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Children's Psychological Affect on Their Daily Life in Private Welfare Institutions

*(Keadaan Psikologikal Kanak-Kanak dalam Kehidupan Harian
di Pusat Kebajikan Persendirian)*

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Abstract

Children who are separated from their biological families have an unusual life experience compared to their counterparts residing with their biological families. This paper describes children's psychological affect by measuring their self-expression based on their daily experiences in welfare institutions. A total of 163 children in four private children's homes completed the Malay version of the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) developed by Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener (2009). The results show that more than half of the children (60.1%) had high levels of positive expression, while 63.2 percent recorded intermediate levels of negative expression. In total, only 30.1 percent of the children had high affect balance. Independent sample t-test shows that male children had significant positive expression and higher affect balance compared to their female

counterparts. Female children had higher negative expression than male children. Correlation analyses show that no significant relationships can be established between self-expression and the factors of age and length of stay at the private welfare institutions. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) indicates that there was a significant difference in mean affect balance between male and female children while adjusting age and length of stay. This implies that gender is an important factor in the positive expression of children in out-of-home care. Any efforts to help the children feel positive about their living experience should begin by considering their gender.

Keywords: Affect balance, positive expression, negative expression, children out-of-home care, subjective well-being.

Abstrak

Kanak-kanak yang berpisah daripada keluarga biologi mempunyai pengalaman kehidupan yang tidak normal berbanding dengan kanak-kanak yang tinggal dengan keluarga mereka. Artikel ini menghuraikan perasaan Psikologi kanak-kanak menerusi ekspresi sendiri berdasarkan pengalaman kehidupan harian di institusi kebajikan. Seramai 163 kanak-kanak di empat rumah kanak-kanak persendirian telah menjawab versi Bahasa Melayu Skala Pengalaman Positif dan Negatif (SPANE) yang dibangunkan oleh Ed Diener dan Robert Biswas-Diener (2009). Hasil kajian menunjukkan 60.1 peratus kanak-kanak memiliki ekspresi positif yang tinggi, manakala 63.2 peratus daripada mereka menunjukkan ekspresi negatif yang sederhana. Secara keseluruhannya, hanya 30.1 peratus kanak-kanak menunjukkan jejak seimbang yang tinggi. Ujian perbandingan min menunjukkan kanak-kanak lelaki mempunyai ekspresi positif dan jejak seimbang yang tinggi secara signifikan berbanding dengan kanak-kanak perempuan. Kanak-kanak perempuan menunjukkan ekspresi negatif yang lebih tinggi berbanding dengan kanak-kanak lelaki. Analisis kolerasi menunjukkan tiada hubungan yang signifikan antara ekspresi sendiri, faktor umur dan tempoh tinggal di institusi kebajikan. Analisis Kovarians (ANCOVA) menunjukkan terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan jejak seimbang antara lelaki dan perempuan apabila faktor umur dan tempoh tinggal dikawal. Ini menunjukkan faktor jantina adalah penting kepada ekspresi positif

kanak-kanak yang tinggal di institusi kebajikan. Sebarang usaha untuk membantu kanak-kanak untuk merasa positif tentang pengalaman kehidupan mereka perlu bermula dengan mempertimbangkan jantina kanak-kanak.

Kata kunci: *Jejak seimbang, ekpresi positif, ekspresi negatif, kanak-kanak di bawah jagaan institusi, kesejahteraan subjektif.*

Introduction

Well-being is a concept used typically to describe an individual's physical, mental, emotion, social and spiritual state (Adams et al., 1997; Edlin & Golanty, 1985; Hettler, 1980; Ragheb, 1993). Subjective well-being, conversely, is a more complicated concept that has been explored across various professions. It is a concept that explains people's positive thinking and feeling towards their daily experiences (Diener 1984). It is a phenomenon that includes people's emotional responses, domain satisfaction, and global judgements of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999, p. 277). For instance, subjective well-being decreased during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany (Zacher & Rudolph, 2020). If applied in children, it is a set of perceptions, evaluations, and aspirations of children on their current life and homes (UNICEF Spain, 2012).

