strategies that build resilience to prevent high risk behaviours by using the developmental assets framework. From their quantitative study, it was confirmed that afterschool programmes organised by the

community successfully developed resilience among the at-risk and underprivileged youth.

According to Abdul Kadir et al. (2014), community programmes are very important to assist underprivileged and at-risk youth to “successfully manoeuvre through an ever-changing environment that encourages them to become more creative and flexible and increase their ability to bounce back from stressful experiences” (p. 147). As there was only a handful of studies in Malaysia carried out to assess the effectiveness of community programmes for positive youth development, specifically for underprivileged and at-risk youth, as well as changes in the youth attitude and behaviour and their overall wellbeing; the authors initiated a development programme for youth from a poor urban community, also aged from 13 to 25 years old which focused on providing a series of activities and experiences in assisting the youth to develop internal assets. The programme emphasised offering life skills in the community, using the developmental assets approach. A multiple regression analysis of data collected via a questionnaire from 403 youth indicated that the developmental assets of “school engagement, self-esteem, interpersonal competence and motivation significantly predicted positive emotions” (p. 143).

From the literature review, it was observed that most of the Malaysian research were focused on positive youth development during tertiary education, and not focused on building their resilience but rather on overall soft skills for employability. A few other Malaysian studies which focused on the underprivileged did focus on resilience and other soft skills development, but did not target resilience building in children and the very young, the life stage when it would be most sustainable and cost-effective. The

current study aims to narrow these gaps, and the next section reviews literature which are related to the emerging themes from this study to achieve this.

2.7 Literature Review for Identified Themes from Data Analysis

During the data analysis, when coding and themes identification was well underway, more literature review was carried out to either support or challenge findings interpreted from the themes' relationships, which were not expected at the beginning of the study process, to facilitate a complete literature review for the study. This is also described in Chapter 3, indicating that emerging literature review is included in a separate section in this chapter.

Most of the identified themes during the data analysis are related to ecological factors such as parents and family, and this is supported by Ungar et al. (2013) when they described that both Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development and Ungar's four-decade research work on resilience focus on social-ecological factors for development, and moved away from only concentrating on the individual child's capacity. To succeed in facing adversity, more emphasis is to be placed on processes by which individuals receive support from their surrounding environment such as their family, peer groups and community members by attaining social and physical resources for development. Resilience is built by children interacting with the environment of multiple reciprocating systems in their lives, which is in line with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory.

2.7.1 Parenting Styles

According to Pinquart and Kauser (2018), the four styles of parenting based on the two-dimensional framework according to the work of Baumrind of warmth or responsiveness as well as control of behaviour: (a) authoritative, the style which demonstrates high warmth with high control; (b) authoritarian, parenting that demonstrates low warmth with high control; (c) permissive, which means high warmth with low control; and (d) neglectful, a style with low warmth and low control.

Pinquart and Kauser (2018) pointed out that most of the related research had been carried out on American and western families, with outcomes and results indicating that children with (a) authoritative parents have fewer developmental issues (in relation to internalising issues such as anxiety and depression, externalising issues such as aggression and delinquency), and better academic outcomes; (b) authoritarian, neglectful and permissive (in part) parents result in the opposite in their children. In addition, Pinquart and Kauser also highlighted that most research in non-western countries were conducted in urban areas where parenting styles may be less traditional than rural areas.

Parenting styles in relation to child outcomes may vary between cultural contexts. Pinquart and Kauser (2018) highlighted that research indicated that Baumrind's parenting styles may not be applicable to Asian cultures as parental warmth and behavioural control may have different meanings under different contexts and cultures. However, there was also research that found that Baumrind's parenting styles were relevant to non-western cultures as well.

2.7.1.1 Culture

Masten (2018) stated that culture is now playing a role in research on resilience, and that parents can pass on various forms of culture that may assist their child to build resilience “through beliefs, values, routines, rituals, religion, and other traditions influenced by culture” (p. 21). Masten went on to highlight that parents either teach or lead by example through their ethnic cultures or their religious beliefs which include practices of self-regulation such as performing prayers, which during times of adversity can provide “sense of continuity, connectedness, hope, positive identity, and meaning in life” (p.21). In addition, Masten impressed that the resilience of parents is important for the resilience of the family, and that more research should be done on parent resilience to develop programmes that focus on building resilience among youth.

However, Ungar et al. (2013) highlighted that research is also beginning to show that culture (commonly held beliefs), context (social exclusion, gender), and time period (of the development) are overlooked in resilience studies; and that including these perspectives in resilience studies could result in new protective processes being identified. For example, a child’s contribution to ease a family’s financial burden by doing tasks which would be considered as child labour, has been found to be beneficial in resilience development for a child of a certain context and culture, where the child’s family and community view the work as socially acceptable.

Ungar et al. (2013) added that when resilience is partly recognised as the process of an individual’s culture to facilitate the development of a positive sense of self-worth, intervention may be seen as an important aspect for intervention with the institution,

and not a programme which aims to assist children to change their behaviours in contexts that marginalise them. This is important to be considered, especially when programmes fail to provide changes to the environments that individuals return to, post treatment.

Sangawi, Adams, and Nadja (2015) expressed that parenting styles should not be generalised across cultures as different types of parenting styles have different effects across different cultures; such as physical discipline which is considered detrimental to European American children, but has insignificant effects on African American children. The authors also stated that authoritative parenting styles have less effect on academic excellence in Asian American children when compared to other children with authoritarian parents. Sangawi et al. (2015) went on to state although various research suggest that Eastern and Islamic societies should have authoritarian parents, conflicting findings show that Syrian, Pakistani, Iranian and Chinese children do not fare well under harsh parenting; which indicate that the effects of different parenting styles may be inconsistent among eastern societies, and that it is important to study the effects of non-western parenting styles, especially as most related studies were done among American families. Therefore, it is important to study the effects of different types of Malaysian parenting styles in the future, with this current study narrowing the knowledge gap on Malaysian parenting.

Pinquart and Kauser (2018) stated that parenting styles are interpreted differently depending on the specific cultural meaning of the parenting behaviour; and that how this behaviour conforms to the norms of the culture, or the normativity of the parenting style, may moderate their socialisation function. To illustrate this, there is empirical

evidence that physical punishment has weaker negative effects in cultures which have a higher prevalence of this type of child discipline method.

Pinquart and Kauser (2018) also highlighted that in collectivist cultures, there may be less adverse effects of authoritarian parenting, and even some positive effects. This is because individuals in collectivist societies contain their own needs to attend to the others in the society, and this quality is promoted with authoritarian parenting which requires compliance from children without them voicing out any opinions or views. Rudy and Grusec (2006) added that collectivist cultures emphasise interdependence and usually use higher levels of child control for compliance with authoritarian parenting, because collectivist cultures value authority. Authoritarian parenting in collective societies do not translate into low levels of love and concern for children, and children in collectivist societies perceive strong parental control as normal and does not reflect parental rejection. However, Sangawi et al. (2015) stated that there is empirical evidence to show that maternal physical discipline causes behavioural problems in collectivist societies in Pakistani, Iranian and Chinese children.

In contrast, Rudy and Grusec (2006) emphasised that authoritarian parenting is seen as abnormal in individualist societies and reflect parental rejection and hostility, while authoritative parenting which focuses on negotiation and responsiveness may be relevant. Pinquart and Kauser (2018) added that only authoritative parenting would be effective in individualist societies, because in these societies individuals assert themselves and actively pursue their own personal needs; and authoritative parenting promotes autonomy which encourages self-assertion, self-reliance and self-interest in positive relationships with others.

From a meta-analysis of relevant 428 studies around the world by Pinquart and Kauser (2018); certain studies found cultural variations between parenting styles and the resulting child development outcomes; whilst other studies found similarities in individualist and collectivist cultures, as certain parenting styles have similar functions in different cultures. From the meta-analysis, Pinquart and Kauser recommended that authoritative parenting is practiced irrespective of different cultures, even though authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are acceptable in certain cultural contexts. The meta-analysis found more similarities than differences in the different cultures; and that being warm but firm, and accepting of child autonomy, seems to be applicable for children and adolescents around the globe. Pinquart and Kauser recommends that future research be carried out in rural areas of non-western countries as the results may differ from urban areas that may be affected by globalisation. Future research should assess specific different cultural features which relate parenting styles to child outcomes, such as cultural normativity of parenting styles, rather than restricting knowledge to global collectivism/individualism constructs. More longitudinal research in non-western countries would also be important to be carried out to achieve this. These recommendations are being implemented in this current study, where a retrospective longitudinal study is being carried out on life stories of individuals brought up in the rural areas of Malaysia.

Grusec, Danyliuk, Kil, and Neill (2017) highlighted research findings that point to the importance of considering cultural differences when studying parental discipline which uses power assertion.

2.7.1.2 High Discipline Environment, using Physical Punishment

Gershoff (2010) highlighted that parents use physical punishment on their children to achieve the following objectives towards children behaving in socially acceptable ways: (a) short term is to stop the child from carrying out the unacceptable behaviour and be compliant to the parent/s; and (b) long term is to reduce the possibility that the child will repeat the unacceptable behaviour. However, there are conflicting views surrounding child discipline such as: (a) authoritarianism believes that power assertion drives compliance in a child; (b) equalitarianism believes that parental control is oppressive; (c) radical child rights advocates believe that parents should not assert power to force a child to do something that is not of his/her choice; and (d) leading leadership scholars believe that parental power assertion would not achieve its objectives but may backfire instead.

Baumrind (2012) argued that although power assertion, which entails the use of force by a parent in a situation where the will of a parent conflicts with that of the child, is seen negatively by various researchers; it is a necessary and normative part of socialisation, with the child's wellbeing dependent on how the power is asserted. Baumrind differentiated between coercive and confrontive power assertive parenting styles; where coercive parenting by authoritarian parents is arbitrary, domineering and hierarchical, and confrontive parenting by authoritative parents is negotiable, reasons and outcome-oriented to regulate child behaviours. Baumrind reasoned that parental power assertion is harmful only when it is coercive, and that confrontive power assertion is important for child wellbeing and development. Pinquart (2017) and Smetana (2017) have also argued that effective parental discipline does not involve intrusiveness or coercion.

On the other hand, Gershoff (2010) stated that there is weak evidence that physical punishment is more effective than other methods for immediate child compliance. Instead, there is evidence that physical punishment is related to less long term compliance, more aggression and antisocial behaviour. The unintended effects of physical punishment include risk of injury, potential abuse, child mental health issues due to emotional distress, negative parent-child relationship, reduced cognitive development, increased aggression and antisocial behaviour at adulthood. However, Gershoff highlighted that Baumrind criticised the outcomes of Gershoff's meta-analysis study, and stated that there may be advantages in light disciplinary physical punishment.

Gershoff et al. (2010) found in their study of 292 mother-child relationships in 6 countries of individualist and collectivist cultures (China, India, Italy, Kenya, Philippines, and Thailand) when their children were between 8 and 12 years old; that usage of various methods of discipline including physical punishment related to more child anxiety but with some moderation due to the children's perceptions of normativity, even though there was not much evidence that the results vary by the country and culture.

Grusec et al. (2017) explained that parents with a low socioeconomic status tend to exert higher control disciplinary methods to ensure safety of the child as they come from risky environments, and strict obedience is seen to be crucial. In underprivileged families, the child would be more compliant in a high discipline environment as the parental control is perceived as showing care and support rather than anger and rejection. Implementing discipline, including with physical punishment, would be

regarded by the underprivileged child as normative, which is acceptable and doing them good, and would be taken in a positive teaching context; rather than a negative one of anger.

Helwig, To, Wang, Liu, and Yang (2014) added that a child's perception of normativity moderates child psychological outcomes, as well as reasoning and judgements of different discipline methods. However, as there is no evidence of how much these differences may be due to different cultures and contexts (social class), more research should be carried out. Gershoff (2010) confirms that a child's perception of parental discipline normativity is important towards the impact on the child's behaviour, and encourages more research to be carried out on the children's opinions by considering the role of perceived normativity of discipline implemented with physical punishment. This current study undertaken is hoped to close, to some extent, the above two research gaps.

Lee, Altschul, and Gershoff (2013) stated that physical punishment is used by mothers who display various levels of warmth, from high to low; and highlighted that several studies indicated that physical punishment is not related to increased child behaviour issues when the parent also displays a high level of warmth towards the child. However, the authors stated that other studies found different results of physical punishment causing child aggression. However, another study of 3,000 families of various cultures found no evidence of physical punishment having any relationship to child aggression.

Lee et al. (2013) also performed a study of mother-child relationships in the first five years of the child's life as most spanking was done in the first few years of life, and found that parental warmth does not moderate the physical punishment relationship to child aggression, but parental warmth instead increases aggression. However, in another similar study of families during the child's age of 5 to 12, it was found that parental warmth does moderate the physical punishment relationship to child aggression; and this may be because older children may understand the reasons why and the context in which physical punishment is meted out.

According to Hallers-haalboom et al. (2016), the main disciplinarian in any family would traditionally be seen as the father, but recent studies found that the traditional role patterns in a family have changed. In the authors' Dutch study of 242 families, it was revealed that the fathers were more lenient and lax towards child disobedience, and the children were disciplined more often by their mothers rather than their fathers. It was also found that both parents used more commands towards the eldest child. Other studies have indicated that even though the child's gender does not play a large role in parental discipline practices; parents usually feel that punishment is the best method for disciplining boys, and that physical punishment would prepare boys for challenges and hardships in their future life.

Hallers-haalboom et al. (2016) also highlighted that as mothers are the main caregivers, they may experience more occasions when they are required to discipline their children. There is empirical evidence that mothers, even when they work full time, spend two to three times more time with their children than the fathers. In addition the studies show that time spent with fathers are usually playful, while the

time with mothers are the daily care routines where they would be required to instil discipline. Fathers may also feel that disciplining the children is more the mothers' responsibility.

2.7.1.3 Religiosity and Spirituality

According to Goeke-Morey and Cummings (2017), religion and spirituality provide parents with certain meaning to challenging situations in child upbringing; and they take it as a sacred responsibility which helps them cope, as this belief relieves them of the stress in looking after their children. However, this is not the case if the parents practice a negative view of religion. Dumas and Nissley-Tsiopinis (2006) clarified that parents who practice a negative view of religion feel that their parental challenges are due to divine anger resulting in their punishment; and this will have a detrimental effect on families facing difficult challenges and adversities, especially if society feels that they should be able to handle those challenges.

Similarly, Holmes and Kim-Spoon (2016) stated that norms in religion encourage parents to spend longer, better quality time with their children that strengthens the parent-child relationship. However, Holmes and Kim-Spoon went on to highlight that the display of parent religiousness, such as endorsement in beliefs and engagement in religious activities, is important as it influences adolescents' religiousness, which in turn affects the quality of their behaviour. This intergenerational transfer of religiosity and spirituality happens as parents strive to raise their children with similar beliefs as their own, which may promote better quality parent-child relationships due to aligned beliefs.

Kovacs et al. (2011) added that religious parenting is described as having religious beliefs which promote emotional warmth and stability, guidance, safety and care; which facilitates a trustworthy and stable parent-child relationship where parents are thought of as role models; while molding children's attitudes towards risky behaviours and health risks. Significant research has been done which support religious parenting, finding that a family's religious environment may serve as a protective factor against adolescent risky behaviour.

Goeke-Morey and Cummings (2017) also highlighted that religiosity may facilitate important conversations between parent and child to come to an agreement about acceptable behaviour, which reduces potential occurrences of parent-child conflicts.

2.7.1.4 Communication

Almas, Grusec, and Tackett (2011) stated that parents play a critical role in a child's ability to develop resilience and coping strategies, by assisting their children to express themselves and communicate in an environment which is felt as safe and supportive. In this environment, parents provide comfort, and teach them how to comfort themselves to manage their negative emotions. To build resilience, parents should also strive to know a child's thoughts and feelings, to assist their children to deal with adverse emotions such as stress and anxiety. This knowledge may be obtained by having a good parent-child communication relationship, so that their child can disclose information such as about their friends, where they went and what went on in school. It is found that children who disclose information to their parents have a higher level of resilience and can cope with negative emotions better. Authoritative mothers who are controlling but sensitive and show consideration to their children's needs may

build healthy communication with their children by showing genuine interest and understanding, and this will help to optimally develop their children.

Givertz and Segrin (2014) added that open family communication where parents display a better understanding of their children's feelings and facilitates an effective family role, usually relate to overall positive results in child development.

2.7.2 Family Cohesiveness and Adaptability

Ungar et al. (2013) stated that family resilience is when there is family cohesiveness due to dependence, attachment, interest and bonding which are felt and displayed among family members. Family adaptability, on the other hand, is the family members' capability to be flexible during stressful times; focusing on parenting styles, problem-solving strategies, and the method used to communicate values and beliefs. Parental monitoring in more cohesive families also result in positive school engagement.

2.7.3 Religiosity and Spirituality

Kovacs, Piko, and Fitzpatrick (2011) explained that religiosity is an important sociocultural protective factor, and is a developmental asset for youth to protect against risky behaviours. Religiosity focuses on active social involvement to show religious affiliation, such as a commitment towards regulations or rituals of a religious belief as well as activities at mosques and churches. According to Luna and Macmillan (2015), religiosity is related to a structured value and ritual system which is practiced within the organisation of the community.

Similarly, Iles, Boekeloo, Seate, and Quinton (2016) described religiosity as a structured system of beliefs and practices, as well as symbols and rituals, that develops an individual's relationship with God and the community. Religiosity had previously been assessed in studies by measuring affiliation, frequency of attendance at religious vicinities and prayer; and may be a social norm or tradition. Hodge, Zidan, and Husain (2016) found in a study of Muslims in the United States that performance of daily prayers was a protective factor against depression; as the more prayers were performed, the lower the likelihood of the risky behaviour. This finding contributes to the limited global knowledge on spirituality among Muslims.

Kovacs et. al (2011) also expressed that religiosity among youth may be a protective factor by increasing understanding, reducing identity crises, and avoiding risky behaviours and health risks like substance abuse. Adolescents who attended religious services have a lower tendency to smoke, drink alcohol and take drugs than those who do not attend them. Research found that children and adolescents build more supportive and caring social networks if they are part of a religious community, which also provides them a purpose in life and helps them build resilience to cope with stress and bad life experiences. Holmes and Kim-Spoon (2016) stated that only when religiosity is supported by the social environment, would adolescents be able to refrain from bad and risky behaviour; as more support may be provided if the adolescent is part of a religious community.

Luna and Macmillan (2015) highlighted that spirituality may also be a critical protective factor against risky behaviour such as depression. Spirituality is characterised as complicated and multidimensional; which includes the search for life

meaning, which helps to connect to self and the environment, and acts as a buffer against stress and mental issues, as well as one's relationship to God or a higher being. Kovacs, Piko, and Fitzpatrick (2011) describes spirituality as the closeness to a Godly experience. Iles et al. (2016) explain spirituality as an individual's personal faith experience, and the extent of the role played by the divine being in an individual's life and how it affects life decisions.

Holmes and Kim-Spoon (2016) explained about the divine interaction theory; when one can build a relationship with the divine or God, as how one could build a social relationship. In this instance, rather than receiving support and guidance from individuals in the family or community, these may be received from the divine privately. Similar to how a religious community functions, the divine being may be able to provide a framework of identity, morality, meaning and purpose; which may result in positive behaviours and reduce negative ones.

Kress, Newgent, Whitlock, and Mease (2015) highlighted that it is consistently found in research that there is a positive relationship between spirituality and religiosity, with life satisfaction and meaning; and they score high in the personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness which are connected to good mental health. Religious and spiritual individuals usually have a higher life quality with better satisfaction gained from individuals in their environment such as family, friends, school and community. Spiritual individuals usually have positive self-esteem, and are able to be resilient and cope with stress better. In addition, adolescents who have found meaning and purpose usually have higher life satisfaction, being more positive about their future.

2.7.4 Entrepreneurship Skills

Rosendahl, Sloof, and Praag (2014) stated that development programmes which build an entrepreneurial mindset and skills are usually carried out in secondary schools or in higher learning institutions, focusing on adolescents and youth. However, the authors argue that from their study on students aged 11 and 12 (in their last two years of primary school), it was found that a better result and outcome would emerge if these programmes which cultivate entrepreneurial skills and knowledge are carried out much earlier in life.

Unfortunately, most Malaysian studies focus on entrepreneurship development programmes only at higher learning institutions, which may indicate that only at this level of education is entrepreneurship development focused on : (a) Ahmad, Ismail, and Buchanan (2014) investigated the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship curriculum at Malaysian polytechnics to develop students' inclination towards entrepreneurship; (b) Gelaidan and Abdullateef (2017) found that the entrepreneurial inclination of Malaysian university business students is largely affected by educational and relational support; (c) Raja Kasim and Wan Mustaffa (2010) analysed Malaysian research universities' statuses, roles of researchers and innovation achievements to ascertain the degree of impact on entrepreneurship development in the university; while comparing to UK university experience; and (d) Bagheri and Lope Pihie (2013) determined entrepreneurship education programmes roles to develop Malaysian university students' competencies for entrepreneurial leadership.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained that literature review in qualitative research supports the importance of the study's focus, validates the eventual study results, guides the development of findings during data collection and analysis, and organises data to explore connections between theory and phenomenon; while resulting in a guiding hypothesis to seek patterns by illustrating possible directions to follow, but which provides the flexibility when unexpected phenomena patterns are discovered during the research. In addition, Robson and McCartan (2016) explained that in qualitative research, hypotheses may only be developed as a result of data gathering; and that the conceptual structure or framework would need to be reviewed at the data collection and analysis stage.

Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study shown in Figure 2.3 below was drawn up only after literature review was done and when data analysis was well underway, and aims to guide pattern detection and findings development during the data analysis. This conceptual framework indicates that the study focuses on the importance and value of early soft skills development of the underprivileged, as well as the main soft skill of resilience. In order to discover how the soft skill of resilience may be developed to enable an underprivileged individual to thrive in life; the concept of positive youth development with its developmental assets and protective factors are to be explored from the participants' life stories narratives. The developmental assets and protective factors guided from the literature review as well as the data analysis at this stage include school, family, community, and religiosity and spirituality. The protective factors are to be explored even further, for example the style of parenting may include culture, discipline, religiosity and spirituality, and communication.

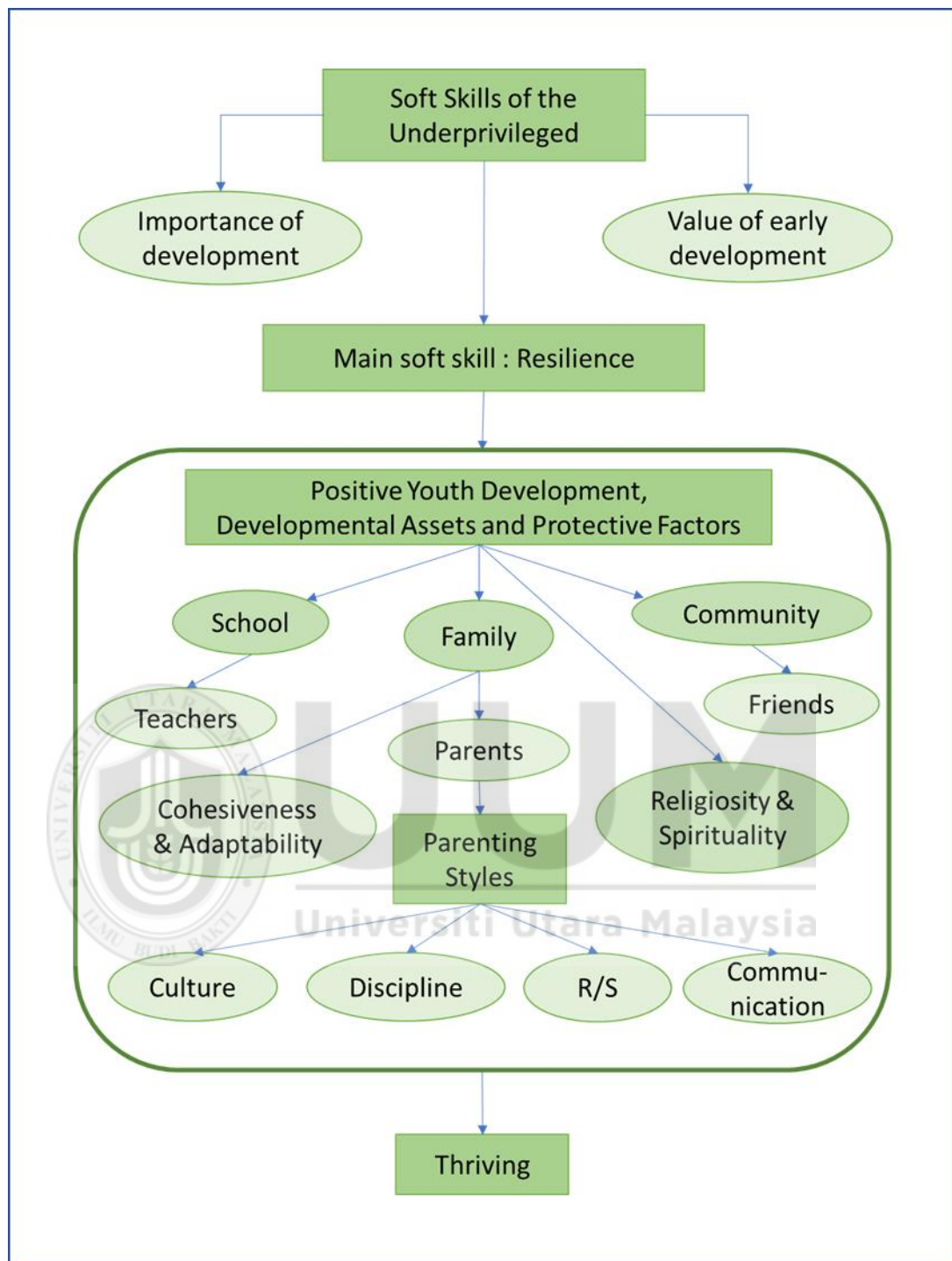


Figure 2.3. The Conceptual Framework

2.9 Conclusion

In the literature, the subject of soft skills is studied globally in relation to reducing life or health risk factors as well as being a critical factor of employability in the 21st

century. In Malaysia, it is observed that most studies related to employability had referred to the lack of soft skills in the country to meet existing employer demands.

From the literature review, it was found that various theories and empirical evidence provided strong proof that resilience and other soft skills development should be carried out during the early stages of life, rather than later. However, it is observed that Malaysian studies mostly focused on soft skills or life skills development during tertiary education; instead of pre-school, primary or secondary school life stages and at home, in school and within the community. A study to close this gap in the Malaysian context would be useful to reinforce the theories and provide empirical evidence in the Malaysian context to prove that human development is most effective and impactful when done at the early life stages, and impacted by the promotion of ecological factors in their lives.

The importance of resilience to be developed among underprivileged children and youth for other soft skills development through positive youth programmes was also focused in the literature. Underprivileged children and adolescents is a target group which requires development of resilience and other soft skills more than others, due to two main reasons. Firstly, these skills would help prevent risky and unhealthy behaviours among them, which they are more exposed to, due to their socioeconomic background. Secondly, the skill gap requires to be narrowed or closed as it was found from empirical evidence that both hard and soft skills are the least developed in the underprivileged from a very young age due to their upbringing and exposure.

The literature indicated a paucity of research done, especially in Malaysia, to identify important developmental assets or resources present and promoted within the various life stages of a young adult who was previously underprivileged, which eventually resulted in resilience and facilitated the individual to turn his or her life around for the better, with the mastery of even more soft skills. This internal asset of resilience would facilitate various other soft skills to be inculcated throughout their childhood and adolescence, resulting in them being able to thrive or flourish even before they commenced tertiary education.

The results of the current study will assist in prioritising the types of intervention programmes that may be recommended for implementation targeted at the underprivileged groups in Malaysia during the early years of their lives i.e. their childhood as well as adolescence; which are to be implemented at home, in school and in their communities; for a more lasting effect and significant outcome in their adult lives.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter commences with an overall view of the interpretive research paradigm, which justifies that the qualitative research approach would best be used for the present study to achieve its research objectives, including it being more beneficial for positive youth development and resilience studies. For this exploratory study, the usage of life stories within the narrative inquiry method is rationalised to produce the desired type of results for the study. The sampling and selection criteria are then explained, followed by information about the selected participants which show that they are suitable for the present study. The data collection as well as the analysis techniques and procedures are described in detail. The chapter concludes by describing the data validation actions taken to counter researcher bias issues to ensure rigour and trustworthiness of the data interpreted and findings, as well as research ethical considerations.

3.2 The Research Approach

In this section, the qualitative research approach including the paradigm behind it are analysed to support the decision of using the qualitative research method, to address the current study's problem statement and answer its research question.

3.2.1 Qualitative Research

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), research paradigms or philosophical assumptions guide research work, assist to explain the method being used, and allow

strengths to be taken advantage of to compensate for the weaknesses. Within the naturalist-constructionist paradigm, naturalists and interpretive constructionists believe that there are various realities that are perceived by people, each viewing it through the lens of his or her prior knowledge and experience, therefore always being interpretive and subjective. They learn how people interpret what they encounter, as well as how meanings and values are assigned by people to objects or events, by being inductive.

Robson and McCartan (2016) explained that qualitative research focuses on subjectivity and adopts inductive logic. It commences with data collection from which theoretical ideas and concepts emerge, with a flexible research design throughout. Qualitative research emphasises the important role of the researcher with reflexivity while being open and receptive, using verbal rather than statistical analysis to study a small number of persons and situations.

As the aim of this study is mainly to explore and answer the research question of how certain underprivileged individuals developed resilience which enabled more soft skills to be developed throughout their lives despite life challenges and risks, the qualitative research approach is chosen to address the problem statement. Qualitative research is best for this study as it looks for interesting subject matters with unanswered questions, as well as social problems which require investigation and exploration for solutions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012); and it is conducted when a problem or issue is to be subjectively explored with no objective answer (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the appropriate methodology should be used to answer a research question,

rather than using the most prevalent one in the research area (Robson & McCartan, 2016) which is currently quantitative research (Ungar, 2003).

Creswell (2013) guides researchers towards four of the philosophical assumptions behind the qualitative research paradigm which are beliefs related to ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology. Ontology relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics, whether single or multiple realities. Qualitative researchers believe in multiple realities and this is evidenced in the words of various individuals giving their insights from different perspectives. With the epistemological assumption, individual views put together subjective evidence, with qualitative researchers making the effort to be close to the participants and minimise distance. Axiology is the role of the qualitative researcher's values within the study, and how it affects the study by the reporting of researcher values and biases. Methodology is the research procedures in qualitative research which are inductive and emerging as result of collection and analysis of data, with research questions possibly being revised during the study to better understand the problem statement.

3.2.2 The Importance of the Qualitative Research Approach for this Study

According to Ungar (2003), by using the qualitative research method for studies on resilience, the sociocultural context in which resilience occurs would need to be accounted for with qualitative research due to the many dimensions of risk and resilience. Different risk impact relate to different time periods, as well as geographical and cultural differences. Qualitative research would assist to account for the diversity in each individual's case, which may consist of numerous different factors.

Ungar (2003) also highlighted that the qualitative research method may assist in five ways specifically for resilience researchers to: (a) discover the protective factors and processes in the lived experience of the participants; (b) provide thick and rich descriptions on the subject matter of resilience; (c) provide a voice to the minority populations who account for the unique localised positive outcomes; (d) promote transferability of results in place of generalisation; and (e) account for researcher biased standpoints.

In addition, due to certain criticisms of developmental psychology, Ehrlich (2016) believes that qualitative research assists to expand positive youth development studies while addressing certain aspects not adequately studied in positive youth development such as process examination and placing matters into context, because:

- Developmental psychology has mostly focused on risk indicators rather than healthy development indicators, which result in intervention programme designs emphasising more on prevention of risk behaviours and this is found to be less effective for youth development programmes. On the other hand, the qualitative research method would facilitate the child or youth voice to be studied via interviews and focus group discussions, while reviewing lived experiences which are important for youth development programme designs.
- Developmental psychology has the tendency to focus on the individual rather than in the context of the individual's interaction with his or her environment, thus not considering how any external factors are either supporting or hindering development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), the entire ecological system in which growth happens must be taken into consideration to understand human development. However, the qualitative research method focusing on narratives

may assist with the discovery of how individuals develop certain skills from a young age due to their surrounding environment and people relationships.

- Developmental psychology has primarily focused on outcomes rather than processes, which leaves a large knowledge gap relating to the factors which cause the outcomes. Without the information of the development process facilitated by the qualitative research method, intervention programmes may not be designed adequately to develop children or youth.

Therefore, the qualitative research method is important to be used for this study which seeks to understand the development of resilience and positive youth development in underprivileged individuals.

