PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESSES AMONG DIVORCED PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of factors, impacts and coping mechanisms in divorce in relation to psychological stress among professional women. This research utilized the mixed method approach with sequential exploratory strategy. The quantitative data from Revised PSS-10 were used to support the qualitative section. This data gave an initial picture on psychological stress among divorced professional women. In this study, there were 18 respondents participating using purposive sampling. The selection criteria were that a divorced professional woman had to be working in the related field of study that she took in the university or college. This study discovered that occupational prestige and stubbornness were the two main reasons that have affected the marriage. This study has produced a framework to raise awareness of forgiveness and skill of adjustment that enabled a divorced professional woman to seek emotional stability. It was proposed that this framework was used for a more thorough research on culture and social norms on a domestic level. It was also recommended that a more in-depth quantitative method focusing on stress level in divorced among professional women were utilized for future studies.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka factor hubungan, kesan dan mekanisme menangani perceraian berkaitan tekanan psikologi dalam kalangan wanita profesional. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kajian gabungan dengan strategi penerokaan berurutan. Data kuantitatif dari Pindaan PSS-10 digunakan untuk menyokong dapatan kualitatif. Dapatan ini memberi gambaran awal tentang tekanan psikologi dalam kalangan wanita profesional bercerai. Dalam kajian ini, terdapat 18 responden yang mengambil bahagian menggunakan persampelan bertujuan. Kriteria pemilihan responden adalah di kalangan wanita profesional yang bercerai dan bekerja dalam bidang yang sama ketika belajar di universiti atau kolej. Hasil kajian mendapati dua sebab yang memberi kesan kepada perkahwinan iaitu sikap mengutamakan prestij pekerjaan dan kedegilan diri wanita. Kajian ini menghasilkan kerangka untuk meningkatkan kesedaran kemaafan dan kemahiran penyesuaian di kalangan wanita profesional bagi membolehkan mereka mencapai emosi yang stabil. Adalah dicadangkan kerangka ini dapat digunapakai untuk kajian yang lebih mendalam berkaitan isu budaya dan norma-norma sosial tempatan. Di sarankan juga, kajian kuantitatif yang lebih mendalam dapat dilaksanakan pada masa akan datang dengan memberi tumpuan kepada tahap tekanan di kalangan wanita bercerai yang profesional.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

Many researchers in various dimensions from legislation to social and psychological factors had studied causes of divorce. In the Institute of legislation, Berardo and Shehan (2004) and United Nation (2012) have discovered liberal countries like United Stated, Sweden and Canada practicing family no-fault law created over 40% divorce rate. However, conservative countries like Italy, Spain, and Poland which remained in family fault law had low divorce rate as under 10%. Herring (2004) noted that a pure fault-based system allows divorce only if the party proved that the other party committed adultery or behaved in an unacceptable way, but non-fault focused on divorce by agreement or on demand. Additionally, there were researchers like Neubeck and Glasberg (2005) and McKenry and Price (2005) who focused their attention on social factors such as family income, educational level and occupational status as part of the causes igniting divorce. Others like Ng (2003) and Raihanah (2008) found that psychological factors and cultural factors have become other critical issues causing divorce.

Nonetheless, filing divorce did not simply mean closing all critical issues in relationships or changing the vow from "I do" to "I am done" because it had a series of psychological factors and impacts that follow. For example, Boyan and Termini (2005) discovered that pain and fear of letting go was one of the psychological impacts. James (2008) echoed this finding and identified that the common symptoms divorcees had to go through were fear and emotional turmoil. Further, Ali Edalati and Ma'rof Redzuan (2010) found that the rapid replacement of traditional family value and the role of females in a family to social values and economic advancements were considered reasons for divorce.

When looking at the situation in Malaysia, statistics from Women, Family and Community (2010) had perceived the inclination of divorce. These impacts have caught the attention of many professionals in family counseling and therapy, and governmental bodies. For example, Rita Raj Karim and Rashidah Abdullah (2003) found that women experience distress and insecurity in a marriage because of divorce in their study. Researchers agreed that divorce as having negative influences toward a family. Nonetheless, Norrizan Razali and Marohaini Yusof (2003) found in their study that people continued to blame governmental sectors and non-government organizations for not being able to develop an effective program educating a divorcee-to-be on how to walk away from the decision for divorce, so as to help divorcing couples recovered from family and personal disaster.

For a divorcee, after many years in a relationship, the causes of divorce and psychological impacts might convert into tension, anger, and battering in new lives after separation (Distenfield and Distenfield, 2005). Findings from Berardo and Shehan (2004), Boyan and Termini (2005), and James (2008) have focused the attention on factors and impacts among divorcees and identified many findings not put enough attention on divorce among professional women. Therefore, it was of great interest to focus on different perspectives of the divorce, especially the intensity level of psychological stress that became part of the impacts in professional female divorcees' family. With this concern, studying relationships among professional

female divorcees with factors, impacts and coping mechanisms in divorce that were related to psychological stress for which could use as references in related programs.