Subjective well-being can be generally associated with an individual's levels of happiness. Diener (1984) defined well-being according to normative, subjective, and emotional aspects. The normative aspect refers to an external framework of cultural and societal values that influence an individual's perception of life satisfaction. The subjective aspect refers to an individual's internal evaluation of the importance of something in their life. The emotional aspect refers to an internal expression that is related to pleasure experience when participating in certain activities. Combining the three aspects, subjective well-being can be explained as an individual's self-evaluation of their current state of happiness regarding important aspects of life (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008). Diener's explanation of subjective well-being has been generally used to articulate the concept of happiness (Schiffrin & Nelson, 2010), and has proven that

happiness has an inverse relationship with perceived stress among college students.

Efforts have been invested in articulating children's subjective well-being with various dimensions adopted to construct the concept. One of the popular dimensions is life satisfaction measured through a single-item format (e.g. Casas & Rees, 2014; Rees et al., Bradshaw, n.d.). Another popular dimension is the 'affect' manifested by self-expression on positive and negative emotion (e.g. Casey, 1993; Nezlek & Kuppens, 2008). This is best represented by the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) co-developed by Ed Diener, the pioneer of subjective well-being, together with his son, Robert Biswas-Diener. Overall, subjective well-being is still hardly measured because of the factors of language, culture, and values (Casas, & Rees, 2014).

In the study of children's emotion, psychological affect is an important frontier in articulating the concept of subjective well-being. It was claimed that "children do not understand emotions, their own and those they witness" (Widen & Russell, 2008. p. 293). Studies of children's emotions are commonly focused on emotion regulation. In other words, it is a subject concerning children's competency in controlling their feelings through their unique socialisation experiences (Kim-Spoon et al., 2012; Zeman et al., 2006). For instance, maltreated children often have low emotion regulation compared to non-maltreated children (Kim-Spoon et al., 2012). Suppressing negative emotions was associated with negative personality traits such as sluggishness, sadness, lethargy, boredom, and sleepiness (Nezlek & Kuppens, 2008).

Positive responses from the socialisation and the environment support positive development. Arslan's (2009) study of 499 adolescents found that those with positive self-esteem received social support from family, friends, and teachers. Similarly, based on data from 9000 children, Rees et al. (n.d.) measured subjective well-being and concluded that family was one of the domains that contribute to overall well-being.

Staying together with birth parents has a direct impact on the children's subjective well-being. A population study in Spain reported high levels of subjective well-being among children (UNICEF Spain,

2012). In the report, happy children stayed with both parents and did not experience critical changes in life. Conversely, marginalised children were mostly children out-of-home care under the child protection system. Furthermore, the study shows that life satisfaction between boys and girls differed. Boys had high satisfaction on time management and self, while girls had high satisfaction on the place of living, school, personal belonging, and interaction.

Parents play important roles in influencing children's psychological affect. Gentzler et al. (2018) conducted a study on the types of positive affect (high-mild-low arousal) among 96 mothers and their 7-12 year-old children. The study shows that the desired types of positive affect among mothers were the types they wanted for their children and themselves. They may reinforce and socialise their children's positive affect based on their preferred types of positive affect.

Gender and age are popular factors commonly associated with children's affect. Casey's (1993) study of 66 children aged 7 to 12-years shows that older children had more ability to express their emotion (initial reaction + facial display of emotion) compared to younger children. After receiving warnings or compliments, female children displayed their emotion more explicitly than male children. Children were more open to expressing themselves and understanding their emotions if they receive positive feedback from the environment.

Zeman and Shipman (1996) study negative expression among 137 young children in relation to their socialisation. The study shows that children expressed sadness when they received emotional support while releasing anger did not make them feel better. Girls expressed their emotional feelings more such as sadness and pain and received more support compared to boys. Conversely, no significant differences were found between boys and girls in anger expression. Children passively expressed their emotion to their fathers, and younger children believed that their mothers would tolerate their expressions of anger.

Differences between male and female children concerning their psychological affects are established. Kaye-Tzadok et al. (2017) examined children's subjective well-being using secondary data that

involved 5000 12-year-old children from 16 countries. Their analysis reveals that male children displayed better subjective well-being than female children. Male children's subjective well-being was associated with school-achievement, while female children were associated with social relationship.

In the latest study in Spain, the subjective well-being of 1540 children aged 8 to 12 years was examined based on physical activity and screen time (García-Hermoso et al., 2020). Subjective well-being was measured, combining life satisfaction and psychological affects. The Spain study reported that children with active physical time experienced higher life satisfaction and higher positive affects than their inactive counterparts, even though their screen time was high. However, high screen time was associated with negative affects.