3.3 Research Design

The research design steers the overall strategy of the research procedures including data collection and analysis, to address this study's problem statement and answer its research question. After careful consideration of this study's research question which is related to how resilience and other soft skills are developed, it was decided that the collection and analysis of life stories within the narrative inquiry method would suit the study best. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that life stories focus on an individual's experiences over time so that "the processual development of the person can be captured" (p. 157). Creswell (2013) mentions that the data collected in a narrative study would be analysed "for the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies" (p. 189). Through life stories, significant and unique events may better unfold and inform the development of

resilience and other soft skills. Therefore, the narrative inquiry method was decided to be the most appropriate qualitative research approach to be used for the study.

3.3.1 Life Stories within the Narrative Inquiry Research Method

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the founders of the narrative inquiry approach, “Narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (p. 20). In addition, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) stated that:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study (p. 375).

Earlier on, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) claimed that people are natural storytellers who lead lives full of stories, either individually or socially. Therefore, narrative inquiry is the study of the ways people experience the world, where such lives are described by collecting and telling their stories by the writing of experience narratives. The idea of life stories within narrative inquiry is inspired by Dewey’s theory of experience (1938), which is “most often cited as the philosophical underpinning of narrative inquiry” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 12). Narrative inquiry is shaped by being carried out within this ontology of experience, and it assists the researcher to

understand and study experience as it “comprises a view of experience as composed and lived over time” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 15).

Inspired by Dewey, Clandinin (2013) views experience within three aspects i.e., relational, continuous and social. Experience is relational as it relates across time, events, relationships and places. Narrative inquiry researchers need to realise that continuity needs to be importantly considered within our inquiries, as experiences are continuous. The social dimension should also be emphasised on as narrative inquiries examine stories which people live and tell, and experiences result from social influences on an individual’s life, environment and history.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) highlighted that life stories review individuals’ subjective experiences, and are able to focus on important and fateful moments. As life stories shape a picture from a significant part of an individual’s life, the strengths of this approach are that a reader may understand those experiences, more research questions may result from the interesting research, and perspectives and actions among social groups may be analysed for comparison. The authors also point out that life stories research may also focus on a figure who challenged and defied his or her culture because they opposed the normal culture they lived in, such as Mahatma Ghandi. Somewhat similarly, this study is about underprivileged individuals who were resilient and stood against the odds to develop other soft skills to thrive in life, rather than following the social norm of the underprivileged in Malaysia who rarely possess the important soft skills to succeed. Therefore, life stories within the narrative inquiry approach would best suit this study and answer the research question.

3.3.2 A Longitudinal Study

From examination of the literature, this current study may be categorised as a ‘qualitative retrospective longitudinal study’; and is aimed at filling the gap in a subject matter mostly studied using quantitative cross-sectional methods, especially in Malaysia. According to Zimmerman et al. (2013), even though resilience research has expanded over the past decade, innovations such as longitudinal research is important to push the field of study forward. Longitudinal research studies the timing of protective factor development for protection against risk, identifies the ages when certain promotive factors become important for development as well as considers effects across an individual’s ecological factors across time. This will assist in understanding the resilience process better, to develop better intervention programmes for children and youth.

Longitudinal studies engage in continuous and repeated data collection activities to follow particular individuals over prolonged periods of time, usually years or even decades, and they come in various forms i.e., repeated cross-sectional studies where the participants are different during each sampling occasion, prospective studies where the participants are physically followed for a time period and retrospective studies where the participants have already experienced the relevant events and the data on these experiences are collected and analysed retrospectively (Caruana, Roman, Hernández-sánchez, & Solli, 2015).

McAdams et al. (2006) commented that an individual’s life story is an integral feature of personality, therefore the life story should have continuity over time while providing proof regarding important personality change. Their study on “Continuity and Change

in the Life Story: A Longitudinal Study of Autobiographical Memories in Emerging Adulthood” confirmed this theory. The researcher named his study of autobiographical memories of a life story as a longitudinal study.

In the literature, the above type of study is referred to as a ‘retrospective’ longitudinal study, as the following of participants’ experiences over a period of time is done retrospectively via the collection of stories over a certain life period. In fact, quite a few studies were found using the qualitative retrospective longitudinal approach, although they were mostly done overseas. For example, Bruce, Beuthin, Sheilds, Molzahn, and Schick-makaroff (2016) highlighted that they had drawn on their experiences in a longitudinal narrative inquiry, where the life stories were collected to understand past experiences of living when faced with the uncertainty of a life-threatening illness. Another example is a study conducted by Patterson, Romm, and Hill (2008) to review customer satisfaction as a process, where it was stated that a qualitative retrospective longitudinal study of overseas students in Australia was carried out. Gray and Carroll (2012) mentioned that they had examined class-formation processes in 20th century Ireland from the perspective of changing education experiences by developing an understanding via a retrospective longitudinal approach.

3.3.3 Role of the Researcher

My voice as the researcher was heard in Chapter 1 when I explained about my inspiration to undertake this study, as well as how both the organisation that I am in and I, myself would gain from this research. For reflexivity, in Chapter 1 (point 1.3), I provided information about my experiences in the form of my personal history and culture. The reader may use this information to determine how it influenced the

interpretation of the data analysis and shaped the findings, discussions and conclusions (Creswell, 2013). Reflexivity is also discussed where relevant in the data collection and analysis sections in this chapter, to recognise that my personal assumptions may shape the data collected and analysed.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) highlighted that the researcher is the instrument in qualitative studies and that research designs should include the researcher's identity, voice and biases. Researcher bias, a type of research tool, is the researcher's "identity, experience and values" (p. 117), that result in passion and insight which could add value to research. When these elements are disclosed, it provides the opportunity to the reader to assess how they affect the study. Rubin and Rubin (2012) believe that qualitative researchers are active participants in their own study, because "their personalities, their knowledge, their curiosity, and their sensitivity all impact the quality of the work" (p. 17).

Braun and Clarke (2013) described that researchers bring histories, values, assumptions, perspectives and mannerisms into research, which contribute to the valuable subjectivity in qualitative studies. Reflexivity or self-awareness, where the researcher acknowledges and reflects on his role, is essential for good qualitative research as it acts as a control to ensure research quality. According to Creswell (2013), reflexivity requires qualitative researchers to position themselves by disclosing their history, work and cultural experiences, how these may affect their interpretation of data, as well as what they would gain from the study. Saldana (2013) mentioned that reflexivity is to critically question what and why a researcher carries out an action

while confronting and challenging assumptions made, recognising that a researcher's thoughts and decisions would shape what he or she sees or does not see in the data.

3.4 Research Participants

The research participants are the selected human subjects to be studied using the selected research design, to address the current study's problem statement.

3.4.1 Sampling and Selection Basis of Participants

The life stories of three individuals were decided to be documented and analysed to understand and interpret their experiences to identify patterns and answer this study's research question. Aside from Firdaus who was the inspiration to carry out the study, I selected another two former YSD scholars as participants because they fit the criteria of being underprivileged at the time of their scholarship interviews but were discovered to possess a high level of soft skills during the scholarship assessment, on top of already being good academic achievers to enable them to be shortlisted for the interview. The selection of suitable candidates via physical review of scholarship interview documents took some time, as those who fit the required sample criteria were few and far in between. All three participants were carefully selected, so that they are distinctive to the study and light may be shed on how resilience was built in their underprivileged lives, to develop other soft skills for them to thrive.

Similar to other authors, Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative research uses purposeful sampling, which means that the participants in the sample are chosen due to their purpose to meet the objectives of the study. Creswell went on to explain that

narrative inquiry participants should be “accessible, willing to provide information, and distinctive for their accomplishments and ordinariness or who shed light on a specific phenomenon or issue being explored” (p. 147).

Riessman (2005) stressed that the narrative inquiry approach is “not appropriate for studies of large numbers of nameless and faceless subjects” (p. 6), as the analysis of personal life stories requires arduous and strenuous efforts to provide the required attention to subtlety, how a response is organised, and relationship detection within social and historical contexts. Similarly, Robson and McCartan (2016) explained that qualitative social research is commonly carried out with a small number of persons or situations being studied. Creswell (2013) also found many examples within narrative inquiry which involved only one or two individuals as participants. Braun and Clarke (2013) affirmed that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative research which usually uses smaller samples, and sometimes only a single participant or text is analysed in depth. Marshall and Rossman (2016) also stated that qualitative research designs may only include one participant.

While quantitative research uses a large number of random samples for generalisability where the study results may apply to a wider population, qualitative research uses a smaller number of purposive samples to understand the subject matter in-depth for better insight (Braun & Clarke, 2013); and is valued more for its capability to unearth new findings and answers, than on its generalisability (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The rich, thick descriptions of qualitative research allow for transferability as the detailed descriptions facilitate information transfer to other settings with the same characteristics (Creswell, 2013). In addition, the assertions or theories from research

findings may be transferred to similar present and future contexts to advance from the particular to the general by predicting patterns and inferring transfer (Saldana, 2013).

3.4.2 Participants of the Study

Although YSD had awarded about 3,700 scholarships to Malaysians since 1982, it was found that it is still a difficult task to find the right three participants who meet the criteria of coming from an underprivileged background and having a high level of soft skills at time of scholarship interviews, who are currently employed in various organisations and are thriving in their careers. However, this difficulty is not surprising as this phenomenon is predominantly the reason why this study is being carried out.

After much sifting through of information on former scholars with the YSD scholarship operations team members, the best candidates who meet all the above criteria as participants were found and are listed in Table 3.1. I communicated my intention of including these former scholars as participants of this study, and all of them have agreed to assist with the research by providing their life stories as it is for the cause of assisting the underprivileged society in Malaysia. All three of them have confirmed in writing to waive their rights to anonymity, and therefore I am able to use their real names throughout the study.

Table 3.1

List of Participants for the Study, with Details

Name and Current Designation	Date of and Background at Scholarship Interview	Awarded Scholarship Details and Academic Achievement	Strengths during Scholarship Assessment
1 Muhammad Firdaus bin Abu Hassan, Administration Officer, Students with Disability Management Unit, Counselling & Career Section, Student Affairs and Alumni Division - Universiti Malaya	Date : 7 May 2013. Father is a pensioner earning RM725 monthly, while mother is a housewife. Have eight other siblings, three of which are still schooling. Semester 1 CGPA : 3.22.	• YSD Special Needs Bursary (Disability Category: Blind) • July 2013. • Bachelor of Arts (Anthropology & Sociology). • University of Malaya. • Final CGPA : 3.56	Outstanding communicator, ambitious, motivated to excel, positive, passionate, highly confident and determined in the face of adversity, active in extra-curricular activities, high leadership qualities, award winner.
2 Mohd Amir Affiq bin Marzuki, Head, Pipeline Services, Tractors Petroleum Services, Sime Darby Industrial	Date: 12 January 2005. Father is self-employed while mother is a teacher, with a total monthly household income of RM2,750. Four other siblings are still schooling. SPM: 10A1s.	• YSD Excellence Overseas. • January 2006. • Bachelor of Engineering and Bachelor of Commerce. • University of Melbourne. • Finals : First class degree.	Clear and distinct communicator, high confidence and intellect, good reasoner, high leadership qualities, well rounded student, sincere and trustworthy.
3 Nur Laili Zahwan binti Mohammad Nor, Assistant Manager, Succession Planning and Performance Management System, AEON Credit Service (Malaysia) Berhad.	Date: 14 June 2010. Unemployed father, while mother is a nurse earning RM4,000 monthly. Three other siblings are still schooling. Diploma CGPA : 3.86.	• YSD Excellence Local. • July 2010. • Bachelor of Business Administration (Business Economics). • Universiti Teknologi MARA. Final CGPA : 3.54.	High confidence and composure with learning agility. Emotionally intelligent and drives change. Shows good leadership and communication skills.

Note. Data obtained from the respective YSD Scholar Personal Files (as at April 2017).

In Malaysia, the bottom 40% of households (or the B40 group) are considered underprivileged (Patel, 2014), and YSD considers scholars to be underprivileged when their monthly household incomes are RM4,000 and below. This is in reference to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reporting that the B40 are measured as households that earn a household income of RM3,855 and below in 2014. In addition, during the 2018 National Budget announcement made on 27 October 2017, the B40 group was classified as those families with a monthly income range of RM3,900 and below. Although one participant, namely Laili, did not meet the maximum monthly income criteria as her family's household income was RM4,000, she was included as a participant in the study because (a) it was a challenging task to find participants who met all the criteria, which is precisely why this research is being carried out; (b) the difference of RM100 is minimal; and (c) RM4,000 is the maximum household income allowed for the YSD Bursary programme which offers scholarships to the underprivileged.

All three participants selected for the study are Malays, and this was entirely by chance. As mentioned before, it was a difficult task to choose participants who met the study criteria i.e., from low income backgrounds but with a high level of soft skills and a thriving career. Therefore, I chose the best three former YSD scholars who met these criteria for the study. However, there are two advantages of all three participants being Malays, which are (a) as I am also Malay like all three of the participants, I was able to relate to them and this facilitated a quality data analysis process; and (b) as the

rich, thick descriptions of qualitative research allows for transferability to other settings with the same characteristics (Creswell, 2013), the study results may be transferred to the Malay ethnic group for intervention purposes.

Creswell (2013) pointed out that maximum variation sampling is a popular qualitative research sampling approach; where certain differentiating criteria are determined at the onset of the study, and followed by the selection of participants who have diverse variations but meet the specific set criteria. Braun and Clarke (2013) mentioned that maximum variation sampling is aimed for perspectives diversity and quality data collected towards an analytic goal. Despite the difficulty in identifying the participants, I found that they are quite different from various angles.

Although all the participants were former YSD scholars who are Malays from underprivileged backgrounds at the time of their scholarship interviews but with a high level of soft skills, and are thriving in their current careers; there are quite a few variations among the three. They include one being disabled (blind), one who was extremely outstanding in his academic achievements, and one of the fairer sex; and all three were awarded different categories of YSD scholarships i.e., Special Needs Bursary, Excellence (Overseas), and Excellence (Local) respectively. After the interviews commenced, I also found that one of the participants is an introvert, whilst the other two are extroverts. Creswell (2013) explained that maximum variation sampling is favoured because when differences are maximised at the onset of the study, there is more likelihood that the results will reflect differences in perspectives which is ideal for qualitative research.

After the three main participants were identified, I asked for each of them to recommend two important individuals in their lives who I could interview. I advised them that these identified individuals may be from their family, school or community who the participants thought would be suitable to be part of the study. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that purposive sampling which is guided by concepts is built into qualitative research design, and that criterion sampling may be the first sampling method followed by snowball sampling when interviews are done with people suggested by the first sample participants. Braun and Clarke (2013) affirmed that snowballing or friendship pyramiding are usual qualitative research techniques where the sample is built via the participants' networks.

Initially, I had requested for the two other individuals in each of the participants' lives to interview, for purposes of triangulation or usage of more than one data source to provide corroborating evidence. However, aside from providing substantiating evidence, these other individuals also managed to provide more useful important data to complete the life stories of each participant. Marshall and Rossman (2016) confirmed that triangulation is about having more than one data source to address data rigour, but these different data sources may also be used to elaborate and illuminate the research. The authors advised that meaning may be substantiated by the researcher interviewing others in the participant's life, and their details are in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2

List of Important Individuals in Participants' Lives who were Interviewed for the Study

Participant Name	Interviewee Details (Name and age in years)	Relationship with Participant
Muhammad Firdaus bin Abu Hassan	1. Name: Siti Fatimah binti Ismail Age: 58	Mother.
	2. Name: Wan Zolkipli bin Wan Ismail Age: 58	Former boarding school teacher and warden.
Mohd Amir Affiq bin Marzuki	3. Name: Syarifah Norsalmah binti Abdullah Age: 53	Mother.
	4. Name: Fatin Fazzrini binti Marzuki Age: 24	Sister.
Nur Laili Zahwan binti Mohammad Nor	5. Name: Norzaihan binti Ghazali Age: 54	Mother.
	6. Name: Mell Yap Lin Foong Age: 31	Former neighbour.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All three of the participants within this study signed the consent forms before the first interview on their life stories commenced; after they were briefed about the purpose of the study and the expected interview time, as well as being advised that they do not have to sign the form if they were uncomfortable with being a part of the study in any way. They were also assured that they would be informed of the related study results to seek their feedback and comments, and that a copy of the final thesis will be provided to them at the end of the study. The consent form they all signed included the right of the participants to freely withdraw from the study whenever they decide to and are guaranteed anonymity if they so desire it; with the study objective and data collection procedures being stated, with any risks in relation to participation in the study being disclosed (Creswell, 2013).

Marshall and Rossman (2016) impressed that for any inquiry research, it is important that researchers do not use participants to achieve research objectives without respecting their privacy, anonymity and their right to participate with consent; as well as ensuring that the participants are not harmed by being a part of the study. With a signed informed consent form, the researcher may be assured and assure others that that participants are fully aware of the study purpose, that their participation is voluntary with an understanding of their commitment to the study, that their identities are protected, and that there are minimal risks in study participation.

On the matter of the right to anonymity, it would have been challenging for me to guarantee this right, as the YSD scholarship team knew who the participants were because they provided me with their scholarship documentation. Therefore, I was pleasantly surprised when all three of the participants confirmed in writing that they are waiving their right to anonymity for this study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) pointed out that participants may agree to not be anonymous, as they wish to be recognised in the study which they will form a substantial part of. I find this to be especially so in this study, as all three participants verbally advised that they wished to contribute to research which they believe would benefit the underprivileged in the future, as they understood my role in a charity foundation that focuses on assisting the underprivileged especially with the sustainable initiative of education. Although Clandinin and Connelly (2000) warned that anonymity is a concern throughout the inquiry as the participants may change their minds anytime, I am relieved and happy that all three participants did not withdraw their consent to not be anonymous at any time during the study.

3.6 Data Collection

The procedures to collect data would need to be planned carefully to effectively gain a deep understanding of the participants' experiences through their life stories. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describes three data collection tools within narrative inquiry which include field notes of shared experience, journal records and interviews. Upon completion of the important task of selecting the most suitable participants for the study to answer its research question and achieve its objective, I chose to use the above three tools to collect data.

3.6.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out to collect data to be analysed. Braun and Clarke (2013) stated that interviews are the most suitable data collection tool for research questions which relate to experience and explore understanding, perception and development. For qualitative interviews, the main form is semi-structured interviews where although an interview guide is prepared, it is not rigidly followed in terms of wordings and order. The researcher is flexible during the interview so that participants may speak about issues important to them and which may not have been expected by the researcher.

3.6.1.1 Planning the Interviews

I designed an interview guide suitable to assist with answering the main research question and it is attached in **Appendix A** for reference. The development of the list of questions, which Creswell (2013) considers as the core of interview guides, was influenced by the earlier literature review I carried out that I felt would help answer the study's main research question such as the ecological theory, resilience theory, and

protective factors. Aside from the list of questions, the interview guide provides direction on how to open and close the interview, as well as a guide of procedures throughout the interview for a more complete data collection.

Braun and Clarke (2013), Creswell (2013) as well as Rubin and Rubin (2012) recommended that an interview guide be designed and used, because successful use of interviews in qualitative research depends on thorough preparation. Braun and Clarke (2013) stated that a good interview guide would enable trust and rapport to be built in interactive data collection so that the participants would feel comfortable to disclose personal information for a more complete data collection. Some or all of the interview guide questions may be adapted from previous research. Creswell (2013) stated that the interview guide questions are focused to understand the main study phenomenon. Rubin and Rubin impressed that questions are open-ended so that the participant may be flexible in his or her responses, and raise new and unexpected issues which is crucial for exploratory research.

The consent form template used in this study is included in **Appendix B** for reference. Aside from addressing ethical concerns in the study, this initiative appeared to be considered by the participants as the step to formally commence each of their involvements in the study. During the signing of all three consent forms, each participant verbally advised that they wished to waive their right to anonymity for the study. I subsequently documented the permission of anonymity waivers from all three participants with emails which were sent to them after the first interviews. Creswell (2013) stated that for narrative inquiry, researchers start obtaining data from participants after obtaining the participants' permission to be a part of the study.

Participants should be clearly informed of the reasons for their selection and the researcher's objectives, as well as their right for anonymity if they so require it, towards building rapport.

3.6.1.2 Carrying out the Interviews

A close relationship was easily formed with the participants as they were provided with a scholarship from the charity foundation I worked in, and they are aware that the foundation focuses on alleviating the lives of the underprivileged with sustainable initiatives such as education. When I first explained the reason for the study and why I selected them as study participants, they appeared to be visibly pleased to be given the opportunity to potentially give back to society through a charity foundation, with the knowledge from the collection of their life stories. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained that being selected to participate in an interview may also be considered as an achievement of an exceptional talent.

According to Creswell (2013), the epistemological assumption in qualitative research is that the researchers try to get as close as possible and minimise the distance between themselves and the participants to collect subjective individual experiences and views to improve data quality. Rubin and Rubin (2012) focus on the responsive interviewing technique, an in-depth interviewing style where participants are considered as partners in answering research questions which forms a close relationship between the researcher and participant based on trust and respect, keeping emotions and comments in check by maintaining a friendly and supportive tone throughout the interviews. Interviewees are also more willing to open up to the researcher if they feel they have

some personal connection. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that interviews are intimate engagements depending on trust, an integral feature of a good interview.

During the interviews, I could sense their trust as they appeared to be comfortable in telling me their life stories without any hindrance of fear or shame, which added to the value and accuracy of the data collected. Although Braun and Clarke (2013) highlighted that a researcher may interview an acquaintance, they emphasised that care needs to be given so that the pre-existing relationship is not used to force participation and information sharing, and any hierarchical relationship is to be sensitively handled as it may be potentially coercive. Therefore, I countered this risk by advising them of their rights and commitments as study participants before they each signed their consent forms, emphasising that they have the right to not participate or withdraw from the study at any time without affecting their relationship with YSD.

I tried to ensure that I incorporated all my understandings and recommendations from the literature in the interview sessions for more complete data collection towards better quality findings. Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated that in-depth interviewing is where the researcher seeks for rich information with experiences, where the questions are open-ended and where the planned set questions to be asked may be changed throughout the interview; carried out with main questions, follow-up questions for depth and detail, and probes and prompts to manage the interview. Charmaz (2014) also described a similar interview technique which she called intensive interviewing a “gently guided, one-sided conversation that explores a person’s substantial experience with the research topic” (p. 56) where “the participant talks; the interviewer encourages, listens and learns” (p. 57) and the technique is used to “explore, and not

to interrogate” (p. 65) and assist the participant to “articulate his or her intentions and meanings” (p. 69).

Two face to face in-depth interviews with each participant were carried out to collect this study’s data, where the interview questions were open-ended and flexible to elicit life stories and understand experiences in the participants’ lives from as far back as they could remember in their infancy, childhood and adolescence; which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for ongoing analysis. Robson and McCartan (2016) stated that face to face interviews provides flexibility in revising questions, following up on interesting information provided by participant and exploring underlying motives. The same was done with the two important individuals from each of the three participants lives, where one interview was done with each of the six individuals. In total, twelve interviews from nine individuals were audio-recorded and transcribed, which include six interviews from the participants and six interviews from the individuals they recommended me to interview to support their data from their life storytelling. Braun and Clarke (2013) highlighted that it is important to have audio recordings, which are thereafter transcribed, of interviews as qualitative researchers require detailed responses including the language used. The information on the number, type, duration and location of interviews for each of the twelve individuals interviewed in this study is tabulated in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3

List of All Individuals who were Interviewed for the Study, with Interview Details

No	Interviewee Name and Details	Number, Type, and Duration of Interview(s)	Location of Interview(s)
1.	Muhammad Firdaus bin Abu Hassan (Participant 1)	Two (2) face to face interviews. Interview 1: 108 minutes. Interview 2: 78 minutes.	Both interviews done at Firdaus' office, University of Malaya.
2.	Siti Fatimah binti Ismail (Mother to Participant 1)	One (1) face to face interview. Duration: 69 minutes.	Interview was done at Firdaus' house in University of Malaya employee quarters, while his mother was visiting.
3.	Wan Zolkipli bin Wan Ismail (Former teacher to Participant 1)	One (1) face to face interview. Duration: 58 minutes.	Interview was done at the Bukit Mertajam train station in Penang, near the interviewee's house.
4.	Mohd Amir Affiq bin Marzuki (Participant 2)	Two (2) face to face interviews. Interview 1: 74 minutes. Interview 2: 60 minutes. Emailed Amir twice with follow-up questions.	Both face to face interviews were done at my office in Kuala Lumpur.
5.	Syarifah Norsalmah binti Abdullah (Mother to Participant 2)	One (1) face to face interview. Duration: 56 minutes.	Interview was done at Kuala Terengganu airport, near the interviewee's house.
6.	Fatin Fazzrini binti Marzuki (Sister to Participant 2)	One (1) face to face interview. Duration: 41 minutes.	Interview was done at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, when she was on her way back to the United Kingdom to continue her studies.
7.	Nur Laili Zahwan binti Mohammad Nor (Participant 3)	Two (2) face to face interviews. Interview 1: 64 minutes. Interview 2: 54 minutes.	Both interviews were done at my office in Kuala Lumpur.
8.	Norzaihan binti Ghazali	One (1) face to face interview. Duration: 73 minutes.	Interview was done at the Starbucks outlet in Taman Equine, Seri

	(Mother to Participant 3)		Kembangan in Selangor, near the interviewee's house.
9	Mell Yap Lin Foong (Former neighbour to Participant 3)	One (1) telephone interview. Duration: 27 minutes.	Interview was done when the interviewee was at home.

After both face to face interviews were completed with the second participant, I found that I needed more clarification from him on certain issues that I saw emerging from my data analysis. As I felt that the follow-up questions I required to ask him did not require another face to face interview to be answered, I emailed him the questions on two occasions. Robson and McCartan (2016) stated that the advantage of interviewing via email is that it saves travelling and transcribing costs in the follow-up interview.

For the third participant's former neighbour, she only agreed to an interview if it was done by telephone as she advised that she was too busy to have a face to face meeting with me. Robson and McCartan (2016) stated that telephone interviews are quicker and cheaper but need to be relatively short and usually less than 30 minutes, as compared to face to face interviews which can last from 30 minutes to an hour.

Throughout the interviews, I tried to make the individuals feel as comfortable as possible while telling me their life stories, because the completeness of their stories would add to the value and accuracy of the data to be interpreted for the study. I allowed the participants and interviewees to choose their preferred interview locations, which would provide adequate privacy for the interviews. An interview location should be chosen where the participant feels comfortable and the researcher feels safe

to conduct the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The interview site should be any which is convenient to the participant, quiet and free from distractions, which also facilitates the best sound quality for audio-recording (Creswell, 2013).

I took pictures of each of the twelve participants and the interviewees, after securing permission that whatever was recorded was to be used for my research including their identities. They also provided me with written permission to use their pictures as evidence that I interviewed them for the study, in my thesis.

The interviews were also carried out in the language that the participants felt most comfortable with to tell their life stories, which was mainly a mix of English and Malay. Almost all the conversations were in Malay towards the end of the interviews, as the participants began to feel more comfortable speaking in their native tongue. As I am a native speaker of both languages, this did not pose any challenge to me during data analysis.

3.6.2 Field Notes

I wrote down field notes during and completed them after each interview, and this helped me to capture any findings in the storytelling that highlighted notable or surprising issues during the sharing of life stories by the participant, for analysis. For example, these comments in my field notes assisted me with analysis: (a) “It was my first time being guided into an office room by a blind man, and who was even without a walking stick!”, and (b) “He kept on talking about his father, and I had to ask him about his mother.” I also included notes as a reminder to ask any follow-up questions

to gain insight into stories which I did not probe on enough during the interview, as well as on any new areas brought up by the participant which I did not have enough time to ask about during the agreed interview time.

Creswell (2013) stated that a good qualitative research protocol is to record notes in the field, and complete the field notes immediately after; ensuring that these field notes include records which are both descriptive and reflective. Braun and Clarke (2013) highlighted that it is useful to make field notes after each interview to reflect on reaction to the participant, the interview proceeding, data analysis ideas, any additional questions to ask, and how to improve on the interview technique.

3.6.3 Analytical memos

I found it most useful to continuously analyse data collected by maintaining analytical memos in a researcher blog where I noted down my personal thoughts, observations, insights and reflections; and also to document those priceless 'Eureka!' moments when an interesting idea or phenomenon suddenly occurred to me when I least expected it to. I also wrote memos to help organise my ideas and any concepts that occur to me while reading, understanding, analysing and interpreting the data, to facilitate larger ideas to occur that may assist in forming initial categories leading to the development of themes.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described journal records or entries to be modern day blogs, which are similar to memos or analytical memos which Charmaz (2014), Robson and McCartan (2016) and Saldana (2013) recommend to maintain. The

authors impressed on the importance of analytical memos as a tool to document and facilitate self-discussion to reflect on thoughts, ideas, codes, themes, and patterns, which may be lost if not noted down immediately when they happen.

3.6.4 Simultaneous Data Collection and Analysis Process

In this study, data collection and analysis occurred at the same time. After preliminary data analysis, there were numerous instances when it was found that certain data were not that clear for analysis. Follow-up questions were immediately emailed to the participants for responses to fill the data gap, to assist with the continuation of the analysis. Coding also commenced as field notes and analytical memos were progressively written, and when interviews were being transcribed, as recommended by Saldana (2013).

Creswell (2013) stated that it is difficult to separate data collection, analysis and report writing activities in a qualitative study; and that data analysis and report writing may happen at the same time as data collection is happening, not waiting for one activity to complete before commencing another. Marshall and Rossman (2016) highlighted that data collection and analysis go hand in hand to facilitate the researcher to meaningfully interpret the data, by being guided with initial concepts and building the understandings which are revised as the data is continuously collected and analysed.

3.7 Data Analysis

Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained data analysis to be a step by step process that takes researchers from their interview raw data to their important study research question answers. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that “the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data is messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, and fascinating” (p. 214). In addition to data collection, data analysis and report writing processes being simultaneous in qualitative research, Creswell (2013) highlighted that in data analysis itself, there is also no linear approach and that the researcher moves in analytic process circles in a data analysis spiral; where data analysis core elements are data preparation and organisation, data reduction into themes through a coding process, and data representation into tables, figures, or discussion. Figure 3.1 below illustrates how the data analysis spiral works without linearity within the simultaneous processes of both data collection and analysis in this qualitative study, with detailed explanations from sections 3.7.1 to 3.7.3.

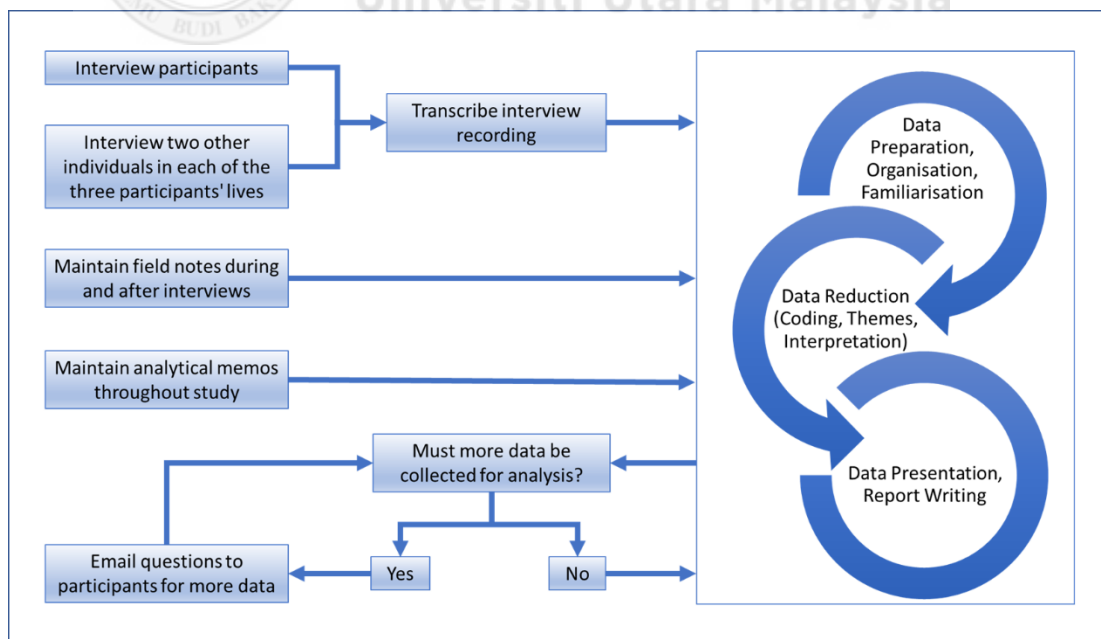


Figure 3.1. Simultaneous Processes of Data Collection and Analysis

3.7.1 Data Preparation, Organisation and Familiarisation

To prepare and organise the data, I ensured that all the different data types for all three life stories which are interview transcripts, field notes, and analytical memos, were placed in one space for easy reference. I also allocated time to immerse myself in the data by listening to the audio-recordings while going through the transcribed interviews and other data types a few times to obtain a picture of each life story studied, noting down my initial thoughts on coding and themes. Although this may seem to be easy fundamental initial steps to be done, I realised that precious time allocated to carry out these activities well was crucial to assist with the commencement of coding.

