

## THE INFLUENCE of FAMILY CONFLICTS on the INCLINATION to RELAPSE among ADDICTS in CURE and CARE SERVICE CENTRE, KUALA PILAH, MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

The debates on how the influence of family conflicts on the inclination to relapse among former drug addicts widely debated particularly international and local setting. In this social psychology study, the author undertook in-depth understanding on how inability of former drug addicts in Cure and Care Service Centre, Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan (voluntary recovering clients) controlling family conflict that arises resulted in relapse addiction. A qualitative phenomenological approach was taken to conduct interviews with five former drug addicts. Purposive sampling was used and responses were analysed thematically. This issue included the lack of fatherly confidence, burdens in the daily activities, pressure from the father in law, the aggressive trait of an ex-wife, and isolation from siblings. As a relevant implication for this study, there are useful information in term of practice, learners, and educators. In term of implication for the practice, managing conflict among addicts effectively by understanding Thomas and Kilmann's theory five varying styles of management quite applicable. The implication for educator is they can reduce public's negative perception towards former addicts by infusing and integrating conflict resolution into the school curriculum. Definitely, the implication of the learners is the institutionalizing of practices and principles of conflict resolution, social and emotional learning and inter-group relations into the culture and a policy to minimizing conflict.

**Keywords:** Family Conflicts, Drug addicts, Interpersonal conflict, Relapse

## 1.0 Background

Globally, some 35 million people are estimated to suffer from drug use disorders and who require treatment services, according to the latest World Drug Report, released on 26 June 2019 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The higher estimates for 2017 are the result of improved knowledge of the extent of drug use from new surveys conducted in India and Nigeria, both among the ten most populous countries in the world.

The Report also estimates the number of opioid users at 53 million, up 56 per cent from previous estimates, and that opioids are responsible for two thirds of the 585,000 people who died as a result of drug use in 2017. Globally, 11 million people injected drugs in 2017, of which 1.4 million live with HIV and 5.6 million with hepatitis C. To making clear, a withdrawal symptom is an actual reason why drug addicts are having complications in leaving this habit of addiction. Generally, a withdrawal symptom is a physical and mental effect when someone stops taking drugs. Physical and mental repercussions that happen for instance are a weakness of the body, intense stress and dependency towards a type of drug that had been taken, during their period of drug abuse. Lastly, as a last choice to incredulous the problems of withdrawal symptoms, drug addicts had to take drugs continuously to calm themselves. Specifically, relapse is a normal situation that happens among former addicts that had gone through rehabilitation and treatment processes. Rasmussen (2000) in his study regarding relapse prediction already mentioned that relapse as re-using drugs after halting use for a certain period of time that depends on the resilience of the individual to resist withdrawal symptoms. Mahmood (1996) said relapse addiction involves psychoactive drug abuse when someone has completed a treatment in a drug rehabilitation program that emphasizes on physic and psychological dependency towards drugs. Marlatt & Gordon (1985) explained High-Risk Situations are conditions that have the possible to result in a former drug addict to fall back to their addiction. High-Risk Situations is a situation happen when a former drug addict which had initiated to a change of behaviour such as plummeting alcohol intake faces difficulty to sustain that changed behaviour. The situations that contribute to the relapse addiction such as negative emotions (anger and worry), interpersonal conflict (misunderstanding within the family and society) and social stress (peer pressure to take drugs). Interpersonal conflict has become the main issue by contemporary and previous researchers to elucidate how interpersonal conflicts resulting societal problems in organizations and society. Interpersonal conflicts are a well-known issue that had been focused by researchers in the field of organizational behaviour (Bao, Zhu, Hu, & Cui, 2016). Numerous research entitlements this condition known as high-risk situation relapsed is mainly due to the interpersonal conflict which leads to the relapsed of addiction to occur. In this study, researcher interested to examining and explores how interpersonal conflict with family members that occurs among former drug addicts may result in a relapse. This issue also could become the main contributor or reference to the researcher that interested in researching the area of interpersonal conflict ahead.