1.2 Background of the Study

Many might not be aware that divorce has been threatening our society in various ways. There were studies demonstrating that some routine activities such as long working hours (Medalia and Jacobs, 2008; Melamed et al., 2011) and working parents (Noraini M. Noor, 2004; Nichols, 2009 and Becker, 2010) could alter a relationship in a family to a stressful situation. Zunker (2006) mentioned that high education was commonly believed to be the first step in bringing big earnings and wealth to the family. Aminah Ahmad (2008) has also found that most family conflicts' causes were surrounding work balance and family life. With these social impacts, communication discrepancy (Tam et al., 2011), lack of mutual understanding and hot temper (Raihanah Hj. Azahari, 2008) could all be part of marital problems.

The tension of balancing family and work among spouse was one of the most common psychological stresses in the marital relationship (James, 2008). As Boyan and Termini (2005) studied, the most stressful moment prior to divorce was the pain and fear of letting go of a marital relationship that the two had once committed. When made a decision to divorce, this pain would gradually become stress. Further, the change from marriage to divorce in life carried negative emotion and insecurities (Brown and Brown, 2002).

When studying a report on divorce from Statistics of Women, Family and Communication in Malaysia in 2012 (Table 1.1), it demonstrated that the divorce rate for Malaysia between 2000 and 2010 has inclined from 9.78% to 19.17%,

outnumbering the number of marriages of the same period. In 2010 Muslim divorce rate had reached 20.68%, which also outnumbered Muslim marriages of that same year. For non-Muslims, the divorce rate was 15.70%, which was higher than the non-Muslim marriages of that same period. In fact, the overall divorce rate was in an ascending pattern within the period of 11 years of observation, but having a slight descending on year 2011.

Table 1.1: Overall Divorce Rate in Malaysia

Divorce Rate in Malaysia

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Muslim	14.47	14.41	14.54	15.23	14.71	15.65	18.72	15.89	17.10	20.07	20.68	19.46
Non-Muslim	2.63	5.89	6.40	5.59	6.57	7.19	8.97	10.37	10.96	14.38	15.70	11.64
Average	9.78	11.21	11.42	11.68	12.20	12.96	15.22	14.25	15.18	18.30	19.17	16.95
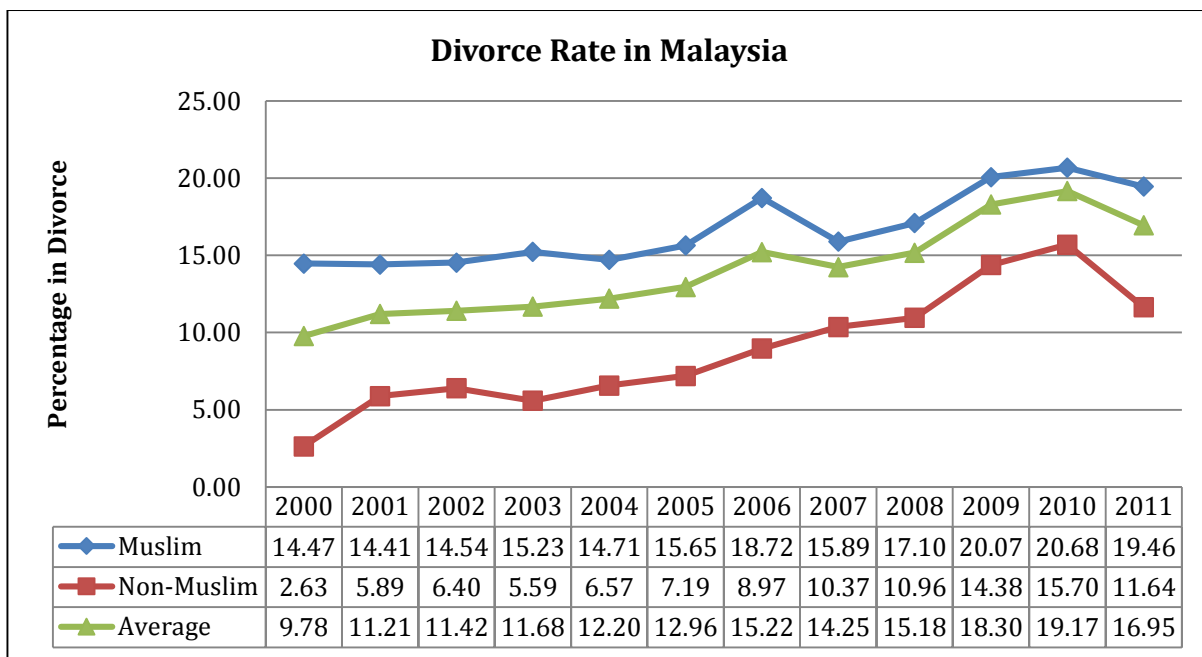
Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia 2013

When the number of divorces increased, there was also a chain reaction among family members and couples with children. It was especially serious when dealing with marital dissolution that involved children because this move led to single parenthood. To overcome this hardship, the society, and government needed to put a lot of efforts to assist related families and their children. As Ramachandran (2008) identified, there were126,810 single mothers in Malaysia, which made up 1.11% of the population. Although the number of professional women in Malaysia was unknown, almost all of divorcees were suffering from financial hardship, emotional instability, difficulty in children's education, and housing and legal rights.

