

FAMILY CONFLICT AMONG FORMER DRUG ADDICTS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Up until now, not many studies have been done to identify family conflict that occurs among former drug addicts in the rehabilitation period. If not being handled properly, this factor may lead to an increase in the drug relapse rate among former drug addicts. Therefore, this study is conducted to (1) identify the level of family conflict among former drug addicts during the rehabilitation period, and to (2) identify factors that influence family conflict among former drug addicts. This study was performed using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. A total of 380 former drug addicts who have completed their rehabilitation program at the Cure and Care Rehabilitation Centre (CCRC) were chosen as the respondents of the study. The collected data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results of the study found that the level of family conflict among former drug addicts is only at a moderate level. Analysis of the study shows that their desire for drugs and the combination of emotional disturbance, social surrounding stress, and self-efficacy to avoid drugs are factors that contribute to family conflict among former drug addicts. This study gives implications on the need to enhance policies related to drug treatment programs and conflict resolutions towards relapse prevention.

Keywords: family conflict, drug addict, relapse, emotional disturbance, social surrounding stress.

INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse is a chronic issue that is regularly associated with relapse and has been one of the public health concerns around the world for a long time (Lo, et al., 2020; Greaves, 2020; Rashidi et al., 2019; Wan Shahrazad, et al., 2010). United Nation (2017) reported an estimation of 271 million people or 5.5% of the global population aged 15 to 64 have been involved in drug abuse (United Nation, 2019). Drug abuse among the community is harmful to national safety and well-being (Bowser et al.,

2014; Peacock, et al., 2018). In Malaysia, this drug issue has threatened national safety because many young people who will be the country's future leaders are involved in this negative activity. Statistics by the National Anti-Drugs Agency in Malaysia revealed a total number of 15,131 youths aged 19 to 39 were involved in drugs in 2018, from the overall number of 20,223 individuals [AADK, 2019]. This situation shows that drug treatment and rehabilitation programs do not succeed in the aspect of recovery among drug addicts (Zarina, et al., (2015). Based on the drug involvement

data in 2018, a total of 14,459 drug addicts admitted that their friends are among the main factors influencing their involvement with drugs. Meanwhile, 11,531 individuals were attracted to take methamphetamine (crystal) drugs rather than other types of substances. A study done by Fauziah, et al., (2020) discovered that majority of female drug users choose syabu (75.6%) and heroin (61.3%) over other types of drugs. In addition, most convicts in prisons were involved with drugs that affect their mental well-being (Galassi, 2015). Drug addicts are also associated with criminal activities such as stealing, snatching (Fauziah, et al., 2020; Nazira, et al., 2019; Siti Nurkhairina, et al., 2019; Tharshini, et al., 2021) and child abuse (Loy et al., (2020).

Several prior studies have found that former drug addicts are at a high risk of relapse when they are unable to handle interpersonal conflicts with their families (Fisher et al., 2007). Interpersonal conflicts experienced by drug addicts usually will be displayed through their physically or psychologically aggressive behaviours, which will lead to relapse. Hence, conflict management skills are proposed to reduce relapse cases among drug addicts (Fisher, 2007). Family conflict is one of the main causes of emotional stress and tendency to relapse (Liu, 2009). The pressure experienced by former drug addicts causes them to behave negatively and involve with drugs again (Arpawong, et al., 2015; Sinha, 2000). A study performed by Unger, Sussman & Dent (2003) stated that youth drug addicts have obvious aggressive behaviour to relapse. High responsiveness is the best method to handle family conflicts experienced by drug addicts and can reduce the possibility for them to relapse (Unger, et al., 2003).

Thus, the community is advised to assist in giving support to former drug addicts to recover and avoid the risk of relapse (Chan, et al., 2019; McMurrin, 2007). Low social support from their families may lead to interpersonal conflicts among former drug addicts. Hence, interpersonal conflict is an essential element to prevent relapse (Larimer, et al., 1999). Besides, interpersonal issues are also existed due to many factors such as social isolation, relationship issues with family and society, and impacts from negative emotions and other things that may cause physical or psychological stress (Larimer, et al., 1999). A study done by Chermack et al.,

(2006), discovered that interpersonal conflicts are the major cause for drug addicts to be involved in acute relapse and behave in aggressive ways. It is recommended for relevant stakeholders to provide a holistic drug prevention plan to the society in an effort to create a drug-free Malaysian community (Rozmi et al., 2017; Wan Shahrazad, et al., 2020).

