

Emotional Experiences and Regulation in the Workplace: The Effects of Culture

(Pengalaman Emosi dan Pengaturan di Tempat Kerja: Kesan Terhadap Budaya)

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Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji emosi yang dialami dan pengaturan emosi di tempat kerja khususnya praktis kerja sosial kanak-kanak dan keluarga dalam konteks Malaysia. Hubungan antara emosi dan pengaturan emosi dan konteks budaya telah diteroka. Secara keseluruhannya strategi penyelidikan adalah etnografi. Para penyelidik menggunakan pelbagai kaedah termasuk temu bual, pemerhatian peserta, dan soal selidik. Kajian ini dijalankan di tiga lokasi di Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur, Petaling dan Kota Kinabalu. Peserta terdiri daripada pegawai pelindung dan pegawai pemulihan daripada Jabatan Kebajikan Malaysia dan pekerja sosial perubatan di hospital-hospital. Kertas kerja ini membentangkan analisis temubual di ketiga-tiga lokasi. Sebanyak dua puluh lima temubual telah dilakukan (12 lelaki, 13 perempuan lingkungan umur 29-51). Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis tematik. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa budaya masyarakat dan profesional telah mempengaruhi bagaimana pekerja sosial mengatur emosi yang dialami semasa berurusan dengan klien.

Kata kunci: *pengalaman emosi, pengaturan emosi, kesan budaya, pekerja sosial kanak-kanak dan keluarga, organisasi khidmat manusia.*

Abstract

The present research aimed to investigate the experienced emotions and emotional regulation in the workplace particularly in child and family social work practice in a Malaysian context. The interrelationship between emotion and emotional regulation and cultural context were explored. The overall research strategy was ethnographic. The researchers used a mixture of methods including individual interviews, participant observation, and a questionnaire. The research was conducted in three locations in Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur, Petaling and Kota Kinabalu. Participants consisted of child protectors and rehabilitation officers from the Malaysia Welfare Department and medical social workers in hospitals. This paper presents an analysis of individual interviews in the three locations. A total of twenty-five interviews were conducted (12 male, 13 female; age range 29-51). Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The research findings show that societal and professional cultures have influenced how child social workers regulate their experienced emotion when dealing with clients.

Keywords: *Experienced emotion, emotional regulation, cultural effect, child and family workers, human service organisations.*

Introduction

Psychological theories of emotions are limited in scope and content (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault & Benton, 1992). Crawford et al. (1992) note that such limitations are reinforced by the ways that psychologists have chosen to study emotions. They add that even social constructionists have chosen methods such as questionnaires which fail to capture much of the richness and complexity of emotional experiences. A method is therefore needed which will recognise that emotions are constructed in interactions involving both self-interaction and interaction with others that enables the development of theory encompassing such interactions (Crawford et al., 1992). Therefore, the limitations of psychological theories only emphasise that – theories concerning emotions are cognitive, motivational and relational (Lazarus, 1991), internal feelings of states and behaviours (Strongman, 1974, 1987), and physiological and psychological phenomena – the James-Lange theory (in Sartre, 1948).

Thoits (1989) stated that cultural beliefs about emotions include the question of what should be felt or not, be expressed or not, ideology about emotions, common understanding about the causes, consequences and results of emotional experiences and interactions, beliefs about emotions that they can be controlled or not, and circumstances (determined by social contexts) from the requirement of society (expectations) to conform to emotions. Issues that can be seen in cultural beliefs (i.e. the focused area) are the types of emotions

that can be felt or not, that may be expressed or not, and the belief that emotions can be controlled or not, which reflect the issue of ideology of emotions in the setting of child and family practice (i.e. working relationships and decision-making processes).

Goldie (2000) summarises conventional psychological thinking about emotions. Goldie (2000) explains the phenomena of emotions using a combination of philosophy and science. The role of culture is also considered in his explanation of the phenomena of emotions. He explores the links between emotions, moods, and characters. He also explores the contexts of emotions in relation to phenomena such as consciousness, thought, feeling and imagination. He clarifies how individuals are able to make sense of their own and other individual's emotions, and also proposes how individuals can explain whichever emotions would lead them to their responsive actions. He outlines six explanations referring to psychological aspects: 1) when a person experiences an emotion, he/she is engaged with the world, grasping what is going on in the world and responding accordingly, 2) an emotional experience or action out of the emotion can be made intelligible by reference to the thoughts which are involved in it, 3) an emotion can be educated, 4) emotions partially shape and determine what we value, 5) emotional responses can reveal to us what we value and what might not be epistemically accessible to us if we did not have such responses, and 6) we should respect our emotional responses and listen to what they have to say to us and about us. These portray how emotions make their contributions to individuals' relationships with their environments.