In addition, Zaleha Kamaruddin (1998; 2005) has also found that some common reasons for Malay families to seek divorce as their final decision were due to incompatibility between two spouses and inability to adjust to each other's temperament. Although the Chinese families in Malaysia had different motives in divorce, it was interesting to know that inability to bear a son, immorality, disrespect shown to husband's parents, talkativeness, and jealousy had all become part of the reasons for divorce. Furthermore, all reasons for divorce created a significant level of psychological stress. Therefore, factors, impacts and coping mechanisms in divorce among divorcees in Malaysia have become an interesting topic to study.

When studying the relationship between social economic status and the role of genders in the family, Brooks (2006) and Graham (2007) have identified a lot of attention focusing on female divorcees who survived under poverty line, but most of these studies ignored or skipped the needs of professional female divorcees. According to Schaefer (2000), women were always noticeably underrepresented by the society, regardless of being poor or rich. Overall, women were not placed in decision-making positions and experienced unequal treatment. As mentioned by Williams (2011), many studies merely focused on women's experiences in male-dominated occupation. Besides, Schaefer (2000) has further identified that many Asian families treated women as part of the property of the household. Therefore, it was easy for researchers to focus their attention on the needs of working class or under a poverty line female divorcees instead of professional female divorcees.

In short, professional women were always in a disadvantage position when dealing with divorce. The situation was obvious especially when placed psychological stress in consideration. That was saying that divorced professional women might receive greater psychological stress like concerning social class and family wealth while dealing with divorce. Hence, this issue became a topic to study.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Roziah Omar (2003), Ng (2003) and Weber (2011) have conducted studies in psychological stress related to divorce. Others helping professionals like Drummond and Jones (2010) and Sue and Sue (2012) have tried to utilize information in guidance and counseling for divorce women. Nonetheless, a research gap was found in understanding psychological stress and divorced professional women. Therefore, it was interesting to study the factors, impacts and intensity of psychological stress among divorced professional women.

In addition, as Neukrug (2011) suggested that family problem depend on a family system; therefore, the focus had to be on the interpersonal nature. However, many researchers like Brooks (2006) and Graham (2007) were paying attention to female divorcees under the poverty line, and the significance of divorced professional women was not catching enough attention. As a result, there was having limited information on the types of factors that led to psychological stress in divorce among professional women. With varying information between knowing how and understanding where to facilitating divorced professional women, there was also a lack of research on impacts of psychological stress in divorce among professional female divorcees.

According to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in Malaysia (2005), there were estimated 41.6% of women lawyers, accountants, engineers and doctors in Malaysia. University students in Malaysia, who was females, also made up 60.6%, and there were 49.8% women lecturers in Malaysian public institutions of higher learning in 2004. In addition, although the number of divorced professional women in Malaysia was unknown, the percentage of divorce inclined from 9.78% in 2000 to 19.17% in 2010. Non-governmental organization in Malaysia like Family Keepers Malaysia and helping professionals from Malaysian

Social Science Association (Abdul Rahman Embong, 2010) and Counseling Centre (Universiti Technologi Malaysia) claimed that they might have good training in counseling, but identifying sufficient and significant help to a divorced professional woman was a challenge at work. Many might assume the needs of divorced professional women as not distinguishable from others; however, help was very limited as many might only see the needs for emotional security and not the appropriate coping skills. Therefore, helping professionals and counselors were lacking sufficient information in providing help on how divorced professional women to deal with the divorce. In short, the need to understand psychological stresses and develop a framework for divorced professional women became a relevant task.

1.4 Research Objectives

Research objectives for this study with the scope position were as follow:

1. To determine the levels of psychological stress using stress inventory among professional female divorcees during the post-divorce period.

2. To identify the types of factors that lead to psychological stress in divorce among professional women.

3. To analyze types of impacts that cause psychological stress in divorce on professional women in hardship situations.

4. To identify patterns of coping mechanisms among professional female divorcees when dealing with divorce.

5. To develop a post-divorce framework for professional female divorcees.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, four research questions in this study were developed as below:

1. What were the psychological stress levels among divorced professional women in the post-divorce period?

2. What types of factors that have led to psychological stress in divorce among professional women?

3. What types of impacts caused psychological stress in divorce among professional women?

4. What were the patterns of coping mechanisms among divorced professional women when dealing with divorce?

1.6 Theoretical Research Frameworks

Changing a relationship from marriage to divorce was not due to a single reason, which was balancing work and family life, but due to multiple factors (Aminah Ahman, 2008). Researchers have further identified additional divorced factors such as communication discrepancy (Tam et al., 2011), lack of mutual understanding (Raihanah Hj. Azahari, 2008), and core belief system and interpersonal skills (Parrott III, 2003). Moreover, the family system and central consideration among spouses have also contributed to the primary outcomes of the decision (Corey, 2009). Worell (2001) pointed out that gender differences often led to different outcomes. Sue and Sue (2012) have further suggested that it was suitable to counsel a female client under feminist theory with family therapy. It was also possible to understand the influencing factors and impacts of making a decision. Therefore, it was also important to know that some small alterations in a relationship have greatly influenced the outcome in a family.