This is because Creswell (2013) emphasised that the transcribed data should be organised in one large database, before reading them entirely several times followed by breaking them down into sections and writing notes and memos down as the initial process of data exploration. Robson and McCartan (2016) also mentioned that during data familiarisation at the initial analysis stage, memos about coding ideas and theme initial thoughts should be written down.

3.7.2 Data Reduction : Thematic Coding Analysis

I used the thematic coding analysis method to analyse data in this study towards data reduction. Braun and Clarke (2013) stated that thematic coding analysis which identifies themes and patterns of meaning across datasets in relation to a research question is the most common data analysis method in qualitative research. Robson and McCartan (2016) added that the common features in qualitative data analysis such as coding, adding memos with reflections, identifying themes and relationships, using themes to collect more data, and linking to theories, all form the basis of thematic

coding analysis. Riessman (2005) stated that thematic analysis is one of the ways to analyse data in narrative studies, as the thematic approach may be used to find common themes across a number of research participants and the experiences they narrate.

3.7.2.1 Coding

I commenced initial coding by being guided by the literature review done surrounding theories and frameworks such as the Bronfenbrenner's Ecology Theory, the Resilience Theory, positive youth development, the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets framework and others. While performing coding, I also searched for new ideas, insights and concepts which were in the life story data to be coded and subsequently categorised and themed. Data which were unexpected or may seem to be contrary to theories or frameworks were also coded to ensure better quality of analysis and findings, while countering researcher bias (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Aside from coding the transcribed interviews, data analysis was also performed by the coding of field notes and analytic memos as they are equally important. After coding and identification of themes were well underway, more literature review was done to either support or challenge potential meanings and findings interpreted from the relationships of themes that emerged from the data analysis process. The emerging literature review is included in a separate section within Chapter 2 (section 2.7).

Coding is a process that identifies aspects of data that relate to the research question, and that thematic coding analysis requires complete coding where the researcher identifies everything of interest within the entire dataset that may be relevant to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Coding is marking on a copy of the transcript a word or phrase, about what a segment of data means, as thought by the

researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), and is the process of aggregating text into small categories of information while assigning a label to the code (Creswell, 2013), is more importantly linking data to data and idea to idea, identifying patterns (Saldana, 2013).

Saldana (2013) explained that field notes may include important insights and comments, and analytic memos may contain “future directions, unanswered questions, frustrations with the analysis, insightful connections” (p. 42); which are useful to be coded and categorised. Similarly, Marshall and Rossman (2016) also emphasised that these notes which will include “reflective memos, thoughts, and insights” (p. 221) will enable creative analysis of the data throughout the study.

Analysis may begin with predetermined codes and themes from literature (theory-driven), and subsequently analysed inductively with codes and themes emerging from data interaction (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Theory-generated codes are those where the literature guide the data analysis, and in vivo codes which are those that emerge from the data, may be used in coding (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). However, while literature suggest codes and themes, they should not be heavily relied on as insights which are not in the literature may be missed in the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

I sought for Malaysian Muslim cultural values of the underprivileged in the data, which may have played a significant part of my coding. As the study’s researcher, I felt I could relate to these values to identify significant codes as I myself grew up in the underprivileged Malaysian Muslim family culture. This is because for life stories, the participant is seen as a member of a culture which captures the significant role that

others play in his life, assumptions in the cultural world should be described and analysed with focus on experience over time i.e., processual development (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

I was also careful to code all interesting occurrences and turning points that I found in each of the three life stories, together with all the insights and concepts that I noticed which surrounded them. Creswell (2013) advised that data collected in a narrative study should be analysed for “the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies” (p. 189). The analysis may lead to findings highlighting the participant’s life processes, the different theories that relate to the experiences, and the life features which may be general or unique. Marshall and Rossman (2016) also highlighted that life histories may focus on crucial life moments but impressed that instead of using a chronological order to present the story, focus may be given on important aspects or dimensions of the person’s life, critical turning points and the life conditions between them, and how the person adapted.

I performed coding while being guided by the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space approach described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as the avenues to be pursued to reduce stories to a set of understandings, of temporality (past, present and future), interaction i.e., personal (feelings) and social (environment), and place. I found various similar and overlapping codes which assisted with pattern finding and categorisation to identify themes for interpretation.

3.7.2.2 Theme Identification and Relationship Interpretation

Once subthemes and themes were identified from the coding process, I checked them to the codes and data to ensure quality of potential findings. Braun and Clarke (2013) described that a theme has a central organising concept which is supported by various ideas or codes, and captures important patterned responses or meanings in the data in relation to the research question. Themes emerge from patterns in the data that are identified by reviewing codes and the data relating to each code, to identify similarity and overlap among codes to look for concepts, topics or issues. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained that themes may be formulated by linking more than two concepts found in the data, and are “summary statements, causal explanations or conclusions” which explain “why something happened, what something means, or how an interviewee feels about the matter” (p. 194).

I drew a diagram for each of the three life stories to assist me in exploring the identified themes’ relationships, which I had to revise numerous times until I felt that the diagrams showed the best way the themes fit together towards the overall analysis (refer to Chapter 4, Figures 4.4, 4.7 and 4.11). This is because good themes are required to relate and fit together well to form the overall analysis such as with hierarchical relationships (overarching theme, theme and subtheme), with visual thematic maps being a useful aid for exploring relationships among themes that assist the researcher towards developing the final results (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Braun and Clarke (2013) stated that while themes are being identified, the researcher is required to check whether the themes suit the coded data as well as the full dataset; and if they do not fit, the researcher should consider to refine the theme or drop it

altogether. This checking may also confirm themes to be substantiated and have enough depth to remain as a theme. Rubin and Rubin (2012) mentioned that as themes and the relationships among themes are developed, the researcher is required to check whether there is sufficient evidence in the data to support the assessment in the analysis and make the necessary changes if required.

After themes and their relationships are identified, interpretation is carried out to provide meaning, coherence and linkage of the results to answer the research question (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Creswell (2013) explained that interpretation in qualitative research means to obtain the larger meaning from the data which is above and beyond the codes, categories and themes; and it encompasses the learnings surrounding the phenomenon which are based on “hunches, insights and intuition” or linked to “larger research literature developed by others” (p. 187). Data analysis interprets data, relates it to the research question, as well as ties the data and analysis into scholarly literature while showing how the analysis contributes to, further develops or challenges what is in the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

I implemented the above recommended procedures in the literature to carry out the interpretation and meaning-making from the theme relationships for each of the three life stories. However, as I realised that there were various similar and different assertions or findings within each of the three life stories, I decided to undertake a cross-analysis of the three life stories as an overall analysis while relating the overall findings to the literature to better answer the research question.

3.7.3 Data Representation and Report Writing

I found that continuing to write analytical memos during the data analysis stage as well as drafting the report findings while data analysis was ongoing assisted me substantially to put my thoughts, insights, ideas, concepts, themes and meaning-making together; as the coded data appeared to me like a maze of puzzles which I needed to solve. At the initial data analysis stage, I developed a life story chronology from the coding of each participant's life from the data collected and presented it in a table. This had assisted me with the simultaneous coding, theme identification and relationship interpretation being guided by the life story three-dimensional model analysis of time, place, and relationships. The chronologies were also used in the final report, to facilitate the findings explanation and description.

Qualitative data analysis cannot be done without writing because writing is the process through which analysis develops into its final form, and qualitative analysis is writing and thinking done simultaneously (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As the data come together in themes, it is important for researchers to write about their thoughts and insights in notes and reflective memos, to assist in the meaning-making process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). It is beneficial to create a visual image of the information in a table or diagram that assists with inductive analysis while the data analysis process is ongoing (Creswell, 2013).

3.7.4 Computer Assisted Analysis

I commenced coding manually for the analysis of the first two participants' individual life stories. By doing this, I had a better sense of control by taking ownership of the work (Saldana, 2013) and felt closer to the data. Only after having experience in

manual coding which develops a basic understanding of the fundamentals of qualitative data analysis, should a computer software be used to assist in the data analysis (Saldana, 2013). After doing manual coding, I subsequently used the 'NVivo for Mac 12' software to assist with a more detailed analysis of these two life stories, before I commenced with the third life story analysis by fully using the software.

As I also found various similar and different themes within the three life stories, I proceeded to use the computer software to assist me in the cross-analysis of the three life stories. As the cross-analysis process may have proved challenging if it was manually done, the computer software assisted me tremendously in this task. Marshall and Rossman (2016) impressed that although no mechanism can replace the researcher's mind, a computer software can be a useful tool for qualitative research. Creswell (2013) stated that computer programmes helps to store data and access codes especially for large databases, that: (a) helps with locating material like memos, ideas, statements, phrases or words from one storage space, (b) encourages a researcher to analyse data in detail and line by line, and (c) helps with code and theme relationship visualising due to ease in drawing visual models. Rubin and Rubin (2012) affirms that computer-assisted qualitative data analysis programmes (CAQDAS) ease data management and analysis, even though the researcher still performs the analysis.

3.8 Data Validation: Rigour and Trustworthiness

I carried out the five validation strategies of maintaining an audit trail, performing triangulation, reporting negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias and carrying out member checking. Creswell (2013) highlighted that at least two validation strategies should be used in any qualitative study to ensure trustworthiness and rigour,

while countering bias; even though the validity of findings is a distinct strength of the qualitative research approach because of the excessive time spent in the field interviewing, as well as the close-trust relationship between the researcher and the participants; which add to the rigour, value and accuracy of study findings.

Even though qualitative researchers are expected to influence research procedures and the knowledge produced, and researcher role is not minimised as a source of error or bias like in quantitative studies (Braun & Clarke, 2013); the issues of bias and rigour are never absent when a human being is the data collection tool (Robson & McCartan, 2016), and we are unable to focus on the qualitative researcher to be reliable as the instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Therefore, Marshall and Rossman (2016) highlighted that qualitative researchers identify the traits that enable us to be credible and our data interpretation to be trustworthy. For trustworthiness, the traditional terms used were “reliability, validity, objectivity and generalisability”, and Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) modernisation of them are “credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability” (p. 47) are to be included within the research design stage. Guba & Lincoln (1989) (cited in Morse, 2015) explained that credibility is reinforced with prolonged engagement, triangulation and member checking; transferability is strengthened with the thick descriptions to transfer the study findings to another set of individuals or context; reliability and dependability is attained through credibility and audit trail; and confirmability is attained by using triangulation and audit trail.

3.8.1 Maintaining an Audit Trail

I maintained all the research documents and records that may act as an audit trail in of the study to support trustworthiness and rigour, as well as for potential future transferability. An audit trail provides information on how data were collected and managed in a transparent manner so that the whole study process may be traced with evidence (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), and maintained by keeping a complete record of all study procedures carried out such as interview transcripts, field notes, memos, as well as data analysis details (Robson & McCartan, 2016)

3.8.2 Performing Triangulation

Triangulation was done by interviewing two important individuals in each of the participants' lives; as well as reviewing theories or frameworks such as the Bronfenbrenner Ecology Theory and Resilience Theory, or other research findings such as on parenting styles as well as religiosity and spirituality to triangulate categories or themes found. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that triangulation is “the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point” (p. 262) and that different source data may be used to elaborate and illuminate the research. It is a strategy to assert that the researcher's data interpretation is credible, as evidence is provided to show that the participants' data is accurate. Creswell (2013) added that in triangulation, researchers use other data sources and theories to provide corroborating evidence to shed light on themes or perspectives found.

3.8.3 Reporting Negative Case Analysis

I consciously did not disregard any negative, contrary or unexpected findings I found in this study, as they are crucial to be included within the overall results discussion

towards the conclusion. Robson and McCartan (2016) stated that to counter researcher bias, researchers should not limit themselves to substantiate preconceived standings but be open to contrary findings. Creswell (2013) pointed out that hypotheses are to be refined in light of negative evidences, as not all evidence fit the identified patterns from data so that a more realistic assessment is made on the phenomenon. This is because in the real world, evidence is not always positive and is usually a mix of both the positive and negative.

3.8.4 Clarifying Researcher Bias

To clarify researcher bias, I had included comments with regards to reflexivity and self-awareness throughout the thesis with emphasis in Chapter 1 (Introduction) to guide the reader to understand my biases as the researcher to support the overall study validation. Creswell (2013) emphasised that as a validation strategy, it is important for the reader to understand the researcher's position, biases and assumptions that may affect the study from the study outset. The researcher should comment on experiences, orientations and prejudices that may have shaped study approach and data interpretation. Marshall and Rossman (2016) highlighted that when a researcher's biases are transparently disclosed, the final report reader may assess how researcher identity elements affected the study.

3.8.5 Carrying Out Member Checking

I performed member checking by providing the research result summary to the participants for feedback to seek their comments on the accuracy of data collected from them. The member checking was performed at two stages before the final report was written. The first stage of member checking was at the individual life story

analysis stage when each participant was given their respective life stories findings to review. The second stage of member checking was at the cross-analysis stage of all three life stories, when they were provided with the same findings which involved all three life stories to review. Member checking is when the findings and result summaries are handed to the participants, where they are asked whether the researcher understood the data obtained from them, and his or her feedback and insights are obtained before the final report is written (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), and is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 319) (cited in Creswell, 2013).

3.9 Summary

This chapter summarises the current study’s research methodology using qualitative research, focusing on the collection and analysis of life stories which were simultaneously carried out within the narrative inquiry approach. The research design is presented by reviewing and comparing the relevant scholarly literature, followed by an explanation of how the research procedures recommended by various authors were carried out in this current study when value was seen in their implementation. The important subjects of role of the researcher, ethical considerations and data validity in a qualitative study such as this were also discussed, which completed the chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS FROM ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL LIFE STORIES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of each of the three participants' life stories; to answer the question of how an underprivileged individual can develop resilience and other soft skills to thrive, despite being exposed to risks earlier in life that could have hindered the development of abilities and skills. To answer this research question, the chapter presents the protective factors or developmental assets present in the lives of each participant, their life experiences and turning points. In this chapter, each individual life story section commences with the overall life story of the participant, followed by the participant's profile. Information about the other interviewees and how they are related to each participant is then presented.

The life story of each participant is then retold while being guided by the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to understand life stories as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) of time (temporality), place, and relationships (interactions, or feelings and environment). For each participant, life experiences are analysed against a timeline, with indication of the place and relationships related to each experience to understand the life stories better. After the clarity of each life story, the subsequent section then presents the emerging themes and subthemes from the thematic analysis towards achieving the research objectives. To conclude, the findings summary of each participant's life story is presented.

4.2 The Life Story of Firdaus

4.2.1 Firdaus' Story

The story of Firdaus is about a blind boy from an extremely poor family of eight siblings. With his resilience and other soft skills, he had achieved so much in school while leaving the other blind students trailing far behind. Firdaus is the only one among his siblings who is academically inclined, with an undergraduate degree. After working at his university to help manage and counsel disabled students, as well as getting married recently, he is now pursuing his postgraduate degree.

4.2.1.1 Firdaus' Profile

Firdaus was born in May 1991 in Kulim, Kedah. He is the fifth child in a family of eight siblings with an elder sister and six brothers, one of whom was born blind. Firdaus had glaucoma when he was a child and became totally blind on 31 March 2005, when he was 14 years old. At the time of the scholarship interview, his father, a retired civil servant was earning a pension of RM725 while his mother was a housewife. Firdaus is the only one among his siblings who made it to university.

He did his primary school studies in Sekolah Kebangsaan Kulim, and took his *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR, Standard 6) in 2003. He started his secondary studies in *Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Keladi*, but when he suddenly lost his eyesight completely early in his second year, he had to enrol in a special school that catered for the blind. He continued his secondary school studies and took his *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM, Form 5) examinations in 2008 at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Alma, Penang. He then continued his studies at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tengku Abdul Malik, Kedah where he took his *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran*

Malaysia (STPM, Form 6) examinations in 2010 and won an achievement award for his excellent results. Throughout his secondary school education, he won state-level competitions for various sports such as goalball, short put and athletics; while being active in school club activities and as the President of the Goalball Club, Society of Disabled Students and Inclusive Club.

Firdaus went on to complete his Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology & Sociology undergraduate degree in University of Malaya in 2014, achieving a Cumulative Grade Point (CGPA) of 3.56. While in university, he was on the Dean's List in 2013 and 2014, while also being the Chairman and Vice President of the JTKDOKU Za'ba UM Club and the PERMIUM Club respectively. Firdaus proceeded to work as an Administrative Officer for Students with Disabilities at the Counselling and Career Section, University of Malaya, and decided to get married in early 2017. He then pursued his dream to continue with his postgraduate studies, and commenced his Masters in Professional Counselling at the University of Malaya in September 2017.



Figure 4.1. Firdaus and myself, just after I interviewed him for the second time at his impressive office at University of Malaya on 7 July 2017.

4.2.1.2 First Interviewee Profile in Relation to Firdaus

Puan Siti Fatimah bt. Ismail, who was 58 years old at the time of interview, is Firdaus' mother. She has been a housewife all her life and raised Firdaus and his seven other siblings almost single-handedly, as her husband who worked in the army was mostly away from home.



Figure 4.2. Puan Siti Fatimah and myself, just after I interviewed her at Firdaus' house at the University of Malaya staff quarters on 5 September 2017, while he was away working. She stays in Kulim, Kedah but was visiting him during this time.

4.2.1.3 Second Interviewee Profile in Relation to Firdaus

Encik Wan Zolkipli bin Wan Ismail, who was 58 years old at time of interview, is Firdaus' former secondary boarding school teacher who used to teach Firdaus how to

read Braille. He was also the boarding school warden and lived in his house near Firdaus' hostel at the boarding school. He was responsible for and acted like a father to Firdaus when he was in school. He was very close to Firdaus while he was at the boarding school, and is still in touch with Firdaus until today.



Figure 4.3. Encik Wan Zolkipli and myself, just after I interviewed him at the Bukit Mertajam train station in Penang on 29 September 2017.

4.2.2 Retelling Firdaus' Story

Firdaus is the inspiration for this current study, as highlighted and described in Chapter 1. Although he is blind, he is usually the life of any party. He is a pleasant, talkative and opinionated young man who strives to improve his life every day, even though he has already achieved so much for someone from his family background and with his disability. Apparently, an undergraduate degree is not enough to reflect life success for Firdaus. He commenced his postgraduate degree, a Masters in Professional Counselling in September 2017, to secure an even better future for himself and his new family, after getting married in March 2017.

During his storytelling, Firdaus disclosed the challenges he faced in his life at home, at school and in the neighbourhood where he and his family were living. It is evident that he led a difficult life, facing trial after trial, which appeared to have assisted him to be resilient and develop other soft skills, building his willpower to excel and thrive in life. Firdaus described how his family lived in poverty, and provided examples of how poor they were when he was a child attending school.

“We searched for school shoes thrown behind houses in our neighbourhood, picked them up and washed them for use. This is because we did not have enough money to buy such things at the time. We collected discarded school shoes and school bags, and reused them. We did not feel any embarrassment doing this, because that was how my mother taught us. We lived a modest and difficult life. We ate rice with margarine, that was the way my mother taught us to live.”

Firdaus expressed that his neighbours thought that they were a family of crazy people. One of the reasons is because they looked through their neighbours' rubbish and took anything that could still be used. In addition, as he and his siblings who were mostly boys were not allowed out of the house much, they played actively in their house; and because of this, their windows were mostly broken. However, as his parents did not have money to replace them, they were covered with cloth, which added to their neighbours' dislike for the family as they did not conform to the neighbourhood normality.

To add on to his life trials, even though he took on many leadership roles and participated in various activities in school which were much to his satisfaction, he faced challenges with the other students for different reasons at different stages in school. In primary school, they teased him because he appeared effeminate and liked to befriend girls. However, his teachers provided him support throughout this school stage. In secondary school, the other blind students appeared to be jealous of him after he was appointed Library Prefect; a high achievement considering he was the very first visually-impaired Library Prefect in his school. The other blind students also appeared to ignore him because he was the first blind student to participate in school clubs and activities and this affected him. He mentioned that he was so sad with the situation that he had cried often during this time. However, he made friends with the other visually abled students, with whom he fit in well with; as well as his teachers who provided him with care and warmth.

Firdaus' mother appears to have made the largest impact in his life, shaping and developing him to be the person he is today, with him describing her with much animation and love. On the other hand, he appeared sorrowful that his father did not spend enough time with the family due to working away from home, and did not provide much support to Firdaus' mother in bringing up their eight children. Firdaus' mother herself had expressed that she faced much hardship in raising her children all on her own.

Firdaus' highest achievements occurred immediately after two important turning points in his life, which provided him with epiphanies and the realisation which changed how he viewed and lived his life. The stages in life were when Firdaus became

completely blind, losing his eyesight at the age of 14; and when his father had an outburst about his children's lack of academic achievements when Firdaus was 17.

Firdaus' life story may be made clearer with an analysis of his prominent experiences through time which is tabulated in Table 4.1 below, described by place and relationships, which are potentially related to his resilience and soft skills development.

Table 4.1

Firdaus' Prominent Experiences According to Age

Age	Firdaus' Experiences	Place, Relationships
6 - 12	Gradual increase in confidence and other soft skills to take up leadership roles from kindergarten to primary school. He was more an observer and follower.	School, teachers and friends
10	Confided in mother when fellow students were giving him a hard time at school as he was close to the girls and was considered 'soft' or effeminate. His mother advised him to stop his participation in school activities to mitigate the teasing.	School, school friends, mother
13	Sudden increase in confidence when he entered secondary school in Form 1. He took on leadership roles and was involved in school activities.	School, teachers
14	Became totally blind and changed schools. Sudden expansion of protective factors in his life in boarding school because he effectively had another close 'parent' to look after him and provide protective factors.	Home and secondary school, mother and teachers

15 - 17	Mother saw him change after he became blind and went to boarding school, he was more hardworking with schoolwork and became manly in nature.	Secondary school, teachers
	Did not confide in mother about problems with fellow blind students who ignored him, gave him the cold shoulder and spoke bad things about him behind his back. Instead, Firdaus sought solace from God and found strength to pull through these tough times.	Secondary school, other blind students
17	Father's outburst, just before Firdaus sat for his Sijil Pelajaran Malaysian (SPM) examinations. He took it as a challenge and responsibility to do well in his SPM, with the final objective of entering into university as his father had aspired for him to do.	Home, father
17 - now	First and only one among his siblings to have a university degree.	

4.2.3 Emerging Themes and Subthemes from Firdaus' Life Story

Firdaus' life story was read many times, with the identification of codes being carried out simultaneously while being guided by the relevant theories and frameworks from the literature review to commence the coding process, acting as a catalyst to identify various other codes from the life story. The identified codes were then categorised and themed for relationship and pattern identification. These processes were assisted with the NVivo for Mac 12 software; for data coding management because of the large volume of data, and to draw up diagrams to assist with the brainstorming and mind mapping that visualised thoughts from the identified codes and mapped out ideas on relationships and patterns. This resulted in the identification of emerging themes at the end of the process.

The challenge encountered was how to relate the identified themes within the thematic coding analysis process. After numerous attempts at relating the emerging themes, it was found that the themes could be related and fit together to attempt to answer the three research questions identified at the beginning of the study. Braun and Clarke (2013) had recommended that an overall analysis be done by identifying hierarchical theme relationships that include overarching themes, themes and subthemes. Therefore, for this thematic analysis, the subject matters behind the three research questions were identified as the overarching themes within Firdaus' life story, and the emerging themes and their subthemes were connected to them as well as among the themes and subthemes themselves. A diagram was drawn up on the emerging hierarchical theme relationship in Firdaus' life, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013) to assist final research result development, using the Microsoft PowerPoint software and is presented in Figure 4.4.

The findings from the analysis of Firdaus' life story as visualised in the diagram in Figure 4.4 below are elaborated in detail from sections 4.2.4 to 4.2.6. In summary, it was found that the risk factors of extreme poverty and Firdaus' disability may have been countered by the strong protective factors which were found in the emerging themes and subthemes in Firdaus' life story. These include the warmth and support, the discipline and training, as well as the religiosity and spirituality in his upbringing. His life experiences include the opportunities during the various stages of his school life, and his relationship with his schoolmates and the community. In addition, his two life turning points of becoming completely blind at 14, and his father's outburst about his children's lack of academic achievements when Firdaus was 17; may have changed

his outlook on life and assisted him to be more resilient while developing his other soft skills.

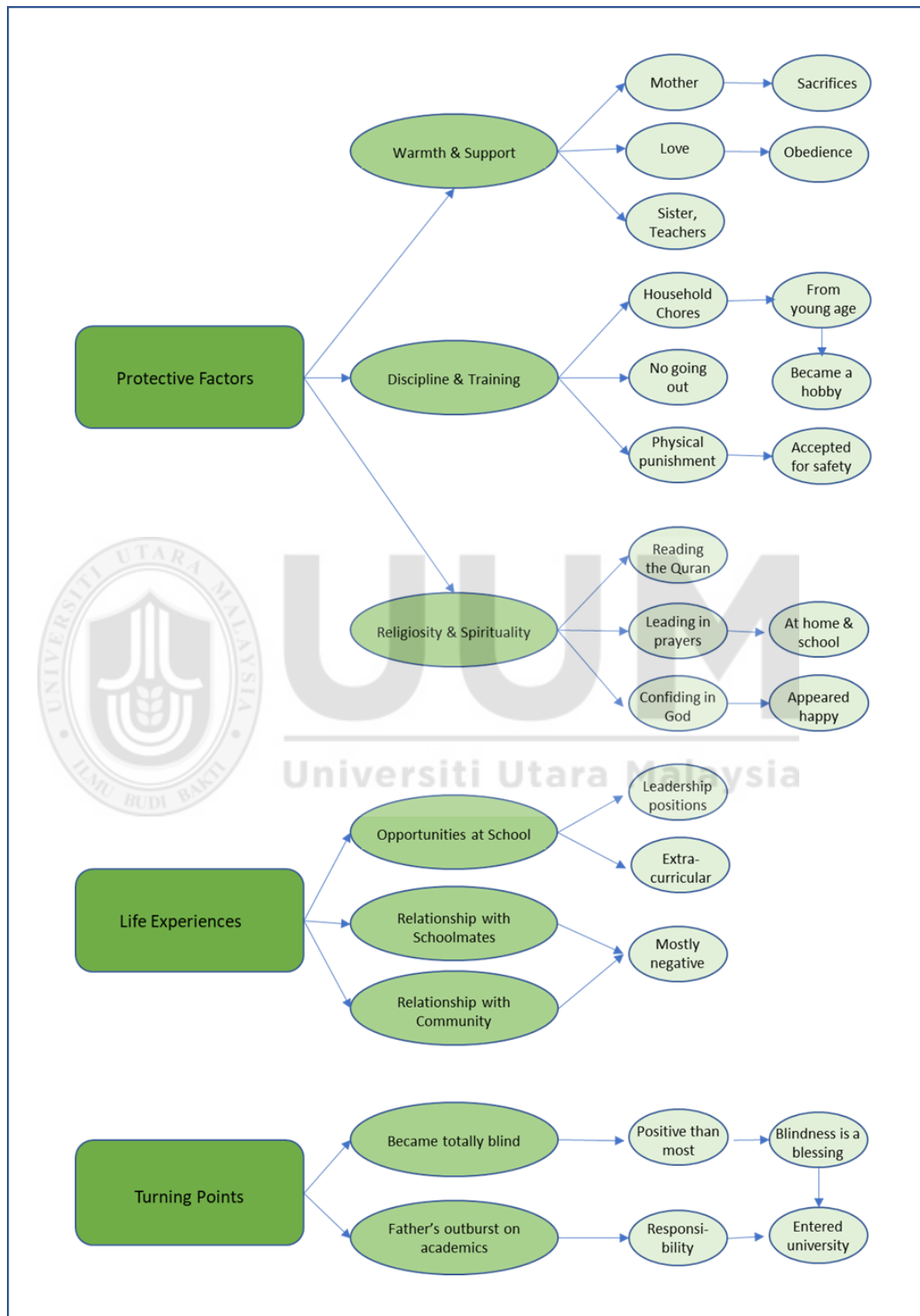


Figure 4.4. The emerging themes and subthemes from the analysis of Firdaus' life story.

4.2.4 Protective Factors and Development Assets in Firdaus' Life

From the analysis of Firdaus' life story, various protective factors and developmental assets were noted during different stages or times of his life through relationships with various close adults either at home or at school, but especially his mother at home. These protective factors and developmental assets include a warm and supportive environment, with high discipline and training coupled with upbringing filled with religiosity and spirituality; which were found to be intertwined and worked synergistically together.

4.2.4.1 Warm and Supportive Environment

Throughout his storytelling, Firdaus displayed a lot of love for his parents, especially his mother. He explained that it was his love for his mother and father that pushed him to work diligently and strive to enter university. When he received his university offer letter and later his outstanding university examination results, he proudly showed them these documents and told them that he had worked hard to achieve their dreams, rather than his own. His mother confirmed this in her storytelling as well.

From her storytelling, Firdaus' mother appeared to have provided him with a warm and supportive environment due to her strong beliefs and values. She highlighted that children must always be given focus and attention, to provide them with the best care.

“With our children, we cannot lose focus. There should be extra attention. We must provide them with the extra attention. Only then will there be love.”

Firdaus exhibits unconditional love for his parents, especially his mother, mainly due to the sacrifices she made for her children. He described the situation when, despite the adversities they faced, his mother provided him with a supportive environment by sending him and his siblings to school, with three or four of them riding pillion at the same time on her bicycle or motorcycle. Although their neighbours complained about how unsafe it was for her to do this; she continued to send her children to school this way, simply because she had no other choice. The challenges he saw her face on her own, and the sacrifices she made to support him and his siblings, convinced him that success is a critical milestone in his life.

“... I saw my mother crying while bringing us up and facing challenges, and this is the reason why I love her so much..... she handled everything alone because my father was always away at work.”

Firdaus' mother related how she chartered a taxi at RM30 a day, a substantial amount to her at the time, to send Firdaus to and fro from school during his SPM examinations as his boarding school was closed. It was difficult for her, but she related how it was worth it as Firdaus had expressed to her that mainly because of her sacrifices, he was working hard to succeed in his own life.

Firdaus' boarding school teacher believes that one of the main reasons for Firdaus' success is that Firdaus has a supportive family, which he had observed during his school days. It was also found that Firdaus' teacher himself provided a supportive environment for Firdaus at his boarding school, which was facilitated by the fact that

he lived in the school compound with the students and he made sure he spent time with the blind students every day. He described how Firdaus performed group prayers with him, and how he brought Firdaus and his friends out for school excursions. On these school trips, the blind students were encouraged to do things which seeing young boys do, such as experiencing fun waterpark activities and even something as adventurous as abseiling. His intentions were to prove to them that they could do anything they set their minds to, despite their physical disabilities, and that blindness does not stop them from doing anything they target to achieve. The teacher also displayed warmth and care by preparing extra food at home, so that the boys could enjoy home-cooked meals every now and then. He explained that this assisted him to be closer to the students, and have a much better relationship with them.

Firdaus' teacher also related that he encouraged his blind students to participate in the various activities that he organised when they were under his care at boarding school. He expressed that he believed that his blind students should experience everything that an able student usually experiences, as their disability should not hold back their personal development which may be facilitated by these activities.

“... for whatever activities, such as sports or others, group activities like choir or camping; I provided them (his blind students) with the full opportunity to participate. Even for those who told me that they could not do it (due to their blindness), I encouraged them to participate and not let the opportunity pass. As long as I knew that the student had some interest in it.”

The warm and supportive environment at school may have assisted Firdaus to be outstanding academically, as the teacher related how exceptionally quick Firdaus learnt Braille even though he became blind when he was already a teenager. The teacher advised that from his experience, he had expected Firdaus to take a longer time to learn to read Braille because Firdaus was not blind from birth. His teacher explained that Firdaus' fingers would not have been sensitive enough for him to easily touch and sense the Braille dots for him to read Braille. However, Firdaus managed to learn to read basic Braille within a month of learning, pleasantly surprising his teacher. Due to his close relationship with his blind students, the teacher is currently still in touch and occasionally meets up with his former students to see how they are doing. He also continues to provide them with advice, including Firdaus.

Firdaus is also very close with his sister, the eldest of his siblings. He described how when he was young, he would rather spend time with his sister in the kitchen as his mother had trained her to do more in the kitchen, as well as to sew. He also mentioned that he was close to his brothers and played a lot of games with them, but he would rather spend time with his mother and sister at home, and he liked to cook and clean. Firdaus now feels a sense of responsibility towards his younger two siblings as they are still schooling, and he feels that they are not being brought up in the strict environment that he was raised in. Also, they do not listen to Firdaus' mother's instructions like he used to, as she is not as strong and as healthy as before. He was worried about their wellbeing and was considering to get his younger siblings to live with him so that he could provide the support for them as his mother did for him.

Firdaus displays a high level of obedience and compliance, mentioned by both his mother and teacher. His level of compliance may be a result of his unconditional love for his parents, as well as high level of spirituality he has due to his upbringing.

“I believe that if we do good by our parents, we will receive only goodness in our life. I live by this principle. If our parents are sad, we will receive sadness in life. If we make them happy, we will receive happiness. So that is why I do not do things which make them concerned or worried about me..... I do not wish to make them cry because of me.... I always ask my mother to pray for me.... Because I believe that whatever they ask for me, I shall receive.... Whatever I have right now is not totally due to my hard work, but I am sure it is because of their prayers.... I do everything with my trust and belief in God because of my parents.”