Emotions and emotional regulation are prominent in the workplace (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2014; Ashkanasy & Daus, 2001; Mann, 1999). Social workers in child and family services are reported as facing difficulties especially in terms of challenging behaviours, abusive and demanding clients (Kemp, Marcenko, Hoagwood & Vesnesky, 2009; Coffey, Dugdill & Tattersall, 2004). Therefore, the effective regulation of emotion in self and others is seen as an important skill for workers who need to build relationships with clients (Aldao, Nolen-Hoksema & Schweizer, 2010; Howe, 2008).

Practitioners in the social work profession deal with troubled individuals, families, groups and communities who are in need. Working with people who are in need requires that social workers give thoughts to issues of resilience and coping strategies (Morrison, 2007). Developing resilient personalities with good self-esteem and a sense of self-control is one of the strategies that has been encouraged in order to empower social workers to combat stress (Collins, 2008). Storey and Billingham (2001) note that stress within the workplace is prevalent at high levels for many individuals. Stress is considered dangerous, not only to the practitioners' health but also to the

service that practitioners provide to users (Storey & Billingham, 2001). Practitioners' characteristics, such as age and gender, are associated with stress in the workplace (Chadsey & Beyer, 2001). Research done by Storey and Billingham (2001) also found that practitioners aged 45 years or younger appeared to have a higher level of stress compared to individuals aged more than 45; whereas females were reported to have a higher level of stress than males.

The term 'emotion regulations' is defined as deliberate or automatic changes in any aspect of emotional responses, including eliciting situations, attention, appraisals, subjective experiences, behaviour or physiology. Meanwhile, the term '*response-focused* emotion regulations' is defined as emotion regulation strategies, which are mainly directed at emotional responses after emotions have been generated. An example of such a process is the act of denying an emotional experience. On the other hand, *antecedent-focused* emotion regulation strategies are mainly directed at aspects that occur early in the emotional process (Mauss, Bunge & Gross, 2007). These regulatory strategies take place in response to situational cues, where socio-cultural contexts matter so much in automatic emotion regulations. According to Mauss, Bunge and Gross (2007), socio-cultural contexts provide norms about appropriate responses, which are activated in response to emotional cues. Mesquita and Boiger (2014) conceived that emotions are largely functional to the sociocultural environment in which they occur. In Western countries, the people stress positive aspects of emotions and generally encourage emotional experiences and expressions (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, Shiota, Campos, Gonzaga and Peng (2010) showed that among the European-American participants, the expression of negative emotions (i.e. feelings of anger, contempt, or shame) during interaction with a romantic partner were thought to preclude feelings of love, whereas Asian-American participants were more likely to report feeling both types of emotion.

This article aimed to investigate the use of emotions and emotional regulation in child and family practice in a Malaysian context. The interrelationship between emotion, emotional regulation and cultural context were explored further.

Methodology

Based on the consideration that emotions are seen as affects and ideas whose meanings are elaborate and subtle learned (Lutz & White, 1986), this present research employed the ethnographic approach as the research design. However, the present research was not conducted as a full ethnography. The present research draws on and is framed by some ideas which originate from

ethnography. The way in which the ethnographic approach was used was due to the philosophical stance of the researcher (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994), in which emotion is perceived as a confluence of biological underpinnings, shaped by a cultural worldview and script for social behaviour. Thus, in the context of the social work profession, generally, the present research used the ethnographic approach to adopt the narrower focus associated with a mini-ethnography. A mini ethnography, like more traditional ethnography, allows the understanding of a local world, as well as the structure and flow of interpersonal experiences within this; however, it makes allowances for the constraints placed on the ethnographer and the difficulties preventing long-term immersion in the field (Kleinman, 1992). Furthermore, the ethnographic framework is considered as a suitable approach in dealing with the way the social workers in Malaysian culture operate and use emotions and EI in their daily activities, either in their career or social matters. In addition, the choice of the ethnography framework as the research framework in this research aimed at gaining a working familiarity with the frames of meaning within which the child social workers enact their lives (Greetz, 2000).