In this new millennium, there were countless theories, concepts, models, and frameworks on relationship and family in psychology research and development. Each of these has had advantages and disadvantages in explaining marriage and divorce. In particular, "Attachment Theory" cited by Pietromonaco et al. (2004) and "Social Exchange Theory" cited by Rasheed et al. (2011) gave a lot of attention to family and divorce. In particular, attachment theory has strong theoretical support on relationship and social exchange theory provided a scope of social network and social support. In addition, with the major goal of "Feminist therapy", it empowered a female client with a sense of self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-esteem and self-actualization. Besides, it was also employing a series of technique to a female client in reframing and relabeling the role in a society. On top of this, Dykeman (2009) also recommended "Family Therapy" that family crisis would resolve with technique in communication skills, core beliefs and interpersonal.

Figure 1.1 demonstrates how these theories are tightly related to a divorced professional woman. It was always a rewarding feeling when having a satisfactory marriage because this was the moment when family members were willing to help one another as reciprocity as identified by Cheal (2002). Corey (2013) has further remarked the relationship among family members as having the interactions between individuals as a system in term of "Family Therapy". Nonetheless, when married professional women do not find a marriage rewarding, it also signaled major conflict in the relationship. At this moment, looking for friends and family supported to reduce a series of negative reactions, such as emotional discomfort, sleep problems, and depression became greatest needs as mentioned by Lieberman (1993). As highlighted by Bitter (2014), one of the key purposes for "Feminist Therapy" was to empower women while supporting egalitarian families through supporting women's stories and validating women's experience.

Of course, the result of the received encouragement from social networks, such as friends and family, was a healthy situation. With social support as positive reinforcement, people were willing to help one another in tradeoff, in order to maintain a rewarding relationship. However, when it failed to reach the supportive social network, it would become a dysfunctional situation whereby one felt unfairly treated with the feeling that the costs of marriage exceeded the rewards of marriage. As Schoon et al. (2005) suggested that when life satisfaction was in the lower level, it had the tendency for couple to seek divorce as their final solution. In addition, Scott et al. (2013) studied the reasons for divorce and found that lack of commitment, infidelity, conflict, and arguments were all major factors.
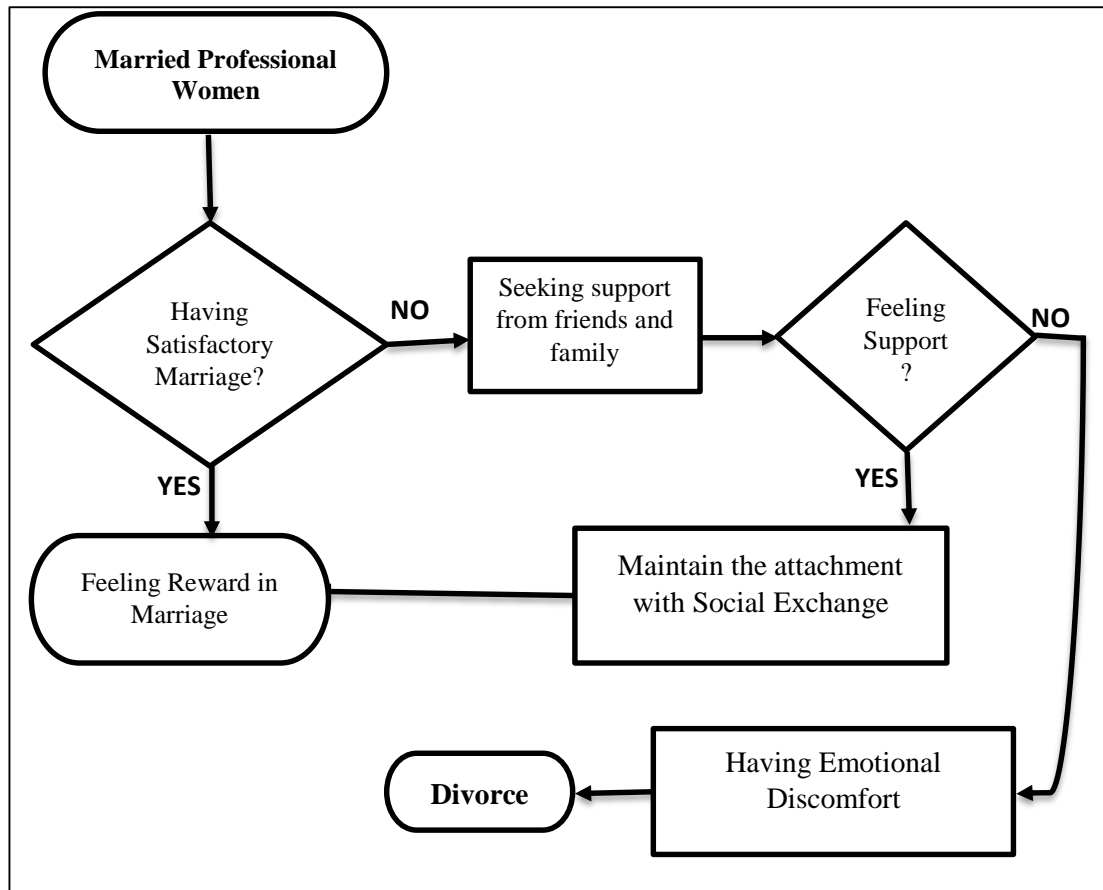
Figure 1.1 Decision Making of Divorce

1.6.1 Explaining Psychological Stress with Personal Factors

A quick review of attachment theory was that this theory tried to explain the attachment power that make two strangers into having intimate relationship. In the research, Bowlby (1958) discovered that it was important for a person to develop at least one normal social and emotional development in the dynamics of a long-term relationship. Later, in Hazan and Shaver (1987) research of romantic love, they uncovered the attachment among lovers would apply to at least three different styles directly related to their love experiences, namely secured, anxious or ambivalent, and avoidant.

