

## THE PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT OF CHILD ABUSE SURVIVORS

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### Abstract

*The abuse cases, especially among children, has been enormously reported and in fact, abundant of the research has been conducted to identify the effects towards the abuse survivors. Thus, this study had taken the new approach by investigating the causes of abuse from the perspective of the survivors itself, as well as including the coping mechanisms practice by them. The highlight of this study is the real experiences of the survivors regarding on the abuse incidents during childhood. Thus, the interviews were carried out with two female participants from a different country, which are Indonesia and Malaysia. The result strongly endorses that the personality development has strongly influenced by the coping mechanisms utilized by them.*

**Keywords:** Abuse, personality development, coping mechanisms

2017 JHLCB

### Introduction

The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), (42 U.S.C.A. §5106g), as amended and reauthorized by the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010, defines child abuse and neglect as, at minimum: “Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.”

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News from around the world shows that many children had become victims of a child. In fact, statistics from the Malaysia Welfare Department show that the number of children in need of protection and care following abuse and neglect under Section 17(1) (a) to (k) of the Child Act 2001 has increased 36.7% from 3,257 cases in 2010 to 4,453 cases in 2015 (New Straits Time, 2016).

Unfortunately, this is not surprising because according to National and State Child Abuse and Neglect Statistics, there are approximately 40 million children subjected to abuse each year around the world (Child Act, 2011). The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of the child abuse survivors as well as the possible causes from the perspective of the victims. In order to have a deep insight into this topic, the main objective is focusing on the long-term effect that might affect the development personality of an individual. Indirectly, this research seeks to examine the most effective coping mechanism practice by the child abuse survivors as well as their future planning due to the abuse incident with aims to provide the beneficial insight for the society as a whole, the victims of child abuse as well as for Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development to prepare with the National Action Plan for Children with the aim to reduce the number of cases involving child abuse.

Basically, personality was defined as the way of an individual behaves, thinks, feels, and how he or she acts based on the commandments of her or his mind (Vivekananda, 2009). Apart from that, personality also can be described as an individual trait, characteristic, pattern of taught, react and interact with each other (Widom, 2000). Similarly, personality also as a dynamic of the person's psychological systems that measure his unique adjustment or adaption to the situation and the environment surrounding (Gaussen, 2001).

Hence, the personality development embraces two kinds of challenges which are very differently (Mansor & Samah, 2011). Firstly, development characteristic patterns are through experienced. Each person develops with distinction stages, or probably indicates that certain emotional experiences are common at someone versus others. Secondly, understand development factors that contribute individual distinctions, it means nature and nurture. For instance, when a person know who he is because of biological features that he inherited. On the other hand, personality of the person is a reflection his nurturing, that is the experiences in his family and in society. Moreover, according to Gewirt and Edleson (2007), there are three factors determinant of a person's personality. Firstly, heredity, in which refers to the factors that were measures at conception, i.e., facial attractiveness, temperament, physical structure, biological rhythms, energy level, muscle composition and reflexes. Basically, these factors were considered to be influenced by parents including physiological, biological and inherent psychological. The next factor is environment, which means the basic foundation that shapes the personality of an individual from the culture where the person raised as well as norms of family, social group, friends and other influences that individual experienced. Hence, the environment is the essential role in development an individual's personality. Then, the third factor is situation in which personality was the result from heredity and environment. Generally, personality of individual generally consistent and stable, but does change in different situation, i.e., an individual changes little across the course of his life. Apart from that, a person who living with the same family members, friends, educational systems, and social circumstances over long time periods of time indirectly will be contributed to consistency of personality. However, when a person are not consistently stay with the same

family members, friends, and educational system, thus, new environment will occur which resulted in changes of situation that might effect the persoanlity of an individual (Lewis, 2002).

