

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Transitioning into Independent Adult Life: A Phenomenological Study of Teenagers at a Shelter Home

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Studies on adolescents ageing out of shelter homes in Malaysia were scarce. This research aimed to explore the phenomenological experiences of the teenagers in their preparation to transition out from the shelter home upon reaching the age of 18 years towards the independent living phase. **Method:** This qualitative research employed a purposive sampling design that used focus group discussion as the main source for data collection. Thematic analysis was selected for the analysis of data to generate themes and sub-themes gathered from significant phrases shared from the participant's responses in the group discussion. Five participants who met the criteria of inclusion were recruited for the focus group discussion. **Results:** The findings presented the challenges faced by the participants in preparing for their journey toward independent living. Among the issues shared were relationships, lacking skills and competencies, and mixed feelings faced by the participants as part of the overall concerns in the transition process. **Conclusion:** The findings of this research will hopefully shed light on the administration of shelter home institutions and policymakers for improvement of the services, facilities, and interventions for teenagers in helping them transition through emerging adulthood towards independent living.

Malaysian Journal of Medicine and Health Sciences (2022) 18(19) 169-177. doi:10.47836/mjmhs.18.s19.26

Keywords: Teenagers; Group Counselling; Transition Process, Shelter Home, Independent Living

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INTRODUCTION

'Where will you go after you reach 18 years old?'

This is a question that all children of shelter homes will have to answer. Some of them have no clue what to respond to, the age limit is reached, they have to leave the shelter and be on their own. The number of children entering shelter homes in Malaysia has been fluctuating in recent years. The record presented by the Department of Statistics Malaysia showed that the latest number of children going into children's homes for protection in 2017 was 1,096 cases, as compared to the number in 2016, with 1,166 cases, and 2015 with 1,111 cases (14). The recorded cases vary from each other in terms of the reasons for entrance. This is because children who entered the children's homes were admitted due to different cases of protection, namely, abandonment,

negligence, or low socioeconomic status, with short-term or long-term orders set by the court.

The Malaysia Child Act 2001 has set its guidelines for protecting the children within the institution to maintain the effective and caring management system (25). Those who grew up in the institutions live their lives without the care of biological parents and are nurtured around systems and rules within the confines of the Safety Place's Rules. Limited resources were found in shelter homes where the administrator and person in charge are the same people who act as the operation staff, warden, foster parent, and the children and adolescents suffer due to a lack of attention and support. This group of children and adolescents is believed to be identified as a vulnerable group of individuals as their living in the shelter home is involuntary and they need to find their own strengths, autonomy, and resiliency, in order for them to cope living with strangers. Lacking personal strengths, autonomy, and resiliency among adolescents may expose them to psychological disruptions in their developmental growth (7) (12). Without close supervision and proper guidance and incentives, adolescents are

easily exposed to disruptive behaviours and activities such as crimes and misdemeanors, escapism, violence, abuses (10) (23). Unfulfilled psychological needs, minimal adult guidance, and supervision may lead adolescents to acquire limited life skills and attract them to negative activities in their community (1) (7) (17).

Local media has highlighted the issues pertaining to adolescents' survival knowledge after being 'de-institutionalized'. The concerns are forwarded to policymakers to implement appropriate measures to make sure the adolescents are able to learn relevant skills for independent living, without which they could easily be inclined towards anti-social misconduct or worse, end up in jail (7) (21) (26) (37). This shows that the need to address this issue in Malaysia is imperative, as the improper transitioning out of shelter homes in Malaysia has deleterious consequences yet Malaysia still falls behind in terms of understanding, managing, and maintaining the welfare of the older adolescents in facing their transition-out process from the shelter home. It is essential to explore how adolescents in shelter homes have been struggling to go through the uncertain situations of reconstructing a life independently after years of living under close supervision by governmental administrators. Without appropriate mental, physical, social, financial, emotional, and spiritual preparation, adolescents could be associated with crimes or misconduct acts as described in previous studies conducted in western countries (5) (15) (35) (36). Literature exploring children staying in shelter homes due to abandonment cases is scarce in Malaysia. Abandonment in this study refers to adolescents staying in a shelter home due to having no family members or relatives outside the shelter. Definition of abandonment in this case derived from the Child Act 2017. Reasons for choosing these participants were due to their unique characters as compared to other children who reside in the shelter home due to negligence cases. Most of the children who stay there have legit parents or relatives to be their guardians; only limited years of staying are allocated by the court. Hence, upon release from the shelter home, they will go back to their parents' or relatives' homes while these participants are parentless and ought to be independent and find their own home when the date of release i.e. upon reaching 18 years old. Exploring their personal experiences in the transition process and readiness to emancipate from the shelter home would give a significant impact on the researchers to understand how they are adequately groomed by the administrators before leaving the shelter home and how the intervention programs can be developed for such kids who are still staying inside the shelter so as they have proper skills, knowledge, direction, guidelines, supports, and resources and most importantly acquired self-resiliency when they exit the shelter home. Hence, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of teenagers at shelter homes, and the challenges that they

go through in their transition-out process.

