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“Am I A Super Mom”, Malaysian Working Mothers Believes About Their Parenting Self-Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of present study was to explore the nature of believes held by Malaysian working mothers regarding their parenting self-efficacy. After implying certain inclusion/exclusion criteria for sample selection to control the effects of any confounding variables, seventy-four (74) mothers were selected as participants of the present study. Translated version of The Self-Efficacy for Parenting Tasks Index – Toddler scale (SEPTI- TS) questionnaire which is a 53-item scale developed by Coleman (1998) was used in this study. The scale consists of seven subscale i.e. (a) emotional availability (b) nurturance, and responsiveness, (c) protection from harm or injury, (d) discipline and limit setting, (e) play (f) teaching and (g) instrumental care and establishment of structure and routines, and it measures self efficacy believes in different parenting domain. It was found that Malaysian working mothers believes about their parenting self-efficacy were higher pertaining to (a) being emotional available to their child (93.2%), providing nurturance and responsiveness (90.5%), protecting their child from harm or injury (78.4%), as well as involving in play activities with their child (74.3%). However, moderate levels of parental self efficacy were reported by mothers pertaining to limit setting and disciplining (83.8%), involving in teaching activities (70.3%) and providing instrumental care and establishment of structure and routines (81.1%). Only one (1) mother reported lower level of self efficacy believes in discipline and limit setting domain (1.4%). Findings of the present research can help in designing and implementing parenting programs to enhance parenting self efficacy believes of young working mothers so that they can provide optimum parenting environment for their toddlers.

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INTRODUCTION

Statements like am I good mother that echoes in the mind of many young moms, appreciative phrases such as you are a super mom, or harsh, critical and judgmental comments such as you are not fit to be a mother are part of our daily life. Situations like these are more frequently faced by mothers when they are a part of workforce as balancing their role simultaneously as a mother and worker put them under pressure to comply with the demands of these roles and proof to people around them that they are able to manage it very well.

We can see that in recent years' women participation in work force has increased a lot, which put them under pressure to play their role efficiently both as a worker and as a mother. Women believes in their abilities as an employee help them perform better in their workplace. On the other hand women belief in their abilities to fulfill their role as a mother effect their parenting in which turn may affect their child. The term maternal self efficacy which is often used to refers to mothers' self-referent estimations of competence in the parental role. According to Bandura (1989), implicit in such cognitions is knowledge of appropriate parenting behaviors and confidence in one's own abilities to perform them. Grounded in social cognitive theory PSE is a cognitive construct that is broadly defined as an individual's appraisal of his or her competence in the parental role (Jones & Prinz 2005). According to Bandura, self-efficacy is not considered to be a fixed personality trait but rather a dynamic and emerging process that is modified by changing task and situational demands as well as changing individual factors. PSE has been identified as a key variable to study when considering the substantial variance observed in parenting skills and satisfaction (Coleman & Karraker 1997; Jones & Prinz 2005). It is a major determinant of competent parenting behaviors (Jones & Prinz 2005), and as such is closely linked to healthy child development (Coleman & Karraker 2003). Mothers' self-efficacy is specifically related to women's perceived performance in their roles as mothers. Studies investigating self-efficacy beliefs report that it can enhance or impair performance behaviors. Self-efficacy affects cognitive, affective and motivational processes. Mothers with strong self-efficacy beliefs may become more responsive caregivers and are likely to create a more stimulating home environment in which their child can reach their full potential.

There is a rapidly growing body of research on the role of perceived self-efficacy on parenting. Jones and Prinz, (2005) have suggested that parental self-efficacy plays an important role in influencing parental behaviors. Parents with high parental self-efficacy conveying confidence in acquiring and exercising effective parenting skills, and conversely, parents with low parental self-efficacy might find it more difficult to parent effectively in the face of challenging child situations. Many researchers have suggested that working mothers who are confident and positive about their dual role as a worker and mother are able to function better in both environment compare to those who are ambivalent about their roles. Research findings have shown that when a mother's experience of her role (as either an employed mother or a homemaker) is negative, detrimental effects are more likely to be displayed in her children and herself. Spitze(1988), suggested that mothers who are dissatisfied with their employment status are at greater risk for experiencing negative effects than mothers whose employment status is congruent with their employment preference parental self-efficacy appears to be an important correlate of parenting practices, child development, and child outcomes (Sabatelli& Waldron, 1995).