4.2.4.2 Discipline and Training

Firdaus described his mother as stricter and fiercer than his father. As she herself was brought up by a strict policeman father, she believed in the importance of instilling a high discipline environment at home.

“Discipline will ensure that they are obedient to us, and that they do not lie to us. They will do whatever is right by us. They will have good manners. If there is no discipline, then there will be no respect for us.”

However, even though she was stricter and fiercer with her children, Firdaus has a much closer relationship with his mother as compared to his father. This is mainly because his father was not at home most of the time, and due to the warmth and support his mother gave him. Firdaus described his mother to be strict and controlling as she did not allow them to play outside the house, and would punish them physically when they disobeyed her instruction. He remembers the pain caused by her physical punishments.

“...she did not have to call out to us, she did not have to shout. She would just show us (from afar) what she would use (to punish us with), and we would run home. This is because we were afraid of (the pain which would be inflicted with) what she held in her hand.”

Firdaus's mother described how she would have to implement physical punishments to ensure the safety of her children. She advised that even when the father mentioned something, she would be the one who beat them, rather than him. However, Firdaus expressed how his father was also sometimes strict and fierce.

“My father did not physically punish us very often, but when he decided to, he would go all out, that was my father's way. He loves his children, he listened to them, he spoilt them, but when he became very angry with us, which would be may be once or twice a year, the whole house would shake..... my father would physically punish everyone in the house, even though only one of us did something wrong. That was my father's way.”

However, Firdaus displayed that he understood that the strict environment at home was for their own good.

“.... Normally, we dislike fierce people. However, it was not that way for us as she was fierce because she was just being our mother. Although we were physically punished daily, we barely felt the pain. This is because it became normal for us... When we received the punishments every day, we cried for a short while. And after she stopped and went away, we would laugh as if nothing had happened. It felt somewhat normal because we were stubborn children..... This was the way my mother educated us. She was fierce with us, but it had a good impact on her children’s development.”

Both Firdaus’ mother and teacher described Firdaus to be an obedient boy, and usually did as he was told. His teacher advised that Firdaus did not shirk from carrying out any tasks requested by his teachers, especially with prayers, and followed his teacher’s advice. Firdaus related how his mother trained them to do house chores from very young.

“.... my grandfather physically trained his children; about time, about cleanliness. That was what my mother tried to apply for her children.... Although we were boys, we had a duty roster. For example, today my duty is to be in front so I would work at the lawn area only. Everything about the lawn cleanliness would be under my responsibility. If my elder brother

was tasked to work in the kitchen, he would be only in the kitchen. He would have to wash the dishes, he would have to do everything in the kitchen. He would not do anything in the front. If someone was tasked for the rooms, then their duty would be the rooms only. So, it was very structured that way. And even though we were just six or seven years old, we could already cook. This is because my mother had taught us how to. Now that I think of it, even though I am visually-impaired, I can even cook today.”

There appears to be no distress or trauma displayed when Firdaus’ related about the physical punishments he experienced from young. Instead, he appeared to be proud about the strict environment at home relating to carrying out house chores, such as how he and his siblings could already cook, clean the house and wash their clothes from as young as six years old.

“For example, I am able to iron all my shirts and pants on my own even though I am visually impaired. This is the reason why I feel that the training that my mother provided to me from before until today is positive, if you will accept it as being positive.”

Firdaus also appears to have a strong sense of responsibility over his younger brothers, and he showed concern that his mother has now mellowed down and is not as strict with his youngest two siblings as she was with him and the others, as she is not as strong as she used to be due to old age. He explained that his younger siblings are

currently unable to do house chores, even though the youngest brother is ten years old which is a much older age than when Firdaus and his older brothers could carry out all the chores.

4.2.4.3 Religiosity and Spirituality

Firdaus' family is Muslim, and Firdaus related how his mother ensured that he and his siblings read the holy Quran each day after Subuh (dawn) and Maghrib (sunset) prayers. He explained that during weekends and holidays, she would ensure that they read the Quran for a longer period of time in the morning, which is from Subuh to sunrise. Firdaus described his mother to be constantly holding the cane, the equipment of choice for physical punishment if necessary, while sitting with them to ensure that they do this. As a result, Firdaus managed to finish reading the Quran five times before he became totally blind. His mother also saw to it that they performed their five prayers daily.

Firdaus' mother spoke repeatedly about parenting while being guided by religiosity and spirituality. She believed strongly that only with this method of child upbringing, which must start from a very young age; will her children obey her instead of becoming rowdy and uncontrollable. She seemed to think that the latter is a norm in her community, and that children who go against their parents wishes like going out and not coming home until the wee hours of the morning, are involved in unsafe activities.

“Reading the Quran is important... Knowledge in religion is most important, for me..... We wish for our children to favour the verses in the

Quran, and that they can read them.... We cannot start only when they are older..... We have to guide them from very young. This is why all my children are not that 'wild'. They don't go out at night, coming back at 2, 3 in the morning..... We wish for our children to excel in reading the Quran and performing their prayers. Our children will be obedient, they will be well mannered. If not, they will talk back at us. Children who do not have religious teachings will be brave enough to fight back, you know.”

Firdaus' mother related how she also encouraged Firdaus and his siblings to 'fast' from a very young age. Fasting, in the Muslim religion, is to heighten religiosity and spirituality practices, while refraining from consuming food and water throughout the day from dawn to dusk. During Ramadhan, the Muslim fasting month, Firdaus and his siblings were made to spend most of their time at the mosque and read the Quran. Firdaus related that his mother also told stories about the prophets to them. Firdaus admitted that he did not understand why his mother emphasised on religious matters when he was young, but understands now as he is older and realises the positive impact.

“My mother was strict. When we came home at 7 pm, and after we had a bath, we were required to read the Quran, she was very particular about this. Only when we were older and completed school did we realise that what my mother was doing all this while was critical to build our soft skills, and develop our identity.”

On the exceptional days when he gets home early from work, Firdaus' father would read from his religious books and give sermons to his children after Maghrib prayers. The father's favourite sermon subject matter, which both Firdaus and his mother related in their storytelling, was about how Muslims are required to respect and obey their mothers; and this further contributed to Firdaus' compliance to his mother's instructions and requests. Firdaus also mentioned that at home, he used to lead the prayer sessions that is to act as the 'imam' in prayers. He advised that even at school, he would volunteer to lead prayer sessions when he was provided with the opportunity.

Firdaus felt that his teachers in Form 1 realised his potential in becoming a leader due to his capability in leading prayers. Firdaus' mother also related that Firdaus' teacher favoured Firdaus in comparison to his other students because Firdaus likes to read the Quran. In line with this, Firdaus' teacher described Firdaus as a student who consistently performed Subuh prayers with him daily, while sometimes taking the role of the 'imam' to lead the prayer sessions.

From his storytelling, Firdaus' upbringing appeared to be influenced by strong religious teachings received from various adults close to him. He explained that he believed then and still does now that he will receive blessings from God in return for the happiness he gives his parents. He also expressed that he believes that their prayers for him will consistently be answered, with no exceptions. He commented that his parents' prayers for his success resulted in his university degree and his job achievements. He related that he communicated with them that his success is not for himself, but for them. This was confirmed by Firdaus' mother in her storytelling, who went on to say that none of her other children have said this to her except for Firdaus.

After he completely lost his sight and entered a new school which catered for the visually-impaired together with seeing students, Firdaus explained that he was sorrowful about how the other blind students were treating him and what they were saying about him. This was mainly due to Firdaus' achievements even though he was visually-impaired like them such as being the first blind student to be appointed as a Library Prefect as well as participating in clubs. However, unlike what he used to do when he was younger and in primary school, he advised that he did not confide in his mother or any other adult close to him. Instead, he admitted that he chose to cry in private and confide in God to maintain resilience.

“....I was given the cold shoulder and not treated well. I communicated with Allah, and I was granted fortitude. I am unsure how, but I could handle the situation at the time. Now when I reminisce about it, I remember how very sorrowful I felt at the time, but not to the extent of suicide or blaming fate. At the beginning it was unclear for me, and I felt quite lost.

But Allah helped and gave me clarity, and that was because of the strong religious training towards my development and identity.”

When asked about this period of Firdaus' life, both his mother and teacher commented that Firdaus did not have any issues during his secondary school years in boarding school. His mother had even described that Firdaus flourished and thrived when he was in the school, and was more hardworking to achieve better academically.

4.2.5 Firdaus' Life Experiences

There were life experiences which may have been significant to shape Firdaus into a resilient person with various soft skills to enable him to thrive in life, which were filled with protective as well as risk factors which he experienced together. These include those during his various school stages, and in his relationships with his schoolmates and the community.

4.2.5.1 In the Various School Stages

Aside from resilience, Firdaus displayed various other soft skills when he related about his experiences in various stages of his school life. From a very young age, he exhibited the presence of confidence, adaptability and leadership skills. Although he was teased in primary school for being somewhat effeminate as he seemed to interact more with girls, and liked to sweep the floor and clean the classroom; he developed confidence and leadership skills by being active in school.

In secondary school, both before and after he became totally blind, he was active and took on leadership roles and participated in various activities. Although he was treated badly by his blind schoolmates and teachers in charge of the blind students, his good relationship with the other teachers and seeing schoolmates as well as his high level of spirituality enabled him to think positively and excel in school as well as his final examinations. His favourite learning stage was at university, where he expressed that he used all the soft skills he developed from young to thrive and succeed.

Firdaus described that he was different from the other children in kindergarten, as he easily adapted himself when his mother sent him to school on the first day and she did not have to wait around like the other parents. He was not afraid and did not cry like the other children, instead he mingled with his newfound friends. As he was not shy to talk to others, his teachers would often select him to speak at any activities. He jokingly said that this is why if he is given a microphone today, he would not let it go.

In primary school, Firdaus was appointed a prefect, although he admitted that he was still somewhat a follower and did not have much leadership skills yet at the time, and was still learning. Firdaus mentioned that he was appointed as class monitor in Standard 3 and was active in all school activities, except for sports. His mother advised that he was already having trouble with his sight from very young and could not participate in sports. Instead, Firdaus volunteered to lead in activities that even had the participation of older children.

In secondary school, he was appointed as a prefect in Form 1. When he was transferred to the integrated school with facilities for the blind during Form 2, Firdaus related how he brought changes to the blind community. He was the first blind student to be appointed as a Library Prefect. Firdaus was also the first blind student to enrol himself into various school clubs and associations. He described how he was an outspoken student who was unafraid to voice his opinions and had requested for a change of a resource teacher in Mathematics, as this teacher who was managing the blind students was not carrying out her duties. Firdaus explained that for a blind student, having effective resource teachers in the subjects of Mathematics and Science is critical; and therefore he had to speak up not only for himself but for the other blind students as

well. As he did not have any support at school, he explained that he sought his father's advice and assistance, and his father helped him make a case to be reported to the authorities that facilitated the change of teacher. He related that unfortunately, not all the teachers and students saw the positive side of his actions and he faced backlash due to this. However, Firdaus expressed that he learnt a lot in stakeholder management from this situation, and would not change how he had handled it.

Firdaus highlighted that he excelled in university mainly because of all the learning experiences from his hard life in secondary school. In university, he related that he was elected as club president for disabled students, which he felt was such an important role. Firdaus described that he exercised the freedom to display and improve his leadership skills in university, and enjoyed his time studying there.

4.2.5.2 Relationship with Schoolmates

In his storytelling, Firdaus appeared to be quite affected by his schoolmates who used to tease him, bully him, talk about him behind his back and ignore him. These may be risk factors in his life which were countered by the strong protective factors such as the warmth and support from his mother, as well as religiosity and spirituality.

In primary school, he related that he encountered mean boys in his class who used to tease him using hurtful words, due to his effeminate ways. However, he mentioned that although this situation made him sad, it did not stop him from being active in school. Firdaus added that he was appointed class monitor and continued to participate in school activities.

In secondary school, when he was the first blind student to be appointed Library Prefect as well as participated in school clubs and associations, Firdaus described how it did not fare well with his blind schoolmates and teachers who managed the blind students. Firdaus claimed that as he was the first blind student to be appointed into a leadership role and was active in extra-curricular activities, the blind students ignored him as they did not take the change he was making to their community positively. He related that they also spoke about him behind his back, which made him very sad. He admitted that he cried a lot during this time but he did not share his feelings with anyone, including his mother, as he did not want her to worry about him when he was living away from her at boarding school. However, he advised that he found solace in God.

Firdaus mentioned that he got along very well with his visually abled schoolmates in secondary school as they did not treat him differently and accepted him for who he was. Firdaus also related that he had no issues with his university mates, and enjoyed his time during his tertiary studies.

4.2.5.3 Relationship with the Community

Firdaus explained that he is very close to his family members, especially his siblings and they played together a lot. His mother described that when he was very young, he used to call the young girl neighbours who lived in front of their house to play and lead in playing 'house' or singing together. However, Firdaus only related his bad experiences with the community in his storytelling, which may be risk factors in his life which were addressed with the strong protective factors he possessed such as a warm and supportive environment at home.

Firdaus explained that he did not mix with the neighbours much as they did not like his family as they were poor. He commented that one of the reasons why Firdaus' family was disliked was because they used to look through their neighbour's rubbish for items to be reused. Firdaus related that their neighbours also accused them of stealing when anything went missing from the neighbourhood. Firdaus also mentioned that his uncles, aunties and cousins looked down on their family due to their poverty, and described that they were treated badly when they visited Firdaus' grandparents during festive holidays.

4.2.6 Firdaus' Life Turning Points

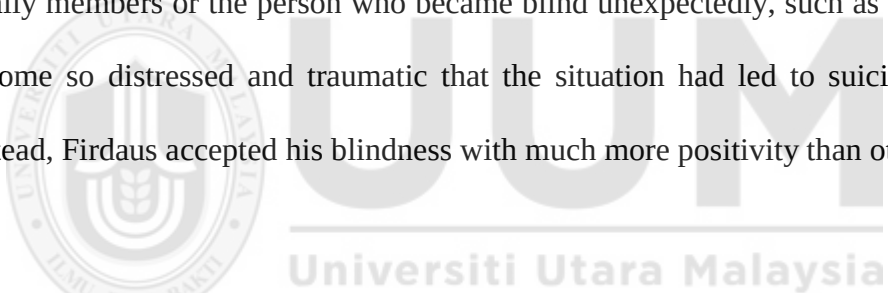
From Firdaus and his mother's storytelling, his siblings seemed to have also been brought up the same way as he was. However, the turning points in his life may have caused him to have a different outlook on life with a realisation or epiphany, resulting in him being different from his other siblings. Firdaus had experienced two significant turning points, which were expressed to have shaped him to be the person he is today. They include him becoming completely blind, and his father's outburst about his children's lack of academic achievements.

4.2.6.1 First Turning Point : Firdaus Becoming Blind at 14

Firdaus became totally blind on 31 March 2005, a date he mentioned more than once in his storytelling. His mother described that it was extremely challenging for Firdaus to come to terms with his fate of becoming completely blind. Being a teenager at the time, and as he realised that he could not do anything to reverse the fact that his world had become completely dark, Firdaus cried and threw tantrums at home. His mother advised him to stop fighting the situation, calmly accept this life challenge given by

God, and not to mourn his situation but instead to be strong. It did not take long for Firdaus to accept his fate and start living his new life positively.

On 2 May 2005, Firdaus enrolled into an integrated school which had facilities for the blind to continue his education. His teacher related that Firdaus was the only student there who had become completely blind as a teenager, while the other visually-impaired students in the school were born totally blind. His teacher explained that as this situation of becoming blind came unexpectedly for Firdaus, his experience was not the same as the other students. To illustrate how different experiences of becoming blind affect people, Firdaus' teacher described incidents in the past when either the family members or the person who became blind unexpectedly, such as Firdaus, had become so distressed and traumatic that the situation had led to suicide attempts. Instead, Firdaus accepted his blindness with much more positivity than others.

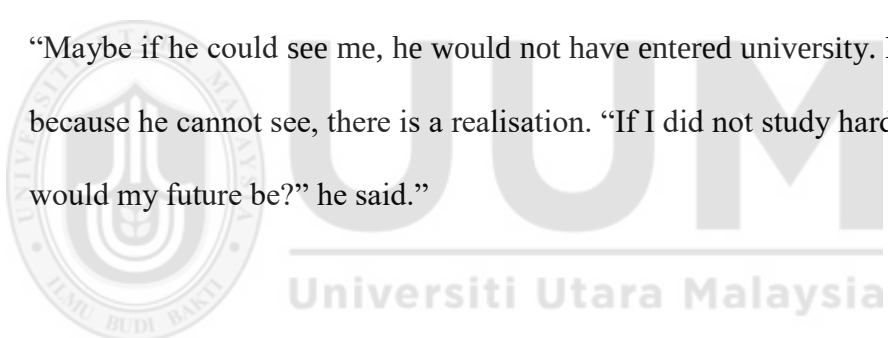


“That’s why I say that what had happened is a blessing. I am convinced that if I could see, I would not have become much.”

The above were Firdaus' words, although they are rather surprising considering what Firdaus went through when he became blind; and how becoming totally blind halfway through one's life could affect a person, as advised by his teacher. Although Firdaus had just undergone a traumatic life situation, and it was Firdaus' first time being away from his family when being transferred to the boarding school; his mother described that it was during this time that she noticed Firdaus had suddenly bloomed, flourished and thrived. His mother described Firdaus to be even more studiously hardworking,

and he participated in various activities and took on leadership roles in his new school. In addition, both Firdaus and his mother described himself becoming more masculine after the traumatic experience of losing his eyesight completely; as compared to before when he was mercilessly teased about being effeminate because he favoured interacting with his eldest sister and other girls over his brothers and other boys.

Most interestingly, both he and his mother mentioned that Firdaus may not have succeeded to obtain a university degree if he had not become completely blind, and they now consider this life turning point as a divine blessing.



“Maybe if he could see me, he would not have entered university. Maybe because he cannot see, there is a realisation. “If I did not study hard, what would my future be?” he said.”

4.2.6.2 Second Turning Point : Father’s Outburst when Firdaus was 17

“...my father began to, what do people say, think and let out his innermost feelings. And only then did I feel “Oh, actually my mother and father are sad”. Before that, I did not know that they were sad. They never shared their feelings, to tell you the truth. So, only during study did I realise that they were sad, and I began to study really hard. And yes, I achieved what they wanted of me.”

Firdaus was describing about his father’s outburst, which happened just before he took his SPM examinations at the age of 17. Apparently, his father was disappointed by

Firdaus' older siblings who did not enter university, indicating that this was an important objective in his life. And Firdaus was taken aback by this, as he never knew that his father wished for his children to enter university, as there was never any indication before that that his parents were concerned about their academic performance.

“...he told us: “I am ashamed that none of my children have successfully made it to university. One after another, they have all tried and failed.” Following that incident, I felt the pressure as I was the one in Form 5, just about to take my SPM examinations, and I was blind. I thought to myself, I have to do something to grab this opportunity. I mean to say that my father had never been this upset before, and had never expressed himself this way.... And when it was my turn (to sit for an important examination), he let out his feelings like this. I knew that I had to grab this opportunity to prove myself to him, and achieve the best in my examinations.”

Firdaus appeared to have felt a sense of pride that his father chose to express his feelings just before he was about to take his examinations. Firdaus explained that as his father is usually always at work and is a person who does not usually express himself, Firdaus sensed that his father had high hopes for him. Firdaus expressed that he felt like he had the responsibility to prove himself as his father was challenging him. His mother also related that she saw some changes in him when he was taking his SPM examinations, with Firdaus displaying more determination to succeed. He told his mother that he would do the best he could to achieve success.

Firdaus emphasised that he strived to enter university not because of his own dreams but to achieve those of his parents, and that he did not wish to let them down like his elder siblings, which had made his parents unhappy. Today, Firdaus is the exception among his eight siblings, being the only child in his family with a university degree.

4.2.7 Summary

The analysis of Firdaus' life story indicated that the biggest development asset and protective factor in his life was his mother, who not only provided him with the warmth and care he needed to counter all the risk factors in his life; but was also strict, fierce and meted out physical punishments to instil discipline. His mother also provided training for him to perform household chores from a very young age, which he enjoyed doing and can still do now although he is a blind adult. Religiosity and spirituality was a very important part of Firdaus' upbringing, and Firdaus had used his spiritual strength by seeking assistance from God to protect against the risk factor of being ignored or treated badly by his blind schoolmates in secondary school. These protective factors and development assets were found to be intertwined, working synergistically to reinforce one another and provide Firdaus with resilience and other soft skills.

Firdaus' life experiences with his schoolmates and community were mostly negative, and appear to have added on to the risk factors already in his life. However, aside from the protective factors he had; the opportunities which he took full advantage of during the various school life stages may have provided him with the experiences to further develop his resilience and other soft skills such as leadership, confidence, positive-thinking and independence. Firdaus' life turning points of becoming totally blind and

his father's outburst about his children's academic achievements, which both happened when he was an adolescent, totally turned his life around. These experiences required him to quickly and efficiently adapt to the stress and pressure he was suddenly under, which was supported by his resilience and developed his soft skills even further.

4.3 The Life Story of Amir

4.3.1 Amir's Story

Amir's story is about a young boy from a working class family in a small village in Setiu, Terengganu which was rife with the hazardous activity of illegal racing. Despite being at risk due to his life situation and economic background, Amir had learnt to read at the age of four, and had been academically excellent from his kindergarten days up to his life at a prestigious overseas university when he successfully completed a double degree with flying colours. His resilience and other soft skills, especially his entrepreneurial mindset have assisted him to thrive; moving upwards from his at-risk, modest life to being part of the senior management team of a conglomerate today.

4.3.1.1 Amir's Profile

Amir was born in October 1987 in Setiu, Terengganu and is the eldest sibling in his family, with a brother and three sisters. At the time of his scholarship interview in 2005, his mother who was a primary school teacher was earning a monthly salary of RM2,250 and his father who did not have a permanent job declared that he was earning about RM500 monthly from self-employment.

Amir achieved the results of straight As in both the important examinations of *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR, Form 3) and *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM, Form 5) examinations in 2002 and 2004 respectively during his secondary studies at Sekolah Menengah Sains Sultan Mahmud, Kuala Terengganu. He also received a string of academic awards such as *Anugerah Cemerlang Kuiz Kimia Kebangsaan* (High Distinction Award in the National Chemistry Quiz) and *Anugerah Gangsa Kuiz Fizik Kebangsaan* (Bronze Medal in the National Physics Quiz), both in 2004. He was also the Chairman of the Library Prefect Body, Deputy Chairman of the Science and Mathematics Association, and the Assistant Captain of the Basketball Club while in secondary school.

With the Yayasan Sime Darby scholarship, he took his South Australian Matriculation Programme at Taylor's College, Malaysia in 2005, achieving a Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) of 98.65. Due to his excellent results, he was awarded a scholarship to pursue a double degree at the University of Melbourne from 2006 until 2010. He completed his Bachelor of Engineering & Bachelor of Commerce undergraduate degrees with the outstanding achievement of first class honours. During his time at university, he was also active as a student leader within the Malaysian Students Council of Australia, managing student activities such as monitoring and supporting activities of Malaysian student clubs in each university, organising the National Conference and Games (sports and career fair), Malaysian night, as well as other student activities.

In 2011, he started working at Sime Darby Industrial and has been fast-tracked in his career due to his outstanding work performance. Amir is now holding the management position of Head – Pipeline Services.



Figure 4.5. Amir and two of his sisters, as well as myself, just after I interviewed his sister, Fatin Fazzrini who is standing next to him, at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport on 9 September 2017.

4.3.1.2 First Interviewee Profile in Relation to Amir's Life

Puan Syarifah Norsalma binti Abdullah, who was 53 years old at the time of interview, is Amir's mother. She is of Chinese descent and converted to Islam upon marrying Amir's father. She has been working as a primary school teacher all this while, even at the time when I interviewed her. When Amir's father resigned from his teaching job at a neighbouring school, she became the sole breadwinner of the family. She did this while raising Amir and his four other siblings, spending much more time with them at home than their father, who did not spend much time with them as he was preoccupied with other activities including being involved in politics.



Figure 4.6. Puan Syarifah and myself, just after I interviewed her at the Kuala Terengganu airport in Terengganu on 25 November 2017.

4.3.1.3 Second Interviewee Profile in Relation to Amir's Life

Cik Fatin Fazzrini binti Marzuki, Amir's younger sister who was 24 years old at the time of interview, is six years younger than him (refer to Figure 4.5 for a picture of her). At the time of the interview, she was in her final year of her medical degree at the University of Leeds, United Kingdom. The interview was done while she was in transit from Kuala Terengganu to London to continue her studies after her semester break. Although Amir brought his sister to meet me, we sat at another restaurant when I interviewed her, so that Amir was not present during the interview. She looks up to Amir as a caring big brother, who provides her with support when she needs it. She was also emotional when describing how difficult Amir's life was, during his university days.

4.3.2 Retelling Amir's Story

Amir has been an academically outstanding individual all his life. He is currently heading a department in a large organisation in the heavy equipment business, even though he is only in his early thirties, selling products and services across the Asia Pacific region. Being an introvert, Amir is soft-spoken and well mannered; while serving as an inspiration to many, especially the YSD scholars currently working in his organisation, due to his career achievements. Amir is currently the backbone of his family as he is financially assisting his parents, his sister who received a scholarship to study overseas, and his youngest sister who is studying for a local medical degree.

Originating from a humble village in Setiu, Terengganu, Amir's parents were both teachers who at the start of their careers only earned a monthly salary of about RM360 each. However, being teachers in a small village of mainly fishermen, his family was considered to be one of those who were better off. However, his family was far from being financially comfortable, especially as there were a few years in Amir's adolescent life when his father did not have a permanent job to earn a stable income. Amir was the eldest of five children in the family, and was taught to earn his own money by selling food at school and was nurtured to save money from a very young age.

Amir's family was not very well-off to start with, but when his father decided to resign from his teaching job after taking a year off from work when Amir was 15, the situation became financially worse off for the family. During the few years when Amir's family of seven was living off the income of only one breadwinner, his mother; his father was looking out for other sources of income. However, even though the family faced

financial challenges during these years, Amir highlighted that his father appeared to have mellowed down and was less angry after he ceased his teaching career, which also included him being the disciplinary teacher at the school.

Amir was three when his parents started to teach him how to read. As both his parents were teachers, this appeared to come as second nature to them. They bought him books and toy blocks with letters, and spent time with him daily to teach him to read. He commenced to read at four, and started going to kindergarten at five already knowing how to read. There was a high focus on academic excellence by his parents, which appeared to have resulted in Amir being a top student in both primary and secondary schools, while he was also active in extra-curricular activities. This paid off handsomely as Amir was awarded a prestigious competitive scholarship to study overseas for a double degree which he passed with flying colours. Aside from these achievements, Amir was very proud to relate that he was the very first youth in his small village to be given the opportunity to study overseas.

Amir's village community that consisted of those who were very poor, had posed extreme risks to the children as it was rife with a phenomenon in Malaysia called '*Mat Rempit*' who are wayward youths who participate in illegal motorcycle racing, that usually results in them not making much of themselves as adults. '*Mat Rempit*' are mostly youth from low socioeconomic families who participate in this hazardous and reckless activity to exhibit power and courage, while entertaining themselves. They endanger their own and other road users' lives when they ride dangerously on their motorcycles while performing stunts (Hidzir, Arbain, Wan Ismail, & Ismail, 2015). In his storytelling, Amir related how the children in his village started this activity from

very young by racing on their bicycles, and told the story of his first personal encounter with it at a very young age.

“... If I am not mistaken, I was about 7 or 8 at the time.... After finishing our (Quran reading) class, we (my brother and I) were expected to go home immediately, we were not allowed to loiter about. This is because my father was concerned about the dangers of the illegal racing happening in the village, among the young. In fact, they offered us the opportunity, when a few secondary students encouraged us to take it up by offering us 10 sen if we could race against each other. This is how the village children start their illegal racing lifestyle.”

Amir described his father to be the authoritarian disciplinarian, and his mother to be the authoritative pillar of support in his life. He related how he was pressured by his father's highly controlling behaviour, and his physical punishments for things which Amir felt were not his fault. Amir admitted that he planned to run away from home during his late primary school years, although he did not build enough courage to do so. He expressed that he had felt anger and was rebellious during this period of his life, trying to do things his father would not approve of, without his father's knowledge but with his mother's permission and blessings. Amir commented that this was highly important to him as he was brought up to be obedient and compliant. However, Amir explained that he had directly retaliated by writing a personal letter to his father when he was 14 to express his dissatisfaction; which garnered a positive reaction from his father. However, while Amir spoke about all that his father did when he was young that made him feel angry and stressed; he stated that he now realises that his father did

it all, albeit using harsh methods, for Amir's own good and safety, while building his soft skills such as being responsible for his siblings.

Amir's life story may be made clearer with an analysis of his prominent experiences through time which is tabulated in Table 4.2 below, described by place and relationships that are potentially related to his resilience and other soft skills development.

Table 4.2

Amir's Prominent Experiences According to Age

Age	Amir's Experiences	Place, Relationships
4	Successfully learnt to read, after a year of his parents teaching him.	Home, parents
5	Entered kindergarten. As he knew how to read already, he helped his teacher to teach his kindergarten friends how to read.	Pre-school, friends and teachers
6 – 12	Entered primary school a year earlier, but took the last year twice to meet age requirement for Standard 6 examinations. Excelled every year as top student, while being encouraged by mother to participate in co-curricular activities and competitions.	Primary school, teachers
	Entrepreneurship training commenced.	Home, primary school, mother.
	Father started to be very strict with him, and mete out physical punishments even if his younger siblings did something wrong.	Home, father

10	Father started to take him and his brother fishing every other evening. However, they did not engage or converse much during these trips.	Home, father
11	Due to the stress of being controlled by his father, Amir planned to run away from home. However, he only got as far as packing a bag, with plans in mind of how to sustain himself for food.	Home, father
13	Entered boarding school, and felt so much freedom even though the boarding school had rules and regulations, as he was no more being controlled at home. The physical punishments from his father also appeared to have ceased.	Secondary school, school friends and teachers
	Parents would only visit him at boarding school and provide him with his monthly RM20 allowance if Amir achieved top academic placing in class, which was a condition set by his father.	Secondary school, father
14	Wrote letter to father to voice out his dissatisfaction of his father physically punishing him because of what his brother did.	Home, father
	Father responded to the letter by visiting him at boarding school, and broke down when telling Amir that he loved his children all the same. The physical punishments totally stopped at this juncture.	Secondary school, father
15	Father started to take unpaid leave from his teaching job to secure another source of income from construction projects, leaving only Amir's mother to earn for the family during this time.	Home, parents
16	Father decided to resign from his teaching job, even though he did not secure any construction projects at the time. However, he started to mellow down and was less stressed and less angry with the children.	Home, father
17	Amir achieved the outstanding results of 10A+ in his examinations, and received a prestigious scholarship to study overseas.	Secondary school

4.3.3 The Emerging Themes and Subthemes from Amir's Life Story

A similar analysis process, as performed for the analysis of Firdaus' life story as described in section 4.2.3, was carried out to perform the analysis on Amir's life story. The thematic coding analysis process was carried out with the assistance of the NVivo for Mac 12 software for data coding management and drawing of preliminary diagrams to visualise thoughts for brainstorming and mind mapping to identify emerging themes from the codes. This facilitated in the drawing up of the emerging hierarchical theme relationship using the Microsoft PowerPoint software that is presented in Figure 4.7.

The findings from the analysis of Amir's life story as visualised in the diagram in Figure 4.7 below are elaborated in detail from sections 4.3.4 to 4.3.6. In summary, the emerging themes and subthemes indicate that strong protective factors and development assets of a warm and supportive environment, the discipline and training, as well as religiosity and spirituality in his upbringing may have contributed to Amir's resilience and other soft skills development for him to thrive in life. His life experiences filled with various protective and risk factors were also noted in his relationship with his father, and the opportunities he received in various school stages. The turning point in his life was when Amir was 14 and confronted his biggest fear in life, by writing a letter of dissatisfaction to his father, with a positive outcome.