Schlossberg referred to variants of transition aspects of life that include the anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions, non-event transitions, relativity, context, and impact (16). The transition process experienced by adolescents from the welfare system would be different from that of ordinary adolescents emerging into the adult phase of life. The majority of adolescents who grew up in welfare institutions showed similar characteristics including complex and unpredictable processes that affected their wellbeing in general. Some have claimed that those adolescents tend to be fast learners of independent living or are sometimes labelled as morphing into 'instant adulthood', as compared to their counterparts (18) (19).

Issues among adolescents living in welfare institutions are no different from other countries since the adult phase that adolescents go through is often considered a tumultuous stage. The journey the adolescents have to go through inside the institution may be different compared to adolescents living at home, particularly involving education and training opportunities, employability, accommodation, health, and well-being aspects (26). In addition, children living in the welfare institution or foster care placement suffer detrimental effects mainly related to cognitive conditions, socialisation skills, emotional wellness, health care, and academic performance (20). Several studies have shown that adolescents living in welfare institutions were found to experience a lack of self-governing skills, low employment opportunities, immaturity (19), repeated housing placements, law-breaking activities, lack of learning opportunities (3), financial restriction (38) and mixed feelings about learning (32). In Malaysia, some adolescents in children's homes have limited academic opportunities. It was identified that the academic achievement of the adolescents living inside residential institutions was degraded, which then affected their personal growth and emotional development (7). In other situations, scarce resources in preparing proper nutrition, accommodations, books, and clothes, have affected students' concentration and focus on studies and their overall health care (20). Experiences of children living in a welfare institution have been alarming in Malaysia. Mixed-method research was conducted with the pregnant adolescents' shelter home for rehabilitation purposes discovered that their aspects of well-being, thoughts, and feelings are the main concerns. The study showed that facing situations of intense conflicts that have contributed to emotional distress among adolescents, their main coping mechanism was receiving support from immediate family members and trusted residents in that place (33). Furthermore, emotional disturbances became significantly detrimental among children and adolescents who were living at several orphanage shelter homes in the northern part of Malaysia as they had experienced emotionally burdensome, obsession,

anxiety, and phobia (7). Additionally, victims with sexual abuse cases who had stayed for a certain duration in the rehabilitation institution mentioned that they faced difficulties to gain social support from the administrative staff and rarely received visits from their family members while living in the institution; and if they receive any support at all, it was paltry and inconsistent (1). It was found that social support is crucial throughout the developmental phase for adolescents, especially as a guide for their emotional regulation process and for coping (33) (34).

With reference to the earlier mentioned issues, the researchers believe that the proper development of modules could provide significant results in terms of their life skills, coping mechanisms, prevention of substance abuse, behavioural misconduct, dismissal from home, meaningless absurdity, accommodation arrangement, finances management, career planning and readiness towards tertiary education (8) (27). This is due to the reasons pertaining to factors and barriers to moving out that were reported to occur in the middle of the transition process, and adolescents would require alternative care and other appropriate alternatives to surmount those obstacles (36). It was found that factors that helped adolescents to be ready to integrate with the community are based on several ecological aspects, namely, age maturity, available support, educational opportunities, administrative assistance, policymaker, and individual criteria (15). These showed that alternative interventions for adolescents' exit policy need to be developed to ease their transition to adult life later. Preparing those adolescents into independent living with the purpose to minimise the risks has been one of the main goals of policymakers through ongoing support and guidance like those from mentoring programs such as Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) (8), Program Suai Kasih, and so forth.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative approach in ascertaining the lived experiences of the participants living at the foster home and the transition process. A phenomenological design was selected due to the exploration of specific events involving teenagers and their concerns about the transition-out process. The phenomenological aspect of living and the transition process were ascertained using Focus Group Discussions (FGD) in gathering information and sharing the participants' views, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings (13) (6). The group sessions were conducted five times (five group session meetings) hence the depths of the data are explored. Unlike other FDG, researchers take into consideration the psychological and emotional vulnerability of participants throughout the interview meetings.

Participants. The researchers recruited five participants for this study involving male and female teenagers for

the group. They were selected homogeneously with similar characteristics, namely a background check which includes no parental information, in the midst of the transition-out process from the shelter home, abandonment cases, and born in the same year (6). Five participants were recruited based on the homogenous criteria. Table I presents the details of the participants in this study.

