

บริบทของครอบครัวแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยว: การศึกษาประสบการณ์ชีวิตวัยรุ่น

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่ออธิบายบริบทของครอบครัวแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยวด้วยประสบการณ์ของวัยรุ่นที่อยู่ในครอบครัวแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยว ในรูปแบบการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพโดยใช้ปรัชญาทฤษฎีปรากฏการณ์นิยมของเฮ็ทมันด์ ฮุสเซอร์ล ผู้ให้ข้อมูลประกอบด้วยวัยรุ่นที่อยู่ในครอบครัวแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยวจำนวน 13 คน โดยการเลือกแบบเฉพาะเจาะจงเก็บข้อมูลโดยการสัมภาษณ์แบบเจาะลึก ใช้การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยวิธีของโคไลซี ผลการวิจัยพบว่าวัยรุ่นที่มีแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยวอธิบายบริบทครอบครัว 2 ประเด็นหลัก คือ สัมพันธภาพในครอบครัวแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยว ประกอบด้วยประเด็นรอง 3 ประเด็น ได้แก่ ความสัมพันธ์ที่เข้มแข็งระหว่างแม่และลูก สัมพันธภาพระหว่างฉันและพ่อ และความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างฉันและพี่น้อง อีกประเด็น คือ การสนับสนุนทางสังคมของครอบครัวแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยว ประกอบด้วย 2 ประเด็นรอง ได้แก่ ความช่วยเหลือจากพ่อหลังจากการแยกทางกับแม่ และการสนับสนุนของครอบครัวขยายต่อครอบครัวแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยว ผลการศึกษานี้ช่วยให้พยาบาลและทีมสุขภาพเข้าใจชีวิตของวัยรุ่นจากครอบครัวแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยว อาจเป็นประโยชน์ในการวางแผนการดูแลวัยรุ่นในครอบครัวแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยว

คำสำคัญ: ประสบการณ์ชีวิตวัยรุ่น ครอบครัวแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยว บริบทครอบครัว

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**มหาวิทยาลัยบูรพา

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The context of single mother families: A study of adolescent's lived experiences

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the context of single mother families as experienced by adolescents. Descriptive phenomenology based on Husserl's perspective was employed as philosophical underpinning to explore and clarify adolescents' experiences. Thirteen participants were selected by using purposive sampling. Data were obtained by using meaning interpretation through in-depth interviews. Colaizzi's strategy was employed for data analysis. Results revealed two main categories explaining the context of a single mother family. The first category was relationship in a single mother family comprised three themes, including 'Strength of relationship between mother and child', 'Relationship between me and my father' and 'Relationship between me and my siblings'. The second category was 'Social support in a single mother family' which divided into two themes, 'Father's support after separation' and 'Extended-family support to a single mother. The findings could help nurses and health care providers to understand adolescents' life. It might be beneficial in enhancing the quality of care for single mother family.

Keywords: lived experience, adolescents, single-mother family, family context

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Background

A single-mother family is a family with children under age 18 headed by the mother who is single for any reason. Such reasons may include death of husband, divorce, decision to have, by birth or adoption, a child on one's own, that is, without a partner.¹ In Thailand, 40.1% of single-mother families are the result of divorce and 28.6% are the result of marital separation.² The divorce rate in Thailand has been increasing. In 2010 the number of divorces was 124, 404, while there were 124,487 cases in 2011³ an increase of 0.06%. The number of single-mother families is about 4 times higher than that of single-father families and there are currently more single-mother families than single-father families in Thai society.