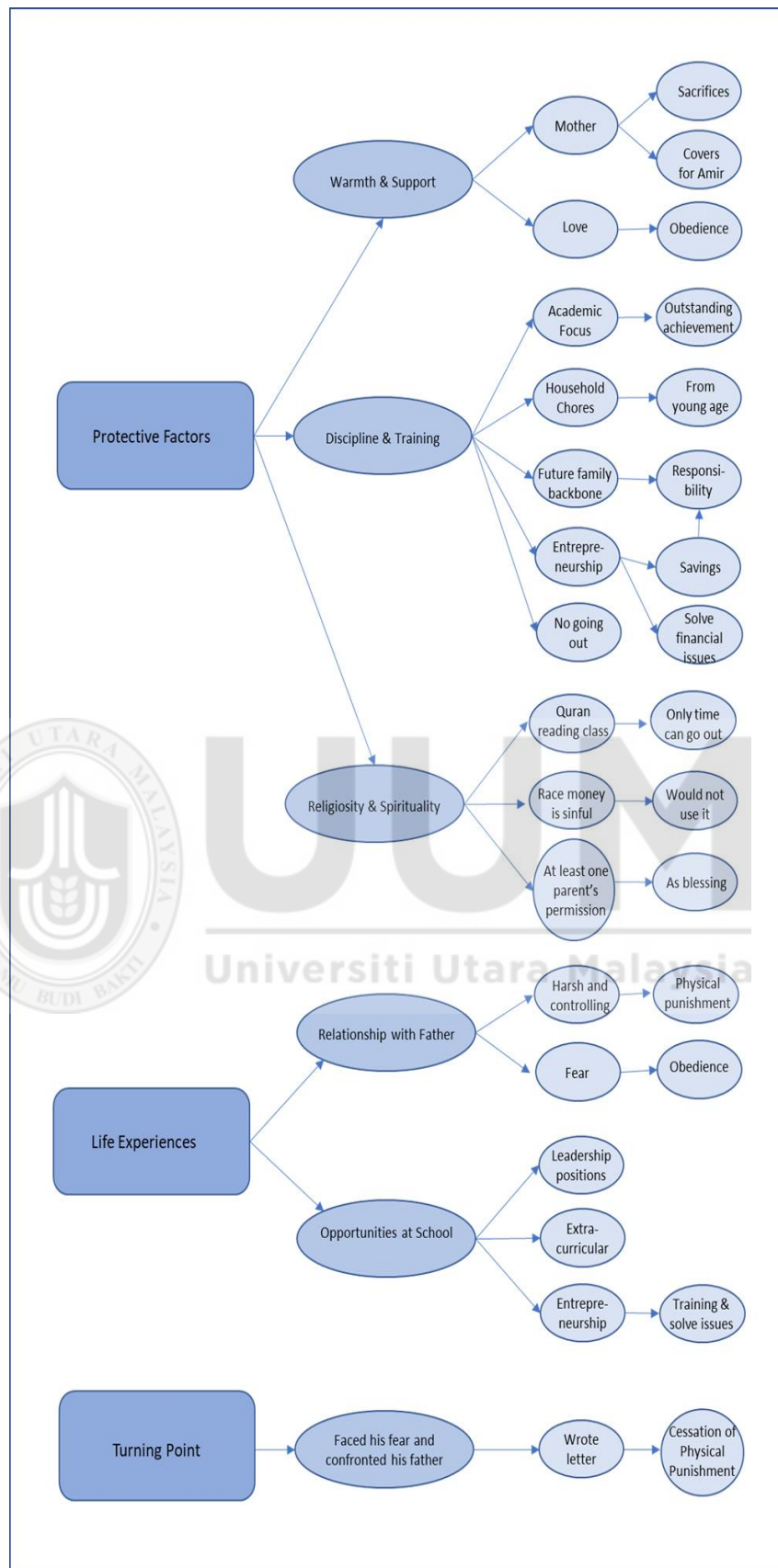


Figure 4.7. The emerging themes and subthemes from the analysis of Amir's life story.

4.3.4 Protective Factors and Developmental Assets in Amir's Life

From the analysis of Amir's life story, various protective factors and developmental assets were noted in different stages or times of his life, through relationships with various adults close to him, either at home or at school. These protective factors and developmental assets include a warm and supportive environment, discipline and training, as well as religiosity and spirituality; which were found to be intertwined among each other and worked synergistically together.

4.3.4.1 Warm and Supportive Environment

Amir's storytelling indicated that he was provided with a warm and supportive environment at home mostly by his mother, a patient person with a pleasant disposition. From his various stories, it was found that his mother had maintained calmness and encouraged happiness in the home; irrespective of whatever challenges that came Amir's way, mainly caused by his harsh, controlling father. Amir described her to be an authoritative mother, as she provided a warm and supportive environment that had assisted Amir to build his resilience and other soft skills by always being happy at home, chatting and watching television with her children; while at the same time emphasising on their academic performance, discipline and training. As both Amir and his mother related that his father was not at home most of each day; this may have allowed Amir's mother to fill the home with a positive, learning ambience that proved strong enough for Amir to overcome the risk factor of his authoritarian father.

“... I compared myself to the other village children, and felt that I was not receiving what I wanted. I was unhappy, but I couldn't express myself or retaliate. I knew that if I stepped out of the house by myself, I would be

punished. So, I would have to keep what I wanted to myself. I could have become pressured and take a wrong turn in my life - it could have gone either way. But we are lucky as all five of us went the right way (in our lives). It may be because my mother was the key. Whenever I was unhappy, she would cook, she would talk, she would watch t.v. with you.... those kinds of things. These may have been the happiest times for us.”

Amir described his mother to be very supportive of his interests and trusted his actions and decisions. On occasions when his father was not at home, he would request for his mother’s permission to go out fishing. Amir related that not only would she agree to Amir’s request, she would advise him to be home by a certain time that she felt his father would be back. Amir added that when he was staying away from home at boarding school or at university, he would still ask permission from his mother to do certain things which he felt his father would not approve of, like visiting places he had never been to.

Amir described how his mother had sacrificed her life previously for Amir and his family, which in turn resulted in Amir feeling love, indebtedness and responsibility towards her.

“....my mother followed a different religion, she left her whole family and moved here. So she has no one, especially if my father is not around....

She sacrificed a lot for the family..... If my father decided to leave her, she would be alone. So this is why I have to be there for her.”

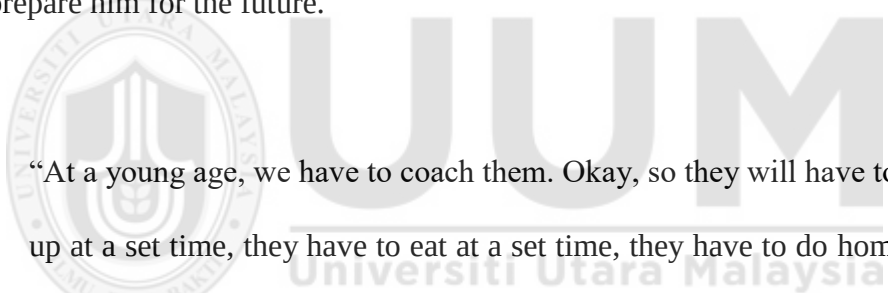
Amir expressed that he complied with all that his mother requested of him because of the warmth and support which she provided him, as well as the sacrifices she had made in her life for him. From his storytelling, it appears that it is mainly due to his love and care for her that he obediently did all that she asked of him, such as following the house rules, doing the household chores, focusing on his academic performance, participating in extra-curricular activities and carrying out entrepreneurial initiatives at school. From his various stories, another reason why he was compliant could be because he was aware that she was instilling discipline in him and training him to be the backbone of the family in the future.

4.3.4.2 Discipline and Training

Amir described that he lived in a household that was mainly controlled by his father's rules and regulations. On the other hand, Amir's mother explained that both she and her husband instilled discipline in the home, although her husband practiced the hard approach while she practiced a much softer approach. One of the main house rules that both she and her husband maintained was not allowing their children, during their schooling years, especially the girls, to go out on their own without adult supervision. Amir stated that he was not allowed to go out except to attend Quran reading classes after which he was expected to return home immediately and not do other things, including fraternising with the village youngsters or go swimming in the nearby river. This is mainly due to safety reasons because of the rampant illegal racing activities in the village that cause road accidents, as well as the danger of influence by the other

children in the village to participate in these illegal racing activities. However, this house rule appeared to have affected Amir the most, as he expressed that it had made him upset and angry because he felt it was unfair that his father would not allow him to go out of the house freely, while all his friends in the village could do so.

Amir, his mother and sister had also described about the discipline instilled at home which was on adherence to strict timing from getting up from sleep in the morning; carrying out daily tasks such as studying, reading the Quran, doing household chores; as well as going to sleep at night. Amir highlighted that his father was very strict about this matter, and his mother mentioned the importance of this discipline to train Amir to prepare him for the future.



“At a young age, we have to coach them. Okay, so they will have to wake up at a set time, they have to eat at a set time, they have to do homework at a set time, and they have to sleep by a set time at night. This means that we coach and train them, that is the way.... we make him (Amir) sweep the tree leaves outside, he has to help with house chores..... when he was in primary school, in year three or four, I forget, I saw to it that he washed his school shoes and socks every weekend.... I trained him because when he goes to boarding school for his secondary studies, he will be required to carry out these chores himself.”

Amir's parents had focused on the importance of academic performance, with his father teaching him by using newspaper cut-outs. Amir's mother related that from the

age of three, they had taught him how to read by using toy blocks and books. She explained they did not get him many toys as she felt that they were not useful. She was also proud to relate that while watching television, he would have a dictionary with him to refer new words to; he liked to read books; and that he would be in his room studying from a very young age. Amir's mother pointed out the connection between his academic excellence and leadership skills, stating that Amir was provided the leadership and confidence skills in kindergarten and primary school when his teachers asked him to teach his friends during class because he was academically outstanding.

Both Amir and his mother described how she had consistently encouraged him to participate in school extracurricular activities, such as public speaking, storytelling, science and mathematics competitions, as well as sports. Amir pointed out that she impressed on the importance of collecting school activity certificates, to increase his future chances of securing a scholarship to further his studies. He stated that she even told him to volunteer to man the school shop selling essential items to the students at boarding school, which he also did due to his obedient and compliant nature. All these extra-curricular activities had assisted Amir to develop various soft skills which are useful to thrive in his future life.

Amir's mother highlighted that she had focused more on training Amir mainly because he was the oldest of her five children, and would be responsible to look after them in future. Amir expressed that he also knew about the responsibility that his mother had put on his shoulders to care for his siblings, due to the way she was advising him. Amir's mother commented that she feels that his younger siblings' successes are due to him being disciplined and committed towards guiding them and setting a good

example for them. She described that he influenced them so much that they even wrote essays about him in school, as their role model.

“Discipline, commitment, religion were all that he held as important, and this may be the reason. He is someone who feels responsible and does not disregard his younger siblings. He is, how do you say, committed in the responsibility he has. Because we moulded him to be the example as the eldest brother... So he exhibits his best behaviour for his siblings’ benefit. Praise be to Allah that his younger siblings succeeded (because of this).”

Amir, his mother and sister related that his mother had taught Amir to sell food at school to earn money, which his mother encouraged him to save. They described how during his primary school years, Amir’s mother would buy chocolates and sweets in bulk and repackaged them into smaller packets, or cut the fruits collected from the garden, and gave them to Amir to sell them at his school at a profit. Amir’s mother advised how she provided Amir with the first funds and the knowledge; after which Amir used his savings to purchase what he thought his schoolmates would be interested to buy from him, and would then sell them at a profit. His mother explained that she encouraged his entrepreneurial mindset from a very young age to train him so that he would understand that nothing comes easy in life, and that he could only gain opportunities by going through hardship first. She proudly attributes the early training she provided Amir as a main contributing factor to his successful career today.

Amir related how his mother encouraged him to save whatever money he received from his sales at school by opening a Tabung Haji bank account for him when he started his entrepreneurship initiatives, and providing him with the statement for him to see how his money grew. Although it was not much, Amir stated that he tried not to spend his pocket money at school as his mother prepared packed food for him. He described that due to his mother impressing the importance of saving, Amir would usually save his daily pocket money as well as the profits from his sales in school. This habit of saving inculcated from very young is now enabling Amir to help fund his youngest sister's medical degree, being the big brother who is responsible to look out for his younger siblings. He is also helping his second youngest sister, who is studying overseas with a scholarship, with some of her expenses as her scholarship may not always be enough.

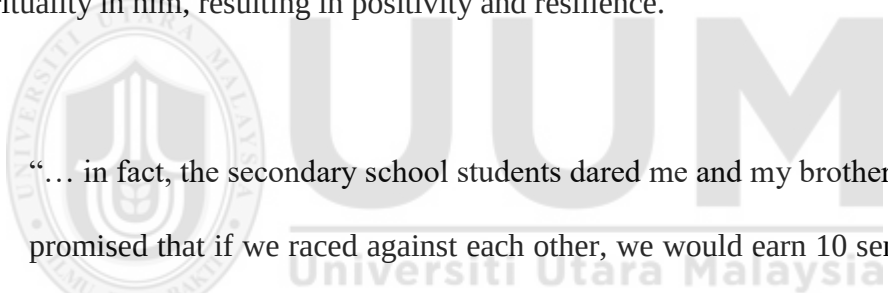
The various discipline and training which Amir experienced, which were enforced by the warm and supportive environment he experienced, had substantially contributed to his resilience and other soft skills to help him carry out his responsibility to look out for his family.

4.3.4.3 Religiosity and Spirituality

As a Muslim brought up in a rural village, Amir expressed how he experienced an environment which emphasised the importance of performing the five daily prayers on time and reading the Quran daily. As this was very important to his parents, Amir advised that his father had allowed him and his brother to go out on their own to Quran reading classes, which was the only exception to the house rule. Amir added that he had finished completely reading the Quran four times even before he went to

secondary school. In addition, he described that he was given the responsibility to teach his three sisters how to read the Quran, as part of his training as the eldest brother. Amir's mother related that due to safety issues, his sisters were not allowed to go out to attend Quran reading classes, and they were trained by Amir. This appeared to have enforced his religiosity, as he related how proud he felt that his sisters had also finished reading the holy book numerous times, after he had taught them to read it.

The protective factor of religiosity and spirituality that was embedded within Amir's ecological system may have contributed in protecting him from the risky factors in his life. Amir related how the religiosity that he was trained with from young had built the spirituality in him, resulting in positivity and resilience.



“... in fact, the secondary school students dared me and my brother. They promised that if we raced against each other, we would earn 10 sen - this was how youngsters start their interest in illegal racing. Unfortunately, I gave in once. I received 40 sen. I went home with the money and thought carefully about what had happened. Was the money which I received halal? I decided that it wasn't, and I put the money in a bottle and planted it out back, I remember this. A few years later, when my father commissioned some renovation work at home, the contractor somehow dug up the bottle... I found that the 40 sen was still there in the bottle.”

In the Muslim religion, it is considered sinful to spend money earned from non-halal sources. Although Amir had once given in to the lure of illegal racing in his village,

and earned some money for it; he felt remorse and would not spend the ‘sinful’ money he earned from it. As he felt that the act of illegal racing was sinful, he was protected from being lured into the dangerous habit. In addition, Amir expressed that when he felt rebellious and wanted to do something his father would not allow, such as going out alone to fish, he would obtain his mother’s permission. Amir described that if he secured his mother’s permission and blessing to do something which he knew his father would disapprove, he felt that it would not be considered a sinful action. This was a protective factor to him as he did not shut off both his parents completely, and he always ensured that his mother knew where he was, doing something which she allowed him to. Amir’s mother had described Amir to be religious and spiritual, and sincerely believes that this may be one of the reasons why he is now successful in life.

4.3.5 Amir’s Life Experiences

Amir’s life experiences which may have been significant to develop his resilience and other soft skills to enable him to thrive in life, were filled with protective as well as risk factors which he had experienced together. These include those in his relationship with his father, and in the opportunities that presented themselves in his various school stages.

4.3.5.1 Relationship with Father

Amir described his father to be an authoritarian, who believed in bringing his children up with a heavy hand when they were children, although he did not spend much time with them as he was usually not at home, except in the evenings. Amir described that he received physical punishments from his father at least once a month in his childhood and early adolescence, which at times he felt was unfair as he was beaten because of

something his siblings did, such as fighting noisily and waking their father up from sleep. However, Amir added that his mother had comforted him after each punishment ordeal. His sister stated that Amir was sometimes physically punished by their father when he was young, and that she was afraid of him until today and would rather only speak and share things with her mother. Amir's mother did not mention about any physical punishment by his father, but admitted that Amir was afraid of his father.

Amir related that when he was about 10 years old, he started to follow his father fishing about three times a week after work and school. However, Amir described that there was not much conversation during these fishing trips, except for his father giving him instructions of what to do. Therefore, he did not engage much with his father even though he had spent some time with him during these outings. However, Amir expressed that his love for fishing developed from these trips.

Amir related about the time when he was staying at the boarding school during his secondary school years, but did not go out for outings with his friends even on weekends when his father did not visit. He advised that this was because his father did not give him permission to go on these outings with his friends throughout the entire five years he was in boarding school, even though he had asked for it on numerous occasions. Amir appeared to be afraid of his father due to his authoritarian ways, and was obedient even at times that he did not have to be.

Amir highlighted that at certain times when he felt dissatisfied with how his father was treating him, he retaliated against his father's strict rules by being 'disobedient'. He

expressed that he felt that he was being disobedient when he went out to fish alone or loitered about after his Quran reading class had finished, but he did all this when his father was not at home. Amir described that he was careful that his father did not know about these acts of retaliation lest he received more physical punishment, but felt satisfied that he had disobeyed his father and did not comply with his strict rules.

To display how strict his father's rules were, Amir also related how during his secondary school years, his father had limited his pocket money to RM20 a month while he was living in boarding school, with a strict condition. To emphasise on the importance of the highest academic achievement, Amir described how his father imposed a condition that Amir had to secure top academic placing in his class if he wished to be visited by his parents at boarding school and be given the monthly RM20 allowance. Although Amir expressed that he felt this situation of not being able to see his mother to be harsh, which pushed him to achieve first placing in his class most of the time, he appeared to be less concerned about missing the RM20 monthly allowance as he was able to earn his own money by implementing and sharpening the entrepreneurial skills he was trained with from young.

“.... He taught me the value of money. As I only received RM20 monthly for food during recess time and in between main meals, I had to plan the usage of my money. ... I started to develop my entrepreneurial skills, I sold burgers.... I worked with the school guard to bring the burgers I bought from outside into the school to sell them. I also planned the production and selling of the school uniform for my batch. And that's how I earned the extra money.”

Amir described that the physical punishments from his father stopped when he entered boarding school, as he was not beaten when he came home for holidays. However, he was still required to follow the set house rules even though he was already an adolescent. When Amir's father took unpaid leave and stopped teaching when Amir was about 15 years old, Amir described him to be less angry or stressed. Even when he was not earning for the family, he did not seem stressed but calmly decided to resign from his teaching job a year later. His father then tried to secure other sources of income such as from construction projects, which he only succeeded in securing some years after he resigned. He was also busy with politics and managing the state football team. During this time, Amir described his father as having mellowed down, which reduced the impact of this risk factor in his life, while his authoritative mother's protective factor impact appeared to become stronger.

As he matured, Amir reflected on his father's actions and justified why his father was harsh on him. Amir accepted these experiences in his relationship with his father to be positive developments in his life. He stated that he understands now, that as the oldest brother, he should be responsible for his siblings' behaviour; and was rightly punished for them although he did not understand this at that point in time. Amir also now understands why his father did not allow him to go out of his house compound, although he was very unhappy with the strict rule at the time. Aside from the safety issues, Amir feels that his life would not be much if he was influenced by the other village youth.

“.... to be honest, there was a period when I retaliated a lot. This is because even when I was in Form 5 (17 years old), I still could not go out from the

house gate.... I thought that my father was unfair when he did not allow me to make friends. I also felt that the time when I was not provided with allowance was also unfair. However, when I reflect, I don't think I would be where I am today, if my father did not carry out those actions. If I had mixed with the others in the village, I may not have focused on my future.... Of course, I was unhappy at the time but I understand that his treatment was right, considering the environment we lived in.”

4.3.5.2 In Various School Stages

Amir's experiences in the various school stages also indicated how he developed his other soft skills, while building resilience to counter the risk factors in his life as well as building his entrepreneurial skills for his future. Due to his academic excellence and interest to join many extra-curricular activities which he was keen on, his confidence and leadership skills were nurtured in school. His mother related that as Amir could read at four, he was enrolled into kindergarten when he was five which is a year younger than all the other children. His mother described that he was requested by the kindergarten teacher to teach the others to read, and he was leading in kindergarten activities such as singing.

His mother described how when he was in primary school, Amir achieved top academic placing in class and batch every year, and in certain years his teachers would request for him to teach the class. Both Amir and his mother related that he also participated in various extra-curricular activities such as public speaking, storytelling or academic subject competitions, and sports. He was also a prefect, and appointed Head Prefect at one stage. Amir's mother described him to be inquisitive in school, as

her teacher friends told her that Amir would ask many questions in class. Amir was an outstanding student in academics as well as extra-curricular activities, while all the time being occupied with practising his entrepreneurship skills at school as trained by his mother.

Amir mentioned that there was also a state cultural completion which was held near his village, and he entered the drawing and colouring competition which he lost in the first two years, but finally won in the third year. Although the prize was just more colouring pencils, Amir described that he had achieved the satisfaction of winning a state-level competition. This had nurtured his competitiveness edge. However, Amir did not have many friends, most probably because he was not allowed out of the house. He related about the time when he asked a friend from school to call his house and speak to his father to secure permission for him to go out, but he was scolded by his father instead.

Due to his outstanding UPSR results, he managed to enter a good boarding school in his state. At this point of his life, Amir's storytelling indicated that he was happy because he felt that he was finally free from his constantly controlling father, although his father still did not allow him to go for outings with his friends. Even though his life in boarding school was governed by a daily timetable, Amir expressed that he felt he had more freedom to do as he pleased like trying out more sports such as basketball and volley ball. He was also the Head Library Prefect, and helped at the school convenience shop. Amir also participated in various extra-curricular activities such as the Mathematics and Science Olympiads, representing his school at national level competitions.

His mother related that he was the top student in secondary school every year as well. However, Amir described that the instruction from his father to achieve top placing in class, or else he would not be visited or receive his monthly RM20 allowance, had pushed him towards this achievement. Amir shared that he also used to save his monthly allowance by buying buns in bulk to control his hunger in between mealtimes at the boarding school. To earn his own money to cover the lack of it, Amir practiced the entrepreneurial skills he was taught in primary school, and found a few opportunities to make money either on his own or in collaboration with his friends.

4.3.6 Amir's Life Turning Point : Confronting his Father

Amir related that he felt pressured as he was not allowed to do things which he felt he should be allowed to, and planned to run away from home as an act of retaliation when he was about 11 years old. He packed his bag, with the idea of running to his uncle's house. He related that he had gone to the extent of planning to catch fish and selling them to sustain himself. However, as he was too afraid of his father, the planning was all that he did. Amir described that he retaliated against his father from time to time by disobeying him, but without his father's knowledge and all with the blessings of his mother.

However, the turning point in his life happened when Amir felt he could not stand the physical punishments anymore, especially when he was punished for what his brother did, and mustered up the courage to go against his father, directly this time. This happened when he was a little older at the age of 14, when he summoned up enough courage and decided to face his fears and confront his father by writing a letter to him, voicing out his dissatisfaction about his father's actions.

“...when I started secondary school, my father ended his physical punishments. But there was a time when I went home, and I received a punishment again because of what my brother did.... I forget what it was. But somehow it triggered me to write a letter at the time.... I wrote a letter to my father, it was about two or three pages long.... I wrote to ask why was my younger brother more important than me, and why was he pampered? I asked my father why he did love him more than me. I also asked why was I physically punished..... and then I put the letter under his keyboard... I went back to boarding school... and the next day he came to visit me, and he cried. He explained that he did not love his children differently, and everything he did was for everyone. And I think I stopped receiving physical punishments after that. I am unsure whether this was the incident that had mellowed my father down”

Amir described that the letter resulted in his father opening up and sharing his innermost feelings with Amir while in tears, and this may have resulted in the permanent cessation of the physical punishments from his father. This incident appeared to have made Amir realise that if he mustered enough courage to confront his biggest fear, there would be a high potential of a positive change. This may have contributed to his resilience building and other soft skills. Amir did not have to live in fear of his father's physical punishments anymore from then on. Amir also stated that he respected his father in a different way now, and that he knows that his father also respects him as he depends on him and would call him if there was any issue at home.

4.3.7 Summary

The analysis of Amir's life story indicated that there were various risk factors in his life which were overwhelming at times, especially when they were related to his lack of freedom and unhappiness due to his authoritarian father. However, these risk factors were overcome with the protective factors and developmental assets he had in his life which were mainly due to his authoritative mother's warmth and support, and her instilling discipline while training him, together with the religiosity and spirituality environment in his life. His mother also trained him with entrepreneurial skills from primary school, and inculcated the habit of saving in him from a very young age. She focused on these trainings for him as the eldest child, in view that Amir will be the backbone of the family in the future. These protective factors and developmental assets were intertwined and worked in synergy with one another, enabling each one to be stronger.

Amir's life experiences, especially those at the various stages of school; provided him with opportunities to further develop his resilience and other soft skills such as his confidence, competitiveness, independence, leadership and entrepreneurship skills. The turning point in his life of finally confronting the biggest fear he had, which was standing up to his authoritarian harsh, controlling father, built his resilience even further, and allowed him to make peace with his father thus eradicating a main risk factor.

4.4 The Life Story of Laili

4.4.1 Laili's Story

Laili's story is about a young girl from a working class family living in a not so well-to-do urban neighbourhood in Kuala Lumpur. She was forced into the world of adulthood at the age of nine when she had to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of her two youngest siblings who were just babies at the time, while her mother had to work night shifts as a nurse. Her family life was far from peaceful due to various consistent arguments among her father's family members. However, despite various life challenges faced from a very young age; Laili was very active and an achiever in school and university, and is now part of the management team of a large company.

4.4.1.1 Laili's Profile

Laili was born in April, 1989 in Petaling Jaya, Selangor and is the eldest among four siblings, with two sisters and a brother. At the time of her scholarship interview in 2010, her father was unemployed and her mother was working as a tutor at the Nursing College at the University of Malaya Medical Centre, earning RM4,009 monthly.

With a government loan and scholarship, Laili completed her Diploma in Business Studies/Administration/Management in December 2006 with a CGPA of 3.86. During her diploma studies, she was on the Dean's List for all three years i.e., 2007, 2008, and 2009.

After securing a Yayasan Sime Darby scholarship, she underwent her Bachelor of Business Administration (Economics) at Universiti Teknologi MARA from 2010 to

2012, and graduated with a CGPA 3.54 while being awarded the Vice Chancellor Award. At the end of 2012, she joined Yayasan Sime Darby as an Executive, Education Development; and then was transferred and promoted to Senior Executive, Group Human Resources in Sime Darby Berhad. In early 2018, she left Sime Darby to take up a more senior position as Assistant Manager in the Human Resources department at AEON Credit Service.



Figure 4.8. Laili and myself, just after I interviewed her at the Yayasan Sime Darby office after the second interview on 23 August 2017.

4.4.1.2 First Interviewee Profile in Relation to Laili's Life

Puan Norzaihan binti Ghazali is Laili's mother, who was 54 years old and was working as a nursing tutor at University of Malaya Medical Centre at the time of the interview. Before successfully completing her degree at about the same time as Laili achieving hers, Laili's mother had worked as a nurse throughout her life, being the stable breadwinner of the family when her husband decided to resign from the navy when

Laili was about two and half years old. Although her husband was running a family business for a few years after that, his income was unstable and it was up to Laili's mother to work shifts to earn a reliable monthly income for the family.



Figure 4.9. Puan Norzaihan and myself, just after I interviewed her at the Starbucks at Taman Equine, Selangor on 9 December 2017.

4.4.1.3 Second Interviewee Profile in Relation to Laili's Life

Ms Mell Yap Lin Foong was Laili's neighbour in Taman Permata, Kuala Lumpur for a large portion of her life, and is very close to her and her family. Mell is two years older than Laili, and knew her from when she was very young. They used to spend a lot of time together in each other's house. Laili is also close to Mell's parents and called them "Mom" and "Dad" as well. Although they do not live near each other now as Laili and her family had moved away, they still try to spend time with each other when they can over the weekend.



Figure 4.10. Ms Mell Yap and Laili in a recent photograph. A telephone interview was done with Mell on 23 March, 2018.

4.4.2 Retelling Laili's Story

Laili is a pleasant young lady who loves to chat about everything and anything. She has an effect on people that makes it impossible for them not to like her after a few minutes of conversation. This impressive young lady exudes an air of independence, befitting her management position at a large company she works at. Meeting Laili for the first time, the thought would not have crossed your mind that she experienced a difficult childhood and adolescence, coming from a working-class family. In her earlier life, only her mother held down a permanent job as a hospital nurse earning a meagre salary. Her father quit his comfortable navy job when Laili was just two and half years old, and not long after that had started a business in partnership with his brothers to sell household gas tanks. In Malaysia, gas is provided to homes via gas tanks. As Laili's father was untrained and inexperienced in this high-capital business, he was saddled with debts throughout, with some days seeing less profits than others,

which was hard on his family of six. Her mother had to work three shifts as a nurse while also doing housework including cooking and washing clothes for her in-laws next door, as the family could not afford to pay for help at home. As Laili was the eldest sibling, she had no choice but to start taking on the unlikely jobs as the housekeeper as well as the nanny to her two youngest siblings when she was aged seven and nine respectively. Laili's father carried on doing his business and it survived for more than 10 years with many ups and downs, after which he had to throw in the towel when the debts went out of control. The business went bankrupt after he left it to his brothers to run, following a fallout with his family. Until today, Laili's father is still paying off the business debts with his taxi driver income.

Despite all the above happening in her life, Laili was active in school and represented her school at state-level competitions. She was appointed as her school's first head girl prefect and scored perfect results in UPSR (Standard 6) which enabled her to be enrolled into a good boarding school for her secondary school education. Although she did not achieve the SPM (Form 5) examination results that everyone expected of her, Laili never failed to make it to the Dean's List each semester when she was doing her diploma. This resulted in her winning a prestigious scholarship to complete her undergraduate degree. She is now only in her late 20s but is already part of the management team in the human resource department of a large multi-national credit services company, thriving in life with a bright future ahead of her.

Laili's life story may be made clearer with an analysis of her experiences as tabulated in Table 4.3 below. The timeline, places and relationships relevant to each experience are included to ease the understanding of her life story.

Table 4.3

Laili's Prominent Experiences According to Age

Age	Laili's Experiences	Place, Relationships
3	Moved into grandparents' house, and then moved next door after half a year. Mother related that Laili was already talking to neighbours who were passing by, even about embarrassing family fights.	Home, family, neighbours
5	Started to do simple household chores such as hanging out, taking in and folding the clothes, sweeping the floor and cleaning the house.	Home, mother
7	Started to do more household chores such as cooking the rice, washing the clothes, washing her school shoes and ironing her school uniform.	Home, mother
8	Appointed as assistant class monitor.	Primary school, teachers
9	- Appointed as school librarian, while being active in school co-curricular activities and competitions. - Given responsibility to take care of her baby sister at night, while her mother was working shifts.	Primary school, teachers Home, mother, sibling
10 - 12	Active in school co-curricular activities and competitions, and was appointed as a school prefect.	Primary school, teachers
12	Appointed as the first girl head prefect in her school. Achieved straights As in her UPSR.	Primary school, teachers
13-17	Her father's business experienced decline during her secondary school years.	Home, father
14	Appointed as dorm head. Also produced her first school play, where the boys had to follow her instructions.	Secondary school, teachers, schoolmates

15-17	Appointed as dorm prefect and representative of dorm.	Secondary school, teachers
17	Appointed as head of dorm home room, and held leadership positions in school clubs like <i>Kadet Remaja Sekolah</i> and the Arabic club. Did not score very good results in SPM (4As only).	Secondary school, teachers, school mates
21-22	Received a government loan, and then a government scholarship, for her to do her diploma. During this time, her father had a fallout with his brothers on the family business. He walked out of the business with nothing, leaving all the assets and stocks with his brothers. Laili's family also moved away.	University, home, father, family
22	Was on the Dean's list during her diploma studies, achieving excellent final results and receiving the Vice Chancellor's award. Following this, received a prestigious scholarship to study locally.	University

4.4.3 The Emerging Themes and Subthemes from Laili's Life Story

A similar analysis process, as performed for the analyses of Firdaus' and Amir's life stories as described in sections 4.2.3 and 4.3.3 respectively, was carried out to perform the analysis on Laili's life story. The thematic coding analysis process was carried out with the assistance of the NVivo for Mac 12 software for data coding management and drawing of preliminary diagrams to visualise thoughts for brainstorming and mind mapping to identify emerging themes from the codes. This facilitated in the drawing up of the emerging hierarchical theme relationship using the Microsoft PowerPoint software that is presented in Figure 4.11.

The findings from the analysis of Laili's life story as visualised in the diagram in Figure 4.11 below are elaborated in detail from sections 4.4.4 to 4.4.6. In summary,

the emerging themes and subthemes surrounded the main protective factors in Laili's life; and include a warm and supportive environment, discipline and training, her relationship with friends, as well as religiosity and spirituality. Others include the life experiences which may have built her resilience and other soft skills, which were those happening within Laili's relationship with her parents' family members, as well as experiences with opportunities in various stages of her school life. Laili also encountered two turning points in her life which changed her outlook on life and the way she saw things; these happened when she was nine and given the adult responsibility of taking care of her baby sister; and also when she was 12, and her mother suddenly showed concern over her academic performance.



