

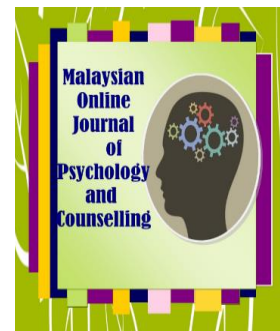
## PARENTAL STRESS AND ITS EFFECTS ON WAYS OF COPING AMONG PARENTS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS IN KOTA KINABALU, SABAH MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify parental stress levels among parents of young adolescent children and to examine the effects of parental stress on their ways of coping. This study employed a quantitative research design which includes 2 sets of questionnaires. The Parental Stress Scale by Berry and Jones (1995) was used to measure parental stress and ways of coping with stress was measured by the revised version of Ways of Coping Questionnaire by Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, and DeLongis (1986). Three hundred and sixty-three parents of 13-year-old children participated in this study. The results showed that these parents were experiencing high parental stress. The results also revealed that among the 8 ways of coping, only 3 ways of coping contributed significantly towards parental stress. These were 'distancing', 'self-controlling' and 'escape avoidance'. This finding confirms the theory that coping with stress in negative ways would increase the levels of stress.

**Keywords:** *Stress, Coping, Parents, Young Adolescent*



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## INTRODUCTION

Stresses are dramatically on the rise today and being a parent can be joyful but stressful at the same time especially for parents for young adolescents. This is because their young adolescents are entering a rebellious age and most young adolescent's parents find this age difficult to manage. According to Andreassen, Hetland, and Pallesen (2013), individuals living with children reported having more stress than those living without children.

Higher parenting stress may also be related to an increase in family conflict for both men and women (Gallavan & Newman, 2013). All families, especially parents, will experience different levels of stress at different times and for different reasons. Thus, it is important to identify the parental stress experienced by parents of young adolescents.

Adopting the theory of stress, appraisal and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), states that parenting stress occurs when parents judge their children's problematic behavior to exceed the resources they have available to cope. Different parents may experience different levels of stress depending on the duration and timing of the stressor. This was also taken into account as some behavior or events may be perceived as more or less stressful depending on the other events that are occurring. The manner in which a stressor is appraised thus determines how a parent will react. Therefore, identifying parental stress and the ways of coping among parents is equally important.

This research is conducted to identify the stress levels of parents of young adolescents and the effects on the ways parents cope with their stress among parents of 13 year old adolescents in the city of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

This study was conducted in the city of Kota Kinabalu instead elsewhere in Sabah because the stress level for parents who stay in urban areas is higher than in rural areas. According to the Malaysian Mental Health Association (MMHA) secretary-general Datin Ang Kim Teng, people living in urban areas, especially big cities such as Kuala Lumpur, face high levels of stress. Stress could come from dealing with traffic congestion, higher costs of living, as well as demanding jobs and workplaces (Chew, 2017).

According to the MMHA, there is a rising trend in suicide rates amongst urbanites (Khoo, 2016). Besides, research conducted by the Douglas Mental Health University Institute found that the risk of anxiety disorders and mood disorders are 21% and 39% higher respectively for people living in the city (Benedictus, 2014).

Not only that, the National Health and Morbidity Survey done by the Ministry of Health Malaysia reported every 3 out of 10 adults aged 16 years and above have some sort of mental health problem. The prevalence of mental health problems among adults increased from 10.7% in 1996 to 11.2% in 2006 and 29.2% in 2015. The findings above were also reported by the state. The prevalence was highest in Sabah at 42.9% and Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan followed by Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur 39.8% and Kelantan 39.1%. Thus, this research is conducted by focusing on parental stress for parents of young adolescents in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah (NHMS, 2015).

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research design*

The research design of this study is based on quantitative research methods. A quantitative design was utilized to quantify the relationship between multiple variables (parental stress and ways of coping) among parents of 13 year old young adolescents. This study makes use of a simple random sampling method. Analysis method through SPSS was used to analyze the research results. The findings on parental stress were analyzed by using mean and frequency. Linear regression was used to analyze the effects of parental stress on parental ways of coping.

### *Participants*

The population was set to focus on parents of 13 year old adolescents in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. A simple random sampling method was used in this study to help ensure an unbiased sample population. The number of participants in the sample was identified by using the sample size determination table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). 363 parents were recruited to participate in this research.