Numerous local studies such as Hadijah, et al., (2018), Norruzeyati et al., (2020), Salina, et al., (2017) and Yanuar, et al., (2019) focused on relapse issue among former drug addicts. However, there is a lack of studies on drug addicts during the rehabilitation period. Although studies concerning drug addicts during rehabilitation monitoring were conducted such as studies by Ezarina, et al., (2016) and Mohd Alif, et al., (2017), most of the studies did not concentrate on family relationships. A study by Wan Abu & Wan Maisara (2018) discovered that the relationship between people under supervision (OKP) and AADK officers during the monitoring period is closer than their families. This shows that drug addicts should be able to endure this critical phase of becoming drug-free individuals because there are officers who can assist them in any issue including family conflicts. Studies by Muhd Dhamir, et al., (2020) found that family conflict issues are including lack of confidence as a father, burden of daily activities, pressure from father-in-law, ex-wife's aggressive behaviour, and isolation from siblings. Meanwhile, family members feel affected due to financial burdens and disruption to routine works (Sharma, et al., 2020). Studies by Zaidia (2020) and Lukman, et al., (2011) indicated that families play important roles in providing concrete supports to former drug addicts such as financial support, treatment support, and assistance to go to the hospital for treatment. During this recovery process, some conflicts happened due to different expectations from families. According to Alia, et al., (2018), the pressure from families is because they want drug addicts to recover immediately. This will cause them to become depressed and relapse to drug use. As family conflict is a very critical issue, this study is conducted to identify the extent of family conflicts as experienced by former drug addicts, and factors influencing the conflicts so that numerous solutions to overcome this problem can be suggested.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a survey research using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. A total of 380 former drug addicts who are under surveillance were chosen as the respondents of the study. Eight National Anti-Drugs Agency (AADK) Centres participated in this study are located in the Southern Zone (AADK Johor and Negeri Sembilan), East Zone (AADK Kelantan and Terengganu), Central Zone (AADK Melaka and Selangor), Northern Zone (AADK Penang and Kedah), and Sarawak Zone (AADK Sarawak). The instruments used in this study are based on the instruments as established by [38] as follows:

1. Family conflict scale: 10 question items with high reliability value; 0.851.
2. Emotional disturbance scale: 10 question items with high reliability value; 0.893.
3. Social surrounding stress scale: 10 question items with high reliability value; 0.840.
4. Self-efficacy scale: 11 question items with high reliability value; 0.935.

This study uses a four-point Likert scale with options namely (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree.

Data collection process: This study has obtained ethical approval through reference [AADK(S)900-7/38(2)] to collect data from the respondents of the study. The research team and AADK rehabilitation officers cooperated to get the required data. Respondents who are undergoing the AADK surveillance program were informed to attend and gather on the specified date as set by the AADK state director for data collection purposes. After the respondents were successfully gathered, data collection sessions were performed simultaneously by classifying respondents into two groups, namely (1) respondents who can read, and (2) respondents who can not read. This group classification was done to facilitate the survey completion process among the respondents. For the respondents who can read, they can answer all questions in the questionnaire by themselves and being supervised by the researcher and rehabilitation officers. Meanwhile, for the respondents who cannot read, AADK rehabilitation officers were stationed in each group to assist them in reading

all questions. At the same time, the researcher monitored the session so that the respondents can ask directly if they have any inquiries. In addition, the research team examined each sheet of the questionnaire during the collection process to ensure the exact number of questionnaire forms were obtained.

Data analysis: Research data were analysed using the 26th version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results were obtained using descriptive and inference (multiple regression) analyses. Descriptive analysis was performed to measure the stages of family conflict among former drug addicts. Meanwhile, multiple regression analysis with a stepwise approach was used to determine factors influencing family conflict among former drug addicts.

RESULTS

According to Martin (2007), former drug addicts tend to relapse when they are unable to manage interpersonal conflicts faced by them. Interpersonal conflicts are displayed through their physically or psychologically aggressive behaviours, which will lead to the consumption of prohibited substances. In this study, family conflict refers to the misunderstanding between former drug addicts and family members that can trigger a relapse. Based on the study analysis on the tendency of relapse from the family conflict aspect, the majority of former drug addicts under the AADK surveillance show a moderate level of family conflict (42.6 percent) to a low level (56.1 percent). Only 1.3 percent of former drug addicts were facing a high level of family conflict, which needs to be addressed by relevant stakeholders in order to avoid them being involved with drugs again (Table 1).

Table 1: *Levels of respondents Family Conflict (n=380)*

Level	N=380	Percentage (%)	Mean
Low	213	56.1	
Moderate	162	42.6	1.96
High	5	1.3	
TOTAL	380	100	

Note: Low <-0.200 ; Moderate 2.01-3.00; High 3.01-4.00

Based on the aspect of family conflict, the results of the study show that there is a critical aspect that needs to be focused on, especially the family conflicts among former drug addicts who are still under the AADK surveillance program. The study shows that 46.3 percent of former drug addicts felt that they have failed to meet the needs and expectations of their families (item 9). Meanwhile, other aspects of family conflict are still under control. The studies done by Sinha (2008) stated that interpersonal conflict is the main factor that can cause an individual to relapse. High pressures faced by the individual will trigger him or her to use drugs again in order to cope with stress. Sinha (2008) also mentioned that interpersonal conflict is closely related to stress leading to relapse. Hence, interpersonal conflict is one of the essential elements that should be considered in preventing relapse cases.