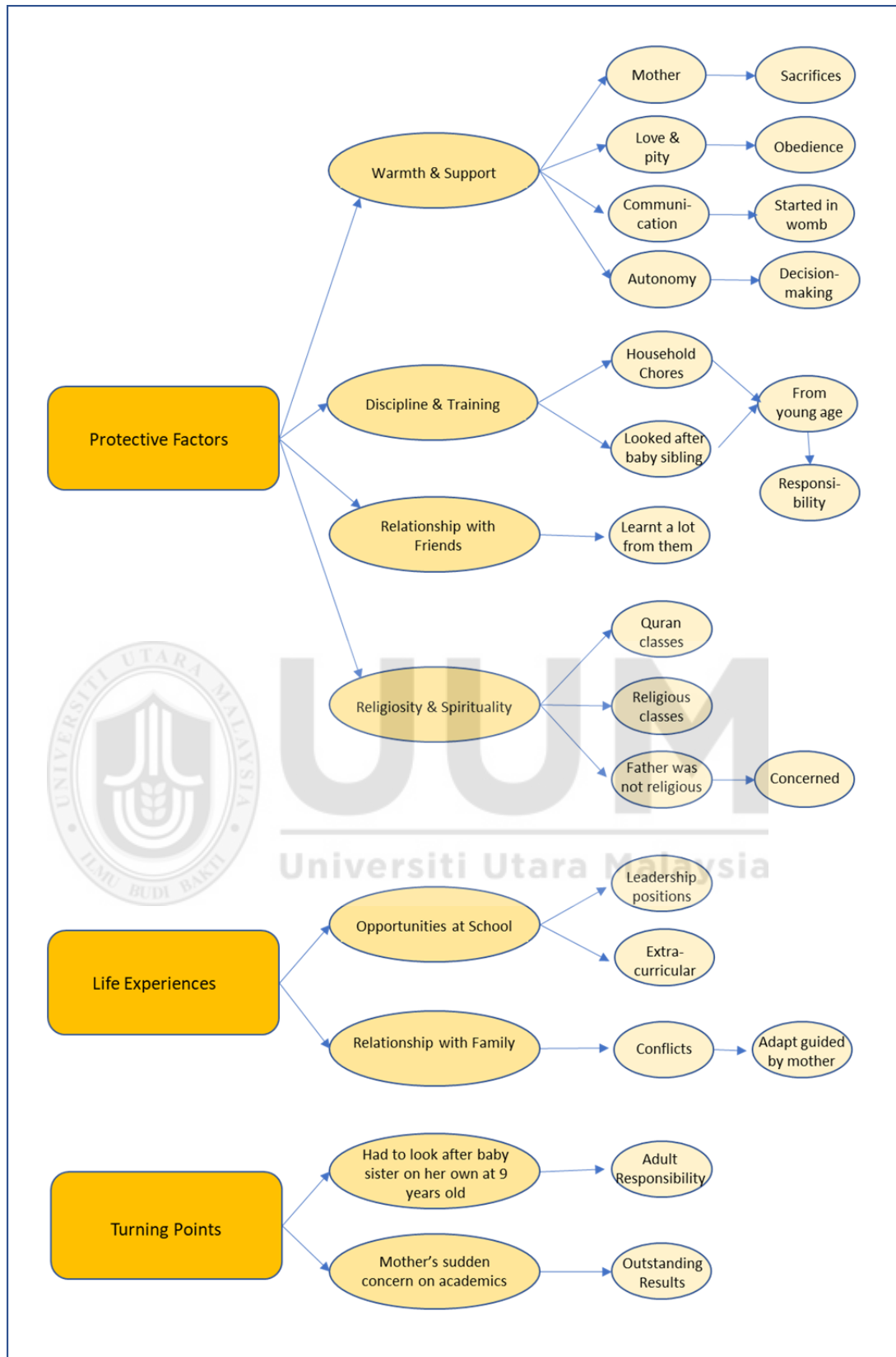


Figure 4.11. The emerging themes and subthemes from the analysis of Laili's life story.

4.4.4 Protective Factors and Developmental Assets in Laili's Life

Various protective factors and developmental assets were found in different stages of Laili's life, through relationships with various adults close to her, either at home or at school, and especially her mother at home. These protective factors and developmental assets include a warm and supportive environment, discipline and training, relationship with friends, as well as religiosity and spirituality; which were found to be intertwined among each other and worked synergistically together to enhance one another's influence.

4.4.4.1 Warm and Supportive Environment

Laili commented that if anyone asked her about her childhood, she would answer that she had a challenging one because her mother was a nurse, who was working shifts. However, from her storytelling, it may be deduced that Laili was provided with a warm and supportive environment amidst all the hardships she faced. This protective factor was mainly provided by her mother, whose sincere sacrifices showed Laili how caring and supportive she was during the time.

Laili related that her family lived next door to her father's parents' house. Having suffered a heart attack, her grandmother was sickly and unwell. Laili described that as she had no daughters to help her with the housework, Laili's mother took it upon herself to help her mother-in-law cook and wash clothes; because to her, it was only the right thing to do. Laili's mother explained that she was raised in a simple rural village, where she was trained to do things this way. However, she did admit that she felt quite stressed out at the time.

Laili related how her mother was working three shifts as a nurse, in various hospital units. Laili described that when her mother was working in the labour room and had to handle baby deliveries, she felt very tired and angry when she came home. Laili's mother also confirmed this, describing the exhaustion she felt during the time when she was working in the hospital's burn unit. She stated that it was difficult for her to even smile at the time. Laili gave an example of how her mother performed her daily tasks at home and for her in-laws next door, while working on one of her shifts.

“When she comes home, she would normally cook lunch immediately. She didn't have a car those days, she took the bus. So when she was almost home, she would buy ingredients and cook lunch for two houses from 8 (in the morning). At about 11, she would finish, and she would make sure that she washes the clothes and I hang them out. From 12 (noon) onwards, she would sleep until 2 or 3 (in the afternoon), and then she would get up to get ready (to go to work). Previously, her night shifts were for four days in a stretch. When she was at the fourth day, she would be half awake. She would be even more moody because she would be tired from the four days. Especially during the Muslim fasting month, my mom would be like a monster when she was working as a nurse. It was tough.”

Aside from the sacrifices Laili's mother made, her mother was also described by Laili as a close ally and confidante, who appeared to provide the warmth and support by constantly communicating with Laili. Laili related how she felt like her mother was her friend, by the way she communicated with her.

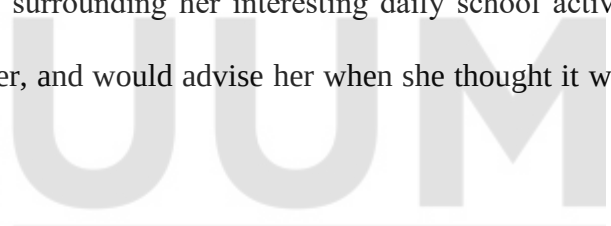
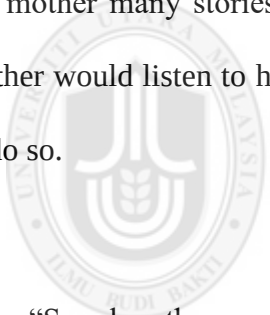
“I am closer with my mother than my father. My mother treated us like friends. She would say, “If you have anything on your mind, you can always let me know.” If I had any problems at school, or when I had a boyfriend when I was very young, my mother was very open about it. My father, we did not speak much to him, he was just too busy with his business.... Normally I would talk with my mother. She always makes an effort to have a conversation with us. It’s actually a culture at home, when you go back, my mother will ask, “What happened today? What happened at school?”..... she would make an effort to ask every day. Even now when we are grown up, she would randomly text me, “How was your day? How was your day at work?””

Laili’s mother commenced her storytelling about Laili’s life by saying that she started to speak to Laili even when she was just a fetus in her ovary. She related that she did not understand why but when she was pregnant with Laili, she felt a very special bond with her first child and used to speak to Laili all the time in very high spirits. She admitted that the situation was different when she was expecting her other children, especially her second child when she had felt unhappy and angry during the pregnancy. This constant communication which commenced very early in Laili’s life appears to have been one of the earliest protective factors of warmth and support, which may have developed Laili’s outstanding communications skill.

Laili’s mother went on to describe Laili to be a very talkative toddler who could speak at the age of eight months, even before she could walk. Laili loved to speak to neighbours who passed by their house, and was known to tell neighbours about

sensitive family matters when she was about three because she did not know good from bad yet at such a young age. Laili's close neighbour and friend, Mel, mentioned that she always knew Laili as an extrovert who was never shy and liked to talk to people. She described Laili to have gained even more confidence to speak after she started schooling and participated in various school activities.

Laili's mother highlighted that she had constantly encouraged Laili to speak up and tell her about her feelings, and also advised her how to handle certain difficult situations she encountered. She stated that when Laili came home from school, she had a lot of things to tell her mother. Laili held quite a few leadership positions, and told her mother many stories surrounding her interesting daily school activities. Laili's mother would listen to her, and would advise her when she thought it was necessary to do so.



“So when they were young, I always asked “What do you feel? What do you want? You talk, you tell me.” If there were any issues, “Is that what the person did? Why did you not answer? You have to answer back.” And when they get home and tell me that they said this and that to another person, I would question them, “So what did you say? Why did you keep quiet? Why did you not reply?” That was how it is. And when they were older, I felt that I actually encouraged them to answer people... hahaha... but that may have developed their quality to be able to voice out what they think..... because from when they were young, I would encourage them to speak their minds and say how they feel, and what do they want. And from there we will know.”

This support by Laili's mother seemed to have developed Laili's soft skill of confidence. Laili related that she remembers herself being quite vocal and opinionated on matters at school, especially during her secondary school years. She explained that she did not like it when her schoolmates only complain but failed to try and make the change they wish to see happen. So, she felt that if her friends did not wish to voice out the issues for whatever reason, she would voluntarily confront the matter and voice her opinion to push for the change, as her mother had always encouraged her to do. This may have developed her soft skills of leadership as well.

Laili's mother described that when Laili was a toddler and her cousins played with her, she would usually lead the group although she was one of the youngest children among the cousins. Laili confirmed this and explained that this was because she was unafraid to try new things, as her mother usually gave her the autonomy to make her own decisions from very young. This seemed to have effectively developed Laili's soft skills of independence, with a good sense for decision-making and problem-solving.

“When I see how my cousins were, they could not do anything as their mothers would not allow them to..... when they wanted to touch something, or try to do something, their mothers would say, “Don't touch! Don't go near there! Don't!” But it is different with my mother. She would say, “Go and see.” And when you touched something sharp and it hurt you, you learnt from that mistake. That's my mother's style of doing things..... My mother explained that when we grew older, we would remember that she did not allow us to do things (if she forbade us). So, she allowed us to

do whatever we wanted, she was very encouraging if we wanted to try something new. And if anyone else wanted to play at some place full of gravel, my cousins' mothers would shout to them to not go near there. But my mother would not say a word to discourage us. If you played in that area, and fell and got hurt, you would learn from that and not make the same mistake again.”

Laili also mentioned that if she failed to follow her parents' instructions, her parents would not punish her. Instead, her mother would just give her a scolding and explain why she was angry and how it was wrong of Laili to not follow instructions and be disobedient. Laili related that after her mother explained the importance of following her parents' instructions a few times, she would begin to understand why and finally comply. Laili also described how her mother would disclose to her about their family conflicts, which involved her father having quarrels with his brothers and his mother. Laili stated that her mother would explain how one should react or not react to these family conflicts, and what could be learnt from those situations by assessing them and not rushing into doing certain things. Laili expressed that her early exposure to 'grown-up' scenarios facilitated her early maturity in life, that may have developed her soft skills.

Laili's mother is not the only one who effectively communicated with Laili when she was young, to provide her with the protective factor of warmth and support. Laili described that her mother's father, who Laili called “Aki” as a term of endearment for 'grandfather', was a school headmaster. Laili related that when she was young, she was often brought to visit her grandfather even though he stayed quite far away from

them, in a different state. Laili related how her grandfather frequently told Laili stories and read her Malay poems, and Laili loved to listen to him. Laili's mother stated that after those sessions, Laili would tell her mother about the story or poetry her beloved Aki told or read to her. Laili also explained that this may have developed her interest to enter storytelling or poetry reading competitions in school.

In addition, Laili's mother had also described her husband as showing love towards his children, although he did not emphasise or show interest in their activities, discipline or schoolwork. Laili's mother highlighted that her husband would have been able to spend more time with Laili when she was young, as she was away at work. However, Laili stated that she was closer to her mother than her father, and communicated more with her mother. This may be because both Laili and her mother explained that Laili's father did not know how to communicate with his children, although Laili's mother insisted that he was and is loving towards them. Her mother described how Laili's father had provided her with trust, as he allowed her to travel to her university in another state driving an old second hand car he had bought for her; even though she had only recently received her driving license and was not accustomed to driving long distances.

Laili related that when she went to boarding school, her father would insist that her family visit her every weekend, as he was afraid that the young siblings would forget how she looked like if she was away too long. Laili expressed that she felt that this was a big sacrifice by her parents, as it would have been expensive for them to make the trips as her father would have to take time away from his business, and her mother

would cook and bring food for all Laili's friends in her dorm to eat. Laili expressed appreciation for the protective factor of warmth and support.

4.4.4.2 Discipline and Training

The presence of the protective factor and development asset of discipline and training in Laili's early life was out of necessity, due to Laili being given the responsibility to take care of their home and her siblings while her mother was away at work. Laili related how her mother was very strict with her, mostly with the house chores, and if she came home from work at night and the clothes were not neatly folded, Laili would be scolded.

Laili's mother explained that when Laili was only six or seven years old, which was just before Laili entered primary school; she trained Laili to do housework such as washing the clothes, hanging them out to dry, bringing them in and folding them. Laili added that on top of dealing with the clothes, she also ironed her own school uniform and washed her school shoes when she started school at the age of seven. She explained that her mother was tough on her because her mother herself was facing challenging times.

“My mother was the only daughter-in-law, so it was really tough for her. She had to work shifts, her children were small, and she had to cook for two houses... it was really tough for my mother so that's why she was tough on me.”

Laili described how she had to heat up the food her mother cooked during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadhan for two houses, theirs and her grandparents'; for them to carry out 'sahur', which means to eat before dawn, the time when the Muslim fasting begins. Laili's mother also related a similar story in Ramadhan when Laili was only ten and she had to heat up food for everyone including her grandparents for sahur.

Laili's mother described how she used to train Laili to carry out house chores from a very young age.

"I trained her from six or seven years old. The clothes in the washing machine need to be turned inside out, pockets must be emptied. After washing, the clothes must immediately be hung out to dry, in a certain way. During that time I was working shifts..... And I could not accept it if I get home from work at night, and the clothes are still outside. I would scold everyone, including the father. But mostly they would get the scolding, Laili and her sister.... But I do not physically punish them..."

Laili expressed that she knew that her mother also started to do house chores when she was very young, so she did not feel that it was unfair to impose it on her. Laili added that she was not afraid of her mother scolding her, but it was more of a sense of pity towards her mother who was facing so many challenges, that encouraged her to do the household chores.

“I felt pity for my mother, that’s the right word. Yes, I felt pity for her. If I didn’t help her, who would? My younger sister was too lazy to take note or to care. My father, he was too busy at work. My younger sister and brother, they were too small so they could not do anything... and my mother was not the complaining kind. She did not complain.... that she had to take care of our house, and she had to take care of grandmother’s house as well. So if she had to cook, she would cook for both our house and grandmother’s house too. Because my grandmother lived just next door to us. My grandmother has five sons, my father is number three, and two of them not yet married at the time. And instead of only looking after us, she had to look after them as well. But she never complained about having to cook, wash the clothes, I really felt pity for her, because my mother worked shifts and was very tired. She would come home, and do all the housework, only then would she sleep... we never had a maid... so I really felt pity for her.”

Laili is the eldest among her four siblings. She has a younger sister who is two years younger than her, and another younger sister and a younger brother who are nine and eleven years younger than her respectively. Both Laili and her mother described them as two pairs of siblings, because of the large age gap between the first and the second pair. Laili reminisced how she was disciplined and trained to look after her younger siblings who were babies while her mother was working night shifts.

Laili’s second sister who is two years younger than her did not follow her parents’ instructions to do household chores. She would just ignore their requests from young,

so much so that Laili's mother admitted that she brought her second daughter to see the ear doctor to assess whether she was hard of hearing, as speaking to her felt like speaking to the wall. Laili explained that since her sister refused to do the housework, it was Laili's responsibility to do them as she was the eldest. In her mind, if she did not do them, no one else would. Therefore, it was up to Laili to be the disciplined and trained elder sister to make sure that all was cleaned, washed, swept and taken care of at home especially when her mother was at work. This may have developed Laili's soft skills of being trustworthy and dependable.

4.4.4.3 Relationship with Friends

Laili expressed in her storytelling that her friends are a very important part of her life, as she learnt a lot from them by just observing and interacting with them. Laili stated that her closest friends who are like her family are her Chinese neighbours whom she spent most of her childhood and grew up with. This neighbour family used to send their three children to Laili's grandmother to be looked after while the parents went to work. The children were older than Laili, with the youngest of them being two years older. Laili commented that she was very close to this family, and even called the parents "Mummy" and "Daddy". Her neighbour, Mel, confirmed in her storytelling that they were as close as family the time when they were neighbours, until now after Laili's family moved away.

Laili and her neighbour, Mel, both advised that the neighbour family also joined Laili and her cousins to play when the cousins came around to visit, and they also went out together on family outings. Laili highlighted that this Chinese neighbour family understood the importance of halal food to Muslims, and maintained a separate set of

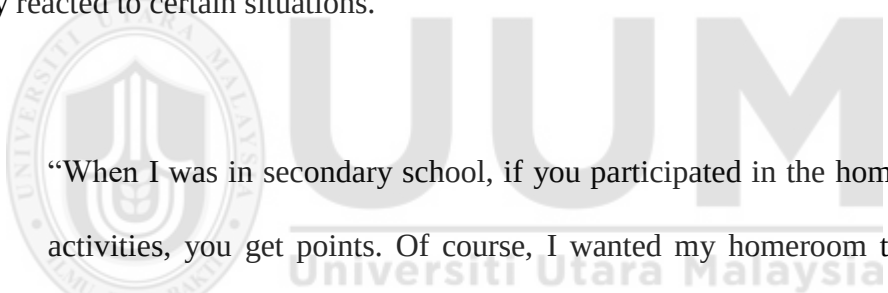
utensils to cook and serve food to her and her siblings. Laili's neighbour, Mel, related how she used to go over after school to help Laili do household chores. She also related that she was inspired by both Laili's academic and extra-curricular achievements in school, which motivated her to strive better in her life. Both Laili and her neighbour, Mel, stated that Laili's family and her Chinese neighbour's family always spend festive holidays together.

Laili related that before the family conflicts started to happen, her father's family was very close and tight-knit. From when she was very young, she used to play with her cousins from two of her father's married brothers' families. As her parents liked to bring the family out but did not have much money, they would go out once a week just for walks, to the park, swim in the river, or just to enjoy the lights at night. Laili described that there would altogether be fifteen or twenty of them in the group when they went on their frequent family outings together. Laili's mother confirmed this saying that they became close as they always went out together, and when they played at their grandmother's house, Laili would always take the lead even though she was one of the youngest among the group of cousins. Laili's mother related that she noticed that Laili took on the role as the group leader when she was only two or three, when playing with her cousins and neighbours. She was telling her husband that it was a curious situation that although she was one of the youngest children in the playgroup, she was taking charge of the games. According to her mother, Laili was already showing leadership skills at a very young age.

Laili's mother explained that she felt that Laili had secured high academic achievements during her diploma studies by securing a place on the Dean's list every

semester, mainly because Laili had competitive friends who were a positive influence on her. Her mother expressed that not only did they challenge Laili academically, they also provided a platform for her to exercise and build on her leadership skills during study and assignment projects. Her mother gave the example of how Laili would also register her friends for classes together with her, as she felt they were taking too long to do it themselves.

In her storytelling, Laili placed emphasis on how her friends helped her to develop and the influence they had on her life, and that she liked to make new friends because of this. She related that she learnt a lot by having friends around her and observing how they reacted to certain situations.



“When I was in secondary school, if you participated in the homeroom activities, you get points. Of course, I wanted my homeroom to win. There were those who were good and competitive; but there were also those who did not care less, or who were shy and did not wish to participate. There were also those who would sacrifice for others. So from what you observe among your friends, you decide which stand you wish to take. Whether you wish for success or not, with teamwork. So you should make friends; because if you do not socialise, you will not gain all this experience.”

4.4.4.4 Religiosity and Spirituality

Laili described her mother to be religious, as her mother was taught by her own religious father while growing up in a village. Laili advised that she and her siblings were made to go to religious school in addition to their mainstream school, and then to attend Quran reading classes at night. Laili advised that as her mother was busy working as a nurse, she did not have the time to teach her children on religion at home. Laili added that as her mother wanted her children to be taught about religion and how to read the Quran, she sent them to others who could teach them.

Laili's mother related that both Laili's father and her grandmother (from her father's side) were concerned that the children would be too tired from mainstream school to go for these extra hours of religious classes, but Laili related that her mother was adamant about it and so all her children had attended these extra classes. Laili also described her mother to be teaching her children about religion at home by carrying out actions which she expected her children to do such as performing prayers five times a day, reading the Quran and watching religious talk shows and documentaries on television.

Although Laili admitted that her father was not religious, she expressed that he had supported his wife's wishes and assisted to send and fetch their children to and from the religious classes so that they may gain knowledge about the Muslim religion. Laili described that although he did not do anything religious, her father would remind her to say her prayers five times a day when she came to the age when it was a requirement for her to do so. However, in her storytelling, Laili mentioned that when her father

started to face hardships in his business, he went to see the Malay shaman or witch doctor for help, which is against the Muslim religion.

“My father was not religious..... after two or three years of seeing the shaman, and after doing various things recommended by the shaman, he realised that it was not working. He then went back to the Muslim way and started to perform full prayers. It was a long time before he actually did that, as my father was not religious. I think he started to perform the full prayers when I was in secondary school.”

In Laili’s storytelling, she appeared to be concerned that her father reverted to the Muslim religion only at a considerably late stage of his life. This may indicate the religiosity and spirituality present in Laili’s way of life, as an important protective factor.

4.4.5 Laili’s Life Experiences

Laili’s life experiences which may have been significant to develop her resilience and other soft skills to enable her to thrive in life, were filled with protective as well as risk factors which she had experienced simultaneously. These include those encountered within her relationships within her family, and in the opportunities she was provided with which she took advantage of during her different school stages.

4.4.5.1 Relationships within Family

Laili experienced the risk factor of family conflict from her father's side of the family, as she was living next door and interacted with them daily. Laili's mother related how when Laili's father quit his job in the navy, Laili's family had to move out from the navy quarters and find a new place to live. As they were only living on her mother's small nurse salary, they moved into Laili's father's parents' house. Laili's mother stated that after six to seven months of living with Laili's grandparents, they moved into the house next door when the renters moved out. She mentioned that Laili's father then started the family business with his brothers, selling gas tanks with his brothers who were living with his mother.

Laili did not have a good relationship with her family next door. Both Laili and her mother stated that Laili's grandmother explicitly showed that she favoured Laili's younger sister over her. They both described that her grandmother kept on saying that Laili's sister's skin was lighter than Laili's, making her sister more attractive. Laili also related the story about her grandmother buying a bicycle for her younger sister and not for Laili, even though Laili was the one who could ride one and not her sister. Laili's mother also confirmed this incident to be one which Laili held a grudge against her grandmother, resulting in Laili feeling bitter. Laili also described her uncles who lived next door to be rude and disrespectful to their mother, Laili's grandmother, as she had spoilt them.

“As my grandfather was mostly never around, I guess my grandmother did not know how to show her love and spoilt her sons.... When my youngest uncle was 27, I started to understand things even though I was very young,

and I saw that my grandmother still washed their clothes, ironed their clothes, and treated her sons like they could not do anything for themselves. She spoilt them. My uncles did not respect my grandmother.... they would say things like “What is this that you cooked for us? It is not tasty at all.” You should not say this to your own mother, right? But my grandmother never scolded them, so they were rude to her. Back then, my mother did not like that situation, especially as we were just next door and she was afraid that we would be influenced by that kind of behaviour.”

Laili’s family lived as neighbours with her grandparents and uncles until Laili was about 21, when the family had a big quarrel because the family business was facing heavy losses. Laili explained that her father was very upset and disappointed that although he took the lead in the business and worked very hard to earn for his family, his mother had sided with his brothers who were hurling accusations at him during this difficult time. Laili’s mother related that he left the whole business to his brothers to run without him, and moved away with Laili and her family. Her mother described that the family business then went bankrupt within a year after selling off all assets, leaving Laili’s father to pay all the loans taken for the business until today as all were under his name. Laili shared that her father was quite distraught after the incident, and he called her a few times when she was at university during her last semester of her diploma studies. Laili described that he was speaking to her in a weird way during these calls, which made her worry about him.

Laili also had a turbulent relationship with her second sister as her sister ignored her and her parents, did not help Laili with household chores or caring for their younger

siblings when they were young, and was favoured by her grandmother next door. Her mother advised that Laili and her sister constantly fought starting from their primary school years, until she and her husband decided to build a wall in the sisters' room when they were in secondary school to separate them. This is despite both of them already being away studying at boarding school, and only came home during school holidays. Although the room the sisters shared was small to begin with, separating the sisters became a necessity as their years of fighting was affecting the family too much.

However, Laili described her grandfather from her mother's side of the family to display positive family values. Laili stated that she enjoyed visiting her mother's family as she felt that there was cohesiveness, while they displayed their love for the arts such as Malay poetry and songs. Laili expressed that her interest for the arts was inherited from her mother's side of the family, and she liked to participate in school activities and activities with these themes.

From Laili's storytelling, it appears that this is the opposite from her father's family as her grandfather from that side of the family was in the army and was never at home, leaving the family disconnected. Laili described that her father's family was never as united as her mother's family. However, Laili reminisced that when she was very young, before her pre-school days; her father's family and her family were very close as they frequently spent time together or went out during weekends together. Laili was very close to her cousins during this time, but the outings and time spent together ceased when the family conflicts started during her secondary school days.

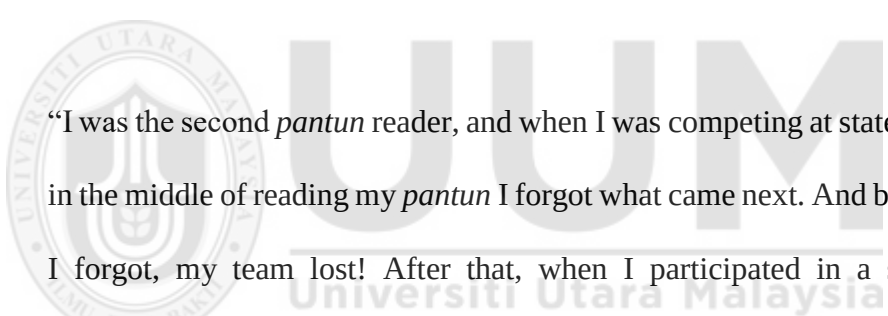
4.4.5.2 In Various School Stages

From her storytelling, it seems that Laili had interesting experiences during the various stages of her schooling life which may also have affected the development of her resilience and other soft skills. Laili related that when she was five, she was enrolled at a Ladybird Kindergarten which used English as the language medium. In the next year, she was enrolled in Tadika Al-Ansar which was an Islamic focused kindergarten. Laili explained that it was the same for her siblings, as her mother wanted to give them exposure in both English and well as religiosity during pre-school. Laili's mother on the other hand, related a story that Laili did not seem to remember, about her pre-school days. Laili's mother described that when Laili brought back a friend's book from pre-school, her mother was very angry as she felt like Laili stole the book, and proceeded to physically punish Laili with a hanger. Her mother explained that this was the only one time that she had physically punished Laili. However, Laili insists in her storytelling that both her parents had never physically punished her.

Commencing from primary school, it is noted from the stories that Laili participated in as many new extra-curricular activities in the various school stages as she could to gain new experiences. Laili explained that she liked to try new things, and that she was not afraid of failure. Both Laili and her mother described how when her teacher requested for participation in activities, Laili would always raise her hand to volunteer. In primary school, Laili was involved in various activities and competitions such as gymrama, storytelling, reading various Malay poetry (*pantun* and *sajak*), giving Malay speeches (*syarahan* and *pidato*), and singing religious songs (*nasyid*); which Laili felt had built her confidence and leadership skills. She was appointed assistant class monitor every year from Standard 2 onwards, librarian from Standard 3, prefect from

Standard 4, and she was appointed as the very first Head Girl of her school in Standard 6, as all the previous student heads had been boys.

Laili related how she liked to participate in any activity she could at school, irrespective of whether she won or lost. She expressed that she learnt a lot from participating in these activities, like how to interact with people and how to manage her time to prepare for competitions. She emphasised that she liked to participate as she liked to try new things, and that if she failed in anything, she would just try again as she did not believe in giving up. Laili's neighbour, Mel, also mentioned that she noticed that Laili does not give up in anything she undertakes.



“I was the second *pantun* reader, and when I was competing at state level, in the middle of reading my *pantun* I forgot what came next. And because I forgot, my team lost! After that, when I participated in a speech competition, I also forgot my lines and my team lost again because of me. I cannot forget those times in my life. I felt so embarrassed, but I thought that if I felt ashamed and did not want to continue participating, I would lose out. I deduced that the embarrassment was just for a short time, and that I could make up for the mistakes I made. So, after those two embarrassing moments, I participated and I never forgot my lines. I learnt from my mistakes.”

However, both Laili and her mother admitted that throughout her primary school years, she was never outstanding in her academic achievements. Laili explained that at the

time, she felt that it was uninteresting to only focus on her studies and that she was always looking to try new activities at school.

In her secondary school days when she was away at boarding school, she also participated in various school activities, similar to her primary school days. In her storytelling, Laili is also proud of her achievement in producing a theatre performance in Form 2, as she managed to get the boys to participate as well. She was also appointed dorm and homeroom head in Form 2 and dorm prefect in Form 3 onwards, while being active in sports such as marching (her school achieved third place at national level) and hockey. Laili also related that she was vocal during her secondary school years, and her teachers saw her as the leader of the rebellious group in school. This was because she felt that certain rules in her boarding school were unreasonable, and she volunteered to speak up as she was always encouraged by her mother to speak her mind when she thinks she is right. She highlighted that she also confronted her schoolmates who were not carrying their weight during group discussions and assignments. However, Laili stated that she was careful to ensure that these confrontations with her schoolmates were done amicably so as not to start any disagreements, quarrels or fights, as taught by her mother.

Laili's mother described that Laili was not very active from Form 1 to Form 3, so she could achieve good results in her Form 3 national examinations. However, her mother related that when Laili entered Form 4, she became extremely active again and entered various competitions, with the marching activity taking a lot of her time. Her mother expressed that due to Laili not being focused on her studies, she did not achieve really good results in her SPM (Form 5) national examinations, which resulted in her losing

the opportunity to apply for a scholarship to do her tertiary studies overseas. Laili's mother explained that as she was in boarding school, she could not help Laili like how she did just before her UPSR examinations, which was to ensure that she was focused on her examinations.

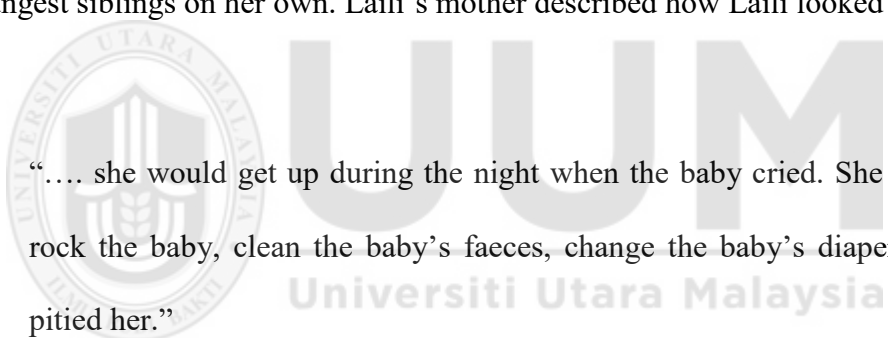
During Laili's diploma studies in a local university, her mother described that although she was very active in extra-curricular activities while representing her university in competitions, her memory of not focusing on her academic studies was fresh in Laili's mind and she made sure that she excelled academically by being on the Dean's list every semester. Due to her constant excellent results as well as extra-curricular achievements during her diploma studies; Laili managed to secure a government scholarship halfway through her diploma studies, as well as a prestigious local scholarship for her undergraduate studies from Yayasan Sime Darby. Her mother highlighted that this was despite her family facing extreme financial difficulties during the last semester of her diploma.

4.4.6 Laili's Life Turning Points

There were two turning points in Laili's life that changed her outlook on life, which may have developed her resilience and other soft skills, resulting her being the outstanding individual she is today. They include Laili being thrust with adult responsibilities to take care of her baby sister on her own when she was only nine, and Laili's mother suddenly showing concern over her academic achievement when Laili was 12.