One interesting finding in this study was that among participant lovers, 56% classified themselves as having a secure relationship with loving experience of happiness, friendship and trust. However, 25% described themselves as living in avoidant style with the experience of fear of intimacy, emotional highs and lows, and jealousy. The remaining 19% identified themselves as living in anxious or ambivalent style with the experience of obsession, desire for reciprocation and union, emotional highs and lows, extreme sexual attraction, and jealousy.

The relationship between spouses was further explained in the concept of attachment as identified by Pietromonaco et al. (2004). In the extent of the relationship, attachment was part of a close relationship with interactions in which partners disclosed their thoughts and feeling, as they listen and respond to each other. On top of this, partners were feeling acceptance and understanding that able to promote this intimate relationship with empirical evidence. Therefore, when there was disagreement or conflict, there was also an opportunity for partners to learn constructive strategies for positive adjustment. As a matter of fact, maintaining open communication and articulating goals and feelings together were considered positive outcomes in attachment. Nonetheless, if such effort failed in an attachment relationship, some emotional discomfort liked distress, and anxiety occurred (Mercer, 2006). Some common outcomes of this discrepancy included sleep problems, depression, and temporary behavior change. Therefore, it was important to maintain such a relationship with real values, and practice such activities on a routine basis. Otherwise, some negative outcomes such as feeling insecure or divorce might come into consideration.

When dealing with divorced professional women, Corey (2013) underlined core principles of feminist therapy as honoring women's value and experience. Bitter (2014) paralleled the argument by stating that women's voice need to be listened, acknowledged and validated by our society. Nonetheless, divorced professional women seem suffering the most in today's world. As Williams (2011) identified, many studies merely focused on women's experiences in male-dominated

occupation. Therefore, not many studies have fascinated enough to put their attention on women, especially divorced professional women as Williams (2011) continued the argument.

In fact, if divorce was the decision of a negative outcome in attachment, as assumed by Parkes (1972), the outcome was synonymous with the loss of a partner. That was saying the psychological stress of losing this attachment was creating similar effects in bereavement. In addition, the level of psychological stress was having a negative effect on relationship conflict on emotional security as Freeman (2005) illustrated. As a matter of fact, the level of stress was proportionately inverted to the level of security. Therefore, losing the power of security in attachment was also known as detachment. McKenry and Price (2005) echoed this finding and further identified the level of security in a relationship as having the function of safety. As a matter of fact, whenever the level of emotional security and safety went down, it also signaled the rise of psychological stress. Consequently, crying was one of the most natural ways of expressing such feeling as Aldwin (2007) found out.

Psychological stress in attachment did not occur immediately after the decision of a divorce. As Bohannan (1970) explained, in term of attachment, the divorcee psychological impacts developed gradually with six stages in the process, which was from emotional divorce to economic divorce, and the final stage was psychic divorce. Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2002) further expressed that this detachment was created gradually, and the intensity of psychological stress under attachment was developed following each stage. In order to pull divorced professional women out from passive situation at this moment, with feminist therapy, the help developed a sense of self-acceptance, self-confidence, and authenticity (Brown, 2010).

1.6.2 Explaining Psychological Stress with Social Factors

In addition, social exchange theory had further explained impacts of psychological stress during and after the act of divorce. For a brief review, as part of a society, people were born into a family cycle, grown up and understood the structure of a family. With this family cycle, people began to date, marry, and formed their families. Further to the experience of a family, everybody created their sense of symbolic interactionism as identified by Charon (2004). The significance of this symbolic interaction was looking at the interaction between people in terms of benefits both parties provided relative to the input as a joint process (Brown, 2006). As a matter of fact, one of the key factors in this process was attraction. For many people, attraction occurred as a positive exchange before any sub-factors took place. Therefore, it was important for both parties to interpret the attractiveness whether their counterpart was projecting it in a positive way.

In fact, social exchange theory was also part of behavioral theory as it dealt with reward and reinforcement in a family life. Social exchange theory was able to execute interpretation by using certain aspects which only happened in behavioral theory. Although behavioral theory did not have direct implication on marriage and family, reward and reinforcement in behavioral theory did have an interpersonal focus. A person would appraise the reward that reinforced the given relationship in terms of what the person felt about what justifies the relationship (Thibaut et al., 1959). Therefore, they became an influencing factor in attitude and behavior in marriage and family.

As Lieberman (1993) mentioned, the most obvious way to encourage a behavior was to reward it. Therefore, someone who was praised and given attention would more likely perform a related behavior as expected by a target group. On the same token, if praise and attention were practiced more often in marriage and family, there would be a higher tendency for a particular person to perform a similar behavior more often than expected. As a matter of fact, if someone expected to

receive praise and attention for a particular performance with nobody noticing it, the similar performance diminished over time.