There are four types of child abuse which are sexual, physical, emotional/psychological, and neglect (Norman et al., 2012; Vallone, Addona, D'Elia, & Vicari, 2009). Undeniably, child abuse can leave the child with serious, long-lasting effects. There are several studies that highlight on the long-term effects of childhood together with its long-term symptoms on the child (Springer, 2003; Stovall-McClough & Cloitre, 2006). Basically, child abuse does not give the same impacts on each and every person. Hence, it affects the individual differently. Although child abuse and neglect are separated into physical, mental, and emotional factors, the type of child abuse (physical, verbal, sexual, and neglect) and severity of each type of abuse experienced also plays an element in long-term effects of childhood abuse. Child abuse somehow affects their emotional adjustment and struggle in achieving what they want (Wilson et.al.,2011). Particularly, a disturbance in the early youth could provide negative impacts to relationship or attachment with others, isolation of self, low self-esteem, self-injury and so on. In another study, it shows that there are negative impacts on long-term health outcomes of child abuse in adults (Springer, Sheridah, Kuo & Carnes, 2007). Adults who experienced abuse during their childhood tend to engage themselves in high-risk behaviors. Basically, the personality development embraces two kinds of challenges which are very differently (Mansor & Samah, 2011). Firstly, development characteristic patterns are through experienced. Each person develops with distinction stages or probably indicates that certain emotional experiences are common at someone versus others. Secondly, understand development factors that contribute individual distinctions, it means nature and nurture. For instance, when a person know who he is because of biological features that he inherited. On the other hand, the personality of the person is a reflection his nurturing, that is the experiences in his family and in society.

The long-term effects include four dimensions according to Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013) namely (i) Physical Health, (ii) Psychological, (iii) Behavioral, and (iv) Societal. This dimensions in line with the findings by Moylan and the colleagues when they found that the impacts will affect the child physically, psychologically, behaviorally or psychosocially (Moylan et al., 2007). According to Vivekananda (2009), personality development refers to deeper levels of a person which encompass a broader range of individual differences in thinking, feeling, and behaving (Caspi, Roberts & Shiner, 2005). There for, direct or indirectly, the long term effects will influence the personality of abused children through behaving, thinking and feeling.

To understand the development of the personality, this study are analyzed by using a theory of Eynseck's Personality Theory. The theory that belief in supporting the types of personality possess by the abused child is Eynseck's Personality theory. There were two dimensions of temperament which are (i) Neuroticism and (ii) Extraversion-Introversion. Basically, Neuroticism is a dimension that ranges from normal, i.e., keep calm towards the tendency to feel nervous. In fact, those who score high in neuroticism are prone to experience "nervous disorder" which is known as neuroses and susceptible to neurotic problems (Boeree, 2006). Then, the next dimension is extraversion-introversion in which defined the contradict forms of behavior, i.e., quiet people versus out-going. According to Eynseck (1971), extraversion-introversion is the result of the balance between "inhibition"

and “excitation” in the people’s brain. Generally, “excitation” is the matter of alert, learning state and brain waking. In contrast, “inhibition” refers to brain calming itself down as such relaxing or going to sleep as the way of protecting itself from overwhelming stimulation. Thus, the hypothesis shows that those who are extroverted tend to have good inhibition especially when confronted with traumatic stimulation, i.e., car crash (Boeree, 2006). On the other hand, the introvert peoples are prone to have weak inhibition as during the traumatic events, i.e., car crash, their brains were not protecting them fast enough or even shut down the memory as the introvert people are highly alert, thus, they tend to remember everything that happened.

Apart from that, Eynseck has related the two dimensions (neuroticism and extroverted-introverted) in regard to psychological problems. Highly neurotic individuals are more prone to overly react towards fearful stimuli. However, there are two cases in which those introvert people with the high score of neuroticism tend to avoid the situations that cause panic which might lead to phobias to themselves. Thus, they will behave in such a way that could hold off their panic, i.e., washing their hands again and again (Boeree, 2006; Eynseck, 1971). On the other hand, highly neurotic extroverts have the ability to ignore and forgetting the things that might overwhelm them by engaging with a defense mechanism, i.e., denial.

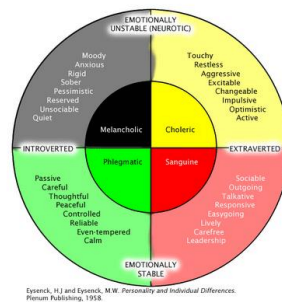


Diagram 1: Model of Eynseck’s Personality Theory

## Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative narrative approach which involved in-depth qualitative interviews that focusing on the story narrated from the perspective of participants. The aim of this present study is to select participants who were rich in information and went through the experiences of being abused, i.e., physical abuse and emotional abuse, with respect to the topic of childhood abuse. Thus, the participants were selected through purposeful sampling. One young adult (28 years old) who experienced physical abuse during a child and another participant are late adulthood (46 years old) who experienced physical and emotional abuse. Sources of data collection for this narrative qualitative research were tape recorded interviews (personal experience) as well as books and articles about verbal abuse experiences. The study will utilize thematic analysis to derived into various of themes after the analysis of the interview transcript.