Table I: Profile of participants

Participant profiles	Participants stories
M1	She lived at the shelter home with her two younger brothers. Their mother has died but they could not track the father's whereabouts. She managed to complete her primary and secondary school and aimed to own a bakery shop one day. She hopes they could live together once again in their own house and find their happiness as a family unit.
Age: 17-year-old Gender: Female Religion: Islam Duration: 13 years Reason: Abandonment	
A1	He entered the shelter home due to abandonment; he was found alone in an abandoned house without an adult guardian. He completed his primary and secondary school and aimed to work to support his living after he was released from the shelter home. He did not have a concrete plan to pursue his study upon leaving the shelter home; however, he had the intention to pursue his study in Islamic studies.
Age: 17-year-old Gender: Male Religion: Islam Duration: 17 years Reason: Abandonment	
FK1	He entered the shelter home due to abandonment; he was found in the hospital without a guardian. Due to documentation issues, he could not complete his schooling. His nationality is unknown. He had the intention to run his own restaurant one day; he plans to work in the restaurant and learn how to be a cook.
Age: 17-year-old Gender: Male Religion: Islam Duration: 17 years Reason: Abandonment	
F1	She entered the shelter home due to abandonment; limited information about the reason for staying in the shelter home was gathered. She was able to attend both primary and secondary school and plan to learn about fashion or work in a boutique after leaving the shelter home. She has no specific aim to continue her study but she has a high interest in learning languages.
Age: 17-year-old Gender: Female Religion: Islam Duration: 17 years Reason: Abandonment	
D1	He entered the shelter home due to abandonment; limited information about the reason for staying in the shelter home was gathered. He completed primary and secondary school and planned to continue his study in welding. This is because he had the intention to work in car manufacturing factories or oil and gas companies as he has a high interest in welding.
Age: 17-year-old Gender: Male Religion: Islam Duration: 17 years Reason: Abandonment	

Group counselling (Focus Group). A semi structured group counselling proposal and interview protocol were vetted by the internship supervisor for approval. The proposal uses the IIUM format (31) following the suggested standard components (11). Researchers who were also registered counsellors took note of every

emotional reaction expressed by the participants and would ensure an appropriate psychosocial support be given to the participants should they display any signs of the emotional breakdown in the midst of group interviews. The number of participants is limited to five (5) in order to get ample opportunity for all participants to share their experiences more in depth which is required for qualitative research (13) (6) (28). Moreover, this is the right range of group counselling size based on the guidelines suggested (11). The group counselling was designed to focus on a specific topic that was in line with the objectives of the FGD for the research study in order to gather rich qualitative data. It also helped to offer a sequential approach of interview protocols for researchers hence facilitated researchers throughout the discussion by having the wide scope of protocol elements. The five series of group counselling were created based on the basic framework of the existential theory (11) (39) in counselling as the group process explored the participants' personal meanings of living in the shelter home. Each group session was allocated around 1.5 to 2 hours. The first and second group sessions were focusing on their living and challenges involving the transition process from the shelter home. Reflections on the group were done in the final session to gather their general views, feelings, and feedback about group counselling. Group counselling as part of the approach in the focus group discussion was utilised with the intention to provide appropriate support for the participants who participated in the research and act as a way for them to share and express their concerns and feelings about the issues (30). Researchers include the interview protocols in the module of group counselling. Among the factors used for this research include existential factors, catharsis, imparting information, instillation of hope, group cohesiveness and interpersonal learning. Therapeutic forces are developed to discover and understand the distinctive roles of in-group psychotherapy and are facilitative for psychological issues. Forces involved in the therapeutic change in the group psychotherapy are inclusive of installation of hope, universality, imparting information, altruism, the corrective recapitulation of the primary family group, development of socialising techniques, imitative behaviour, interpersonal learning, group cohesiveness, catharsis and existential factors (39). Using an existential approach for groups in discovering the challenges, setting of meaning of life, group support and psychoeducation, these support the 4 stages of group counselling that usually involve initial stage transition, working and consolidation/ termination stage (11) (39). To explore the major concerns of participants, among the questions posted as the interview protocols include:

- a. How has your life been at the foster home?
- b. How do you see yourself living in the foster home?
- c. What are the challenging parts about living at the home in preparing for independent living?

d. What does it mean to start a new life?

Data Collection. The researchers prepared a module and semi-structured interview protocol that acted as a guide for focus group discussion (Figure 1). Interview protocol and group activities that are set as guidelines assisted the researchers to ask participants further questions and elaborating on the issues based on the research questions identified for this research (30) (31) (13). The product activities and interview responses provided by the participants were audio-taped, transcribed and kept in the personal folder by researchers.