The researchers used a mixture of methods including individual interviews, participant observation, and a questionnaire. The present research applied a mixture of methods, which allowed to build the strength of both quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2008). The use of mixed methods also allowed this research to produce a fuller picture of the aspects that covered not only the scale of the issue (e.g. the levels of EI, the differences between gender, age, etc.), but also gave some insights into the relevant factors that might arise from the aspects of EI (e.g. societal, cultural, professional, etc.), particularly in Malaysia's local context. Notably, the quantitative data show the dimensions of a phenomenon, while the qualitative data reveal richer and more complex findings. In addition, the mixed methods (i.e. questionnaire, observations and interviews) were valuable and made worthwhile contributions to the discussions on matters being studied in this research (Denscombe, 2007). The quantitative aspects aimed to reveal whether any demographic characteristics relevant to social work were salient, whereas the qualitative aspects aimed to explore social workers' perceptions of these and any other aspects of emotions which they thought were relevant to social work practice.

The research was conducted in three locations in Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur, Petaling and Kota Kinabalu. Participants consisted of child protectors and child rehabilitation officers from the Malaysia Welfare Department and medical social workers in hospitals. In this research, the selected social workers (i.e. the child protectors and child rehabilitation officers) were those who currently deal with issues relating to (i) children in need of care and protection, and (ii) children in need of protection and rehabilitation in hospitals

and welfare departments in Sabah, Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur. The sampling method, which was a non-probability purposive one, was utilised to gain insights into any specific kind of practice (Rubin, Fein & Vandenberg, 1983). In this instance, the child protectors who were assigned to handling child and family cases during the time the research was being conducted were invited to participate. The data were collected from the volunteered male and female social workers, experienced and newly qualified social workers, people of different age groups, levels of education, and lengths of service in their current jobs, and individuals working in a variety of roles (e.g. as a child protector, a child rehabilitation officer or/and an administrator).

This article presents an analysis of individual interviews in the three locations. By using the qualitative method in interviews during this present study, the participants themselves were given opportunities to explain their emotional experiences. Individual interviews were used to provide the qualitative data that aimed at gaining a working familiarity with the frames of meaning within which the child social workers perceived and used emotions and emotional regulation in their professional practice. Through the semi-structured interviews, the social workers' perceptions towards emotions and emotional regulation in their workplace were explored. A total of 25 interviews were conducted (12, 13 female; age range 29-51). Data were then coded and analysed manually. The data were analysed utilising thematic analysis, which searched for themes and patterns as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). More specifically, the taped interviews were transcribed. The transcribed interviews were translated into English. Guided by the research questions, codes were developed to represent categories or themes (e.g. experienced emotions and emotional regulations). It is noted that any unfitted themes were excluded from the final report.

Results

One theme have been identified concerning the cultural effects on emotion and emotional regulation in the setting of child and family social work namely regulating negative emotions. Under the theme of regulating negative emotions, there are two subthemes: (i) Respect others – *societal culture* and, (ii) Encouragement of positive attitude in dealing with clients – *professional culture*. During the interview sessions, the Malaysian child social workers revealed frequent emotional states, which they had experienced when dealing with clients, interacting with colleagues and the top management in the workplace.

The participants reported that they had experienced a variety of emotional states, such as sadness, resentment, anger, dissatisfaction, love,

gratification and others, during their professional practice encounters. With regard to emotional expressions, during the interview sessions, most of the participants disclosed and shared (talked about) their emotional experiences, both positive and negative emotional experiences. The participants reported that they always felt various kinds of emotions when dealing with clients, interacting with colleagues, and working under the organisational management. Nevertheless, how they expressed their emotions depended on certain situations and contexts. Excerpts below illustrated emotions experienced by the workers in the workplace:

Love/Affection

“Emotions, such as considerate and love... I feel like ... like ... he’s my own child. I feel like ... I love him. It’s like ... not sympathy, no, no, not sympathy. In many cases that I handled before, this case has its attraction. That’s why I can feel it. I like him [her child client].”

(Probation Officer 10, female, aged 34)

“This child [his client] is intelligent. I like her. I was happy handling her case and I enjoyed it.”