According to Teti and Gelfand (1991), mothers' self-efficacy correlates significantly with mothers' competence, as well as mothers' perceptions of child difficulty and levels of mothers' depression. In addition to this, they report that perceptions of child difficulty are significantly associated with mothers' self-efficacy, which in turn is related to beliefs of mothers' competence. Therefore, there appears to be a positive correlation between parents' belief of self-efficacy or competence and positive mothers' behavior and perception of child difficulty. Cutrona and Troutman (1986) also suggested that mothers' feelings of competence are likely to be sustained when women have experiences of being able to manage and soothe their infants. On the other hand, mothers' feelings of competence are likely to diminish when mothers experience their infants as chronically fussy, unpredictable and difficult.

Thus women who are confident about their role in both environments i.e. work and family are able to function well. They feel confident about themselves as an employee and as a mother. This confidence in their abilities improves their quality of work and parenting.

OBJECTIVE

Keeping in mind above mentioned facts pertaining to the role of perceived maternal self efficacy on child development, mothers mental health, mother-child relationship and parenting practices, the main objective of the present study was to explore the level of as well as the dimensions of maternal self efficacy believes i.e. (a) emotional availability, (b) nurturance, and responsiveness (c) protection from harm or injury (d) discipline and limit setting, (e) play, (f) teaching (g) instrumental care and establishment of structure and routines; among working mothers.

METHOD

The present research was conducted as an exploratory research to study levels of maternal self efficacy among Malaysian working mothers. After determining mothers job status, they were given self report questionnaires to measure their levels of parenting self efficacy.

Participant

The participants of present study were seventy-four (74) working mothers who have at least one child below the age of three (3). Inclusion/exclusion criteria for sample selection to control the effects of any confounding variables was used while selecting the sample. All mothers were at least 19 years old with no chronic medical illness that that could be considered as interfering with normal parenting. It was also taken into account that mothers had no serious mental health problems or clinical disorders. Mothers' marital status was also taken into account.

Location

Potential participants for the present study were identified and contacted through four (4) kindergartens around the city of Kota Kinabalu Sabah. After seeking the approval from kindergartens' supervisors, mothers were requested to participate in the study.

Instruments

The Self-Efficacy for Parenting Tasks Index - (SEPTI) questionnaire which is a 53-item scale developed by Coleman (1998) in order to provide a comprehensive index of domain-specific parenting self-efficacy for use with parents of toddlers was used in this study. The measure represents only existing instrument available that uses "Bandura's recommended multi-dimensional approach to domain level assessment of parent of children beyond the infancy period" (Coleman, 1998). The questionnaire in its original form consisted of seven subsections and is designed to assess parents' sense of competence pertaining to the following discrete sub-domains of parenting: (a) emotional availability, which is comprised of item 1 -7 (b) nurturance, and responsiveness, item 8-15 (c) protection from harm or injury, item 16- item 22 (d) discipline and limit setting, item 23- item 29(e) play, item 30 -item 36 (f) teaching item 37 - item 45(g) instrumental care and establishment of structure and routines included item 46- item 53.

The original scale items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale by mothers with possible responses ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" (Coleman, 1998). For the present research The Self-Efficacy for Parenting Tasks Index - (SEPTI) was translated to Bahasa Malaysia using Back to Back translation method to retain the originality of actual constructs of the scales. The Self-Efficacy for Parenting Tasks Index - (SEPTI) questionnaire has internal consistency reliability coefficients available for each subscale of the instrument (Coleman, 1998). The Cronbach, alpha

coefficients computed for each subscale and are as follows: emotional availability = .67; nurturance = .71; protection = .53; discipline = .81; play = .92; teaching = .73; and instrumental care = .46. Furthermore, total scores of the SEPTI-TS were found to be significantly correlated with scores on the MEQ ($r=.43$), a maternal efficacy questionnaire designed to assess mothers self-efficacy beliefs in relation to specific areas of infant care; as well as with scores on the parenting sense of competence (PSOC)-Efficacy subscale ($r=.57$). These results can be used as providing preliminary construct validity for the scale as well. Table No 1 given below show the details of alpha Cronbach values for Self Efficacy of Parenting Task Index (SEPTI) found during present research.

