

VULNERABLE FACTORS OF SADNESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN INDONESIA : AN EXPLORATORY INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

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Abstract

Adolescence is an unstable period in human's life. Hurlock (2003) called it as the phase of storm and stress. They easily get sad and angry. Aimed of this study was to identify the causes of sadness among male and female adolescents in order to prevent adolescent's sadness. A total number of 412 senior high school students (males =163 and females = 249) completed open-ended questions asking about what makes them sad. The sampling used in this research was the non-random sampling technique. Data analyzed by categorizing, open coding and cross tabulation. The results showed that females feel sad when they have relationship problems (40, 2%), deal with unexpected events (35, 3%), then personal problems (14, 1%). Unlike female adolescents, the greatest cause of sadness for males was unexpected life events (42, 3%), then relationship problems (27%), and personal problems (15, 3%). This study concluded that female adolescents were more vulnerable towards relationship problems which made them sad, whilst male adolescents were more vulnerable toward life's distress.

Keywords: Adolescent, Indigenous Psychology, Indonesia, Sadness.

Abstrak

Remaja adalah masa yang tidak stabil dalam kehidupan manusia. Hurlock (2003) menyebutnya dengan masa "storm and stress". Remaja mudah merasa sedih dan marah. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi

penyebab kesedihan pada remaja pria dan wanita sebagai upaya mencegah kesedihan remaja. 412 siswa SMA menjawab pertanyaan terbuka yang menanyakan apa yang membuat mereka sedih. Teknik sampling yang digunakan adalah teknik sampling non random. Data dianalisis dengan kategorisasi, pengkodean terbuka dan tabulasi silang. Hasil analisis menunjukkan remaja wanita mengalami kesedihan berkaitan dengan masalah hubungan dengan orang lain (40,2%), kejadian yang tidak diharapkan (35,3%), masalah personal (14,1%). Penyebab kesedihan pada remaja pria adalah kejadian yang tidak diharapkan (42,3%), masalah hubungan dengan orang lain (27%) dan masalah pribadi (15,3%). Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah kesedihan pada remaja wanita lebih disebabkan karena masalah hubungan dengan orang lain, sedangkan pada remaja pria lebih disebabkan karena kejadian hidup yang menekan.

Kata Kunci : *Indigenous psychology*, Indonesia, Kesedihan, Remaja.

Introduction

“Storm and stress” is the times presented by Hurlock (2003) to picture adolescence. During these times, adolescents face instability including emotional issues. The emotional conditions of adolescents are marked with the increased emotional stresses which are caused by social pressure and the new conditions being faced (Hurlock, 1973). Silk, Steinberg and Morris’s research (2003) shows that if an adolescent has a high instability of anger emotions, instability of anxiety and instability of sadness, this significantly shows the presence of depression symptoms and behavioral problems.

Gramling and McCain (1997) stated that the sadness being experienced by someone can affect the quality of someone’s life, adaptation and development. It turns out that sadness becomes an antecedent from depression and can implicate towards the mental health (Gramling & McCain, 1997). Gender-wise, it turns out that women experience more depression compared to men with the ratio of 2:1 (Davison et al, 2004). Because of that, it is important to identify the root of sadness in adolescents as the basis of resolving the impacts to hinder the development of psychological disorders.

Viewed from aspects of culture, a number of researchers suggest that the culture or ethnicity of an adolescent has a significant influence towards how an

adolescent will deal with these adverse circumstances (Weaver 2010). Worldview comprises of attitude, value, opinion and concept which also influences how adolescents define their problems, make decisions and act upon them. Therefore emotions are influenced by culture. According to Kitayama et al in Uchida & Kitayama (2009) there is a difference between how Asian and Western adolescents cope with their problems. Western adolescents tend to blame other people or external factors to preserve their self esteem. Meanwhile, Asian adolescents often blame themselves as a result of the internal issues faced (Kitayama et al, in Uchida & Kitayama, 2009). Therefore, this study aims to understand the things that make Indonesian adolescents feel sad. With the approach of indigenous psychology, the result of this study serves as an initial effort in preventing sadness among adolescents.

Indigenous psychology involves content and context in constructing the study designs. Content comprises of meaning, value, and belief. Meanwhile, context comprises of family, social, cultural, and ecological (Kim et al, 2006).

Indigenous psychology helps us to understand the function of human beings in the cultural context. With indigenous psychology it is possible to understand knowledge, skills, and also belief held by the people regarding their own selves. In addition, we can also understand how they function in the family, social, cultural and ecological contexts.

Methods

Participants. This study involves Senior high school students, comprising of 412 students, 163 male students (39.56%) and 249 female students (60.43%).