In this study, a family conflict is the main concern to understanding why former drug addicts return to their relapse addiction. Relapse additions directly affect the family of former drug addicts in the emotional, physical, and mental aspects (Kassem, 2011). Lee et al. (2011) mentioned in her study in Singapore and justified if any family member is involved in the relapse addiction, then the relationship of family members with other individuals also experiences emotional, social, financial and career problems. Additionally, according to

Barnard (2005) the issue of drug abuse by the family members poses some negative effects in family functionality. This statement supported by qualitative research towards 69 ex-relatives in Scotland and found that majority of family members using drugs had to faced stress, conflict and anxiety caused by drug abuse among family members. Undoubtedly, when some parents know their children involving in drug abuse automatically they will depressed and traumatized. The emergence of trauma also happen among drug-dependent parent and according to Franco (2010) when parents using drugs for unhealthy purpose, the children will probably act in a deviant way such as anxiety, eating disorders, depression, and suicide. According to Carnes (1991) he describes one of the signs that the addict returned to the drug was a conflict. Interpersonal conflicts that arise between former addicts and families can be seen from the family structure, affair, communication level, and parenting style. Referring to the Tec's family structure (1970), Wiener & Egen (1973) & Friedman & Beschner (1982) mentioned the majority of drug addicts derived from families scattered due to divorce and family death. Observation by Lewis & Osberg (1958) also found majority of their relatives also divorced.

## 2.0 Materials and Methods

In this study, researchers have used qualitative research methods to obtain detailed information on family conflict among male drug addicts. Phenomenological approach is one of the approaches in qualitative research also employed in this study. According to Taylor & Bogdan (1997), phenomenological approaches look at human behaviour, what they say and do as products, and how humans convey meaning to their world. The meaning of the experience contains the realities that are formed through social interaction. In addition, the phenomenological approach is highly applicable to this study and in line with Rogers's (1951) whereby phenomenology emphasizes three elements in the process of social interaction; organism, phenomenology and self. Key informant interviewed were five former relapsing drug addicts in Cure and Care Service Centre, Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan. The data were collected between January and May 2018 (n = 5). Researcher selects the informant by using purposive sampling method. Participants were purposively sampled based on some criteria such as male drug addicts, relapsing drug addicts (first timer drug addicts is not the participant), and has experienced a few treatment sessions in the rehabilitation centre in Cure and Care Service Centre, Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia only. To enhance the validity and reliability of this study, the researcher has used the member checks technic. Researcher asked the research informant (addicts) at the study site to review the interview transcripts and the initial interpretations they had made. The purpose of this method is to find out the truth of the researcher's interpretation based on what the informant said regarding the root cause of family conflicts. Researcher asked several questions to the informant such as 'does this match your experience? do you want to change anything?', and do you want to add anything?. Second technique that researcher employed in ensuring the validity and reliability is peer checking or debriefing. Researcher seeks a support from other professionals willing to provide scholarly guidance, such as drug coordinator, case managers, social workers, and mental health treatment providers. In this research, researcher obtains several perceptions of peers in developing the conclusion of the study in term of data collection methods and process, data management, transcripts, data analysis procedure and research findings.

### 3.0 Result

There are five informants that participated in this study that are undergoing the treatment program in Cure and Care Service Centre, Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Each informant is given a pseudonym in the form of alphabets to protect their identity. The age of these informants are 25 years old, 32 years old, 39 years old, 43 years old, and 50 years old. The level of education these participants are one completed Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR), meanwhile, two completed their primary school, Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR), and two participants complete their high school (SPM). The majority of these participants are residents of Negeri Sembilan, one from the state of Selangor, and one from the state of Perak. In terms of marital status, two of the participants are divorced and three bachelors. The layout of the previous occupations of these informants, three were factory workers, while two were self-employed. In terms of the specific abused drug, two of the participants took heroin, two syabu addicts, and one who took marijuana. The longest duration of their addiction period for a participant is 30 years meanwhile the minimum is ten years. Referring to the number of rehabilitation centres enrolled, the highest is nine times and the lowest is three times.