Changes from being a two-parent family to being a single-parent family cause various family problems since changes in family living patterns lead to instability in many ways including such major issues as finances, mental health, and childcare.² Childcare problem is one factor which has increasingly been identified. The number of single parent families in Thailand has reached as high as 1.3 million⁴ and 2.5 million children lived in a single-parent family as a result of divorce in 2013.⁵ Adolescents in single-mother families are at risk of having more health problems than those in 2-parent families. These adolescents are more likely to have behavioral problems and be at risk of mental health disorders than younger children because of the rapid changes, in physical, cognitive, social and emotional development which occur at that time.⁶⁻⁸ Adolescence is the age of being bad-tempered, having fluctuating and uncontrolled emotions, risk-taking and being imprudent, the age of making quick decisions, and being easily persuaded.⁹ Family is the primary social environment of most adolescents and its support has a major impact on mental well-being in that period. A specific family, the single-mother family and adolescent in such a family, need special attention from society.

Although adolescents living in single-mother families might be at risk, knowledge of such a lived experience is very limited. Therefore, a study describing their lived experience in the Thai context is needed to understand the context of adolescent's family. The purpose of this study was to describe just such an experience as perceived by adolescents living in such a family. This knowledge can then be used to guide policy, formulate actions¹⁰ and enable adolescents in single mother families to be more resilience and happy section of Thai society.

Methodology

Descriptive phenomenology based on Husserl's perspective was the philosophical underpinning employed to clearly identify the phenomena. This phenomenological method was appropriate to describe the lived experience of an adolescent in a single mother family which is subjective and encompasses multiple realities.

Participants and setting

Thirteen adolescents comprising five males and eight females participated in this study. They were aged between 13 to 19 years,¹¹ lived in single mother families and were able to communicate at an understandable level in the Thai language. Their mothers allowed them to participate in this study. All participants were studying and lived in Bangkok during the data collection period.

Protection of human subjects

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), Faculty of Nursing, Burapha University. The issues that were covered by the protection of human subjects included 1) Informed assent and consent; the participants signed the informed assent form, while their mother signed the informed consent form to permit the participation of their

adolescents, 2) Freedom from harm; the ethical principle of freedom from harm was taken into account, 3) Confidentiality; the acquired information was kept confidential and participants' anonymity was preserved.

Data collection process

The utilization of the descriptive process was needed to achieve bracketing. Before starting the process, the researcher delayed literature review until after data collection and analysis. The adolescents living in single mother families were invited to participate in this study. All of participants were researched by 2 methods, namely in-depth interview technique and observation.

In a qualitative research, a researcher is placed as a key research instrument. Thus, semi-structuring of an in-depth interview was an instrument for the researcher to ensure the important issues to be discussed were covered. Some examples of semi-structured interviews questions are as follows: What is the life of an adolescent in a single parent family? What are the individual adolescents' perceptions of how a caring single-parent behaves while living in the family? What are your daily activities? The semi-structured of the in-depth interview were verified by three experts. The process of in-depth interviews in this study took around 40-60 minutes per participant. Field notes were used in the qualitative assessment and audio recording equipment, such as a tape recorder and manuscript notes to collect these notes.

Data analysis

The data obtained from in-depth interviews were transcribed verbatim to the transcripts. Data analysis employed Colaizzi's strategy of descriptive phenomenological data analysis.¹² The steps for analysis were: 1) The researcher read and re-read carefully in order to gain a general sense. All of essays were identified and matched up to adolescent's

transcription; 2) Categories were determined. The researcher submitted all data from the interviews to be read by the advisor. In addition, the categories were submitted to the advisory dissertation committee for consultation purpose. Then, the data rearrangement had been made by reading together with the advisor each time. The researcher continued to collect the data along with data analysis; 3) The re-analysis was repeated a total of 4 times until the finding of this study could be finalized; 4) The findings were integrated into a complete description of the phenomenon under the study. Then, the essential structure of the phenomenon was described; 5) Validation of the findings was required from the participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

Trustworthiness

Regarding the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher maintained trustworthiness based on the four criteria¹³ of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Results

The single-mother families, in which the 13 adolescents who participated in the study lived, were the result of separation or divorce. According to the study, the participants were adolescents who had experienced living in single mother families as a result of father-mother's divorce and separation the period of living in this fashion was between 2 and 15 years, with the elapsed period being significant to their learning and adjustment. The time of transition from living with both parents to single mother family was determined by child's age as the following: never lived with father = 2; preschool age = 1; school age = 7; age of adolescence = 3 is the fact that the majority of the family units consisted solely of the mother and child, that is having no other relatives living in the same house.