Instruments. The data collection is conducted by using open-ended questions which are developed by Kim (2009). Open ended questions have several advantages which makes it possible for the participants to answer as how their minds and experience suits them. Answers represent the expressions of the participants' true opinion and are related to the reality of the participant. This is of great use to the researchers since they identify the aspects of the research topics which have not been explored further (Hayes, 2000). The participants of this research were asked to explain the most important things that made them feel sad.

Data Analysis. Data obtained from the open-ended questions are analyzed by categorizing based on the responses that emerge. The data is then coded in respect to the themes. This process is done by involving three raters. Subsequently, crosstab is performed and the frequencies of the sadness causing factors are obtained for the

male and female participants. To understand the differences between the factors causing sadness to the male and female participants, a multiple chi square analysis is performed.

Research Results

The participants in this study are 412 subjects with 163 males (39.56%) and 249 females (60.43%). There are 412 responses towards the open ended questions regarding the things that make them most sad. Categorizations are done towards the entire responses and are then open-coded. Categorizations produce four major categories; which are relationship problems, personal problems, unexpected events, and others. The detail of the categorizations can be seen in the table below:

Table 1.
Categorizations of responds regarding the most important things that elicit sadness

Category	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>personal problems</i>	25	(15,3)	35	(14,1)	60	(14,6)
<i>relationship problems</i>	44	(27)	100	(40,2)	144	(35)
<i>unexpected events</i>	69	(42,3)	88	(35,3)	157	(38,1)
<i>others</i>	25	(15,3)	26	(10,4)	51	(12,4)
Total	163	(100)	249	(100)	412	(100)

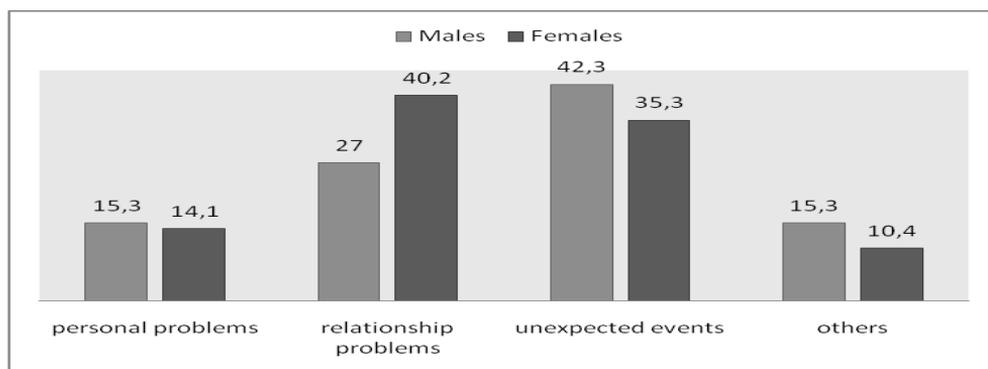


Diagram 1. Categorizations of responses regarding the most important things that elicit sadness

Based on the cross tabulation analysis, from all the male and female participants, the cause of sadness that holds the largest percentage is *unexpected events* (38.1%). On second position is the *relationship problems* (35%), which is then followed by *personal problems* (14.6%) and *others* (12.4%). The percentage of each factor can be seen by the bar diagram 1.

The four categories on the table above are a classification from 20 sub categories. *Relationship problems* comprise of seven sub categories; *being ignored*, *betrayal*, *scolded*, *interpersonal problems*, *problems with others*, *unappreciated*, and *separations*. *Personal problems* comprise of *negative emotions*, *self regrets*, and *spiritual problems*. *Unexpected events* comprise of seven sub categories; *loss of close person*, *loss of family member*, *life problems*, *lost of valuable things*, *painful situations*, *failure*, and *family problems*. *Others* comprise of *others*, *not having / knowing*, and *irrelevant answers*. The following is a table regarding the categories based on gender types.

The cause of sadness in the female participant with the greatest percentage is *relationship problems*; which is 40.2%. The second cause is *unexpected events*; which is 35.3%, and *personal problems*; which is 14.1%. As much as 10.4% of the female participants fall in to the category of *others*.

a. Relationship problems

Sadness related with *relationship problems* are divided into seven sub categories of responses, namely *betrayal* (12%), *being ignored* (8.4%), *interpersonal problems* (5.6%), *unappreciated* (4.8%), *problems with others* (3.6%), *separation* (3.6%), and *scolded* (2%). An example of the subjects' responds towards *relationship problems* are "when I am ignored, I feel lost and unable to achieve what I truly want, when my wishes are being ignored by other people."

b. Unexpected events

There are seven causes of sadness regarding *unexpected events* with the highest percentages being *loss of close person* (9.6%). The second highest percentage is *failure* (8.4%), followed by *painful situations* (5.2%), *lost of things* (4.8%), *loss of family member* (4.0%), and the least percentage being *life problems* and *family problems* (1.6%). An example of the subjects' responds towards *unexpected events* are "failure and loss, I feel that every people will also feel sad when experiencing failure and loss".

c. Personal problems

Sadness related to personal problems is related to *negative emotions*, *self*

regret, and *spiritual problems*. The percentages of responses regarding the cause of sadness related to *negative emotions* and *self regret* received an equal value; which is 6.4%. Meanwhile the responses related to *spiritual problems* are 1.2%. An example of the subjects' response towards the category of *personal problems* are "Anxious and negative prejudices fills up my mind".