Although the results of the study show that family conflict among former drug addicts and family members is under control, several

important aspects need to be considered. For example, the results of the study indicated that 24.7% of former drug addicts admitted that they disagree with their family members' opinions which eventually will cause more conflicts. Other than that, 10.3% of former drug addicts revealed that they are often being compared with other family members, often quarrel with family members (27.3%), being discriminated by family members (19%), and some of their family members are also involved with drugs (11.3%) or becoming drug dealers (5.6%). Besides, this study found that 17.6% of former drug addicts are often being isolated by family, not being trusted by family members although they have changed for the better (33.7%), and felt that they have failed to meet their family needs (46.3%). Meanwhile, 36.8% of former drug addicts acknowledged that they have certain attitudes that are not liked by their family members. Uncontrolled family conflicts may lead to quarrels and negative effects on the recovery and treatment processes of former drug addicts.

Table 2: *Percentage of respondents Family Conflict by Items*

No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Family conflict	Percentage (%) / Number			
1.	I do not agree with my family members' opinions	32.4 (123)	42.9 (163)	18.9 (72)	5.8 (22)
2.	I am often being compared with other family members	26.6 (101)	43.2 (164)	23.2 (88)	7.1 (27)
3.	I often quarrel with my family members	30.5 (116)	42.1 (160)	25.5 (97)	1.8 (7)
4.	My family discriminates against me	36.6 (139)	44.5 (169)	14.5 (55)	4.5 (17)
5.	My family members are involved in drugs	49.7 (189)	38.9 (148)	9.7 (37)	1.6 (6)
6.	One of my family members is a drug dealer	58.9 (224)	35.3 (134)	4.2 (16)	1.6 (6)
7.	I am often being isolated by my family	39.7 (151)	42.6 (162)	12.1 (46)	5.5 (21)
8.	I am not being trusted by my family members although I have changed for the better	27.4 (104)	38.9 (148)	28.2 (107)	5.5 (21)
9.	I fail to meet the needs of my family	18.7 (71)	35 (133)	39.5 (150)	6.8 (26)
10.	I have an attitude that is not liked by my family	21.8 (83)	41.3 (157)	31.8 (121)	5.0 (19)

Based on the multiple regression analysis with a stepwise approach on 380 former drug addicts, the study found that the factors influencing family conflict among former drug addicts who

are still under surveillance period are as follows: emotional disturbance, social surrounding stress, and self-efficacy to avoid drugs.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				Sig. F Change
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	
1	.664 ^a	.440	.439	.40104	.440	297.354	1	378	.000
2	.690 ^b	.476	.473	.38861	.036	25.558	1	377	.000
3	.709 ^c	.503	.499	.37909	.027	20.181	1	376	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Disturbance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Disturbance, Social Surrounding Stress

c. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Disturbance, Social Surrounding Stress, Self-Efficacy

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	47.824	1	47.824	297.354	.000 ^b
	Residual	60.794	378	.161		
	Total	108.617	379			
2	Regression	51.683	2	25.842	171.115	.000 ^c
	Residual	56.934	377	.151		
	Total	108.617	379			
3	Regression	54.583	3	18.194	126.608	.000 ^d
	Residual	54.034	376	.144		
	Total	108.617	379			

a. Dependent Variable: Family Conflict

b. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Disturbance

c. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Disturbance, Social Surrounding Stress

d. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Disturbance, Social Surrounding Stress, Self-Efficacy

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.675	.077		8.749	.000
	Emotional Disturbance	.596	.035	.664	17.244	.000
2	(Constant)	.465	.085		5.445	.000
	Emotional Disturbance	.468	.042	.521	11.143	.000
	Social Surrounding Stress	.233	.046	.236	5.055	.000
3	(Constant)	1.044	.153		6.803	.000
	Emotional Disturbance	.433	.042	.482	10.379	.000
	Social Surrounding Stress	.223	.045	.226	4.960	.000
	Self-Efficacy to Avoid Drugs	-.155	.034	-.170	-4.492	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Family Conflict

Based on multiple regression analysis, the study discovered that emotional disturbance [$F(1,378) = 297.354, p < .05$] is significantly contributing 44 percent variance ($R^2 = .44$) on family conflict among former drug addicts. The combination of emotional disturbance ($\beta = .521, p < .05$) and social surrounding stress ($\beta = .236, p < .05$) added up (47.6-44) percent or 3.6 percent variance ($R^2 = .473$) on family conflict [$F = 2,377 = 171.115, p < .05$]. The factor of self-efficacy to avoid drugs also contributed to changes in family conflict among former drug addicts, due to the combination of self-efficacy to avoid drugs ($\beta = -.170, p < .05$) with social surrounding

stress ($\beta = .226, p < .05$) added up (50.3-48.6) percent or 1.7 percent variance ($R^2 = .499$) on family conflict factor [$F = 3,376 = 126.608, p < .05$]. The results of the study have shown that family conflict can occur due to the existence of several factors namely emotional disturbance, social surrounding stress, and self-efficacy among former drug addicts. This study gives essential input towards the improvement of policies and efficiency of drug rehabilitation programs.