### *Instruments*

Two questionnaires were employed to measure the variables of the study. To measure the level of parental stress, the Parental Stress Scale (PSS) was used in this study. Besides, to find out the ways of coping stress among parents, the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ) designed by Lazarus and Folkman was used. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23. The data analyses included two statistical analyses named descriptive statistical analysis and correlation statistical analysis to illustrate parental stress levels and the ways of coping of parents of young adolescents in this study.

### *Results*

Table 1.1 shows the demographic background of all participants that participated in this research. In total, 363 parents of young adolescents participated in this research. Demographic information included gender, parent's age, parent's marital status, family income, ethnicity, religion, working status for parents, parent's education level and the number of children in the family.

According to the results, a total of 363 parents participated in this research, among which 211 participants were fathers and 152 mothers. The age of participating parents ranged from 28 to 74 years ( $M = 45.6$ ,  $SD = 6.62$ ).

Table 1.1  
*Demographic Frequency Analyses*

Demographic	Frequency	%
Student's Gender		
Male	168	46.3
Female	195	53.7
Parent's Gender		
Male	211	58.1

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Female	152	41.9
Parent's Age		
20 - 30	2	0.6
31 - 40	78	21.5
41 - 50	207	57
51 - 60	69	19
61 and Above	7	1.9
Parent's Marital Status		
Married	333	91.7
Separated	4	1.1
Divorced	17	4.7
Widowed	9	2.5
Family Income		
Less than RM2000	91	25.1
RM2001 to RM4000	135	37.2
RM4001 to RM6000	57	15.7
RM6001 to RM8000	26	7.2
RM8000 to RM10,000	28	7.7
More than RM10,000	26	7.2
Ethnic		
Malay	40	11
Chinese	130	35.8
Indian	1	0.3
Bumiputera	180	49.6
Other	12	3.3
Religion		
Muslim	128	35.3
Christian	165	45.5
Hindu	2	0.6
Buddhist	68	18.7
Working Status		
Both Working	186	51.2
Only One Working	177	48.8
Education Level		
Primary	15	4.1
Secondary	212	58.4
Diploma	54	14.9
Bachelor Degree	60	16.5
Master Degree	17	4.7
PhD	5	1.4
Numbers of Children		
1	45	12.4
2-3	203	55.9
4-6	102	28.1
7-10	12	3.3
More Than 10	1	0.3

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Besides, the majority or 333 (91.7%) parents reported being married without being separated, divorced or widowed. For family income, most of the parents (135 parents or 37.2%) fell into the medium-income group which is between RM2001-RM4000.

Mostly Bumiputera and Chinese participated in this research, at 180 Bumiputera (49.6%) and 130 Chinese (35.8%) participants. For working status, the percentage is almost half for both working parents and either only one working in the family which is 186 parents both working and 177 parents only one from the family working. For the number of children in the family, most of the families or 203 parents (55.9%) have 2-3 children.

## ***Parental Stress Mean Score***

Table 1.2 shows the mean score for parental stress in this research. The mean score for parental stress was 64.03 and the standard deviation was 6.20.

Table 1.2  
*Parental Stress Mean Score*

Variables	Mean	S.D
Parental Stress	64.03	6.20

The possible range for the stress score falls between 18 and 90. The results show that the parental stress for parents of young adolescents in this research tends to be high.

## ***Ways of Coping Mean Score***

Table 1.3 shows the mean score for ways for parents to cope with their stress. It is divided into 8 dimensions, namely confrontive coping, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape avoidance, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal.

According to the findings shown in table 1.3, the highest mean for the ways of coping was distancing with a mean score of 25.19 and standard deviation of 4.96. The lowest mean for the ways of coping was Accepting Responsibility with a mean score of 5.48 and standard deviation of 2.67.

Table 1.3  
*Ways of Coping Mean Score*

Variables	Mean	S.D
Accepting Responsibility	5.48	2.67
Positive Reappraisal	5.52	2.35
Seeking Social Support	6.05	1.70
Confrontive Coping	8.04	2.23
Planful Problem Solving	8.28	2.40
Self-Controlling	12.31	4.92
Escape Avoidance	14.06	4.48
Distancing	25.19	4.96

This finding shows that most parents of young adolescents in Kota Kinabalu use more passive ways to cope with their stress. The 4 higher means for ways of coping were distancing, self-controlling, escape avoidance and planful problem-solving. On the other hand, the 4 lower mean scores fell into 4 ways of coping, which are confrontive coping, accepting responsibility, seeking social support and positive reappraisal.