Table 2.
Categorization responses regarding the most important things which elicit sadness; gender-wise

Category	Males		Females		Total	
1. Relationship Problems	44	(27,00)	100	(40,20)	144	(35,00)
Being Ignored	12	(7,40)	21	(8,40)	33	(8,00)
Betrayal	8	(4,90)	30	(12,00)	38	(9,20)
Scolded	5	(3,10)	5	(2,00)	10	(2,40)
Interpersonal problems	4	(2,50)	14	(5,60)	18	(4,40)
Problems with others	3	(1,80)	9	(3,60)	12	(2,90)
Unappreciated	4	(2,50)	12	(4,80)	16	(3,90)
Separation	8	(4,90)	9	(3,60)	17	(4,10)
2. Personal Problems	25	(15,30)	35	(14,10)	60	(14,60)
Negative Emotions	9	(5,50)	16	(6,40)	25	(6,10)
Self Regret	13	(8,00)	16	(6,40)	29	(7,00)
Spiritual Problems	3	(1,80)	3	(1,20)	6	(1,50)
3. Unexpected Events	69	(42,30)	88	(35,30)	157	(38,10)
Loss of Close Person	22	(13,50)	24	(9,60)	46	(11,20)
Loss of Family Member	4	(2,50)	10	(4,00)	14	(3,40)
Life Problems	6	(3,70)	4	(1,60)	10	(2,40)
Lost of Things	5	(3,10)	12	(4,80)	17	(4,10)
Painful Situations	12	(7,40)	13	(5,20)	25	(6,10)
Failure	19	(11,70)	21	(8,40)	40	(9,70)
Family Problems	1	(0,60)	4	(1,60)	5	(1,20)
4. Others	25	(15,3)	26	(10,4)	51	(12,4)
Others	5	(3,10)	4	(1,60)	9	(2,20)
No (having/knowing)	7	(4,30)	5	(2,00)	12	(2,90)
Irrelevant Answer	13	(8,00)	17	(6,80)	30	(7,30)
Total	163	(100)	249	(100)	412	(100)

The category *others* comprise of subjects' responses which are irrelevant or not having / knowing.

Table 3. Data regarding gender and sadness causing factors

Gender Categories	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	X ²
Male			
<i>Personal Problems</i>	25	22,94	0,185
<i>Relationship Problems</i>	44	55,05	2,218
<i>Unexpected Events</i>	69	60,016	1,319
Total in Category	138	138,00	3,722
Female			
<i>Personal Problems</i>	35	37,064	0,114
<i>Relationship Problems</i>	100	88,953	1,372
<i>Unexpected Events</i>	88	96,983	0,817
Total in Category	223	223	2,303
Total	361		X ² multiple = 6,025

Sadness in males which are caused by *unexpected events* are as large as 42.3%, *relationship problems* as much as 27%, *personal problems* and *others* having the same percentages which is 15.3%.

a. Unexpected events

There are seven causes of sadness related to *unexpected events*. Holding the largest percentage is *loss of close person* (13.5%). The next response is *failure* (11.7%), *painful situations* (7.4%), *life problems* (3.7%), *lost of things* (3.1%), *loss of family member* (2.5%), and *family problems* (0.6%). An example of *unexpected events* experienced by male includes “*facing calamity*”.

b. Relationship problems

Sadness related to *relationship problems* are divided into seven sub-categories of responses, namely; *being ignored* (7.4%), *separation* (4.9%), *betrayal* (4.9%), *interpersonal problems* (2.5%), *unappreciated* (2.5%), *problems with others* (1.8%), and *scolded* (3.1%). An example of *relationship problems* which make the males sad based on the subjects' responses are “*being shunned, disrespected*”.

c. Personal problems

Sadness caused by *personal problems* with the largest percentage is

self regret (8.0%), followed by *negative emotion* (5.5%) and *spiritual problems* (1.8%).

Meanwhile an example of the responds for the category of *personal problems* faced by the males is “*unable to do anything when I want to do something*”. Identical to the category *others* on the female participants, *others* consists of subjects’ responses which are not appropriate with the questions or the subject answered not having / knowing.