The average household monthly income from both permanent and extra jobs was approximately as follows. Three mothers earned 15,000 - 20,000 baht; 2 mothers earned 20,000 - 25,000 baht; 8 mothers earned 20,000 - 40,000 baht. Of the 13, only 2 families received intermittent financial assistance from the offspring's father. The other 11 families declared they had never received any financial assistance from fathers after the separation. Based on the comparison of the average income per household per month in Bangkok in B.E. 2013, it was found that the average income per household per month in Bangkok was 49,191 baht.¹⁴ Therefore, the 13 single mother families in the study had a below average monthly income per household in Bangkok.

Lived experiences of adolescents in the single-mother family were drawn from the data of adolescent in 13 single mother families. The researcher interpreted of the data from the interview. It is arranged as themes and subthemes to three levels.

1. Relationship in single mother family describes the relationship between adolescent and mother, adolescent and father and adolescent and their sibling in single mother family. There were 9 in 13 families with sibling. Adolescents explained the strongest relationship with their mothers, some level relationship with fathers and the sibling.

1.1 'Strength of relationship between mother and the child' represented the strong relationship of mother and adolescents in a single mother family. Adolescents addressed three subthemes of this relationship as the following;

'More than a single mother': Most single mother families consisted of only mother and child, so mother took care of her child simultaneously with being the breadwinner. Their mothers took the role of father and did all housework, acting as the head of the family. An adolescent explained *"My mother performs the duties of my father instead of him. As for*

housework, my mother mostly cleans the house, as well as cooking food and washing clothes...she likes cooking food. She can do all housework, such as needlework, and so on." (Ton)

'The relationship is more than just "Mother-Child": Some adolescents said that their mother is like their friend, older sister, and father. Adolescents in a single mother family feel that their mother is more meaningful than just the word "mother". An adolescent said *"I'm so closed to my mother. She is like my friend. I ask for her consultation when I have any problem. She keeps telling, teaching, warning me. I can tell her everything, ranging from love story, study, and anything else." "My mother is everything. She is like my core leader, friend, sister, and so on."* (Pon)

'A misunderstanding between us': Most families suffer have conflicts among family members. The likelihood is increased when no father is present as there is no mediator when some argument and misunderstanding is triggered. The example of one adolescent described;

"When I try to explain something, she assumes that I am arguing against her. Therefore, I decided not to talk anything or talk less. It is hard to say some sensible words when bursting into tears. If I say I feel hurt, she (mother) will assume that I think about parental biases.... Therefore, I don't want to say anything. I'd better lie down and say nothing. I just do it as I feel not motivated to talk to her (mother)". (Min).

Nick Kung: *"At the early stage (after separation of parents) I hardly talked to my mother (Nick Kung). The biggest problem was that I could not communicate with my mother even though I stayed home with her (Nick Kung)."*

1.2 'The relationship between me and my father' represented the data regarding the relationship between father and adolescent in a single mother family. There were 2 types of relationship between adolescents and their father in single mother families as the following;

'Keep in touch': Some adolescents had regular contact with their father via the phone or the Internet. On some occasions, some fathers picked their children up from home to have a meal together or to stay at their father's home. This is called a Keep in touch relationship. The example of one adolescent reflected *"The relationship between me and my father is good. I usually talk to him and ask for his consultation advice, but we don't stay together. I only stay with my father once a week on Sunday."* (Play)

'Alienated relationship': Some adolescents did not have regular contact with their father or only rare contact. This is called an alienated relationship. An adolescent said *"My father met me but he did not talk to me. He went to the funeral of my grandfather. I saw him and he saw me, but he did not say anything."* (Chol)

1.3 'Relationship between me and my sibling' describes the relationship between adolescents and elder or younger siblings in the same single mother family.