Diener et al. (1999) commented that a simple demographic study on well-being was no longer a useful design because it hardly explains the underlying process of subjective well-being. They further recommended that the context should be incorporated in future studies on subjective well-being. This is because the levels of subjective well-being are influenced by the situation in which a study is conducted (Diener et al., 1999).

In line with the context of a person and their environment, this paper is written based on a study conducted on children who were separated from their families and raised in welfare institutions in 2017. As highlighted by Zhang and Selwyn (2020), most studies on subjective well-being are conducted on normal children with limited studies focusing on children out-of-home care. Without the normal support from families and the presence of their biological parents, children were expected to display patterns similar to those reported in previous studies, namely marginalisation, negative self-esteem and suppressed emotion due to separation from their birth parents. It is expected that their levels of affect differ between males and females, as reported in the literature.

This paper focuses solely on the psychological affect of the sampled children, which is one of the main components in subjective well-being. Diener et al. (1999) suggested that components of subjective

well-being should be measured separately. Hence this paper is written for the following three objectives:

1. To describe the levels of positive expression, negative expression and affect balance among the children.
2. To identify differences of self-expression based on gender and institution.
3. To identify the relationships between self-expression and (i) age and (ii) length of stay.

Method

An adult's perspective on children's well-being is no longer a popular trend because adult's views are adult's personal expectations on children rather than how the children feel about themselves (UNICEF Spain, 2012). Seeking children's account in research is an emancipatory approach to empower children with minimum interference from adults. Children's account is traditionally less trusted by social researchers. For instance, due to the Life Optimism Bias, some studies show very positive results on the children in well-being (UNICEF Spain, 2012). It is still worthy of venturing into children's account in describing the children's inner expression, especially for the local residential care context (e.g. Zhang & Selwyn, 2020). Ignoring children's rights in expression is contrary to Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2019). Accordingly, distrusting children's account in research is equivalent to refusing the basic human rights of children to think and interpret.

This is a cross-sectional survey of children residing in private children's homes. In Malaysia, there are two types of residential welfare institutions for out-of-home care. Public children's homes are officially declared as safe institutions to provide protection and care for maltreated children and are fully funded and managed by the Social Welfare Department. Conversely, private children's homes are a popular welfare initiative from the voluntary sector in which many voluntary organisations, especially faith-based organisations, actively set up institutions for children in need of placement. This study engaged only four private children's homes in the northern region of Peninsula Malaysia. The process of securing access to conduct research in

private children's homes is much less complicated compared to public children's homes.

All children in the four homes were openly invited to be a respondent for this study. This was done with help from the respective caregivers. We welcomed every child's participation in this study if the child is capable of reading, writing, and was willing to join. Children were given a substantial explanation by the researchers on the nature and implications of the study before giving their consents. No time limit was imposed for the explanation session or completing the questionnaire. Every child was given ample time to complete the questionnaire and the opportunity to raise any questions to the researchers. The researchers were present all the time to facilitate, monitor and attend any requests from the children. After completing the questionnaires, children were given tokens of appreciation. To sum up, 163 children participated in the survey.

The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) developed by Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener (2009) was used to measure children's psychological affect. The scale was translated in Malay and verified by a certified language translator. The scale consists of 12 single items. Children were required to respond to each item based on their experience in their respective homes over the past four weeks. The items generated three different scores for every child, namely Positive Expression, Negative Expression and Affect Balance. The scale has been proven compatible for various age groups. For instance, Li, Bai, and Wang (2013) verified the scale on 21,322 full-time workers in Chinese society and proven that the scale generated high internal consistency (0.66 to 0.83) and with acceptable normality (within ± 1). Espejo, Checa, Perales-Puchalt and Lisón (2020) reported internal consistency of 0.791 for Negative Expression and 0.858 for Positive Expression for their study of 821 adults in Spain. Numerous European studies also concluded that SPANE has acquired both convergent and discriminant validity (Jovanović, Lazić, Gavrilov-Jerković, & Molenaar, 2020; Rahm, Heise, & Schuldt, 2017). For this study, from our observation during the data collection session, children had no difficulty answering the 12 single items independently. Table 1 shows SPANE in Malay for the 163 children displays high internal consistency, and the result implies that the usage of SPANE among the children in the local context is acceptable.