Rasheed et al., (2011) has further redressed core concepts of social exchange theory (responses, consequences, shaping, and schemas) into family therapy and suggested that counseling family members needed to be active and direct. Corey (2013) also outlined the family system were best understood by assessing the interactions between and among family members. Therefore, certain habits and patterns within a family could be translated as the outcome of a family system. In addition, Neukrug (2011) has generalized the function of a family system therapy as joining with the family, mapping the family and providing interventions for restructuring.

When placing social exchange theory in a household, Larkin (2005) identified this social support in two-fold measurements, namely structural and functional. On the one hand, it measured structurally to assess the size of social network, number of members in household or number of people interacting daily. On the other hand, social support was measured functionally in searching for the quality of support one received. Therefore, the lack of social support or diminishing social support became impacts of psychological stress when dealing with relationships. Corey (2009) confined the roles and goals of family therapy with social exchange theory in teaching communication skills, increasing attitudes of acceptance, identifying and modifying core beliefs and teaching relationship with self-enhancement.

As McKenry and Price (2005) observed, if one of the spouses in the family felt that the cost of marriage exceeds the rewards, the person would have an emotional gratification. Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2002) have also found that emotional gratification gradually move toward the psychic divorce without giving proper attention. If anybody has an unfairly treated feeling, he or she will receive negative reinforcement under certain circumstances. This emotional gratification became the outcome of a divorcee.

1.6.3 Theoretical Research Framework and Coping Mechanism

Theories in family shared a common purpose, value, function, and philosophy on how to treat a family and individuals. The uniqueness was on how to facilitate a person into the marriage and family life. In the aforementioned, attachment theory and social exchange theory were interrelated as both agreed that causality of conflict was not linear, but circular. Further, both attachment and social exchange theories agreed on the point that a change in an individual affected the whole system. When combining feminist therapy and family therapy into social exchange theory and attachment theory, it was significant to validate a woman's voice and experience, especially divorced professional women. In addition, it was also essential to treat family as a functional system instead of convenient environment.

Taibbi (2009), when utilizing the concept of attachment and social exchange, suggested that effective partnership in a family was strongly related to the need of having a new emotional experience. In fact, this experience stayed within a family system perspective that strongly connected to the attachment and behavioral theories. As families moved through the life cycle, they experienced major developmental transitions for which also included conflict. Therefore, Figley and Barnes (2005) outlined this negative impact as disruptions in family interaction. This dysfunctional pattern in family life was due to a conservative behavioral style without any new emotional experience as claimed by Figley and Barnes (2005) and Taibbi (2009). Therefore, the struggle for a change in treatment from a spouse to a stranger was challenging; altering the style of living from a married couple to singlehood was even more challenging. It involved a series of psychological impacts such as emotion stability, mental health, and behavior functioning. All of these were based on a person's present attitude toward spouse, positive action in daily life, and process focused on spouse emotional reaction.

As Weber (2011) illustrated, two general coping mechanisms for divorcees were either withdrawal from potential support or seeking potential support. That were all decisions based on the person's belief system because all strategies were governed by protesting and advocacy in an attempt to fulfill the goal. In fact, this concept was reflected in the family distress model of Cornille and Boroto (1992). The model identified that when people attempt to withdraw from potential support, they usually treated the crisis which dominated family well-being. Nonetheless, for those who sought potential support viewed the trouble in the situation as its goal. Therefore, they tried to develop a new pattern of stability.

On the other hand, Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) also recommended forgiveness as a way to overcome unsolved events especially when there was a lack of satisfaction, having defensiveness and negative emotional expression. Furthermore, Baucom and Atkins (2013) also introduced marital distress and polarization processes in dealing with conflict in a relationship. Overall, the general function of coping mechanisms in divorce was acting as tools for promoting healthy and quality life in a positive situation.

1.7 Significance of This Research

Studying psychological stresses among divorced professional women was going to benefit governmental bodies like LPPKN (Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara Malaysia) to get better information on how to assist divorced professional women. This study was also going to benefit Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, as very often they are in the primary stage to support those divorced professional women who seem helpless because of divorce.

In addition, this research was also going to provide information about psychological stresses among divorced professional women to many non-governmental organizations and counselors. In fact, any organizations or counselor provided similar services could utilize this study to gain more beneficial information for professional female divorcees and their families.

Studying psychological stresses among divorced professional women would also benefit professional women themselves if they were in the midst of making decision to divorce. On the one hand, they could receive more information before making the decision to file a divorce. On the other hand, this research was also providing a scope for them to have a clear look on the relationship that they have established.

1.8 Limitation of The Study

Laws of Malaysia Act 709, Personal Data Protection Act 2010 Part II section 6 (1a) spelled out that "In the case of personal data other than sensitive personal data, process personal data about a data subject unless the data subject has given his consent to the processing of the personal." It was a challenge to retrieve any divorcee information from any law office or governmental departments. Therefore, having divorced professional women became data limitation.

Furthermore, culture could be another issue in this study especially when studying factors and impacts in ethnographies and social behavior (Matsumoto and Juang, 2004). In particular, when focused on divorced professional women from well-being to uneven patterns of social change as mentioned by Billson and Fluehr-

Lobban (2005) has caught researcher's consideration. Cross-cultural validation was another challenge in this study.