#### 3.1 *The lack of fatherly confidence*

The lack of faith among the family members on the participant's recovery seems to be one of the issues that emerged in the family conflict. The participant stated that a weak relationship with their biological father may be the reason for the prolonged family conflicts. As stated by him, he yearned for that guidance from his biological father; however, the concern that was shown by the latter made him realize that his father had wavering affection towards him. All the steps to recovery were determined by him. Other than that, the words by his father that stated the participant's failure to recover despite being sent to various rehab facilities induced disappointment for the informant. According to the participant's family, they were reluctant to invite the informant to live with the family as they have had enough with his addiction.

*"My Dad ignored me... then when they shifted to Segamat, but I do not know where... dad's favoritism is definitely present"* (IA, ID, IF 170118)

*"My Dad once told me that even if he sent me to thousands of rehabs I would never recover... but what saddens me was that he moved houses secretly"* (IC, IE, IF 10218)

#### 3.2 *Burdens in the daily activities*

The issue of family restraints on daily activities also contributed to the family conflict, hence results in the relapse phenomena. According to the participants, the restraints that he felt from his family, especially his mother, made him feel caged throughout the recovering phase. The reasoning given by his mother was to avoid the relapsing of the participant back to addiction. During the interview, the mother called him twice due to worrying that the participant may not return home on time even though he had mentioned to his mother that he had an interview. Moreover, the participant is not allowed to go out at night and his mother had also assigned him tasks such as chores, accompanying his mother to the bank and grocery shopping. The participants stated:

*“My mom is controlling everything... she kept on calling why am I outside for too long... my mother had been giving tasks every day” (IA, IB, 130418)*

*“My mom instructs me to stay at home, do not go out because she is afraid of the villagers' wrath... but I got out anyway...can't stand it when my mom asks me to do chores...” (IA, IB, 160418)*

### **3.3 Pressure from the father in law**

Other than the issue of father's confidence and the family's restraints, the issue of pressure from the father in law also adds on to the family conflict that caused the relapsing phenomena. Participant stated when he was free from prison; his father-in-law was never satisfied with him. As a matter of fact the father-in-law countless times urged the informant to divorce his wife because he could not bear the thought of his daughter living with an ex-addict. At the same time, he pressured his daughter to file for a divorce as soon as possible. Nevertheless, the wife refused to separate from her husband as she had known about his addiction even before marriage. However, everything changed when the father-in-law threatened to withdraw all the house gifts he had given. Due to the pressing circumstances and feeling offended by the father-in-law, the husband finally divorced his wife thinking that he would not have a place to stay afterwards. Other than that, his ex-wife started to raise her voice in regards to the divorce issue, which leads to the decision to separate. The participants confessed that he had to keep his anger down due to his respect for the elderly. The participant stated that:

*“His ex-wife never prevented him from taking drugs... but what made me lose my patience is the father-in-law kept on forcing me to quickly divorce her once he knew I was taking drugs!” (IF, 220318)*

### **3.4 The aggressive trait of an ex-wife**

The aggressive traits of the ex-wife towards addiction are one of the reasons why family conflict led on to a relapse phenomenon. Heightened of emotions and aggressive actions were behaviors that are portrayed by ex-wives towards the participant's addiction. For instance, once a former wife of an addict reported on her husband but he was not taken into custody due to lack of evidence. He also admitted that he needed the support from his wife to heal but did not receive any from her. Furthermore, the constant defiance from his wife and the death threats received by the participant resulted in him to act violently towards his wife. The peak of this conflict is that the participant found out that his ex-wife had an affair with another man and wanted to ask for a divorce in the near future. The participants stated that:

*“My ex-wife hated me whenever I am taking drugs...But when I stepped out of prison I was set on changing, but when I found out that she was cheating with another man... I was disappointed...” (IE, IF, 040418)*

*“Multiple times I hit my wife because she was rude to me for labeling me unclean... after that, she had another man... I can't take it anymore so I divorced her...” (IE, IF, 250418)*

*“It is a lie if I say that I don't love my wife...I have tried talking to her many times, but my ex-wife was determined to leave... I begged her to give me a chance, but she already had another man,” (IE, IF, 250418)*