Table 1

Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE)

Psychological Affect	No. Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Score Range	
			Minimum (Description)	Maximum (Description)
Positive Expression	6	.779	6 (Lowest possible)	30 (Highest positive feelings)
Negative Expression	6	.755	6 (Lowest possible)	30 (Highest negative feelings)
Affect Balance	(Positive Minus Negative)		-24 (unhappiest possible)	24 (highest affect balance possible)

Four private children's homes in the northern region of Malaysia participated in this study. Seventy-four girls and 89 boys completed the SPANE. Their average age and length of stay were 14 years and 40 months, respectively (Table 2). No specific age limit was set in recruiting the children. Participation was completely voluntary, and special assistance was provided to young children with literacy difficulties.

Table 2

The Children

Item	f	%
1. Private Children's Homes		
A	20	12.3
B	56	34.4
C	53	32.5
D	34	20.9
2. Gender		
Male	74	45.4
Female	89	54.6
3. Age		
8 - 11-year-old	24	14.7
12 - 15-year-old	98	60.1
16 - 18-year-old	41	25.2

Item	f	%
3. Age		
Mean: 13.98		
Median: 14.00		
Mod: 14.00		
Minimum: 8		
Maximum: 18		
4. Length of Stay		
1 to 11 month(s)	42	25.8
12 to 47 months	47	28.8
48 to 83 months	59	36.2
84 months and above	15	9.2
Mean: 40.16		
Median: 41.00		
Mod: 5		
Minimum: 1		
Maximum: 125		

Results

Normality tests were conducted to examine the distribution of responses on positive expression, negative expression and affect balance. Table 3 shows that the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests proved that data gathered for both negative expression and affect balance were normally distributed with $p > 0.05$. Although the p-value for positive expression is significant in which the data is not normally distributed, the p-value for overall affect balance score, generated from positive expression minus negative expression, is insignificant. Although the effects of comparing means with t-test and ANOVA for non-normality can be very mild, it had been suggested the further analyses in Skewness and Kurtosis are necessary (Hopkins & Weeks, 1990; Kim, 2013). The analyses show that every variable is close to 0 and within ± 1 . This implies that the abnormal distribution of positive expression is within the acceptable boundary and commonly applied in social work studies (e.g. Keys et al., 2017). Hence, parametric tests were acceptable to be conducted for this study.

Table 3

Normality Tests

	Kolmogorov- Smirnov	Shapiro- Wilk	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
Positive Expression	.001	.001	-0.533	0.190	0.180	0.378
Negative Expression	.056	.169	0.098	0.190	0.135	0.378
Affect Balance	.200	.231	0.184	0.190	0.359	0.378

Table 4 shows the mean scores for the 12 expressions reported by the 163 children. They often felt happy and joyful on their living experiences in the welfare institutions. However, sometimes they were sad and angry. Angry was the most frequent negative expression recorded among the children. Overall, children experienced more positive feelings (M = 3.84) compared to negative feelings (M = 2.87).

Table 4

The 12 Items of SPANE

Items (Positive Expression)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Responses 1-5
Positive	3.63	1.05	1. Very Rarely or Never
Good	3.78	0.94	2. Rarely
Pleasant	3.60	1.07	3. Sometimes
Happy	4.08	0.99	4. Often
Joyful	4.08	1.01	5. Very Often or Always
Contented	3.86	1.15	
Items (Negative Expression)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Responses 1-5
Negative	2.79	1.09	1. Very Rarely or Never
Bad	2.72	1.08	2. Rarely
Unpleasant	2.64	1.14	3. Sometimes
Sad	3.05	1.23	4. Often
Afraid	2.83	1.17	5. Very Often or Always
Angry	3.19	1.15	

Pearson correlation coefficients shows Sadness was positively correlated with feelings of Positive ($r(163)= 0.309, p<0.01$); Negative ($r(163)= 0.407, p<0.01$); Bad ($r(163)=0.325, p<0.01$); Unpleasant ($r(163)=0.260, p<0.01$) and Angry ($r(163)= 0.420, p<0.01$). Similarly, expression of Afraid was positively correlated with expressions of Positive ($r(163)=0.317, p<0.01$); Negative ($r(163)=0.341, p<0.01$); Bad ($r(163)=0.393, p<0.01$); Unpleasant ($r(163)=0.206, p<0.01$) and Angry ($r(163)= 0.299, p<0.01$). Both expressions of Sad and Afraid were positively correlated ($r(163)=0.5, p<0.01$). These findings imply that children with more positive feelings were concurrently experiencing more sadness and fear, even though the mean scores of Sad ($M = 3.05, SD = 1.2$) and Afraid ($M = 2.83, SD = 1.2$) were relatively lower than the mean score of Positive ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.05$). The relationship was positive and significant. It signifies the importance of person in situation commented by Diener et al. (1999). No significant negative relationships were found between any items of Positive expression and any items of Negative expression.