## Result and Discussion

The findings in this study revealed various themes that were identified as the needs that have to be included in the experiences of child abuse survivors. The themes that emerged from the data are; (a) Family background, (b) Experiences, (c) Causes, (d) Long-term effects, (e) Coping Mechanisms and, (f) Future planning. The findings show that background of the family could be one predicting factors that trigger the occurrence of child abuses. Indeed, the background of the participants plays an important role for the next themes to emerged. Besides that, the bad experiences with parents (either mother or father) and caretaker are another factor that leads to the themes to emerged. Then, the causes have described the perspectives of participants regarding on the possibility causes that lead to the child abuse incidents which is the lack of parents' awareness. Thus, the next dimensions appear as the abuse lead to the long-term effects. In fact, there were three (3) sub-themes derived from this particular theme which is; (a) Life-long memory, (b) Trust issues, and (c) Protective behavior. However, based on the research conducted, the coping mechanisms utilized by the participant is getting married. Interestingly, despite the abuse incidents that the participant went through during their childhood, both of the participants were able to plan their future well. Hence, the development of personality is perfectly matched with the Eynseck's Personality Theory. This is due to the types of personality possess by the abused child that extract from the findings was in line with two dimensions of temperament which are (i) Neuroticism and (ii) Extraversion-Introversion. From the findings, it can be seen that the first participant was developed pessimistic and aggressiveness characteristics which could be considered as emotionally unstable. After all, the level of neuroticism could be considered low as she able to reflect herself and change her mindset due to the bad experiences during childhood. Meanwhile, the second participant could be considered as having strong emotional and psychological well-being as she does not develop any signs of neuroticism. Hence, the finding indicates that the abuse experiences do not necessarily contribute to the neurotic personality of a person as it could be strongly associated with the coping mechanisms applied by the participant which informs of spiritual coping mechanism, i.e., prayer and du'a. Basically, both of the participants were developing a phlegmatic personality as describe in Eynseck's Personality theory. This is due to the fact that the first respondent is quiet thoughtful and careful in their actions. Participant 2 have developed peaceful and calm in her life after the abuse incidents. The findings also illustrate that even though both of the participants are introverted, but, they are emotionally stable. After all, the findings indicate that the experiences of being abused are not the main causes that lead to emotionally unstable personality. In fact, the spiritual elements do play a great role in personality development of a person.

The overall finding of the study indicated that indirectly, the abuse incidents influence the personality development. In fact, lack of support and perceived stress from the surroundings were the main contributing factors that lead to abuse cases. Despite that, the variety of characteristics of child's parents and caregivers, i.e., aggressiveness, depression, anxiety, are another factor that contributes to an increased likelihood of child abuse (English, 1998). Indeed, the participants develop the aggressive and depression personality but manage to overcome the negativity in themselves due to intrinsic motivation. Apart from that, Newberger and Hampton (1983), has mentioned that the causes of child abuse are including environmental and social stresses on the family as well as society's acceptance. The research conducted by the organization of Family Resource Centre (2016), indicates the certain characteristics of children could increase the stress of parenting that exposes the risk to abuse.