Moreover, soliciting participants to come forward could be another major concerns in this study because many viewed divorce as a taboo in their families. There were participants who refuse to explore their painful experience more than once.

It was also a challenge to get respondents if there was a lack of trust between researcher and participants. Although contact information retrieved from my previous clients who matched the research criteria and having snow-ball tactics after the first interviewee, the level of coordination remained unknown between divorced professional women during the time of contact.

1.9 Conceptual and Operational Definitions

Conceptual and operational definitions of several key concepts in this study were illustrated in the following section:

1.9.1 Psychological Stress

Conceptually, psychological stress was tightly related to individuals and families; nonetheless, there were distinctions between these two as mentioned by Rice (1999). For a stress connected with an individual, it was the experience of

emotional distress, lack of concentration and loss of fluid thinking, or in severe cases suffering from ulcers or migraines. However, in stress associated with a family, it was the experience of loss of harmony, reduced resources for collective problem-solving, or breaking up through separation or divorce.

Operationally, the psychological stress in this study was related to divorce among divorced professional women happened after the decision of divorce. At that moment, a series of negative psychological response liked feeling emotional instability, and lack of confidence when work or interact with people occurred gradually. In addition, due to gender difference, divorced professional women might have a feeling of nobody willing to listen to what they say or validate their experience. With a series of impacts from social and personal experience, the core belief system, psychological stress was all considered as part of psychological stress among divorced professional women. These impacts included lack of confidence at work, low level of self-esteem, easy to get angry, seeking sympathy from friends and family, low level in internal locus of control, and unwilling to have major change.

1.9.2 Professional Women

Conceptually, a professional was any occupation requiring leadership skill, technical training, and professional knowledge as identified by Brooks (2006). Besides, Willis and Dubin (1990) have stretched the concept of professional competence as: the discipline-specific knowledge base; technical skills that fit the definition of profession; and capability to solve problems in a particular profession. Therefore, a professional woman was any female who fulfills the above-stated criteria. In Malaysia, a professional was also defined as anybody who belongs to any of the 22 professional association covered under Balai Ikhtisas Malaysia (BIM, 2012).

Operationally, the term professional woman in this study was limited to two criteria namely: 1) any woman who earned at least a degree from any recognized university or college in Malaysia, and 2) any woman working in the related field of study that she had from the university or college. That was because university or college was an institute of higher education to provide a variety of professional knowledge with instruction in skill and research. However, it was also significant for any woman who graduated from university or college working in the related field of study to demonstrate the academic ability. Because there had woman who graduated from university or college but not have a career in the related field of study.

1.9.3 Divorce

Conceptually, divorce was a breakup as husband and wife under Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1986 in Malaysia for non-Muslim (Nuraisyah Chua Abdullah, 2006) or under the Islamic Family Law of each individual state for Muslim (Zaleha Kamaruddin, 1998).

Operationally, divorce in this study was referred to the woman who has been granted the decision of divorce from jurisdiction of court in Malaysia included judicial separation, and limited to five years due to changes in psychological and social factors. Besides, both parties did not stay together after divorce.

1.9.4 Social Class

Conceptually, it referred to a group of people who had similar levels of wealth and income, and rank of similar prestige or lifestyle (Schaefer, 2000). Nonetheless, the function of a social class did not merely distinguish people within their community but also to identify them with appropriate talents and abilities. In addition, this acted as a reward system to motivate people to fulfill their social responsibilities.

Operationally, social class was measured by prestige and esteem. For prestige, it referred to an occupation a person is holding in society with admiration and respect. For esteem, it referred to the reputation of such occupation the person is holding.

1.9.5 Family

Conceptually, family was not limited to the definition within a nuclear family which was composed of a legally married couple and their children. In fact, a family also included relationships of cohabitation and joining powers under social exchange of kinship (Cheal, 2002).

Operationally, family in this study was referred to the marriage of a man and a woman to function as one with the boundaries of kinship. Therefore, members of a family included members of a nuclear family with parents and children and members of extended families like relationships in kinships. Of course, family boundaries vary across cultures as some included certain people but others excluded. Besides, some

cultures like the Chinese used specific kinship terminologies for each member in a family, but others might classifying them into one big group.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed many studies that have discovered factors and impacts of divorce with countless of values that contributed to part of resources for divorcees and helping professionals. Nonetheless, not many studies had put their focus on professional female divorcees. On the other hand, many professionals had put their attention on psychological stress that occurs during or between pre and post-divorce period. However, not many of them have had enough sensitivity for the needs of professional female divorcees. Although the trend of social class has changed rapidly in the last decade, the search for such impacts has been falling far behind the actual needs. Therefore, it was important to place great attention on divorce among professional women so as to at least develop a framework for professional female divorcees and helping professionals.

The next chapter looked into related literatures of this study with various relationships in factors and impacts among professional female divorcees with coping mechanism they utilized.