Table 5

Positive Expression, Negative Expression and Affect Balance

Levels of Positive Expression	Frequency
Low Positive Feelings (score 6 - 14)	7 (4.3%)
Intermediate (score 15 – 22)	58 (35.6%)
High Positive Feelings (score 23 - 30)	98 (60.1%)
Levels of Negative Expression	Frequency
Low Negative Feelings (score 6 - 14)	40 (24.5%)
Intermediate (score 15 – 22)	103 (63.2%)
High Negative Feelings (score 23 - 30)	20 (12.3%)
Levels of Affect Balance	Frequency
Unhappy Possible (Always with negative feelings) (score -24 to -9)	3 (1.8%)
Intermediate (score -8 to 8)	111 (68.1%)
High Happiness Possible (Always with positive feelings) (score 9 to 24)	49 (30.1%)

Table 5 shows 60.1 percent of children were categorised as having high positive feelings, while only 12.3 percent of them in the category

of high negative feelings. Approximately 30 percent of children had high happiness levels of affect balance. Children in this category can be regarded as highly positive in their daily life with minimal unhappiness. The overall percentages imply that more than half of the children had high positive feelings on positive expression, but at the same time had an intermediate level of negative expression. Combining both expressions, children had an intermediate score for the affect balance. Children seem to be happy with their living environments, but they too seem to be feeling sad and fearful.

Table 6

Psychological Affect, Homes, Gender, Age and Length of Stay

Item	Positive Expression	Negative Expression	Affect Balance
1. Private Children's Homes	F(3,159) = 1.732 p = .163	F(3,159) = 1.421 p = .239	F(3,159) = 1.159 p = .327
A	M (SD) = 23.1 (3.5)	M (SD) = 18.8 (4.2)	M (SD) = 4.4 (4.8)
B	M (SD) = 22.1 (4.6)	M (SD) = 16.9 (5.0)	M (SD) = 5.2 (6.0)
C	M (SD) = 23.9 (3.8)	M (SD) = 17.6 (4.7)	M (SD) = 6.3 (5.6)
D	M (SD) = 23.4 (4.7)	M (SD) = 16.3 (3.8)	M (SD) = 7.1 (7.7)
2. Gender	t (155.6) = 2.491 p = 0.014*	t (161) = -2.817 p = 0.005*	t (154.8) = 3.953 p = 0.000*
Male	M (SD) = 23.9 (4.2)	M (SD) = 16.1 (5.3)	M (SD) = 7.8 (5.9)
Female	M (SD) = 22.3 (4.2)	M (SD) = 18.1 (3.8)	M (SD) = 4.2 (5.8)
3. Age	r(163) = 0.108 p = 0.169	r(163) = 0.103 p = 0.192	r(163) = -0.001 p = 0.985
4. Length of Stay	r(163) = 0.063 p = 0.426	r(163) = 0.005 p = 0.948	r(163) = 0.040 p = 0.611

*Significant Difference at 0.05

By controlling for age and length of stay, One-way ANCOVA was conducted to examine the effect of gender towards affect balance (Table 7). Levene's test shows $p = 0.867$. Hence, equal variances can be assumed. Overall, there was a significant difference in mean of affect balance between male and female children [$F(1, 159) = 16, p = 0.000$].

This implies that affect balance is significantly explained by gender, and the association is not affected by the age and length of stay.

Table 7

Analysis of Covariance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	571.499a	3	190.500	5.496	.001	.094
Intercept	41.850	1	41.850	1.207	.274	.008
Age	14.362	1	14.362	.414	.521	.003
Length of Stay	1.893	1	1.893	.055	.815	.000
Gender	556.788	1	556.788	16.064	.000	.092
Error	5510.979	159	34.660			
Total	11596.000	163				
Corrected Total	6082.479	162				

a. R Squared = .094 (Adjusted R Squared = .077)

Dependent Variable: Affect Balance

Discussion

The majority of children had mixed feelings for their out-of-home care. They often felt positive and sometimes negative living experiences. Angry was the most frequent negative feeling experienced by the children. This is in line with the findings within a qualitative study on 52 children in out-of-home care in Malaysia that reported interpersonal conflicts involving peers, caregivers, schoolmates, and schoolteachers were common (Chan, 2013). However, in the present study, the frequency of having anger was relatively lower as compared to the feelings of happy and joyful. This is a positive finding for the private welfare homes that justify their contribution in substitute care services. Placing children into institutional care like a children's home is always seen as a last resort, because many may agree with the statement "the worst family is still better than the best home" (Frommannet al., 1991, p. 96). However, this study shows that institutional care may not necessarily be the worst scenario for children.