(Child Protector 8, male, aged 39)

Happiness

“We feel happy when our colleagues share or tell us their funny stories or make jokes. Sometimes, when we feel stressed with workload, our colleagues help making us happy.”

(Probation Officer 1, female, aged 35)

“Errr ... I realise, normally, the thing that can make me happy is when families come to this institution and visit their children. When they come, we give them the opportunity to meet and interact with their children. Parents will give their positive feedback concerning their children’s progress. They will say that their children’s attitude was negative before and now they are showing the positive attitude. If we look back at our function, it means we’ve succeeded in improving their attitude. So, we feel happy.”

(Probation Officer 4, male, aged 47)

Gratitude/Thankfulness

“Really? [They enjoy working here?] [laughed] ... Ohh ... Alhamdulillah [praise be to Allah].”

Sadness

“ ... with their living condition, poor, very poor, of course, we feel sad. When we know how much income they get, then we can assume it is not enough. So, we feel sad.”

(Probation Officer 5, male, aged 45)

“Children should be protected or cared by their own parents, the mother, the father, for example. But for the children in this institution, their situation is different. They [the children] did nothing wrong. But, because of their [the children and their families] life condition, the children have to stay here. So, sometimes, of course, we feel sad when we think about their fate.”

(Child Protector 4, female, aged 48)

Resentment/Anger

“Yes, it is [felt resentful/angry/’geram’]. I felt angry towards the mother who simply left her children without her protection and love. A mother shouldn’t act like that. Just because of their poor condition, she [the mother] abandoned them because she could not live in that situation”.

(Child Protector 1, male, aged 35)

Depression

“When we lack the experience, being young and surrounded by experienced workers even though they are just our subordinates, because of our limited capability to manage this institution, for me ... I always feel depressed. We want to show the best of our charisma, of course, but if our subordinates refuse to show their respect or give cooperation

to us, we would feel depressed, yeah ... depressed."

(Probation Officer 2, female, aged 35)

Dissatisfaction/Disagreement

"... errr ... for example, when handling a case, we would have our own option for the case. When we propose our suggestion to our boss and he/she doesn't agree with it ... of course, we would feel dissatisfied. Then, he/she would come out with his/her own suggestion. We would disagree, actually. We've handled the case before and we know our case better, but then, our boss would come out with his/her option and we have to follow it. I feel dissatisfied .. yeah ... dissatisfied."

(Probation Officer 3, male, aged 32)

Furthermore, during the interview sessions, the participants seemingly preferred to disclose their experiences involving negative emotions as compared to positive emotions. These negative emotions, such as sadness, resentment and anger, were said to have been experienced in all contexts, namely, when handling clients' cases, working with colleagues and interacting with their superiors at the top level of management. For example, the participant below said:

"I felt sad and pity for the baby. Her pregnancy was already 5 months old but she [her client] aborted her baby."

(Medical Social Worker 7, female, aged 37)

In terms of feeling resentful, one of the participants reported:

"Sometimes, they [his clients – the unmarried pregnant teenagers] don't want to tell us. They would rather hide their problems. So, there is emotion. Of course, we feel resentful! We want to help them here, but they don't want to talk to us. If they don't talk, it will take longer time to settle their problems!"

(Medical Social Worker 5, male, aged 42)

Meanwhile, the feelings of anger and dissatisfaction towards the superiors who failed to play their role as the leader were also expressed by the

participants. One of the participants said:

“How could she/he think that way?! There are many candidates who are more eligible for that post! So I’m dissatisfied!”

(Child Protector 3, female, aged 40)

The participants reported that they experienced a variety of positive emotions in the workplace. They remarked that they care for their clients (particularly the children) and tend to express their happiness when being surrounded by happy colleagues. In addition, they also mentioned that they would express their gratitude when they are being accepted by the environment. In terms of the exploration of the participants’ emotional experiences in the workplace, when they revealed that they experienced some emotions, it can be said and believed that emotions are central to the constitution of the realities that people so readily take for granted in their work and organisation (Fineman, 1993).

Besides positive emotions, the participants in the present research also reported that they also experienced some negative emotions in the workplace. These negative emotions seemed to result from their connections, communication and relationships with clients and the top management personnel. The reported negative emotions, according to the participants, occurred due to ill-treatment from the co-workers or superiors when facing unfairness in the department, lack of support, lack of working experience or incompetence, and pressure from responsibilities and others’ behaviours and attitudes (i.e. of clients). All these events or situations resulted in negative emotions among the child social workers. This suggests that, while at work, one may feel the emotions with regard to one’s work, social relationship and other people. It can be said that in social work profession arena, people (i.e. social workers) may also experience some emotions, and their work processes may also contribute to positive and negative emotional experiences.