4.4.6.1 First Turning Point : Laili Given Adult Responsibilities at Nine

Both Laili and her mother related that when her mother resumed work after her maternity leave upon giving birth to her third child, she was required to work night shifts. During this time, both of them stated that Laili, being the eldest child, was given the responsibility to look after her baby sister although she was only nine and going to primary school. They both added that it was the same when Laili's fourth sibling was born two years after that, while Laili was also still in primary school. Laili described that her family could not afford to have a maid at home, and her grandmother was sickly. Laili was forced to immediately adapt to the situation, and build the required resilience to take on the important and meaningful role of looking after her two youngest siblings on her own. Laili's mother described how Laili looked after them.



“.... she would get up during the night when the baby cried. She would rock the baby, clean the baby's faeces, change the baby's diapers.... I pitied her.”

Laili explained that she took on the responsibility of an adult and had to look after babies at such a young age, because she had no choice as the eldest child. She added that there was no other person to be relied upon to take on the important task, especially as her second sister ignored both Laili and her parents, and did not help with the household chores. Laili expressed that she carried out the responsibility out of the love she had for her parents and her younger siblings, even though it was a heavy responsibility for a young child to carry.

“I remember during the nights when my mother was working the night shift.... I was upset because although I was a child, I had to get up from sleep when my father refused to get up. When the baby cried, I had to get up and make her milk and rock her back to sleep. It was tiring.”

In her storytelling, Laili's neighbour, Mel, emphasised that she feels that Laili is who she is today because of being given the responsibility to care for her two younger siblings on her own at such a tender age. In relation to this, Laili's neighbour related how Laili had enjoyed her life as a child before her third and fourth siblings were born. However, although Laili had lesser time to play unlike other children as her time had to be allocated towards her task of taking care of her siblings, her neighbour commented that Laili was still an overall happy child.

Laili's neighbour, Mel, highlighted that Laili's independence took prominence; while expressing that it was not easy to look after her young siblings, at the tender age of nine, and on her own without any assistance. She said that she knew it was not easy as sometimes she went over to help Laili bathe her siblings in the evenings. She stated that she felt that Laili was forced to mature earlier than others her age at the time, as she was already performing 'grown-up' household chores of looking after her baby siblings. She remarked that Laili did not think like any normal ten or eleven year olds, due to this important responsibility thrust on her. Her neighbour also believes that the responsibility of caring for her two younger siblings had contributed to Laili's maturity and special characteristics.

4.4.6.2 Second Turning Point : Mother's Sudden Concern when Laili was 12

Laili related that her parents had never usually showed concern over her academic achievements. She explained that both her parents did not come from very academically inclined families. Her mother would usually ask about how her day went at school, rather than how she performed academically at school. Laili highlighted that even when she did not achieve well academically, her parents did not put any pressure on her, which she appreciated. Laili even related that when she did not feel like going to school during her primary school years, she would just follow her father while he ran his gas business. She described that during school holidays or when she did not feel like going to school, she would help her father do stock takes and deal with customers. Laili mentioned that only once in a while would her mother ask whether she had finished doing her homework. Laili's mother also confirmed this.

“Frankly speaking, I did not focus on their academics as I am not that kind.... It is quite embarrassing to say this but I myself did not like to study when I was young. This is why I was not surprised when my children also did not like to study.... I remember that when I was young, the last thing I wanted to do was study. So, I did not force them to study..... I just let them do what they wanted to, but I ensured that they finished their schoolwork. I would ask them whether they had homework and whether they had completed it. But I did not sit with them or teach them, none of that.”

However, Laili expressed that it came as a surprise to her when suddenly, two weeks before her UPSR examinations, her mother asked her a question and tested her on her English. Laili related that when she could not answer her mother, she received a

scolding as she could not even arrange an English sentence at the time, and it was already very close to the national examinations. Laili remembers that her mother was extremely angry with her at the time, and her mother made her do many essay exercises to prepare for the examinations. Laili claims that it was because of this incident of her mother's sudden concern for her academics, that she achieved straights As for her UPSR. Her mother related a similar story about the incident.

“I have no idea why but nearing the UPSR examinations, suddenly I had a thought in my head that this girl was not reading her books, so I called her to read with me. Then I realised that she was very bad in English, she did not know how to answer the English questions at all. I remember that at the time, it was about two weeks before the UPSR examinations. So I went out to the book shop, and bought a book on English grammar. My English was also not that good, but I tried to teach her. I remember scolding her throughout my teaching her English. And when her results came out, she achieved 5As. It was a total surprise!”

Laili expressed that this was the only time in her life that her mother had pressured her about her academics. As she achieved excellent results in UPSR, she managed to enrol into a good secondary boarding school, thanks to her many extra-curricular activities and achievements. When she entered the boarding school, Laili explained that she felt the pressure to do well in her academics from the school, but not from her parents. However, Laili stated that when she let her guard down and did not achieve good results in her SPM examinations, her father communicated with her and showed her how upset he was with her. She advised that she did not remember exactly what her

father said to her, but it was along the lines that he had given her everything that she needed and she still did not do well in her examinations. Laili expressed that it was the most serious and upsetting thing that he had ever said to her. Laili admitted that she regretted her SPM academic results, and had strived to do better from then on. This had resulted in her achieving outstanding academic results in her tertiary education.

4.4.7 Summary

From the analysis of Laili's life story, it was noted that a main protective factor and development asset in her life was the warmth and support provided by her parents, especially her authoritative mother. Aside from Laili seeing the sacrifices her mother made for her and her family; her mother had constantly communicated with Laili to provide support and advice; and provided Laili with the autonomy to make her own decisions from a very young age. Another protective factor and development asset is discipline and training, which were due to the circumstances in Laili's life as her mother was working shifts and their family could not afford to pay for help at home. This resulted in Laili having to perform all household chores at a young age. The third protective factor and developmental asset is Laili's relationship with her friends which she values, while learning from them. The other protective factor is religiosity and spirituality. All four factors and assets were found to be intertwined, and they worked together synergistically to strengthen one another and provide Laili with resilience and other soft skills.

Laili's notable life experiences include her relationship with her father's family, where she encountered conflict which may have been a risk factor in her life that was countered by protective factors, especially her mother who constantly communicated

with her after a family conflict and provided her with advice on how to feel and react. The opportunities in the various school stages, along with the protective factors and other life experiences provided Laili with not only the soft skill of resilience but also of independence, leadership, confidence, trustworthiness and dependability. The two turning points in Laili's life which may have changed her outlook on life altogether include the sudden responsibility of caring for her baby sister on her own without assistance when Laili was only nine, which Laili embraced full-heartedly due to her love for her family. The other turning point was her mother's sudden concern over her academic performance when Laili was 12, which showed Laili that her parents did care about her academics although they did not consistently show it throughout her life. Laili managed to get into a good secondary boarding school, and then excelled in her tertiary studies.

4.4.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the three participants' life stories. Each participant's summarised life story was presented, followed by their profiles and the other interviewees' profiles, placing things into context. The retelling of each life story was made clearer with a table that showed each participant's prominent experiences according to age, while relating these experiences to places and relationships. The themes and subthemes which emerged from the analysis of each life story were visualised in a diagram that indicated the relationships among them, and were elaborated in the subsequent sections. Each life story findings presentation was concluded with a summary.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS FROM CROSS-ANALYSIS OF THE THREE LIFE STORIES

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the findings from the analysis of each of the three participants' life stories were reported in detail to answer the research question of how an underprivileged individual can develop resilience and other soft skills to thrive. This is despite being exposed to risks earlier in life that could have hindered the development of abilities and skills. During thematic analysis, various common themes and subthemes were found across the three participants' life stories data, which may reinforce their importance in the study. According to Riessman (2005), thematic analysis may assist to find similar themes across a number of participants' narrated experiences. However, aside from the common ones, interesting different themes and subthemes also emerged from the analysis of the life stories of the three participants, which may contribute to the research.

Therefore, it was decided that a cross-analysis of themes and subthemes that emerged from the individual life story analysis be performed across the three life stories. This chapter presents the findings from the cross-analysis of the three participants' life stories, highlighting the common and different themes and subthemes found from the comparison of the three life story narratives. The findings are consistently guided by the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to understand life stories described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) of time, place, and relationships. The chapter then closes with a summary.

5.2 Cross-Analysis of the Life Stories

The cross-analysis to identify the common and different themes and subthemes was facilitated by analysing the three life stories to explore and discover the protective factors and developmental assets, life experiences, and turning points which changed the participants' outlook on life; that influenced the development of resilience and other soft skills.

Although all three participants originated from low socioeconomic status family backgrounds and were resilient to succeed and thrive in life; they were different from various contexts. For example, the three participants: (a) are of different gender; (b) are fully-abled vs disabled; (c) originated from different levels of low income families i.e. extremely poor vs low working class; (d) grew up in different area types i.e. rural vs urban; and (e) have different personalities i.e. extrovert vs introvert. However, it was found that the protective factors and developmental assets in their lives were very similar.

For each of the three participants, the main themes falling under the protective factors and developmental assets in their lives were the same; a warm and supportive environment, discipline and training, as well as religiosity and spirituality; with certain subthemes being similar, while others were different across the three even though they came under the same protective factor theme. However, Laili differed from the other two participants with an odd emerging theme of her relationship with friends, and it was found to fall within her protective factors. In contrast, Firdaus' relationship with his schoolmates was an emerging theme that appeared to be a risk factor as he was

treated badly, bullied, teased, ignored and talked about behind his back by his ‘friends’ in school.

In the three participants’ life experiences in school, the various opportunities which presented themselves and taken full advantage of to build their resilience and develop other soft skills were similar, as all three were appointed into leadership positions at school and were very active in extra-curricular activities throughout their schooling years. However, all three participants had life experiences of negative relationships which may have been risk factors in their lives; Firdaus with his schoolmates and the community, Amir with his father, and Laili with her father’s family.

Firdaus and Amir encountered their life turning points when they were adolescents, and Laili encountered hers when she was much younger. However, all their life turning points resulted in their lives suddenly going into a direction which they had not anticipated, but eventually resulting in positive changes. And almost all of their life turning points were related to one of their parents, which was either their father or mother, except when Firdaus became completely blind.

To facilitate the detailed cross-analysis of the three life stories, the emerging themes and subthemes drawn up in figures 4.4, 4.7 and 4.11 in Chapter 4 were reviewed and compared. The main emerging themes and subthemes, made up of those similar and those interestingly different, are tabulated in Table 5.1 below and presented by participant for ease of comparison reference. Those items which seem to be life risk factors are *italicised* in the following table.

Table 5.1

The Comparison of Life Stories' Emerging Themes and Subthemes

Theme/ Subtheme	Firdaus	Amir	Laili
Warmth and Support	Mainly from authoritative mother, who spent all her time with her children and provided attention and focus on them.	Mainly from authoritative mother, who maintained the calmness and encouraged happiness in the home.	Mainly from authoritative mother who provided support with communication and autonomy.
Resilient Mother	Brought up eight children mostly alone, as housewife.	• Gave up life for her new family. • Sole family breadwinner for a few years.	• Looked after two houses, despite working shifts. • Stable family income earner.
Discipline	• On not going out, and doing household chores. • Physical punishment, mostly by mother.	• On following a daily timetable at home, not going out, and doing household chores. • Physical punishment by father.	• On doing household chores and looking after baby siblings. • No physical punishment.
Training	Household chores, from six years old.	• Household chores, from six years old. • Entrepreneurship training, including saving, by mother from primary school years.	• Household chores from five years old. • Took care of baby sister on her own and at night from nine years old.
Religiosity and Spirituality	• Both parents are religious. • Attended Quran reading classes. • Relied on spiritual relationship with God during challenging times	• Both parents are religious. • Attended Quran reading classes.	• Mother is religious. • Attended Quran reading classes, as well as religious classes.

	at secondary school.		
Relationship with father	Father was seldom at home as he was mostly away at work in the army.	<i>Authoritarian father was harsh and controlling (risk). He was also seldom at home.</i>	Father spent time with her at home, but was not as close to her as her mother.
Academic focus by parents	Not much focus, except for father's sudden outburst about his disappointment with his children not being able to enter university.	• Parents taught him to read at four. • Both parents very focused on academic achievements, with coaching at home. • Father refused to visit him at boarding school and give him monthly pocket money if Amir did not achieve first academic placing in class.	Not much focus, except for mother's sudden concern just before UPSR, and her father's hard comments after her SPM results came out.
Responsibility given by parents	• Felt that he was expected to enter university, as father had outburst just before his SPM examinations. • Household chores from young.	• Trained to be future backbone of the family, as he is the eldest sibling. • Household chores from young.	• Had to take care of baby siblings as mother was working shifts. • Household chores from young.
Communication with Parents	• Mother always communicates with him, giving him attention and focus, while emphasising on religiosity and spirituality. • Father was mostly away at work, and did not	• Mother always spoke to him at home to cheer him up and keep everything calm. • Father was mostly away from home doing his activities, and did not communicate much, including	• Mother was communicating with her while she was still in the womb. She always provided advice to Laili when required, and explain to her about the family conflicts

	communicate much with him.	during their fishing trips.	and how to react to them. Father who spent time with her, but did not communicate much with her.
Obedience and Compliance	Compliant to both his parents out of love as well as due to spirituality.	- Compliant to both parents, to his father due to fear and to his mother due to love. - Sought his mother's blessing if he was going somewhere he thought his father would not allow him to go to.	Compliant to parents, especially in doing housework and taking care of baby siblings, due to her sense of responsibility and due to her love for her parents and siblings.
Relationship with family	<i>Family conflict with mother's family (risk).</i>	Minimal influence in life.	<i>Family conflict with father's family and sister (risk).</i>
Relationship with friends	<i>Conflicts with schoolmates (risk).</i>	Minimal influence in life.	She feels that this is important in her life.
Relationship with Community	<i>Non-accepting neighbours due to poverty (risk).</i>	- Village rife with illegal racing activities. Was encouraged by older boys to start illegal racing at the tender age of seven (risk). - Looked at by community as a respected family of teachers in a poor fishing village.	Played with neighbour's children when young, and close like family when grown up.
Experience in school	- Good secondary boarding school. - Appointed into leadership positions. - Good in academics and	- Good secondary boarding school. - Appointed into leadership positions. - Outstanding in both academics	- Good secondary boarding school. - Appointed into leadership positions. - Good in academics and

outstanding in extra-curricular activities.	and extra- curricular activities.	outstanding in extra-curricular activities.
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It is important to note that all the themes and subthemes above which emerged from this study's data analysis fit within the Developmental Assets Framework by the Search Institute, of which the 40 developmental assets are listed in Table 2.1 in Chapter 2. This indicates that the main emerging themes and subthemes either fall within the external assets i.e. the relationships and opportunities provided by their families, schools or communities; or their internal assets i.e. the socio-emotional strengths, values and commitments. Both external and internal developmental assets are to be nurtured for positive youth development results (Scales et al., 2016).

5.2.1 Analysis of the Common Themes

Although the various risk factors that emerged from the data analysis, aside from the low socio-economic status, were noted to be quite different for each participant; it is interesting to note that the participants' protective factors and development assets were the common themes identified among all three. These include the warm and supportive environment at home, the discipline and training implemented, as well as the religiosity and spirituality in their upbringing.

In addition, upon cross-analysing these protective factors in further detail; common emerging subthemes such as resilient mother, relationship with father, obedience and compliance, responsibility given as well as communication with parents were found. Aside from these, their school experiences were similar with all three of them successfully attending good secondary boarding schools which resulted in them being

away from home when they were teenagers, and being physically away from the three protective factors at home, while they continued to be active in school extra-curricular activities towards future success in their lives.

5.2.1.1 Warm and Supportive Environment

The warm and supportive environment they experienced at home from very young were mainly provided by their authoritative mothers who demonstrated not only high warmth but also high control. Their mothers were caring, nurturing and supportive towards the participants throughout their lives. Despite their mother's own life challenges, they provided each participant with the right kind of environment for them to feel loved and safe, to enable them to develop their resilience and other soft skills to thrive. Firdaus' mother provided him with constant focus and attention, keeping him feeling loved and supported, especially as she was at home all the time. Amir's mother covered for him when it came to dealing with his harsh authoritarian father, and maintained the household calmness and encouraged happiness in the home. Laili's mother treated her like a friend while constantly communicating with her to advise her how to deal with matters such as family conflicts, and provided her with the autonomy to make her own decisions and learn from her own mistakes.

5.2.1.2 Resilient Mother

Each of the three mothers faced various life challenges and made hefty sacrifices for their families, appearing to be resilient themselves. Firdaus mentioned that his mother looked after her eight children almost single-handedly, as his father was mostly away at work; and she broke down and cried on certain days as she found it too difficult. Amir stated that his mother gave up everything when she left her family in Sarawak

and changed her religion to marry Amir's father, and was the sole family breadwinner for a few years while her husband was not working. Laili commented that her mother had looked after two houses (her family's and her father's parents') by cooking and washing clothes, even though she worked three shifts as a nurse and was exhausted every day; while being the sole breadwinner for certain periods and the stable income earner throughout Laili's life.

5.2.1.3 Discipline and Training

There was a high level of discipline instilled and training implemented in each participant's home. For all three participants, they were trained and monitored to perform household chores from a very young age, which was even before they started to go to school. While Firdaus and Amir shared the responsibility to carry out household chores with their siblings according to a duty roster, Laili had to perform most of the chores on her own as her younger sister refused to help her or her parents. She was also trained to look after her baby siblings when they were just born, after her mother had to resume work, and working shifts. For Firdaus and Amir; they were both not allowed out of their homes, to roam and loiter about in their neighbourhoods while fraternising with the other neighbourhood children, as protection against the risky environments in their communities.

5.2.1.4 Religiosity and Spirituality

For all three participants, all of them were sent to Quran reading classes from young, and they were monitored to perform their prayers five times a day at home. Firdaus emphasised that he also led the prayers at home as well as in school, and that his mother would strictly monitor to ensure that he read the Quran every morning. For Amir, he

also taught his sisters to read the Quran, as they were not allowed to go to the classes unlike him. Both Firdaus and Amir mentioned that they believed in the importance of obtaining blessings from their parents every time, and to never go against them or make them sad.

5.2.1.5 Relationship with Father

All three participants had a distant relationship with their fathers. However, their relationships with their authoritative mothers were strong enough for them to be provided with a warm and supportive environment at home. Firdaus appeared sad that he did not get to spend much time with his father when he was young. However, his father's outburst when he was 17 affected him tremendously and turned his life around, which may have resulted in his university degree. For Amir, his father's authoritarian ways of being harsh, controlling and disengaged with him had also affected him, but as a risk factor. The turning point in Amir's life was when he mustered enough courage to face and confront his biggest fear, his authoritarian father, which may have assisted him to reduce or mitigate his life risk factor. Even though Laili's father spent more time with her when she was young, she was still closer to her mother than her father as he did not communicate with her as much. He also did not help her with household chores or take care of her baby siblings when she was around.

5.2.1.6 Responsibility given by Parents

An interesting common subtheme was that all participants were given a big responsibility in their lives, and this phenomenon may have assisted to develop and nurture their resilience and other soft skills. Even before they started school, all participants were given the responsibility of performing household chores. In addition,

both Amir and Laili were given other important responsibilities at home when they were in primary school. Amir was trained with more focus by his mother because he was given the heavy responsibility of preparing himself to be ready to be the future family backbone, while Laili was thrust with the important responsibility of looking after her baby siblings soon after they were born when her mother had to resume work.

5.2.1.7 Communication with Parents

All three participants' mothers constantly communicated with them, which appeared to have contributed to the warm and supportive environment at home that assisted to build their resilience and other soft skills. Firdaus' mother was mostly at home with him, and communicated with him with full focus and attention, always advising him while teaching him about religiosity and spirituality. Amir's mother spent most of her time at home with him, communicated with him to academically coach and train him, as well as to calm and cheer him up when he felt angry or sad because of his father's treatment towards him. Laili's mother started to communicate with her when she was still in her womb, so much so that Laili could talk at the age of eight months. Her mother also constantly communicated with her and gave her advice to support and help her develop, as well as mitigate the risky effects of family conflicts.

For all three participants, their fathers did not communicate well or much with them. For Firdaus, his father was mostly away at work in the army. For Amir, even though his father spent time with him during their fishing trips when he was young, they barely communicated except when his father gave him instructions during the fishing activity. Laili's father spent more time with her as compared to the other two participants, as

he was mostly at home during the day than her mother at times. However, her father did not communicate well with her.

5.2.1.8 Obedience and Compliance

For all three participants, they displayed a high level of obedience and compliance to their parents. This appears to be due to the warm and supportive environment at home resulting in the love that they feel for their mother or both parents. For both Firdaus and Amir, they were also compliant due to the element of religiosity and spirituality, as they made sure they always obtained the blessings of their parents and never made them unhappy. Laili was compliant mainly due to the strong sense of responsibility she had, because she was the oldest sibling and there was no one else who could be relied upon to do the household chores and look after her baby siblings when her mother was working shifts. However, Amir's compliance to his father particularly when he was young was due to his fear of him, a harsh and controlling authoritarian father. He was compliant to his father even when he did not have to be, such as going out for outings during weekends with his friends when he was in boarding school, as his father would not have known if he had not complied.

5.2.1.9 Experience in School

All three participants started being appointed into leadership positions from when they were in primary school, while already being active in extra-curricular activities. As Amir could already read at the age of four, he was even provided the opportunity to teach his friends in pre-school how to read. One interesting common emerging subtheme was that all three participants had attended good secondary schools which were also boarding schools, and this had resulted in them being physically away from

home at the beginning of their teenage years. Due to Firdaus becoming completely blind at 14, he was transferred into a good integrated boarding and secondary school when he was in Form 2. For both Amir and Laili, they managed to get into a good secondary boarding school due to their outstanding results in UPSR and being very active in extra-curricular activities.

5.2.2 Analysis of the Different Themes

During the cross-analysis of the three life stories, interestingly different themes emerged for each participant that may have contributed to building their resilience and soft skills to thrive. In addition, an interesting phenomenon found is that certain risk factors noted in one participant's life may have served as a protective factor in another's, and vice versa. This section analyses the different emerging themes and subthemes that were found in each participant's life, analysed in comparison with one another; as this may also be important for the study.

5.2.2.1 Discipline and Training

Both Firdaus and Amir were subjected to physical punishments; although Firdaus by his mother, and Amir by his father. While the physical punishments implemented by Amir's authoritarian father affected him greatly and appeared to be a risk factor in his life; physical punishments meted out by Firdaus' authoritative mother were accepted by him as her showing care, and taken in a positive context. In contrast, Laili was not subjected to physical punishments at all.

Amir appeared to have been subjected to more discipline and training at home from young, as he had to follow a timetable at home very strictly; from getting up from sleep, to performing specific tasks at home, and going to sleep at night. He was also trained to read very early in his life, resulting in him being able to read from the age of four. He was trained to have entrepreneurial skills by his mother from his primary school years, and she also trained him to save the money earned from his entrepreneurial endeavours.

5.2.2.2 Spirituality

Firdaus appeared to have more religious teachings at home by his mother, as both his mother and himself spoke about religiosity and spirituality more than the other two participants in their storytelling. During his secondary school years in boarding school when his blind friends treated him badly and ignored him, Firdaus confided in God while crying to himself. He did not trouble his mother or teachers with his challenges in school at this stage, as he did not want them to worry, especially his mother who was away from him and at home. Both his mother and close teacher advised that Firdaus had seemed happy during this time, with his mother even commenting that she saw him bloom and thrive in school during this part of his life.

5.2.2.3 Academic Focus by Parents

Both Firdaus and Laili's parents did not focus consistently on their academic performance, and they were satisfied as long as the participants went to school and did their homework. However, Firdaus' father had the outburst about his children's lack of academic achievement when Firdaus was 17 and was just about to sit for his SPM examinations. This had turned Firdaus' life around, and he managed to successfully

enter university. Laili's mother suddenly showed concern about Laili's ability to answer English examination questions when she was 12, just a couple of weeks before her UPSR examinations. This incident had also turned her life around with Laili surprisingly producing straight As in her national examinations.

However, in extreme contrast, Amir's parents who were both teachers when he was young, placed full emphasis on his academic development and achievements. They started to teach him how to read at the age of three, which resulted in him being able to read by the age of four. He mainly received gifts of books but not many toys from his parents. His mother would coach him on academics at home, and he consistently achieved outstanding results throughout his schooling years. In his strict daily timetable, he was compliant and studied in his room during certain times of each day. While at the secondary boarding school, his father would not visit him or give him his RM20 monthly allowance if he did not secure top academic placing in his class.

5.2.2.4 Relationship with Family

Amir had a good relationship with his extended family. Unfortunately, for Firdaus and Laili, they both encountered conflicts in their family relationships of which the risky effects had appeared to be mitigated by the protective factors in their lives. Firdaus' family on his mother's side looked down on them when they went to visit his grandparents during festive seasons. However, the risky effect was bigger for Laili as her father and his family who lived next door went through conflicts about the family business during her secondary school years, which blew up into a big family fight during the last semester of her diploma studies.

5.2.2.5 Relationship with Friends

In her storytelling, Laili emphasised the importance of her relationship with her friends in various stages of her life, both at home and at school, as they supported her and she learnt a lot from her relationship with her friends. Laili had Chinese neighbours who were close to her from young, and who she considers as her own family members when she became an adult. Her relationship with friends appear to have acted as a protective factor and development asset in her life. However, for Firdaus, his relationship with friends in school appear to be a risk factor in his life, which he countered with his strong spirituality protective factor. Amir, on the other hand, remarked that he did not have many close friends, and they did not appear to have made much influence in his life.

5.2.2.6 Relationship with the Community

In his storytelling, Firdaus mentioned that his neighbours did not like him or his family due to their poverty, and especially the fact that they looked through their neighbours' rubbish to find items which could be reused. Unfortunately, he and his family would be the first ones to be blamed if there were any lost items in a neighbour's house. His community appeared to be a risk factor in his life. Amir related that his community was rife with the hazardous 'Mat Rempit' illegal racing activities, and that he was encouraged by a few older boys in his village to race with his bicycle when he was only seven. His parents' strict regulation of not allowing him to roam and loiter about in the village was to protect him against this risk factor. However, Amir's family was respected by the poor fishing village he lived in as his parents were both teachers. On the other hand, Laili did not have much to tell in her life story about her community, except that she used to play with her neighbour's children.

5.3 Summary

This chapter presented the cross-analysis of the three life stories emerging themes and subthemes. The common emerging themes and subthemes seem to reinforce their importance towards the study, while the different ones provide interesting ideas and phenomena which may contribute to the research. For ease of comparison reference, the emerging themes and subthemes which were important to the study were tabulated. Following this, it was observed that all the themes and subthemes fit within Search Institute's Developmental Assets Framework. This importantly indicates that these themes and subthemes are relevant external and internal developmental assets, which may be nurtured towards positive youth development. However, in certain life stories, these protective factors may also be risk factors, and should be examined in context.

The main common emerging themes among the three life stories were the participants' protective factors and developmental assets of a warm and supportive environment, discipline and training, as well as religiosity and spirituality in their upbringing. The other main common emerging theme is the life experiences of the three participants within the opportunities in school. Following this, the common emerging subthemes which were found from the cross-analysis of the three life stories were resilient mother, relationship with father, obedience and compliance, responsibility given as well as communication with parents. It was interesting to note that certain subthemes were not emphasised on as important during the individual life stories analysis, such as resilient mother, responsibility given and communication with parents.

However, in the common emerging themes of discipline and training, as well as religiosity and spirituality; there were differences which were also presented to put

things into perspective while presenting the interesting phenomena. The other main emerging themes which were different across all three life stories were their relationships i.e. with family, friends and community. A stark contrast to be examined is when the emerging themes of relationship with friends, for example, appear to be a protective factor in Laili's life but a risk factor in Firdaus'. In addition, an emerging subtheme which was different across the three life stories is parents' academic focus, which came from the emerging theme of discipline and training in Amir's life, but emerged only in the life turning points of Firdaus and Laili; with different levels of focus happening at different stages of life. This interesting emerging subtheme was also not emphasised on as important during the individual life story analysis.

The findings from the cross-analysis of the three stories were useful, as they had assisted to bring the detailed review of the emerging themes and subthemes from the individual life stories analysis a step further. They also facilitated to highlight certain emerging subthemes which were not emphasised on before in the individual life story analysis, and looked at from a different angle of analysis for consideration of importance in the research.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, discussion on the findings from both the individual analysis and cross-analysis of the three life stories from Chapters 4 and 5 is presented. The important conclusion which emerged from this exploration study is then reported; followed by the significance, limitations, as well as implications and future research that may be carried out as a follow-up to this study.

6.2 Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyse how an underprivileged individual can develop resilience and other soft skills to thrive; by discovering the protective factors and developmental assets, the experiences, and the turning points in the life of the three participants who met the criteria of the study. This section discusses the findings which resulted from the exploration above within their individual contexts. The findings are then discussed within the contexts of relationships, time, and place, which make up the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to understand life stories described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Overall, the findings from both the individual analysis and cross-analysis of the life stories are discussed, while relating them to existing literature, towards achieving the research objective.

6.2.1 Protective Factors and Developmental Assets

Three protective factors and developmental assets were discovered to be present in all three participants' lives from very young: (a) a warm and supportive environment; (b)

discipline and training; and (c) religiosity and spirituality. As these protective factors were a common theme across all the participants' life stories, their importance is reinforced in this study as being critical for positive youth development to reduce high risk behaviours and increase thriving behaviour indicators.

6.2.1.1 Warm and Supportive Environment

Despite coming from underprivileged family backgrounds where according to Duncan et al. (2014) there is usually less nurturing in a harsh, hostile environment due to economic stress; all three participants experienced a warm and supportive environment, which is the first main external asset in the Developmental Assets framework by Search Institute (Scales et al., 2016). The most effective way to enhance resilience is for the family and community to provide the child with a loving, safe and stable environment; which Southwick et al. (2014) promoted for a healthy emotional and physical development. It was found that the main and sole contributor of this important protective factor in each of the three participants' lives was their mother.

6.2.1.2 Discipline and Training

All the participants experienced highly disciplined lives, where rules were implemented in their homes from when they were very young. To support this, a Malaysian study by Abdul Kadir et al. (2012) stated that rules set within the family for children such as monitoring their whereabouts, prevent risky behaviour. It appeared that certain rules were for the participants' own safety, protecting them from risks in the community while others were for them to carry out their responsibilities such as household chores, taking care of their siblings or to teach their siblings how to read the Quran. In addition, Grusec et al. (2017) pointed out that parents from a low

socioeconomic background usually exert higher control and discipline for the children's safety, as their environments tend to be risky; and there is usually high compliance in this strict environment as parental control is perceived to mean care and support.

It seemed that the strict discipline implemented in the participants' lives, albeit with physical punishments in certain cases, was to provide the training to perform household chores, focus on academic achievement, look after and teach siblings, and as well as learn entrepreneurial skills, effectively from young. These kinds of training are crucial to be carried out by underprivileged families because both hard and soft skills were least developed in their children, which is affirmed by Duncan et al. (2014) and Garcia (2015) in their research. However, although power assertion is seen negatively by various researchers like Gershoff (2010), Baumrind (2012) argued that this assertion being carried out by a parent with the child's wellbeing in mind while being open to negotiation and reasoning is not only normative but also necessary. The training and development of the three participants from a young age appeared to have played an important part in building their resilience and developing other soft skills for them to thrive later in life.

6.2.1.3 Religiosity and Spirituality

All three participants were brought up with religiosity and spirituality embedded in their lives, which Krauss et al. (2014) and Scales et al. (2014) have both found to reduce risky behaviours, develop resilience, and increase thriving behaviours. Religiosity was implemented with discipline and training from a young age in the lives of the participants, with Quran reading classes, as well as monitoring them to perform

prayers five times a day and fasting in the month of Ramadhan. It is confirmed by various research that religiosity acts as an important protective factor (Hodge et al., 2016; Holmes & Kim-Spoon, 2016; Kovacs et. al, 2011), which develops their relationship with God (Iles et al., 2016) and also acts as an important protective factor itself (Holmes & Kim-Spoon, 2016; Luna & Macmillan, 2015). Instead of receiving guidance and support from individuals in the family or community, these may be received directly and privately from God (Holmes & Kim-Spoon, 2016). This protective factor of spirituality had occurred in Firdaus' life. "When I was hated and ignored (in school), I only confided in Allah. I asked for strength from only Allah," professed Firdaus during his storytelling.

In addition, the protective factor of spirituality in Firdaus' life appeared to be so strong that during his time of grief, crying and praying to God for guidance and comfort during secondary school, both his mother and teacher described that he had appeared happy. His mother even commented that she saw him bloom and thrive in school during this period.

6.2.2 Life Experiences

The three participants related most about their experiences with their parents and siblings in their storytelling. In addition, they had also encountered life experiences in school and with their teachers; as well as in relationships with others such as their extended family, their friends and their community. These experiences fall under the main external asset of 'Support' in the Search Institute's Developmental Assets Framework; which Sesma et al. (2013) also pointed out was built according to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory on human development. This theory

states that continuous interaction with various supportive environments or ecologies will result in influential development in children and youth. In school, the three participants were appointed to leadership positions and were active in extra-curricular activities from young which provided them with the important soft skills to thrive.