Basically, there were three sub-themes emerged from the theme of long-term effects which are, (i) Life-long memory, (ii) Trust issues, and (iii) Protective. Indeed, the abuse incidents have contributed the long-term effects toward both of the participants, in terms of (i) Physical Health, (ii) Psychological, (iii) Behavioral, and (iv) Societal (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013; Green, 1993). Thus, the findings indicate that psychological consequences are the most prevalent long-term effect that associated with the participant's abuse experiences as participants are developing social difficulties by having the trust issues and protective towards people surrounding. However, both of the participants are having no problem in terms of developing the relationship with other adults or peers. This contradicts with the facts that the abused children are developing poor insecure attachments and tend to develop antisocial traits as they grow up (Morrison, Frank, Holland and Kates, 1999; Schore, 2003). Basically, people who get abuse during childhood could develop the feeling of fearful, untrusting, low self-esteem and depression (Hermes, 2015). Despite the abuse incident during the childhood, both of the participants were able to set up their future accordingly as attending the parenting conference or talk as well as be more optimistic. This is supported by Sahin and Vicker (2009), which stated that the optimistic individual believes that the causes of bad incidents were only temporary and specific, meanwhile, the causes of good events are more specific and permanent in which motivate the person to try even harder after succeed. Hence, both of the participants could be considered to be high achievers and successfully fight off the depression (Seligman & Schulman, 1986), as both of the participants are able to overcome the challenges successfully as indicated by Seligman (1990) that optimistic people are those who can bounce back from defeat.

## **Conclusion**

Child abuse is often thought of as physical beatings. However, there are several other forms of abuse that children could go through, such as physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect, sexual abuse as well as psychological maltreatment. Undeniably, child abuse occurs at every socioeconomic level, across all ethnic lines and at all levels of education. In the light of the study finding, it is very important to make the following recommendations. The findings of this study directly pointed to three recommendations, specifically serving the behavioral support, namely, (1) Parents, (2) Extended Family, which in fact, critical to the success of children in the future.

Basically, parents are the primary agent in providing nurture and love towards the children. Hence, parents should increase the awareness regarding on child abuse cases, which then spread it in the context of community. Apart from that, parents or guardians are strongly encouraged to develop strong attachments with their children and learn to express warmth as well as positive regard for them. In fact, parents or guardians should properly manage their emotions and learn to deal with stressful events. Furthermore, this present study is strongly recommended the parents or guardians to establish a good relationship with children by talking to them and avoid from doing physical injuries, even though with the intention to give them lessons.

In fact, the parents are instruments of shaping a human being either good or bad from the child. The greatest service which the parents can render to their children is that train them to be well mannered, well meaning, freedom loving, righteous, faithful and well educated. The parents must mold their children in such a way that they are successful both in the world and hereafter, in line with Al- Quran and Sunnah. The mother furthermore has a more important

role to perform towards the upbringing of the progeny. Even during the pregnancy, the mother's food habits, her psychological and behavior will affect the future virtuosity of the children. After the children born, they also spend most of their childhood life with the mothers. Therefore, it is compulsory for all parents to play their role as husband and wife as well as father and mother in the best manner and never take their children for granted.

Children's extended family are important in helping to avoid children from maltreatment or prevent them from abuse. Apart from that, the extended family has to establish the strong relationship with the abuse children to make them feel safe and secure. Indirectly, the extended family could help in reducing the case of abuse as the children will seek help from the closest people as well as develop trust towards them.

Even though parents and extended family play significant roles, they still have some limitations, therefore, need support from the related organization. With the fulfillment of these study objectives, especially the causes of a child abused and coping mechanism, hopefully, it will beneficial insight for Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development to prepare the National Action Plan for Children with the aim to reduce the number of cases involving child abuse as prevention always better than cure. However, if the cases still happened, it is important to know which coping mechanism are most beneficial and best support system to provide.

Childhood abuse is clearly detrimental in the developing children as the experiences of being abuse are long-lasting and definitely, have a strong influence in life. In fact, the present study found that both of the participants were having long-term effects due to the abuse experiences. However, the findings indicate that both of the participants have successfully manage their psychological development, i.e., cognitive, emotional, intellectual and social capabilities even though the participants went through the traumatic events in life. Undeniably, the coping mechanisms utilized by both of the participants strongly influenced their personality development.

### **Acknowledgements**

First of all, We wish to express our sincere thanks to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mastura Badzis and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nik Suryani for their vital support and assistance. Their encouragement made it possible to achieve our goal. It is wholeheartedly expressed that their advice for this research proved to be a landmark effort towards the success of our project. Apart from that, we would like to thank our parents and families for their continuous support and encouragement throughout our years of study. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them. Last but not least, the authors would like to say thank you to those who indirectly contributed to this research, your kindness means a lot to us. Hopefully, this thesis would be beneficial to all.

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