### ***Parental Stress Level***

Data analysis for parental stress in the study variables was conducted through the Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) mean scale and frequency test. For the PSS questionnaire, the 1-to-5 Likert scale was analyzed. According to Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995), the mean of each strategy can be used to represent the frequency of the subjects' stress level.

To be specific, a mean between 1 and 2.33 indicates that the parents have a low-stress level; a mean between 2.34 and 3.67 indicates that the parents have a moderate stress level and a mean between 3.68 and 5 indicates that the parents have a high-stress level. From the findings, parental stress levels were identified through the frequency test.

Table 1.4

#### ***Parental Stress Frequency***

Variables	Level	Frequency	%	Mean	S.D
PSS	Low	2	0.6	3.55	0.39
	Moderate	247	68.0		
	High	114	31.4		

Note: PSS = Parental Stress

From the findings above, table 1.4 shows that most of the parents fell under the categories of moderate and high stress levels; 247 participants experienced moderate stress levels and 114 participants felt high stress levels. In this study, participants that had moderate and high-stress levels were considered in this research because the mean for parental stress is 3.55. It is close to the mean scale high-stress category 3.68 which is interpreted by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) as indicative of the beginning of the high range. Thus, hypothesis that stated parental stress levels for parents of 13 year old adolescents in Kota Kinabalu are high is supported.

### ***Parental Stress Effect to Ways of Coping***

To test the relationship between parental stress and dependent variables, researchers used the method of linear regression analysis. Regression analysis is designed to test the influence of one independent variable on a dependent variable. According to Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, and Petty (1986), although there is no significant influence between independent variables and dependent variables, every researcher is advised to perform linear regression analysis before the researcher conducts mediation analyses. Table 1.5 shows the effects of parental stress on ways of coping through linear regression analysis.

Table 1.5  
*Linear Regression for Parental Stress to Ways of Coping*

H	Variables	Parental Stress			
		Beta	R2	Sig.	F
H2i	WCQ-CC	.088	.008	.094	2.814
H2ii	WCQ-D	.226	.051	.000	19.427
H2iii	WCQ-SC	.266	.071	.000	27.526
H2iv	WCQ-SSS	.128	.016	.014	6.042
H2v	WCQ-AR	.021	.000	.691	.158
H2vi	WCQ-EA	.167	.028	.001	10.388
H2vii	WCQ-PPS	.113	.013	.031	4.683
H2viii	WCQ-PR	.064	.004	.226	1.472

Note: WCQ-CC = Ways of Coping (Confrontive Coping), WCQ-D = Ways of Coping (Distancing), WCQ-SC = Ways of Coping (Self-Controlling), WCQ-SSS = Ways of Coping (Seeking Social Support), WCQ-AR = Ways of Coping (Accepting Responsibility), WCQ-EA = Ways of Coping (Escape Avoidance), WCQ-PPS = Ways of Coping (Planful Problem Solving), WCQ-PR = Ways of Coping (Positive Reappraisal)

## DISCUSSION

Results in this research showed that the parental stress levels for parents of adolescents in Kota Kinabalu are high. In this research, the parental stress scale (PSS) attempts to measure the levels of stress experienced by the parents. It is related to the satisfaction of parents regarding parenthood and their roles as parents. Higher levels of parental stress are related to poorer child behaviors. It leads to parenthood stress, lower quality of the parent-child relationship and lower levels of parental sensitivity to the child.

This research reported among 363 parents that participated in this research, only 2 parents fall under the category of low stress level. Besides, the mean score for parental stress is 64.03. The possible range for the stress score falls between 18 and 90. The results show that the parental stress of young adolescent parents in this research tends to be high.

According to Sarafino and Smith, stress arises when individuals perceive a discrepancy between the physical or psychological demands of a situation and the resources of his or her biological, psychological or social systems (Sarafino & Smith, 2014). In this study, most of the parents reported to have moderate and high stress levels, meaning most young adolescent's parents in Kota Kinabalu perceive demands on parenting that exceeded their resources. Adolescence is a period of rapid biological, cognitive, and neurological changes (Crone, van Duijvenvoorde, & Peper, 2016). It is normal for teenagers to seek independence and separation from their parents when they reach the age of adolescence. Since teens are trying to learn how to be an adult and navigate the world without parental supervision, this is a common problem to arise. Some parents of adolescents will face great conflict with their adolescents that lead to stress.