From the analysis using *multiple chi square*, it is obtained that the $X^2_{\text{multiple}} = 6,025$ with $p < 0,05$. This result shows that there is a significant difference upon the sadness causing factors, seen from the perspective of male and female gender.

Discussion

This study aims to identify the causes of sadness among male and female adolescents. The purpose of this study is to find the root of sadness on adolescents as a basis to solve the impacts in order to avoid developing into psychological disorder.

The results show that there are three categories of causes regarding why adolescents feel sad. These three categories include *personal problems*, *relationship problems* and *unexpected events*. Among female participants, the factors causing most of the sadness is *relationship problems*, namely betrayal. The next factor is *unexpected events* and *personal problems*. Overall, from the female adolescents, *unexpected events* faced by the adolescents are related to the loss of a closest person, loss of family members, or even loss of things. Other events include failure, experiencing painful things, family problems, and life problems. Loss of closest person is the dominant factor that causes female adolescents to be sad for this category of *unexpected events*. Meanwhile, for *personal problems*, *self regret* is the dominant factor causing adolescents’ sadness compared to negative emotions and spiritual problems.

The result of this study confirms the study of Newmann (1987), which shows that females are much more fragile in facing hardships related to the absence of a partner, farewell with friends, insufficient financial sources, and chronic health disorders compared to males. *Personal problems* as the largest percentage category causing sadness in female adolescents are similar to those developed by the feminists. According to the feminists, females prioritize being in a relationship (Santrock, 1998). Females will develop interaction involving emotional, social, as well as intellectual elements. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that if a female feels sad in the case that there are problems regarding their relationship with someone or if they receive a bad

treatment from someone else. Females are hence much more fragile towards problems related to interpersonal relationship, farewell with other people and the way they are being treated (distanced, betrayed, unappreciated, scolded).

The largest cause of sadness for the adolescent male is *unexpected events*. This is in contrast from female adolescents. If the female adolescents are much more fragile to *relationship problems*, then the results of this study indicates that male adolescents are much more fragile with *unexpected events*. From some of the categories of *unexpected events* faced by male adolescents, losing a close person is what makes them most sad. In addition, failure, *painful situations*, *life problems*, *losing something*, *losing a family member*, and *family problems* also contribute to their sadness. The next factors based on the percentage value are *relationship problems* and *personal problems*.

For the *relationship problems* category, male adolescents will feel sad in case they are distanced by their environment. Other conditions would be being betrayed, farewells, subject to someone's anger, having interpersonal issues, unappreciated, as well as having problems with someone else. The personal problems which contribute to sadness of male adolescents include self-regret, followed by *negative emotions*.

Taking a closer at the data, it is observed that the cause of sadness of males and females will show different categories. Females will be sad with events related to relationships or their interaction with other people. In contrast with the female adolescents, the males will feel sad in the case that they suffer from *life distress* which is related to the events external to them. According to Santrock (1998), males have a low interest with their *inner self* and are very poor in relating to others. This becomes logical if it turns out that the largest percentage of the cause of sadness on male adolescents are unexpected events external to him. The results of the analysis indeed show that *relationship problems* remain second in line after *unexpected events*.

According to Kitayama et al, in Uchida & Kitayama (2009), the Asian adolescents often blame themselves as the internal causes of the problems they face. However if viewed from the results of the study regarding the cause of sadness experienced by the adolescents therefore it can be seen to be inconsistent with the cause of sadness experienced by the males. The results of the analysis shows that external events such as losing something, losing someone, failure as a part of *unexpected events* becomes a factor which makes males vulnerable to sadness.

Sadness as shown in the result of the Chaplin research (2006) is associated

with depression symptoms. It turns out that females experience depression more than males with a ratio of 2:1 (Davison et al, 2004). This study provides a result of the factors that make adolescents vulnerable to sadness. From a number of categorizations that emerge, a few of the causes of sadness can trigger depression. Vernberg (1990) stated conditions such as non-established close relationships with a friend, less interactions with friends, rejected by a member of a certain group can trigger the onset of depression symptoms in adolescents. *Rejection especially parental rejections* are also associated with depression symptoms by Robertson and Simons (1989). Even though it appears that sadness has a social function. According to Sullivan et al (2008), sadness is useful to communicate social support. It simply means that sadness is also required in socialization.

Generally, this study provides a description regarding the factors that causes sadness, experienced by the adolescents in Indonesia. From this study it can be concluded the causal factors of sadness in adolescents differ from male and female adolescents. There are three major factors, i.e. *personal problems*, *unexpected events*, and *relationship problems*. Female adolescents are more prone towards *relationship* related problems, whereas the males are more prone towards *life distress*. By understanding the causal factors of sadness, then surely preventions towards depression can be considered by considering these causal factors.

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