'I am an older child in family': Adolescent elder siblings in single mother families take a responsible role of helping their mothers take care of their younger siblings when mothers are away from home, and generally relieving their mothers' burden. The example of one adolescent said *"If my mother is not at home, she will ask me to cook rice, prepare food for my brother, and pick up my brother as she has to work for our living."* (Pon)

'I am the youngest in family' it was found that in single mother families, adolescents who have older sisters or brothers and younger siblings tended to develop a close relationship with their elder siblings who take care of them. The adolescent clearly stated *"My sister helps me in everything, such as doing housework, washing dishes, and cooking rice. She does all these things. I think she also loves me as she gives*

me advice, talks with me, and consolation when I feel sad." (Oily)

2. Social support in single mother family presents social support for single mother families. This is separated into fathers' support after the separation and support from relatives.

2.1 'Father support after separation' describes social support from father after separation under two subthemes, financial support and responsibilities in taking care of adolescent.

'Financial issue...is somewhat significant': 11 of these 13 single mother families did not receive financial support from fathers after the separation. Fathers take little responsibility for taking care of children as explained by the adolescent *"My problem is the real trouble. We are indebted and lenders would like to collect our debts. Sometimes we have some amount of money, while we run out of money in some period. All of our 3 family members used to eat a bowl of mama instant noodle together. Sometimes when our family has not enough money, I have to borrow from my father's relatives."* (Min)

'Not enough support from father': This subtheme explains the activity of fathers in helping take care of children which is deemed an important social support for single mother families. The data indicated that fathers in 10 families did not help single mothers take care of children on holidays or take children to stay with them. In three families, father occasionally takes the family to go sightseeing on holiday. Adolescents addressed the support from father and needs as the following;

2.2 'Extended-family support to a single mother' describes social support from extended family when adolescent became to single mother family.

'Counseling assistance': Single mother families whose relatives do not stay nearby or have closed relationship that they can support or provide

assistance for the single mother family. Some single mother families have relatives who provide assistance in respect of consultation about arising problems and minor support, but do not stay in the same house. The example of one adolescent said *“My uncle talks to me nicely. He listens to me and talks to me reasonably, so it makes me believe that he is open-minded. (Nick Kung)*

‘Financial support’: An adolescent in single mother family in some case received financial support from extended family. The example of an adolescent stated *“My grandparents buy clothing for me. I still have my grandparents..... It depends on what kind of tension I suffer. If my academic performance is poor, I will tell my grandmother.” (Nig)*

Discussion

Based on the presented data on mother-child relationship in single mother family, it was found that mothers have a very close relationship with her child. It is represent relationship in single mother family,¹⁴ the relationship between their fathers after the separation is almost non-existent. Regarding the relationship among siblings, there are both close and alienated relationships, depending upon the age differences.

It was found that most fathers in the study do not provide financial and child care support after separating from their children’s mother. The Law of Thailand cannot help a single mother to get help from the father after separation. This is the characteristic of father support experienced in Thailand after divorce or after becoming a single mother family.¹⁰ Considering the characteristics of single mother families which mostly consist of only mother and children living together, they are an isolated family with a lack of social support from the extended family. However, the study revealed that some families keep in touch with and receive support from extended family.

Implication for nursing practice and nursing research

The findings obtained from this study can be utilized as basic information to help nurses understand adolescents in single mother families with regard to their emotion, social, and family context. Family nurses and psychiatric nurses could apply this information when provide family counseling for single mothers who desire to maintain a relationship with their extended family and strengthen a good relationship with society or neighbors. These relationships are very important when a single mother needs help during a difficult time. This study suggests there should be further research to explore the solution to strengthen relationship between adolescents and fathers, enhance adolescent’s ability to adapt his/her life, and develop a single mother family with healthy environment.

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