DISCUSSION

Based on the intervention aspect, this study revealed that several issues need to be handled immediately by relevant parties in terms of the treatment and rehabilitation processes of former drug addicts. In addition, some former drug addicts still have to deal with family conflict and need suitable intervention to address the issue. If this situation is not properly handled, it will give negative impacts on the treatment and rehabilitation processes of former drug addicts. Thus, programs such as Family Association organised by National Anti-Drugs Agency (AADK) need to be empowered along with social and psychological supports from family members. Studies done by Enver and Halil (2019) and Ventura and Bagley (2017) indicated that family therapy helps in improving drug addicts' family functionality. Meanwhile, Normala, et al., (2018) mentioned that family support intervention is important during the fifth phase of the Transformation Model based on the action aspect. Furthermore, studies by Mannelli (2013) recommended that drug addicts' family to be the main source of the treatment process, so that they can be perceived as suitable individuals in managing drug addicts' behaviours. Affected family relationships due to drug abuse need to be supported with adaptive coping strategies, as highlighted by Terence, Stephenson & Lubman (2018) on how families should be given roles and maintain the roles efficiently. Numerous previous studies have shown that social support from family members helps in the rehabilitation process and relapse prevention (Zaida, 2020). Good communication skills among former drug addicts are the results of good relationships and interactions in their families (Farah Syazrah, et al., (2017).

However, more attention should be given to a low score result based on this study, which is the feeling of former drug addicts because they fail to meet the needs of the family. Prior studies have shown that this guilty feeling always exists in themselves. If this condition is not addressed, it may lead to more problems that happened to drug addicts (Gemma, Manuel & Gabriel (2020). Hence, in implementing interventions on former drug addicts under surveillance, the element of avoiding guilt by forgiving oneself should be taken into consideration. According to Vitz & Meade (2016), the absence of self-forgiveness can lead to more serious mental and

physical issues. In addition, Pelucchi (2014) stated that self-forgiveness can remove angry emotions within oneself. This can assist former drug addicts to manage their self-conflict effectively. Besides, this empirical study discovered three important factors that can cause family conflict among former drug addicts, namely emotional disturbance, social surrounding stress, and self-efficacy. Previous studies also found that former drug addicts have a high possibility of relapse when they are unable to control the interpersonal conflict with family (Fisher, et al., 2007; Wang, 2005). Generally, the interpersonal conflict faced by former drug addicts will be displayed through their physically or psychologically aggressive behaviours, which will eventually lead to relapse. Therefore, conflict management skill therapy is suggested to be implemented in order to reduce relapse cases among former drug addicts Fisher, et al., (2007). Family conflict is believed to be one of the main causes that lead to former drug addicts' emotional disturbance and the tendency to relapse (Arpawong, et al., 2015; Sinha, 2020).

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study only focuses on aspects related to family conflict among former drug addicts using a quantitative research approach. In-depth research to understand family conflict among former drug addicts is strongly required using a qualitative research approach to get different insights. The sample of the study is limited to former drug addicts who are currently under surveillance and rehabilitation period. A bigger sample involving drug addicts from both gender is needed to get more comprehensive data that can describe the family conflict that occurs among drug addicts' family institutions.

CONCLUSION

This empirical study shows that drug addicts are still dealing with family conflict during the surveillance and rehabilitation period. Emotional disturbance, social surrounding stress and self-efficacy are the main factors that lead to the existence of a family conflict. Family conflict may lead to negative impacts on the aspects of emotional, psychological and mental of former drug addicts if it is not being

controlled effectively. Therefore, positive coping strategies are needed to handle family conflict efficiently. Former drug addicts should also be provided with modules that can help them in facing and reducing family conflict. Since this study has discovered the main factors of family conflict among former drug addicts namely emotional disturbance, social surrounding stress and self-efficacy, thus recovery modules such as emotional management, tips to overcome surrounding stress and tips to increase motivation and self-efficacy among former drug addicts are strongly needed. The recovery modules established based on these empirical evidence may help in overcoming the related issues. The ability of former drug addicts to address their family conflicts may help them in ways to enhance their recovery level, continue being drug-free, and live in a more prosperous environment.

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