Regulating negative emotions

The participants reported their experiences of some negative emotions (i.e. Sadness, infuriation and anger) during professional practice. The emotion was said to arise from the clients’ attitudes and behaviours. However, the participants reported that they did not show their negative emotions whilst carrying out their tasks. Participants’ statements included:

“My client, a child aged 12 years old, claimed that she was

a victim of sexual abuse. She claimed that her stepfather raped her. I am not saying that I don't believe her [her client], but after I met her mother and the stepfather, I realised that she lied. During the sessions, I didn't show my anger. I felt infuriated.

(Probation Officer 1, female, aged 30)

"I tried not to be bias to the mother even if she claimed that I was bias! She claimed that I had received an amount of money from her husband. Of course, I felt angry inside. But, I just let her be. I let her express everything she thought about me. Of course, the anger was there but I could control my feelings at that particular time."

(Child Protector 1, female, aged 35)

The participants reported that working experiences could teach them to be competent in regulating their emotions, as well as in handling cases. In addition, such feelings were said to eventually decrease as time passes by and when they are occupied with heavier workloads. The participants reported:

"It is true. Maybe at that time I was new and had no exposure to the situations [sad cases]. I was easily saddened in my early career."

(Medical Social Worker 7, female, aged 37)

"Previously, when I first started my career here, it took me longer time to manage my emotions. My first case really affected me [a child's neglect case]. I felt sad even when I was at home. I just kept on thinking of that child (her child client).

However, due to workload and being busy with new cases, the sadness faded away."

(Probation Officer 10, female, aged 34)

The participants reported that the emotion of sadness was felt in the early stage of their career. However, they agreed that being too emotional, such as being extremely sad over certain cases, is not wise and useful to be displayed in the workplace. Hence, the participants reported on using emotional

regulations in order to handle emotional circumstances.

Moreover, sharing their feelings by talking to friends, colleagues and partners also helped them regulate their emotions. One participant reported:

“We just share among us! I mean, among the colleagues in this section. They understand because they also face the same issues (laughed). They [his colleagues] know, they know”

(Probation Officer 5, male, aged 45)

Furthermore, among the Muslim participants of this study, performing prayers to Allah s.w.t. was also perceived as a way for them to regulate their own and others' internal distress.

The participants reported that they could relieve their internal distress, such as depression, sadness and suppressed anger, by performing prayers and asking for Allah's help. One of the participants said:

“I always pray”

(Probation Officer 2, female, aged 35)

While another participant reported:

“I used to plan a programme for the uncontrolled children. I purposely planned it at night from 9 pm till 5 am. When fajr came, we performed the fajr prayer together. I tackled their emotions by praying together and asking for Allah's mercy and forgiveness. They [clients] cried and regretted what they had done”.

(Child Protector 8, male, aged 39)

With reference to emotion and emotional regulation in the social work profession, efforts to prevent the social workers from using over or under involvement of emotions in their practice, require them to have the emotional intelligent skills so that they can work effectively. Thus, how they regulate their emotions is very important. Apparently, the limited literature related to emotion, emotional regulation and social work may reflect an uneasy relationship between the role of emotions within social work practice when it is set against a backdrop of increasingly procedural practices (Ingram, 2012).

Hence, the challenge for social work is not to ignore the role of emotions within practice, but to recognise, embrace and incorporate them into the profile of the profession (Ingram, 2012). The present research evidently provides support or evidence to various emotions surrounding social work practice in organisations.

Respect others – societal culture

The participants reported that they hide their negative emotions towards clients and/or leaders due to their moral duty to respect others. The participants said:

“This is what we call the way of our life. Actually, we care about others’ feeling. It is our value in life. It is value in society. We care about clients’ feeling. This is because we were taught since we were little to respect others.”

(Child Protector 2, male, aged 35)

“I don’t show him [the head of unit]. I don’t tell him. I mean, I don’t express my dissatisfaction towards him. To me, it’s like I just want to show my respect to him as he is my leader. I need to learn from him. What he says, what he shows to us, I just take it as I want to know and take it as a learning process. Even though, sometimes, actually, we can feel that he is wrong ...errr ... or unethical, of course it’s a pressure. But if I think that I could not stand anymore ... just avoid him .. errr... take our time.”