Sad and afraid are two crucial negative expressions that were correlated positively with feeling positive. This implies that the amount of positive thinking, sadness and fear experienced by the children is similar. The more the children had positive thinking, the more the children encountered sadness and fear. The contradictory feelings reflect the reality of good and bad experiences while living in welfare homes. Children can evaluate their experiences differently and assign their feelings accordingly. Although children's expressions were measured through a 12 single-item scale, the results reflect the complexity of expressions among the children. It further suggests that Life Optimism Bias was not an issue in this study, and most likely was neutralised by the scale. The tendency of giving positive responses was not detected among the children. The overall findings are not in line with the population study conducted in Spain (UNICEF Spain, 2012). Children out-of-home care in this study experienced both positive and negative feelings concurrently. Hence, earlier assumptions on children with mostly negative feelings are not supported.

The quantitative measurement of SPANE provides the overall status of the psychological affect of the children. A total of 49 children always felt positive and rarely had any negative feelings. However, SPANE is still unable to provide an in-depth understanding of how and why children perceived themselves with that feeling. A qualitative interview would be beneficial if children were given opportunities to explain the 12 feelings, especially sadness and fear. This is important to further examine how children exercise their emotion regulation on the two feelings. Children are not only informing the frequency of sadness and fear, but they can also further narrate the root cause of the feelings. As commented by Zeman et al. (2006), many studies have been conducted specifically on feeling angry, but limited studies focused on sadness, guilt and shame. Children living away from their birth families can be associated with volatile emotional regulation. This is because individuals who do not receive proper emotion coaching from parents might have difficulty regulating their emotions (Zeman et al., 2006). Many children were sent to welfare homes because of their parents failed social functioning. Apart from designing a qualitative interview, coping with sadness and fear of children can be considered as among the core tasks for psychosocial interventions in welfare homes. Furthermore, children in out-of-home care have different perceptions of what was important for their subjective well-being as compared

to ordinary children. A qualitative study by Wood and Selwy (2017) on 140 cared for children in the United Kingdom identified different indicators for subjective well-being. From the 18 focus groups conducted, trusting relationships with social workers, caregivers and relationships with pets were crucial components for the cared for children. Hence, a qualitative interview would be a good strategy to complete the construct of subjective well-being for children in out-of-home care.

Gender is a crucial factor in children's psychological affect. As presented, male and female children had significant differences in positive expression, negative expression and affect balance. This corresponds to the previous studies that male and female have different priorities in dealing with their emotions (Casey, 1993; Kaye-Tzadok et al., 2017; Zeman & Shipman, 1996). In the context of out-of-home care, male children were happier than female children, and female children experienced more negative emotions. The differences were not affected by age or length of stay at the private welfare institutions. Welfare homes need to take extra effort to address the different emotional needs among the boys and girls who are staying at their homes under their care. Future study may explore reasons for the differences in gender as highlighted by Kaye-Tzadok et al. (2017) by adopting a qualitative research design. Rich narratives from the children, obtained via one-to-one interviews with the children, would enable home providers to plan and initiate helpful life experiences to the children.

Conclusion

Children in out-of-home care in this study had experienced positive feelings, but concurrently were having feelings of sadness and fear. The male children were relatively happier than female children, but both groups of children were at the same moderate level of affect. Notably, differences of positive emotion, negative emotion, and affect balance between male and female children were not affected by age or length of stay at the homes. This implies that gender is an important factor in describing children's psychological affect. Home providers are urged to pay more attention to gender when organising and delivering services or activities to the children. Although SPANE has proved useful in presenting the overall state of children's psychological affect, the contradictory emotions of the children can be explored

further by conducting a qualitative approach. For instance, collecting the children's responses via semi-structured interviews could provide gender's perspective on children's sadness and fear, which would then generate insightful meanings for the construct of subjective well-being.

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