Another possible reason for the parents of adolescents in Kota Kinabalu to face high stress levels could be related closely with their ways of coping. This is based on in corroborating past literature review where problem-focused coping strategies such as getting social support are more effective in handling stress. Consistent with previous findings among non-clinical samples, problem-focused

coping styles were predictive of decreased perceived stress, whereas emotion-oriented coping styles were negatively associated with these outcomes (Lavoie, 2013).

In this research, most of the parents reported that they tended to use emotion-focused coping. Culturally, Asian parents may tend to keep stress and problems within, and avoid talking and sharing problems and stress. Due to this internalized way of coping, most parents, especially parents in this research, have no effective ways of handling their stress. Without stress reduction methods such as seeking social support, accepting their responsibility as parents and seeking advice for parenting, parental stress will increase. Further discussion on the relationship between parental stress and ways of coping is elaborated on below.

In this research, ways of coping questionnaire (WCQ) was used to identify the ways of coping for parents of young adolescent. There are 8 dimensions of ways of coping. These are confrontive coping, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility and positive reappraisal. Research points to a pattern in which problem-focused coping strategies (e.g., problem-solving and seeking social support) are related to better outcomes and emotion-focused strategies (e.g., escape avoidance and distancing) are associated with poor outcomes. Past researches have reported that problem-focused coping strategies appear related to better outcomes while emotion-focused coping strategies appear to be linked to poor outcomes.

In this research, most parents of young adolescents in Kota Kinabalu reported they are having the tendency of using emotion-focused coping strategies which were escape avoidance, distancing and self-controlling. The results were also congruent with the results of parental stress that affect these 3 ways of coping. When they face parental stress, instead of seeking for help and focus on problem-focused strategies, they tend to keep the stress and problem to themselves and ignored the stress by escaping from facing it or keeping a distance from facing the stress. This also leads to the confirmation of the results why parental stress for parents of young adolescent in Kota Kinabalu Sabah are reported to be high; it is because they did not use the right ways of coping to help them release their stress.

In this research, emotion-focused coping such as distancing and escape-avoidant coping appeared to be an ineffective long-term strategy for managing parenting stress. As a result, 98% of parents of young adolescents in Kota Kinabalu were found to have medium or high stress levels. Ryan (2013) once again confirmed that high usage of avoidant focused coping mechanisms was significantly related to high levels of stress and lower life satisfaction.

The data suggested that parents who experience higher levels of parental stress are more likely to use emotion-focused coping and avoid parenting challenges as they arise. Over time, emotion-focused coping tends to increase emotional distress, in part, because attention is directed toward the emotional experience rather than appraising and problem-solving during the stressful situation (Sears, Urizar, & Evans, 2000). Individuals who use emotion-oriented coping as their primary coping strategy tend to have higher levels of depression, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion, and lower levels of personal accomplishment (McWilliams, Cox, & Enns, 2003; Sears et al., 2000).

Therefore, avoidant coping strategies in response to parenting stressors are a potential point of intervention for decreasing the mental health risks associated with stress (Taylor & Stanton, 2007). While most parents negotiate their children's adolescence without experiencing substantial psychological problems, parenting young adolescents often presents unavoidable and chronic stress



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(Steinberg, 2001). Thus, parents of adolescents are at risk for avoidance and depressive symptoms, making it important for parents to identify their source of stress and evaluate their ways of coping to find the best ways to destress.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, most parents of young adolescents in Kota Kinabalu reported to have the tendency to use emotion-focused coping strategies, namely escape avoidance, distancing and self-controlling. The results were also congruent with the results of parental stress that affected these 3 ways of coping. When they faced parental stress, instead of seeking for help and focus on problem-focused strategies, they kept the stress and problems to themselves or tended to ignore the stress by escaping from facing it or kept a distance from facing the stress. As a result, parents of young adolescents parents in Kota Kinabalu Sabah reported to have high parental stress levels because they did not use the right ways of coping to help them manage their stress.

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