(Medical Social Worker 4, male, aged 32)

In addition, the workers would avoid expressing their emotions to other parties (i.e. clients, leaders) due to professional purposes and to maintain harmony. The participants said:

“ ...for professional practice with clients, I would minimise my negative emotions so that I could restrain myself from expressing them [negative emotions]”

(Medical Social Worker 1, female, aged 43)

“ ... because we care about our relationships. We know them [his clients]. They always come and meet us. So, it’s hard for

us to express our negative emotions”

(Child Protector 1, male, aged 35)

*Encouragement of positive attitude in dealing with clients/colleagues/
management – professional culture*

Tolerance of others’ emotion was perceived as a good practice in the profession and seen to be adopted as a part of the professional culture.

“We have been advised by our seniors that it is useless if we argue or not use toleration with our clients even if we disagree with them. This is because they [clients] are the public who may not understand our tasks. So, as government servants, we need to think positively and ensure our clients understand our tasks so that at the end, we can achieve our expectations.”

(Probation Officer 2, male, aged 29)

Emotions can be used in acquiring one’s confidence at the workplace. The use of emotions is also dependant on situations and cases. Another participant, who is also the head of children rehabilitation institution, perceived emotions as beneficial to be used in gaining support and confidence for programmes that one wants to conduct. He has been working as a probation officer for more than 20 years and has been holding the post of a leader in this institution for the past five years.

“With regard to any decisions related to the management or administration after I’ve made references to my staff and people who are in the top level, at the final stage, I need to make the decision myself. I use emotions, but the right emotions ... I mean the emotions in my relationship with my staff. The challenging decision is when it is related to policies. For example, if I want to create a new programme or activity for the children in this institution, I need to think of how far it will benefit the children, man power, and financial matter. All these things will make us think a lot before we make a decision because it involves the government money. I don’t want to carry out a programme where our children will have no interest in it. It will waste our money. So, we would feel doubtful. So, that’s why I need to share it with my

colleagues, my staff. I need their support. So, I use emotions and emotional intelligence, but this depends on situations and cases."

(Probation Officer 4, male, aged 47)

From the excerpts above, it is likely that expressing anger (or dissatisfaction) and resentment openly is considered inappropriate as this will threaten working relationship and interpersonal harmony between clients and workers, or staff and leader. It seems like they prefer to avoid emotional expressions during their professional encounters.

Discussion, Implication and Suggestion

The importance of workplace emotions and attitudes seems to be emphasised in organisations. That is because emotions and attitudes can make a huge difference in an individual's behaviour and well-being, as well as in the organisation's performance and clients' satisfaction. Positive emotions and attitudes can be extremely beneficial to work environments. Positive emotions, such as happiness, pride, and satisfaction, can lift the spirits of people. The present research shows that emotions clearly play a key role as a determinant of human attitudes and behaviours (Ashkanasy, Dasborough & Ascough, 2009). In addition, positive emotions have an impact on relationships with others (e.g. clients and colleagues). The child social workers' emotions seem to unfold as a consequence of their clients' situations or emotions. This shows the social workers' reactions to what is happening, for example, when they share the relationship or affiliation with their clients. Positive emotions broaden an individual's thought-action repertoire that can have the often incidental effect of building an individual's personal resources, which include physical, intellectual and social resources (Fredrickson, 1998).

Emotions have been treated as a physiological state in which people regard them as a value-laden concept that is often treated as inappropriate for an organizational life (Putnam & Mumby, 1993). This means that emotional reactions are often seen as disruptive, illogical, biased and weak. Thus, emotions become a deviation from what is seen as sensible or intelligent. Moreover, emotions are also linked to the expressive arenas of life, and not to the instrumental goal orientation that drives an organisation.