In regards to the issue of aggressive ex-wives, single father informants have conflicts with their ex-wives due to the lack of financial support given by their ex-wives to help out the participant and their children. The participant admitted that the interpersonal conflict occurred due to the refusal to financially help the informant led to him distributing drugs to survive. The participants mentioned in his statement:

*“I don't know how I can live like this... my ex-wife doesn't want to help... in the end, I thought I might as well sell drugs as long as I can get money...” (IC, ID, 260518)*

*“I am not satisfied with her... she pretends to be good with the kids... but after the divorce, she forgets our children... I want to earn a living too... the money gained from selling drugs was then used to pay for the rent of the house” (IC, ID, 260518)*

### **3.5 Isolation from siblings**

Not forgetting, the isolation from the siblings could lead to the family conflict which then resulted in a relapsing phenomenon. This occurs with participants that had lost his parents. According to him, he was driven out by his siblings as he was involved with drugs and was unemployed. After countless arguments that the informant had to go through to be accepted by his siblings, alas all are in failure. Moreover, the informant was not only driven out, he did not receive any help from his brother. This strange behavior from his brother forced him to gain help from his drug-addict friends. The tension rose when they did not allow him to return to their family home. Due to this, the informant held a grudge against his siblings for the exiling their own flesh and blood that had once lived together. The participants stated that:

*“I got angry when my sister hated me, I even offered to help out with the house chores...I cried when she kicked me out of the house, all because she was ashamed of an addict brother...” (IA, IB, IC, ID, IE, 080218)*

*“I guess I realize that I was an addict... I even got into a fight with my brother as he swears at me... What hurts me most is that he kicked me out because his wife accused me of raping the neighbors' child” (IA, IB, IC, ID, IE, 080218)*

The issue of the biological father knowing his son was problematic since young and has difficulty personality reduced his confidence to see the participant recover from the relapse. This is concurrent with the Statement by Becker (1963) whereby the concept of master status character as deviant acts and even criminalization is quite evident among other characters. This statement had initiated conflicts between the informant and his biological father. This occurred due to the participant practicing the deviant career concept whereby an individual starts acting according to labels that were given to them by the people around them and was dragged into becoming an addict once more. Some research had also indicated that parental communication with the act of drug misuse (Gecas et al.1974; Russell, 1974; Offer and Offer, 1975; Jurich et al. 1985). According to Gecas et al. (1974), without effective communication, children will feel neglected. This, in turn, will result in children trying to fulfil this need by other sources such as drugs, a research by Russell (1974) & Jurich et al. (1985) agreed that a twice receding drug user has a weak communication with his parents. Clearly, the element of favouritism and lack of affection could be seen in the participant's statements. Russell (1974) found that children who did not receive equal affection from parents have the potential to be involved in acts of drug misuse. Streit et al. (1974) & Eldred & Brown (1974) had also mentioned that interpersonal

conflict on the aspects of affection was due to the favouritism practice of parents would lead the children to relapse. The style of resolving the conflict is similar to the style of managing conflict by Thomas & Killman (1976) which is the avoidance style. This style of avoidance means that when an individual ignores and does not want to know about the occurring conflict. It can be seen that the issue of the suffocating behaviour of the family in daily routines show that the autocratic parenting of the participant's mother had prevented her son from falling back into addiction. Findings from this study are supported by Ausubel (1961) & Laskowitz (1961) that mentioned the conflict due to the practice of excessive protective parenting or autocratic has a relationship with the drug abuse issue among children.