Table No 1: Alpha Cronbach Values for Self Efficacy of Parenting Task Index

Scales	No of items	Alpha value
Self-Efficacy of Parenting Task Index	53	
Emotional availability	7	0.701
Nurturance/valuing/Empathetic responsiveness	8	0.771
Protection	7	0.645
Discipline/Limit setting	7	0.623
Play	7	0.711
Teaching	9	0.751
Instrumental care/ Structure/ Routines	7	0.691

RESULT

The results of present study are arranged in two parts. Part one (1) of the study discuss demographic information of the participants. While part two (2) describes the scores obtained by mothers on Self Efficacy of Parenting Task Index Toddler Scale (SEPTI-TS).

Demographic information of the participating Mother

According to table No 2 given below, as for mothers' educational attainment, it was found that 4(5.4%) mother had primary level schooling, 14(18.9%) had secondary level, 20(27.0%) had upper secondary level, 19(25.7%) with diploma, 10 (13.5%) with degree, and 7 (9.5%) with post graduate level. As for ethnic affiliation was concerned, 40(54.1%) were Bumiputera Sabah, 19(25.7%) were Malays, 10(13.5%) were Chinese, 1(1.4%) was Indian, and 4(5.4%) reported their ethnic affiliation as Others. As for number of children in the family, 19(25.7%)reported as having only 1 child, 31 (41.9%)mothers report as having two children, 15(20.3%) reported as having three children, 6(8.1%)as having four children, and 3(4.1%) as having 5 children.

Table No2: Demographic information of the participating mothers (N= 74)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Education		
PMR	4	5.4%
SMP	14	18.9
STPM	20	27.0
Diploma	19	25.7%
Graduate	10	13.5
Post graduate	7	9.5

Ethnic		
Bumiputera Sabah	40	54.1%
Malay	19	25.7%
Chinese	10	13.5%
Indian	1	1.4%
Other	4	5.4%

Number of children		
1 Child	19	25.7%
2 Children	31	41.9%
3 Children	15	20.3%
4 Children	6	8.1%
5 Children	3	4.1%

Self- Efficacy of Parenting Task Index Toddler Scale (SEPTI- TS)

Scores obtained by mothers on self efficacy of parenting task index were further divided into three (3) categories to determine the levels of their maternal self efficacy. It was found that working mothers believe about their parenting self-efficacy were higher pertaining to (a) being emotional available to their child as reported by 69 (93.2%) mothers, providing nurturance and responsiveness as reported by 67 (90.5%) mothers, protecting their child from harm or injury as reported by 58 (78.4%) mothers, as well as involving in play activities with their child as reported by 55 (74.3%) mothers. However, moderate levels of parental self efficacy were reported by mothers pertaining to limit setting and disciplining by 62 (83.8%) mothers, involving in teaching activities reported by 52 (70.3%) mothers and providing instrumental care and establishment of structure and routines reported by 60 (81.1%) mothers. Only one (1) mother reported lower level of self efficacy believes in discipline and limit setting domain (1.4%). Table No 3 given below presents the level of parental self efficacy reported by mothers during present research.

Table No 3: Scores obtained by mothers' on The Self-Efficacy of Parenting Task Index- Toddler scale

Scales	Frequency	Percentage
Emotional availability		
High	69	93.2%
Moderate	5	6.8%
low	0	0
Nurturance/valuing/responsiveness		
High	67	90.5%
Moderate	7	9.5%
low	0	0
Protection		
High	58	78.4%
Moderate	16	21.6%
low	0	0
Discipline/Limit setting		
High	11	14.9%
Moderate	62	83.8%
low	1	1.4%

Play		
High	55	74.3%
Moderate	19	25.7%
low	0	0
Teaching		
High	22	29.7%
Moderate	52	70.3%
low	0	0
Instrumental care/ Structure/ Routines		
High	14	18.9%
Moderate	60	81.1%
low	0	0