The present research findings seem to show that emotions (positive and negative) arise because of the work itself, the social relationships held at

work, and how a person feels about himself or herself due to work, social and professional relationships. In the traditional trend that opposes reason to passion and draws a rigid distinction between reason and passion in the workplace, only emotions which arise from the cognitive aspects of work would have been accepted. However, the present research findings seem to show that emotions are ubiquitous in the workplace and have an important part to play (Hess, 2003). The findings also seem to show that emotions are caused by the interaction with other people. In this case, this refers to the interaction between workers and their clients, as well as the leaders. The child social workers reported that the occurrence of emotions is related to their interaction with people who are connected to them in the workplace. Furthermore, emotional experiences have been reported as could help the participants to be efficient in their tasks, particularly positive emotions (e.g. emotional labour). In addition, the child social workers in this study also perceived that emotions at work are linked to image and self-image emotions. An important class of emotions is those that monitor the goals of image and self-image which includes gratification (Poggi & Germani, 2003). The present research findings have a relevant effect on how the Malaysian child social workers see themselves, and it was shown that their emotions at work are also linked to their self-image. Image and self-image emotion (e.g. religious and gratefulness) seem to guide the child social workers in how to express and regulate their emotions.

Research findings also seem to show that Malaysian social workers frequently talked about expressing negative emotions. This may be due to some possibilities which relate to the contexts of social work, such as working with vulnerable, poor and problematic people. Howe (2008) states that working with people who are under stress is one of the basics in social work practice. Thus, the expression of negative emotions among the workers is seemingly relevant in its context, purpose and cause. The emotion of sadness was felt when relating to someone's fate, such as the client's fate. Meanwhile, the feeling of resentment was reported when the clients did not cooperate with them during assessment processes. Another negative emotion, i.e. anger, was also reported when someone failed to play his or her role.

The negative emotion were suppressed when dealing with clients because the workers tended to perceive negative emotions as a form of weakness. This may be related to collectivist orientation of the East generally, and Malaysian cultures particularly. The cultures in Malaysian societies and organisations may reflect their suppression of negative emotions in the workplace, for instance, to maintain group harmony or organisational procedures in practice. As mentioned by Averill, Koo Chon and Woong Hahn (2001), the Eastern societies tend to emphasise group harmony over individual interest or more proper speaking, whereby the group's welfare is seen as inseparable from that of the individuals. By contrast, the Western societies, at

least over the past several centuries, emphasise the rights of the individuals, even at the expense of the group.

The findings of this research show that societal and professional cultures have influenced how child social workers express and regulate their emotions when dealing with clients. This study supports the view that cultural factors can influence the outcomes of emotion suppression (Butler & Gross, 2009). For example, the workers in this study who suppressed their emotions remained interpersonally responsive. In addition, the participants perceived that regulating their emotions is important in helping them to finish their work. This relates to emotional labour where according to Hochschild (1983) emotional labour is important and vital part in facilitating and regulating the expression of emotions in the workplace.

How the child social workers managed their emotional experiences was related to how they regulated their emotions. There were many ways on how the Malaysian social workers could regulate their emotions. Thinking positively, showing understanding, acting and talking calmly, leaving the situation for a while, talking to someone who they trusted, and performing prayers were among the ways that could help these child workers regulate the negative emotions. The Malaysian social workers showed their emotional competency by regulating the negative emotions in a positive way. They understood the emotions which they experienced; however, due to professional and social rules (i.e. showing respect to people who were in the high ranks), they had to suppress their emotions. Gross (1998) refers to 'emotion regulations' as the process whereby '*we influence which emotions we have, when we have them, and how we experience and express them*' (in Gross, 2000, p.282). In general, sharing the experience with someone who also faces the same emotional experience, or who has the same personal background (e.g. place of origin), or who understands and is trustworthy (i.e. a close friend or a partner) is perceived as the right way of regulating one's emotions, particularly the feeling of anger.

As an implication, the present research findings suggest that effective emotional regulation are important and need to be emphasised in the workplace. As emotional suppression in the workplace have been encouraged due to the societal and professional culture and requirement, workers in human service organisations need supportive environments. Positive environments such as supports from the top management, leaders, colleagues are important. Supervision and guidance from leaders can also be offered to workers who are in needs. Supportive environments are needed to avoid negative effects to the workers such as stress and burnout.

Conclusion

The present research revealed that a variety of emotions (e.g. positive and negative emotions) have been reported in the workplace (i.e. in child and family social work setting). However, due to professional and social rules in the workplace, workers need to suppress their emotions particularly the negative emotion. Furthermore, how the child social workers managed their emotional experiences was related to how they regulated their emotions. To protect workers from negative effects of emotional suppression, a positive and supportive environments need to be provided.

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