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



YATELA BINTI ZAINAL ABIDIN

UUM
Universiti Utara Malaysia

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Awang Had Salleh
Graduate School
of Arts And Sciences

Universiti Utara Malaysia

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sarimah Shaik Abdullah

Tandatangan
(Signature)

Nama Penyelia/Penyelia-penyelia:
(Name of Supervisor/Supervisors)

Prof. Dr. Rosna Awang Hashim

Tandatangan
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Nama Penyelia/Penyelia-penyelia:
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Dr. Hasniza Nordin

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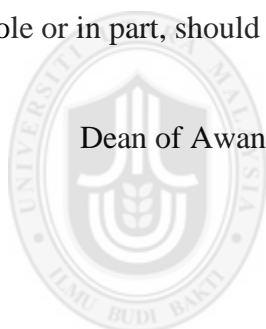
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Abstrak

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

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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.