Other than that, Barnes (1984) stated that the practice of autocratic parenting has a close relationship with anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, the pressure from the father-in-law explained that parental involvement in their children's' marriage would cause interpersonal conflicts among former addicts. Similarly with the findings of a research by Yusuff & Zabdi (2009), when a dispute occurs among loved ones such as parents, siblings, and even wives, it would lead to a source of stress and the root of relationship problems. Additionally, a statement by Kellermann (1996) stated that interpersonal conflict as friction between two individuals that were not ready or unable to meet up the expectation of one another. The aggressive attitude of the ex-wives is portrayed by them loathing their husband's addiction that has brewed interpersonal conflict between them. This type of situation is identical with a statement by Rahim (2001) whereby interpersonal conflict is referred to the dissimilarity, arguments or differences between two or more interacting individuals. Besides that, an interpersonal conflict could culminate in relapses among male former addicts that hold the role of a husband as it happens among married people (Maisto, O'Farrell, & Connors, 1988). The labelling theory element of stigmatization states that the aggressive behaviour presented by the husband is due to the labeling process on the husband, stigmatization and identification of a negative attitude action towards the husband. The stigmatization would linger in the ex-wives memory which then becomes the main reason for the chronicity of their interpersonal conflict. The lacking of ex-wives' financial support is coherent with the findings by Sau et al. (2013), of which family socio-economic problem contributes to an addiction relapse among addicts in rehabilitation centres Kolkota, India. In order to resolve the conflict, the ex-wives demanded divorce as they had other boyfriends, in refusal to stay with their severely addicted husband. These resolutions were accepted by the informants without any objections because they see it as a punishment for their previous addictive behaviour. The conflict management style portrayed by the former wives is coherent with the conflict management style by Thomas & Killman (1976) whereby the conflicting individual would look for a solution that is agreed by both sides although did not give the best effect on the participant. Other than that, there is also isolation by their siblings as a conflict within the family. The isolation from their own siblings caused the family to break apart and this could be due to the parents' death. This statement supported by the family structure research by Tec (1970), Wiener & Egen (1973), & Friedman & Beschner (1982) as most relapsing addicts comes from a broken family or due to the death of a family member.

#### 4.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The results of this study shed light on key factors the emergence of interpersonal conflict (family conflicts) which leads to the relapse addiction. These factors include the lack of fatherly confidence, burdens in the daily activities, pressure from the father in law, the aggressive trait of an ex-wife, and isolation from siblings. By virtue of the above factors, it portrays the adverse relationship between an informant and their family. All the factors can be seen as a state of protest by the family towards newly released informants from their rehabilitation programs. It can be clearly seen that the conflict management utilizes the win and lose method proposed by Thomas & Killman (1977). The win and lose conflict management means that the party that is conflicted would do whatever that it takes to achieve their goal. In this study, the family does all sorts of things to ensure the restriction of informants from socializing freely in the community. This study revealed psychologically that a negative behaviour and perception of the family towards former drug addicts. The significant of this study consists in several sections. Firstly, the study on the existence of family conflicts will be discuss with the rehabilitation staff in CCSC, Kuala Pilah to create a learning module for addicts in managing family conflicts. In Malaysia, learning module in rehabilitation centre based on the conflict management is still deficient. Second sections, the study of family conflict is able to contribute new knowledge to the field of social psychology in variety of issues that contribute to the existence of interpersonal conflict among vulnerable group. In-depth studies focus only on family conflicts at different informational sites and informants. In this study, the comparison to the previous literature that we can found is the new factors that contribute family conflicts among addicts such as burdens in the daily activities and the aggressive trait of an ex-wife. Besides, these study also contributing a several implication to practice, learners, and teacher's aspect. In term of implication for the practice, an individual that working in rehabilitation centre or social worker absolutely know how to managing conflict among addicts effectively. By understanding Thomas and Kilmann's (1974) theory, five varying styles of management in relation to scope of assertiveness and cooperativeness can be applied. The five styles were accommodating, competing collaborating, compromising, and avoidance. The implication for the teachers or educator in this study is can help public to understand that external factors (conflict) contributed why former addicts couldn't stop taking drugs. Undoubtedly, public's negative perception or labelling towards former addicts can be minimising wisely by infusing and integrating conflict resolution into the school curriculum. Lack of co-operative learning, development of frustration, and lack of professional motivation are the multiple effects of the conflicts and it was useful to the learners to discover something. Hence, the implication of the learners is the institutionalizing of practices and principles of conflict resolution, social and emotional learning and inter-group relations into the culture and a policy of the deviant group is an effective way to minimising conflict.

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## Declaration

We, authors of the article declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding publication of this article

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