DISCUSSION

The main objective of the present study was to explore level of parental self efficacy believes held by working mothers. As the earlier researchers suggest that working mothers might experience conflict due to their dual role as a mother and as a worker, thus this may have impact on their parent self efficacy believes. Various dimensions of maternal self efficacy were explored during present research including (a) emotional availability, (b) nurturance, and responsiveness (c) protection from harm or injury (d) discipline and limit setting, (e) play, (f) teaching (g) instrumental care and establishment of structure and routines. The research findings suggested that working mothers seems to have different level of maternal self efficacy pertaining to each dimension of self efficacy explored in the present research.

It was found that working mothers seems to have higher levels of self efficacy pertaining to emotional availability, nurturance and responsiveness, protection from harm or injury and play. The findings of the present study were consistent with earlier researchers such as Stifer, Coulehan and Fish(1993) that although employed mothers spend less time with their children, they are as sensitive and responsive as unemployed mothers. These phenomena could be explained by looking at maternal sensitivity towards their children. Even though they might spent less time with their children however they seems to be emotionally available and responsive to their children. Another aspect is the quality of time rather than the quantity of time. If working mothers can engage their children in a positive way it can result in better mother child relationship development which in turn enhance and maintain mothers believes in their parenting self efficacy.

However as for discipline and limit setting, teaching and instrumental care and establishment of structure and routines were concern, most of the working mothers reported moderate level of maternal self efficacy. This could be due to multiple child care arrangements and many other unseen reasons such as number of care takers involved, child sickness and mothers extra working hours in many situations. As children spent their time with multiple caregivers thus providing consistent discipline can be a problem for working mothers sometime.

While looking at earlier researches we can see that mixed result have been reported. Some researchers such as Youngblut *et al.*, (1998), while exploring differences in parent-child and family relationships for employed and non-employed single mothers of low birth-weight and full-term preschool children, found that employed mothers had more positive perceptions and provided more enriching home environments for their children. They noted that in single-parent families, employment and consistency are positive influences on the mother-child relationship. On the other hand Han, Waldfogel, and Brooks-Gunn (2001) found that maternal employment sometimes led to behavioral problems in children. This finding could be related to children being cared for by several people (both out-of-home care providers and parents). Children likely receive varying amounts and types of discipline in this situation, which could lead to confusion and ultimately behavior problems.

Finding of the present study suggest that working mothers seems to have higher to moderate level of parenting self efficacy which could be related to various factor. Some researchers suggest that working provide mothers with sense of fulfillment which further enhance their parenting believes. According to Menaghan and Parcel(1990), in addition to providing income for basic support and forming a pattern of family life, work also brings many psychological benefits in terms of advancing mothers social, cognitive and emotional development.

Thus keeping in mind, various individual as well as environmental factors, it can be suggested that Malaysian working mothers seems to have higher levels of maternal self- efficacy in many dimensions. Coleman and Karraker (1997) note that PSE may be sensitive to various contextual factors; however, they do not identify family relationships as one of those factors. However the topic further need to be explored with larger sample size and many other factors such as educational attainment and type of jobs can also be studies in depth.

CONCLUSION

Parent-child relationship is important for early development of young children, the mental wellness and appropriate parenting believes and behaviors of significant adults' plays a critical role in how young children develop. Mothers lack of confidence about their role as competent mothers can negatively affect their believes as parents resulting in difficulties while providing consistent sensitive care, emotional nurturance, protection, and the stimulation that young children need. Due to work-family conflicts, working mothers feel under pressure to fulfill their multiple roles. Thus keeping in mind working mothers' perceived sense of parental self efficacy as a critical mechanism that guide them in their interactions with their children, exploring these dimensions of parental self efficacy can help in designing and implementing parenting programs for young working mothers to support them and facilitate their parenting processes. Thus in the light of these fact, present study focused on exploring these dimension of parenting. As PSE is predicted by different variables for mothers and fathers, this suggests that one cannot make the assumption that the experiences and perceptions of mothers and fathers are interchangeable. Thus the future researchers can also focus on father self efficacy believes as well.

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