In the three participants' lives, it appeared that the experiences of interactions they had with others were either protective factors (like school) or risk factors (like the community). However, Forrest-Bank et al. (2015) highlighted that factors that are usually protective may become risk factors, and this may happen for all developmental assets depending on the conditions present. For example, Laili's relationship with her friends was a protective factor in her life as they brought happiness to her with their positive attitudes (Abdul Kadir et al., 2012) and may have provided her with resilience (Jain et al., 2012); while in contrast they were a risk factor in Firdaus' life as his schoolmates treated him badly and ignored him in school as they did not like the changes he brought to the blind community there albeit these changes were positive. However, in the three participants' lives, it appeared that all risk factors were buffered or moderated by the strong protective factors existing in their lives, in order for them to thrive in life.

6.2.3 Life Turning Points

Each participant had one or two turning points that were unique which provided them with a realisation that had changed their outlook on life; which caused them to change how they lived their life, as well as adapt to the change. Firdaus had experienced his biggest challenge when he became completely blind at the age of 14, and had to change every aspect of how he lived his life. According to Firdaus' teacher who taught him

Braille, this huge risk factor in one's life could push an individual to depression and ultimately, suicide. However, Firdaus had displayed the resilience to buffer this risk factor by coping and adapting to his adversity by using existing protective factors to produce a more positive outcome in life, and this is affirmed by Naglieri et al. (2013) to be effective. With a warm and supportive environment, as well as the strong religiosity and spirituality in his upbringing; not only had he overcome his grief, he had also considered his blindness to be a blessing from God which both he and his mother felt he would not have been able to obtain a university degree without.

Amir's turning point in life was when the protective factors implemented from young had facilitated the building of his resilience that Forrest-Bank et al. (2015) and Naglieri et al. (2013) confirm would have buffered his life risk factor; which was the biggest fear in his life, his harsh and controlling authoritarian father. The positive outcome that came out of him confronting his father directly at the age of 14 was that the physical punishments he used to receive ceased at this life turning point, thus reducing this risk factor.

Firdaus and Laili had encountered similar turning points which were both related to their parents' sudden outburst and concern about their academic performance. Therefore, these turning points in their lives were crucial and had resulted in Firdaus working hard in his studies to become the only child in his family to enter university and achieve a degree, and Laili to suddenly achieve outstanding results to be able to get a placement in a good secondary boarding school with better opportunities for her to develop her soft skills.

6.2.4 Relationships

The study's findings are reviewed in the context of the various relationships each participant had in their lives. This is supported by Ungar (2013) who highlighted that studies on resilience development are facilitated by research on individuals' interactions with their social ecologies and environments, having a strong relationship with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory on human development.

6.2.4.1 Parents

The three participants had warm and supportive mothers who were the main contributors of the strong protective factors in their lives, which facilitated the development of their resilience and soft skills while buffering existing risk factors. This is in line with Heckman (2011) and Kummabutr et al. (2013) who emphasised that good parenting is crucial for positive youth development in children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, having this protective factor in their lives is an exceptional situation; as Duncan et al. (2014) provided evidence that most parents from underprivileged families encounter stress, economic pressure, depression, as well as have less resources and time to provide for their children; which usually result in them being inconsistent, harsh, hostile and less nurturing. In addition, Heckman (2013) stressed that children from low socio-economic backgrounds also usually receive less enrichment from their parents than others.

All three participants had authoritative mothers who exuded high levels of warmth but who were also strict in their implementation of control for the good of their children, which was the preferred parenting style of Baumrind's two-dimensional framework of warmth and control in parenting, as highlighted by Pinquart and Kauser (2018).

However, Firdaus' mother used to give out physical punishments as her method of ensuring control over her children, which goes against certain research findings such as from Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) who impressed that responsive parents should be warm and loving, and not overbearing or controlling. To counter this, Grusec et al. (2017) stated that in families from low socioeconomic backgrounds, parents usually exert controlling discipline methods to ensure the child's wellbeing; and this would be perceived by the child as care and support, while being accepted as normative in a positive teaching context. In addition, Lee et al. (2013) found that physical punishment implemented by warm mothers do not relate to child behaviour issues, while Grusec et al. (2017) went on to impress that fearless children are more positively affected by parental warmth.

Firdaus appeared to be affected by the warmth displayed by his parents after he was physically punished. "During the beatings, there was this feeling of hate. But after the beatings were over, mother would call out to us and say, "Come and eat!", and she would hand-feed us all," Firdaus fondly reminisced. "I remember that our mother would cry when she beat us," he shared. "My father, on the other hand, would beat all in the house irrespective of whose doing it was that started him off.... But after he had cooled down, he would speak to all his children after our group prayers and apologise, explaining why he punished us," Firdaus recalled.

Corresponding to the high discipline environment implemented by their parents, all three participants in the study were obedient and compliant, which appears to be mainly because of their love for their parents and a sense of responsibility towards their families.

Pinquart and Kauser (2018) explained that in collectivist cultures which are usually found in Asian countries (like Malaysia); individuals place more importance on the needs of others in the community rather than their own needs, and that there may be less negative and even some positive effects in situations of authoritarian parenting that requires full compliance from children without question. However, the opposite of this was found in this current study, as it was discovered that Amir was compliant to his authoritarian father mostly out of fear of the physical punishment he would receive if he did not comply. Amir's authoritarian father appeared to be a risk factor in his life with negative effects on him, which caused Amir to comply to him even in situations that he did not need to.

Firdaus was also compliant to his mother who used to physically punish him. However, unlike Amir's father, Firdaus' mother was not a completely authoritarian parent as she was warm and supportive towards him even though she also physically punished him. This phenomenon is clarified by Grusec et al. (2017) who explained that in underprivileged families, the child would usually be more compliant in a high discipline environment, as parental control would be more perceived as showing care and support rather than rejection or anger.

All three participants' parents had passed on their beliefs in religiosity and spirituality to their children through discipline and training from a young age; which may be due to culture, a factor which Masten (2018) identified as playing a bigger role in research on resilience. Masten highlighted that certain ethnic cultures or religious beliefs may act as protective factors resulting in resilience. Ungar et al. (2013) pointed out that aside from time (period of development) and context (such as socioeconomic status),

culture is also a component usually overlooked in research on resilience and should be included to identify new protective factors. Therefore, all these three perspectives are included within this current study and this had assisted with the discovery of potential new protective factors towards resilience development, such as the parenting style of embedding religiosity and spirituality into the discipline and training of children. The main contributors of the participants' protective factors, their mothers, appear to be religious individuals. This finding is in tandem with Goeke-Morey and Cummings (2017) research findings that religious parents are: (a) more involved in their children's development; (b) invest more time in them with family activities; (c) display more warmth and affection; (d) have meaningful conversations with their children; (e) have a lower child abuse potential; and (f) have an authoritative parenting style.

Firdaus' mother spoke the most about religiosity in her storytelling of her son's upbringing, and its importance to act as a protective factor and keep him away from rebellious, risky behaviours. "We wish for our children to be the best in reading the Quran, and performing their prayers," she emphasised. "Children who do not receive religious teachings will be brave enough to fight us, but not my children," she added, to prove her point about the importance of religiosity in the upbringing of her children.

Aside from religiosity, discipline and training were also implemented by the parents for all three participants from before they started school, doing household chores like sweeping the floor and cleaning; which appeared to have assisted them with resilience and other soft skills development by providing them with certain responsibilities at home. For Amir, he was also trained by his mother in his primary school years to be a young entrepreneur by selling food in school. His mother related how she trained him

with entrepreneurial skills from young to teach him about the difficulties in life. “When he was in primary school, although I was a teacher, I taught him to sell (food she packed).... From then on, he learnt about hardship so that he would know that we have to work hard to have an easier life,” she explained. Rosendahl et al. (2014) affirmed that training entrepreneurial skills from young would result in a better outcome for the individual.

Laili on the other hand, had to take care of her newborn baby sister, after her mother resumed her work as a nurse, and working shifts. As Laili was the eldest sibling, she had to take on the big responsibility even though she was just nine. Although this may seem to be unreasonable and unfair, Ungar et al. (2013) explained that according to the context and culture, a child’s contribution to assist a family’s income status may be seen to be acceptable to family and community, and may also be beneficial for the child’s resilience development. This may be because of the responsibility that is given to a child; similar to how all three participants were given responsibilities when they were young. For example, Amir was given the responsibility to prepare himself to be the future backbone of his family. Firdaus, on the other hand, was given the responsibility to enter university unlike his older siblings. And Laili, as the eldest, had no choice but to carry out her responsibility to look after her younger siblings when they were born.

Laili’s mother also communicates with Laili constantly, as part of the warm and supportive environment she provided for her; to advise, encourage and guide her on how to react to and manage internal conflicts. Laili’s mother related how she started to communicate with Laili while she was still in her womb. “When I was pregnant

with her, I was actually very happy at the time. Happy and always speaking to her in my womb, telling her stories and singing to her,” she reminisced. In fact, all three participants appeared to have mothers who constantly communicate with them when they are together, while providing them with the protective factors in their lives. The importance of constant communication in resilience development is emphasised by Almas et al. (2011) who pointed out that parents play a crucial role in their child’s resilience development by showing genuine interest and communicating; as well as encouraging a child to communicate, express his or her thoughts and feelings, manage his or her negative emotions, and disclose information, in a warm and safe environment. Firdaus had an interesting way of relating how much his mother communicated with him. “My mother is always positive and giving me advice. So much so that it sounded like it was nagging. But I consider her nagging as advice,” he quipped.

Laili related how her mother had also communicated with her and gave her opportunities to make her own decisions and learn from them. “From young, my mother was very encouraging. She would let me do what I wanted to do. Try it (to do what Laili wanted to do, like play in an area full of stones). Is it painful? (after Laili fell and hurt herself). Then you will learn (not to do it anymore),” Laili described.

6.2.4.2 Mother

From the qualitative data analysis performed in the software NVivo for Mac 12, it was found that the individual mentioned the most was the mother, using the words ‘mother’, ‘mak’ and ‘mom’, with mentions totalling 1,678 times (1.74% of the time). The next individual to be mentioned most was the father, using the words ‘father’,

'ayah' and 'dad', who was mentioned a total 487 times (0.51% of the time). This word count indicator is also in line with the data content analysis, as the three participants' mothers played the biggest role in their lives including contributing towards their crucial protective factors, enabling the development of resilience and other life skills.

All participants showed love towards their mothers, due to the warmth, support and care provided, as well as the large sacrifices each mother made. Each mother had life challenges of her own, which she coped with in order to prioritise her family's interests. This is in contrast with the fathers, as two participants' (Amir and Laili) fathers had resigned from their stable income jobs when their children were very young to pursue their own personal interests. This required their wives to be the sole breadwinners and stable income earners for a period, while at the same time also being the children's main caregiver.

Firdaus' mother was a housewife all her life, while her husband worked in the army that resulted in him being unable to spend much time at home. This had resulted in her having to bring up their eight children mostly alone. "Yes, I went through much difficulty, as I was alone giving birth and looking after my children from small," she shared. "It was difficult to bring up the children alone, I had to do everything on my own," Firdaus' mother added. Even though Firdaus' mother was very strict and fierce, Firdaus had related about how much he loved his mother in his storytelling. "Maybe my mother's methods were too drastic, and she was too fierce... But we all dearly loved her..... I saw how she cried while bringing us up, I love my mother so much because of this," he admitted.

Laili's mother had to work three shifts as a nurse, while taking care of the housework for two households, theirs and her in-laws' next door; despite the daily exhaustion she felt. She also had no choice but to entrust Laili with looking after her youngest two children since when they were babies, even though Laili was only going to primary school at the time. Laili's father was not mentioned much in both their storytelling about his contribution to lighten her mother's and her burdens.

Amir also mentioned why he cared for his mother and how she had sacrificed for her family. "Because I think she is patient, and she is calm irrespective of whatever that happened. I also don't think anyone could come close to match her sacrifices. As I mentioned, she left her entire family to be here (with us), she has no one," he described. "This is why I need to be there for her, especially as she has supported me all this while," he explained.

Despite each mother's personal challenges and the minimal support from her own environment; she had provided each participant a protective and supportive environment for them to feel loved and safe, which not only facilitated their resilience building but also developed their other soft skills to thrive in their lives. Their mothers may have built their own resilience because of what they felt was their responsibility towards their families, so that their children may be resilient as well. This is in tandem with the phenomenon that Masten (2018) had highlighted in her study, that parents' resilience is crucial to build family resilience.

6.2.4.3 Father

All three participants had distant fathers who did not communicate much with them, and this may be due to the culture in Malaysia where mothers are considered the main caregivers for their children, a hypothetical phenomenon that requires research. However, to support this phenomenon, Hallers-haalboom et al. (2016) had found empirical evidence that although mothers work full time, they usually spend two to three times more time with their children than their husbands. This appeared to be the situation even during the period when two of the participants' fathers were unemployed.

Hallers-haalboom et al. (2016) also found that mothers are the ones who usually instil discipline in their children rather than the fathers, as the tradition of the father being the disciplinarian has changed. This was true in Laili's life as her father did not take interest in ensuring that she completed the household chores as her mother had instructed her to; as well as in Firdaus' life, although his father did give out physical punishments maybe once a year because he was mostly not at home.

For Amir, both his parents instilled the discipline in his life; his mother being authoritative and the protective factor, while his father was the authoritarian who displayed a high level of control and low warmth (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018) and was the risk factor in his life. His father mete out physical punishments to Amir even when Amir did not do anything wrong. "For example, if he was woken up from sleep by the noise from my brother and sister fighting, I would be the one who would be beaten," he described. "At the time, I questioned in my mind why was I the one who always received the beating, it was unfair," he expressed.

6.2.4.4 Family

In this study, it appears that siblings had helped build resilience in the participants as well, in their own contexts. Yucel (2014) affirmed that the relationship with siblings is important due to its influence on an individual's character and soft skills. For Firdaus, he was the fifth sibling of his family of eight children, and he was very close to his eldest sibling, who is the only girl in the family. Dai and Heckman (2013) had emphasised that characteristics of older siblings are important for child development. The other two participants were the eldest sibling in their families, with their siblings playing different roles in their resilience and other soft skills development. Amir was trained from young to be the future family backbone, who all his siblings may fall back and rely on in time of need, and he started by being given the responsibility to teach his three younger sisters how to read the Quran. Laili was given the responsibility to take care of her two youngest siblings on her own from when they were babies, even though she was only attending primary school then. For Amir and Laili, they were given responsibilities at a young age to be the one to be relied upon by their younger siblings which was a heavy responsibility to carry. This had built their resilience as well as other soft skills such as leadership, trustworthiness and dependability.

Firdaus related that his extended family on his mother's side used to look down on and belittle him and his family as they were extremely poor. This was another risk factor in his life which was buffered by existing protective factors. On the other hand, Laili's father and his family living next door encountered serious conflicts when she was in secondary school, mainly due to the family business, which was not doing so well. "I think I learned fastest through his family conflict. On my father's side, there was really a lot of family conflict," she admitted. On the matter of learning, Laili was referring

to her mother communicating to her to explain what was happening that caused the family conflict, to guide her how to manage her negative emotions, as well as to advise her how to react in uncomfortable situations (Almas et al., 2011). This was why she felt that she learnt about life fast and matured early. Her family conflict was also a risk factor to her, but which was buffered with the protective factor of her mother's caring communication with her.

6.2.4.5 Friends

Laili related that her friends had helped her develop into the person she is today, which is in line with the findings of Smith et al. (2016), which state that individuals who engage with positive friends or peers develop better soft skills. Laili is also very close to her Chinese neighbours who she grew up with, who are just a few years older than her, and are like family. "We never realise their contribution but when I think it over, yes friends (are important)," she expressed. "At school, I used to have a group of friends who would join me when I invited them to participate (in activities)...Yes, friends are very important," Laili reiterated.

6.2.4.6 Community

Even though positive community support is an important protective factor and developmental asset as they may provide safety in neighbourhoods, recreational programmes and facilities, accessibility to healthcare services, economic opportunities for families, as well as religious and spiritual initiatives (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012); none of the three participants were close with any individuals from their community. This may be due to Firdaus and Amir not being allowed to go out of the house for fear of their safety and bad influence by the other children in their community, and Laili

was too busy doing household chores and taking care of her younger siblings when she was at home. Nevertheless, both Firdaus' and Laili's mothers did relate how they used to play with the neighbour's children when they were very young and had not started school yet. From Firdaus' storytelling, his neighbours appeared to be a risk factor in his life, as they used to dislike him and his family due to their poverty, and would accuse his family of stealing if there was anything missing from the neighbourhood.

All three participants also did not relate about any teacher who they were close to, but Firdaus had recommended his former teacher from his secondary boarding school to be interviewed to contribute to his life story for this study. His teacher appears to have also been a protective factor in his life; by providing the warm and supportive environment away from home, with high discipline and a lot of training, as well as religiosity incorporated within the training. Favourite teachers are usually mentioned as mentors and the support to assist with academic and soft skills development, as highlighted by Carlisle (2011).

6.2.5 Time

The protective factors and developmental assets for all participants commenced at a very young age, and continued throughout their lives as children and adolescents. This is confirmed by Bronfenbrenner (1994), who stated that close interactions which encourage new skill learning known as 'proximal processes', should happen in childhood and carried out regularly over extended periods of time, for effective development. For example, the participants were given the responsibility to carry out household chores from even before they started school, and they continued doing these

chores daily until they entered boarding school. Firdaus' mother also sent him to Quran reading classes when he was five and continued to do so until he could read the full Quran. She made sure that he was given an early start on religiosity training. "We ensure that they perform their prayers from very young. It would be too late if they are older," she emphasised.

This was very important to have happened in the participants' lives, because there is empirical evidence from Duncan and Magnuson (2013) which shows that the best time to develop soft skills is in early childhood, especially for underprivileged children. Garcia (2015) also highlighted that underprivileged children do not possess the same level of skills as those from better backgrounds when they start school, as they are least developed. This is mainly because an underprivileged child's development is hindered due to family economic stress, limited resources for child education and enrichment, and the culture of helplessness in poverty that may be passed down from parents to the child, as clarified by Duncan et al. (2014).

All three participants had exhibited some soft skills even before they started school, which indicated that their development had started before then. On the first day of pre-school, instead of crying and looking around for his mother, Firdaus was excited to learn new things and was happily making new friends. In Amir's case, he was already brave enough to teach his new friends in kindergarten how to read, as he could read when he was four. And Laili was the playgroup leader when playing with her cousins, who were mostly older than her, even before she started school.

6.2.6 Place

The findings are also discussed in the context of place. This is because relationships that form developmental assets, the opportunities that present themselves, and the soft skills that are developed; are included in the Developmental Assets Framework and are placed in the home, school and community, to be nurtured for positive youth development outcomes (Scales et al., 2016).

6.2.6.1 Home

Each participant's story was found to be focused on their lives at home when they were young, rather than at school. The three protective factors of warmth and support, discipline and training, as well as religiosity and spirituality were all first implemented at home towards their resilience and other soft skills development. The participants were given their responsibility to perform household chores even before they started to go to school.

6.2.6.2 School

School was the place where all three participants were provided with support to enhance their resilience and soft skills; as they were appointed into leadership positions in both primary and secondary school, and were active in extra-curricular activities throughout their schooling life. It appeared that their schools continued to provide the protective factors which started from home by their mothers; providing them with the warmth and support, discipline and training, and maybe also with the religiosity and spirituality, in the context of the school. As children and adolescents spend their time between home and school, the school plays a crucial role in resilience and other soft skills development (Naglieri et al., 2013; Vimont, 2012).

In addition, Van Ryzin (2011) explained that the school environment is perceived as an important protective factor and developmental asset as it provides support and interventions for academic and other positive development, which facilitates students to set their goals and achieve them. Amir's school had provided him with a platform to start and develop his entrepreneurial skills by selling food to his schoolmates for profit, which he then saved. School friends affected Firdaus and Laili very differently; Firdaus saw them as a risk factor because his schoolmates treated him badly, while Laili considered them as a protective factor as they provided her with support and she learnt a lot from them.

6.2.6.3 Community

Firdaus and Amir had experienced high discipline, and one of the main house rules was not to go out of the house and play or loiter about. This was because Firdaus' mother was concerned that he would be influenced by the neighbourhood children who she described to be naughty and rowdy. In Amir's case, his poor village community was rife with illegal racing, and the racers started racing very young. Duncan et al. (2014) clarified that low-income parents have difficulty in providing resources which include a safe neighbourhood for their children to reside and play in.

6.3 Conclusion

This study delved deeply into the lives of the underprivileged, with a retrospective longitudinal research of life stories using the narrative inquiry approach; to discover what protective factors and developmental assets, what experiences, and what turning points, that may have resulted in them being exceptional with the development of resilience and other soft skills to thrive in life, and how. The main finding was that

although these three participants who originated from low-income backgrounds had different attributes such as they were: (a) of different gender; (b) brought up in different neighbourhood types (rural vs urban); (c) of different abilities (seeing vs blind); (d) with different personalities (extrovert vs introvert); and (e) of different socioeconomic status (extremely poor vs working class); the protective factors in their lives were discovered to be similar to one another. However, these protective factors were very different from most individuals from low-income families, as described in other studies.

The warm, engaging and supportive mothers, who instilled discipline and training as well as religiosity and spirituality in their children's upbringing were the main contributors towards the participants' resilience as well as soft skills development. Most mothers from low socioeconomic backgrounds are usually less caring and nurturing, due to stress from dealing with financial difficulties, and have less resources to engage with their children. However, the mothers in this study achieved the extraordinary by putting their families' interests ahead of their own, and felt that they had the responsibility to be resilient and face their own personal challenges of being in a low-income family to protect and develop their children. These authoritative mothers provided care with high warmth and high control of their children from a very early stage in their lives, sometimes from birth but mostly before they started school. This was crucial for the participants to be at par with the other children from better family backgrounds; or in their cases, much higher skilled than the other underprivileged students who started school with them in their low-income neighbourhoods.

The primary schools the participants attended, and thereafter the good secondary boarding schools that they went to, continued to provide the protective factors and developmental assets which their homes had provided to them from very young. Being appointed to leadership positions and being active in extra-curricular activities from when they started school and throughout their schooling lives allowed them to continuously develop their academic and soft skills, and build their resilience.

This study allowed for the discovery of unexpected phenomena, and the opportunity to review these discovered phenomena in more detail, now and in the future, for better understanding. It was discovered that all three participants: (a) had a high level of obedience and compliance due to their feelings of love and responsibility; (b) were given responsibilities and meaningful roles at a young age; such as doing household chores even before they entered school, and were carrying out tasks in being responsible for their siblings' wellbeing when they were in primary school, and (c) experienced different risk factors in their lives which were buffered by the existing protective factors. These factors may have facilitated their resilience and other soft skills development. Although certain protective factors and developmental assets were more prevalent than others in a participant's life depending on their upbringing; all the protective factors and developmental assets were intertwined and had worked synergistically with one another, enhancing each of their influences on the participants' lives to enable them to thrive.

6.4 Significance of Study

This study has significance towards addressing the nation's issue of employability due to the lack of soft skills, especially in underprivileged youth who make up the largest

portion of unemployed graduates (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016). In light of the limited research highlighting the development of resilience leading to other soft skills in the Malaysian underprivileged; this study aims to fill this knowledge void, in hopes of spreading awareness while providing recommendations to stakeholders to better carry out development and intervention programmes, and act as a catalyst for other research to be carried out on the subject matter. This would contribute towards addressing the challenges faced by the nation's undergraduates from low-income backgrounds to gain employment.

6.4.1 Significance for the Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education, through both the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013 to 2025) (pre-School to Post-Secondary Education) and the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2015 to 2025) (Higher Education), had planned strategies to develop the aptitudes for students to not only achieve academically but also excel in non-academic areas, and to balance between hard skills, soft skills, as well as ethics and morality. The study's findings confirm that these important strategies are crucial to be implemented, but (a) are to commence at the earliest education stage of pre-school, while consistently advancing in primary and secondary schools, and continuing at institutes of higher learning; as well as (b) with customised initiatives for more emphasis on children, adolescents and youth from low-income backgrounds, rather than with the current 'one size fits all' initiatives. This is because soft skills development should be implemented at a young age for more sustainability and cost-effectiveness (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Garcia, 2015; Heckman, 2011; Heckman & Kautz, 2012). In addition, children and youth from low-income families require a

different focus as they face more challenges and adversities which result in them usually having lesser skills than those from better families (Duncan et al., 2014).

The blueprint also highlights the importance of engaging parents and the community, stating that parents will be more effectively engaged and equipped with a toolkit to support their children's learning, as well as be supported to promote various skills including parenting. The study findings show that this important strategy should be implemented. However, once again, emphasis should be on the difference in implementation for those from low-income backgrounds, as their outlook was empirically found to be different from other parents, such as they trust that teachers know better than themselves about their children's education and do not wish to interact with the school or allocate time for their children's education at home (Patel, 2014), which may affect the success of the engagement initiative implementation. Studies indicate that carrying out training or intervention programmes for low-income parents to improve their awareness and capability to develop their children is important (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Garcia, 2015; Heckman, 2011). In addition, as education policies alone are insufficient to address the issue because inequalities in skill development occur even before children from low-income backgrounds enter school (Garcia, 2015), the Ministry of Education should consider engaging with parents from the low-income group earlier. This may potentially be upon them registering their children to enter Standard One in primary school, which happens before the child enters pre-school. The parents, engaged through their information in the registration database, may be trained on the importance of the protective factors and developmental assets found in this study, as well as how they may implement them at home; before their children enter school.

6.4.2 Significance for Schools

In addition to schools striving to implement all strategies in the government education blueprints in relation to soft skills development from a very young age, the study findings indicate that focus should be prioritised on building a warm and supportive environment, which implements discipline and training, while incorporating religiosity and spirituality, including moral and ethics. The findings also suggest that constant engagement with parents, especially carefully strategised ones with the low-income group, be carried out. As the findings show that responsibility given at a young age may develop resilience in underprivileged children, it is recommended that more attention should be provided to them in their school activities and initiatives, by the school assigning meaningful roles and responsibility to them from a young age to build resilience and other soft skills.

6.4.3 Significance for Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs)

The study findings show that as soft skills should be developed from pre-school or even before for the best results in development, and that it should continuously be implemented in the primary and secondary school stages, there should be no requirement for IHLs to be burdened with the largest responsibility for soft skills development, as was strategised within the expired National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017. However, IHLs should continue with the initiatives on soft skills development that are currently being implemented, as the next stage of soft skills development programmes after the development initiatives in schools. Assessment reporting on both hard and soft skills achievements should also be in place to facilitate monitoring towards improvement of both skills, as they are equally important for employability. In addition, it is recommended that similarly to schools, IHLs should

also implement a warm and supportive environment, with discipline and training, while inculcating religiosity and spirituality for the best development results for their students. In addition, students from low-income families should be prioritised to be given meaningful roles and responsibilities, for resilience and other soft skills development.

6.4.4 Significance for Corporate Organisations carrying out Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Charity Organisations

The findings suggest that the SL1M and ILTIZAM programmes implemented by corporate organisations to train unemployed graduates to provide them with soft skills may eventually cease once all children from low-income families are provided training from before pre-school by their parents, or commencing from pre-school and throughout primary and secondary school, as well as the IHLs. From this study, it is found to be more sustainable if corporate organisations doing CSR and charity organisations focus on spreading the awareness on the importance of commencing child development from a young age especially in low-income communities, and how the development may be carried out. These organisations doing charity may also consider implementing (a) training programmes for low-income parents to implement protective factors and developmental assets in their homes for their children; as well as (b) soft skills development training programmes for children from low-income families before they enter pre-school.

6.5 Limitations of Study

Using life stories for this study was integral to achieve the research objective, as life stories focus on an individual's experiences over time to capture the processes they

went through (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). However, as collected data was based on experiences occurring over a long period of time, in some cases more than two decades ago, the collected and analysed data is limited by the participants' memories. As this study was on three participants' life stories, two interviewees were chosen for each participant to not only verify the stories provided by the participants, but also to provide the missing stories to mitigate the limitation. Nevertheless, with this mitigation, the additional limitation would be the memory of the two other interviewees. However, increasing the number of interviewees for each of the three participants was not feasible for this study.

This study limited the number of the samples to three, as its objective was to unearth and discover new findings and answers by understanding the subject matter in-depth for better insight, thus generalisability by studying a large number of samples was not the priority. Nonetheless, studying the life stories of more participants may have produced even better findings, to identify new phenomenon or perform more cross-analysis to identify new perspectives. However, the study faced the challenge of finding suitable participants who fit the special criteria of the phenomenon within this research subject.

Another limitation of this study was that western theories were mostly used to form the knowledge foundation underlying the research findings. Culture is usually overlooked in research on resilience (Ungar et al., 2013), and it would have been beneficial for the study if there were relevant assertions or theories from Malaysian research on culture that could have been used.

6.6 Implications and Future Research

More research using various methodologies should be carried out on the important subject matter of underprivileged youth in relation to employability, because the low-income group makes up the majority of unemployed graduates in Malaysia due to their lack of soft skills.

This study provides a different insight as compared to what is commonly researched on soft skills development in Malaysia, and it would be beneficial for future research to be carried out on the phenomena discovered within this study. For example, more research may be done to ascertain whether the discovered protective factors and developmental assets of warmth and support, discipline and training, as well as religiosity and spirituality; would generate similar results if implemented in the lives of other underprivileged children and youth. Quantitative or mixed method studies may also be carried out on selected youth from low-income families who were provided the protective factors from birth or before pre-school age. The research would provide the knowledge to understand the influence of this early development in their lives. However, similar to this study, the selection of participants may be a challenge as they are few and far in between.

Alternatively, a longitudinal study may be carried out in collaboration with an organisation doing charity that is interested in providing a structured soft skills training programme for a group of underprivileged children in Malaysia before they start school, similar to the Perry Preschool Programme described by Heckman (2011). This longitudinal study may follow and track the lives of the trained children until they

reach adulthood to ascertain how this early intervention influenced the outcome of their lives, as compared to others from similar backgrounds.

As the mothers of this study's three participants are exceptions, when compared to other parents originating from low-income backgrounds who would not normally be as nurturing while providing a protective environment with development opportunities to their children (Duncan et al., 2014); it is recommended that a qualitative study on their life stories be carried out using the narrative inquiry approach. This study may discover the phenomena that enabled the three mothers to become resilient enough to raise a resilient child who thrived in life, and this may result in even more important research to be carried out in Malaysia. The findings from studying parent resilience may assist in developing programmes to build resilience in youth (Masten, 2018).

An important and interesting phenomenon that came out of this study was that receiving a big responsibility or meaningful role at a young age may assist to develop the soft skill of resilience in the underprivileged. Future studies may examine this phenomenon more closely, to ascertain whether there is a relationship between being given a responsibility from young and the development of resilience in children from low-income families, and the kind of relationship it is, to contribute to resilience development knowledge in Malaysia.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide for the Study

Date of interview:

Time of interview:

Place of interview:

Interviewee name:

Type of Yayasan Sime Darby scholarship received:

Current position of interviewee:

(For the first interview, the researcher is to describe the objectives of the research and why the participant was selected to be a part of the study, explain the contents of the consent form so that the participant understands his or her commitment towards the study and hand over the consent form to the interviewee to read and sign. The researcher is to only commence with the interview upon the signing of the consent form.)

Questions:

1. Tell me about your life story, from as far back as you can remember.
2. Tell me about your relationship with your family, your parents, your siblings, your school, your schoolteachers, your community, your community members, your friends, and any other person close to you.
3. Tell me about any experiences that were important in your life, and where were you then.
4. Tell me which of your experiences that you feel had developed your soft skills, and why.

Note : Always use open-ended questions to encourage flexibility. Probe to find out about high and/or turning points in the participant's life, as well as ascertain how the participant's life was different from others of a similar underprivileged background during childhood and adolescence. Never lead with questions, but probe deeper when certain points in relation to the above are mentioned by the participant's in his/her story.

(The researcher is to thank the individual for participating in this interview. The participant is to be asked which two individuals in his or her life who could also be interviewed for the study.)

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

Dear (Participant name),

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the above study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with Yayasan Sime Darby (YSD).

The purpose of this study is to understand the life experiences of certain individuals who were underprivileged or disadvantaged at time of YSD scholarship interview. Even though these individuals were underprivileged or disadvantaged, they had displayed an impressive level of soft skills during the final scholarship interview, aside from their academic achievements, to secure a prestigious scholarship.

The expected benefit associated with your participation is that the discoveries from the analysis of your life story would assist to identify how resilience was built which led to other soft skills development during childhood and adolescent years. Data will be collected from you at various points of the research; via face to face interviews, telephone calls and emails. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. If you so desire, your name may not be associated with the research findings in any way.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I shall be sharing my findings with you during and at the end of the study, for feedback.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Thank you.