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APPENDIX A

Overall Marriage/ Divorce Data in Malaysia (2000 – 2011)

Year	Marriage			Divorce			Divorce Rate		
	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Total	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Total	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Overall
2000	93560	61290	154850	13536	1613	15149	14.47%	2.63%	9.78%
2001	91489	55017	146506	13187	3238	16425	14.41%	5.89%	11.21%
2002	95182	59228	154410	13841	3793	17634	14.54%	6.40%	11.42%
2003	102062	59387	161449	15543	3318	18861	15.23%	5.59%	11.68%
2004	112239	50089	162328	16509	3291	19800	14.71%	6.57%	12.20%
2005	113132	52877	166009	17708	3804	21512	15.65%	7.19%	12.96%
2006	114422	64084	178506	21419	5747	27166	18.72%	8.97%	15.22%
2007	132511	55723	188234	21051	5777	26828	15.89%	10.37%	14.25%
2008	130314	59676	189990	22289	6543	28832	17.10%	10.96%	15.18%
2009	135136	60957	196093	27116	8765	35881	20.07%	14.38%	18.30%
2010	135548	58847	194395	28035	9240	37275	20.68%	15.70%	19.17%
2011	140535	66645	207180	27355	7759	35114	19.46%	11.64%	16.95%

APPENDIX B-1

Revised Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) English Version

0 = Never; 1 = Almost Never; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Fairly Often; 4 = Very Often

1. After divorce, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
2. After divorce, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
3. After divorce, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
4. After divorce, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
5. After divorce, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
6. After divorce, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
7. After divorce, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
8. After divorce, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
9. After divorce, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
10. After divorce, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

APPENDIX B-2

Revised Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) Malay Version

0 = Tidak Pernah; 1 = Hampir Tidak Pernah; 2 = Kadang-kadang;

3 = Agak Selalunya; 4 = Selalunya

	0	1	2	3	4
1. Selapas perceraian, berapa kerap anda pernah kecewa kerana sesuatu yang berlaku di luar jangkaan?	0	1	2	3	4
2. Selapas perceraian, berapa kerap anda merasakan bahawa anda tidak dapat mengawal perkara-perkara yang penting dalam hidup anda?	0	1	2	3	4
3. Selapas perceraian, berapa kerap anda berasa risau dan "stress"?	0	1	2	3	4
4. Selapas perceraian, berapa kerap anda berasa yakin tentang kemampuan anda untuk menangani masalah peribadi anda?	0	1	2	3	4
5. Selapas perceraian, berapa kerap anda mendapati bahawa semua perkara yang anda lakukan mengikut kehendak anda?	0	1	2	3	4
6. Selapas perceraian, berapa kerap anda mendapati bahawa anda tidak dapat mengatasi semua perkara yang anda lakukan?	0	1	2	3	4
7. Selapas perceraian, berapa kerap anda dapat mengawal gangguan dalam kehidupan anda?	0	1	2	3	4
8. Selapas perceraian, berapa kerap anda merasakan bahawa anda dapat menatasi segalanya?	0	1	2	3	4
9. Selapas perceraian, berapa kerap anda marah kerana perkara-perkara yang berada di luar kawalan anda?	0	1	2	3	4
10. Selapas perceraian, berapa kerap anda berasa kesukaran yang tinggi bahawa anda tidak boleh mengatasi mereka?	0	1	2	3	4

APPENDIX C-1

Agreement as Expert for Research from Family Keepers (M) Bhd.
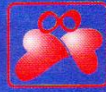
馬來西亞真愛家庭協會
Family Keepers Malaysia Bhd

Date: 4th March, 2013

Samuel Chan Hsin Chlen

15A, Jln Anggerik 39
Tmn Johor Jaya
81100 Johor Bahru, Johor

Dear Mr. Chan,

Re: PROFESSIONAL ADVISOR FOR RESEARCH PROJECT

This is our great pressure to be your profesional advisor in your research project **"Psychological Stresses Among Divorced Professional Women"** for which related to the study of divorced professional women and their psychological stress. It is also an honor for us to participate in part of your research that related to our profesional as we have been helping many professional women to deal with their marriage and family issues. Of course, you are always welcome to mention our organization in your research report.

We hope our material be able to provide useful data in your findings.

Once again, we would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to participate in such a meaningful research project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Stanley Lai
President

Family Keepers Malaysia Bhd. 15,6th Floor, IOI Business Park, Bandar Puchong Jaya, 47170 Puchong, Selangor. 會長：賴騰生牧師 012-209 8621

APPENDIX C-2

Agreement as Expert for Research from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Guidance and Counseling Department

UTM | Pusat Kaunseling Dan Kerjaya
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

Pusat Kaunseling Dan Kerjaya
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
81310 UTM Skudai
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RUJUKAN KAMI.:
RUJUKAN TUAN.:

27th May 2013

Samuel Chan Hsin Chlen
15A Jln Anggerik 39
Taman Johor Jaya
81100 Johor Bahru, Johor

Dear Mr. Chan,

PROFESSIONAL ADVISOR

We, **Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Guidance and Counseling Department**, would like to dedicate our professional knowledge in counseling to you in your research project "**Psychological Stress among Divorced Professional Women**".

2.   In fact, we have found the topic of psychological stress among divorced professional women interesting as you do. Besides, it is a great honor for us to participate in part of your research. In addition, we believed there are many fascinating experience that we may be able to share with you.

We hope our dedication can make your research project fruitful.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mohamed Sharif bin Haji Mustaffa, K.B., P.A. (Mal)
Director
Counselling Centre
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
☎ : +607-5536662
✉ : p-sarif@utm.my

Menjana Minda Kreatif dan Inovatif