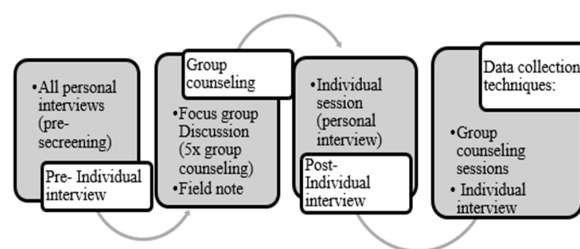


Figure 1: Data collection flow process

Data Analysis. This research utilised thematic analysis in generating themes and sub-themes that were extracted from the significant responses shared by the participants (9). Stages involved in the analysis include familiarity with the data, generating initial codes, looking for themes, reviewing themes and defining and naming the themes. Themes and sub themes were generated by authors and verified by two qualitative readers (expert reviewer) before they were finalised. Members' checks (with participants) were also done for qualitative validity, rigour and worthiness purposes. This was done during the consolidation / concluding session whereby the points gathered were pointed and shared with the participants.

FINDINGS

Mainly, teenagers stayed in shelter homes due to several causes, such as abandonment, abuse, negligence, and many others listed in the Malaysia Child Act 2017. Specifically, this research recruited members with similar backgrounds and cases in order to explore their lived experiences as they transition through their adolescent years at the shelter home.

Challenges in the transition-out process

Looking at the challenges faced by the participants in the group discussions, several themes were derived from the participants. The themes and sub-themes that are discussed by the participants include relationships that are established between participants and others, lacking life skills and competencies and mixed feelings about their transition-out process into independent living.

Theme One: Relationship

Participants who live at the shelter home either live alone or together with their siblings until they reach 18 years of age. Hence their life will be filled with many friends and people coming in and out of the place. Following are themes and sub-themes derived from the relationship issues with siblings, friends, staff and outsiders.

a) Cat-and-dog relationship with siblings

Not all foster home admitters get into the place together with their siblings. Siblings staying at the same foster home often do not get along with each other. However, despite having a conflicting relationship with her siblings, M1 occupied her time doing activities and discussing her plans about independent living with her male siblings.

"...I do have the courage to re-do but I don't want to meet my brother because later I will get angry. I do not like to be scolded. When he is angry, I will do like I'm also a fierce person, and then I'll tell him I don't want to be scolded...during exams, my brother will encourage me to do well. He nags about the difficulty of getting a job now..." (M1)

"...I would only discuss with my second brother only. Then when my little brother comes then I will join him playing. Then later my brother gets angry, I'll come to him back to continue discuss..." (M1)

b) Relationship with friends

With the exception of M1, other participants found that they treasured friendship at the shelter home, since they shared most of the activities and their problems, as well. Strangely enough, their feeling towards friendship is tinged with distrust, as depicted by M1 and F1, who cast different roles on friends, associating them with dissimilar feelings.

"...I don't trust my friends, not even once. I cannot trust anyone. I only trust my siblings because they won't betray me" (M1)

"...I want to go shopping with my friends or my family. Later I want to take pictures with famous artists out there..." (F1)

c) Relationship with the staff of shelter home

Staff refers to someone who is in charge of monitoring and managing the children's welfare inside the shelter home. In addition, the relationship between the staff and participants were indicated as significant, according to D1 and M1.

"...they teach me, buy me stuff that I want and they take care of me..." (D1)

"...later when my brothers are released, I'm not sure I want to go to a foster home for whom. Maybe I can do

it for Miss Is because I do not have any issue with her. Other officers are all mean. I do not like them. Miss Is is the kindness, the most meaningful for me..." (M1)

"...all the while to reach my dreams, I get the support from the officers. He encouraged me. Many staff also support me. He asks me to have trust in myself..." (D1)

d) Relationship with outsiders

M1, F1 and D1 disclosed that they looked for help and advice from people outside the shelter home when faced with difficulties and confusion. Relationships established between participants and outsiders were strengthened, and they would provide the participants with advice, direction and information during formal and less formal sessions. Among the outsiders mostly mentioned by participants were their school teachers and members of the visitor's board.

"...Sir will teach me...but if Sir is not available I can go and meet teacher, teacher S, a school teacher. Teacher S said if I have any problem, go, and find her" (M1)

"Teachers gave good support" (D1)

"Sir will always be with us...Sir often takes us out together..." (F1)

Theme Two: Lacking of life skills and competencies
Acquisition of life skills and competencies in related aspects were limited in terms of opportunities while living at the foster home. This is due to several constraints such as trainers, budget allocations and other aspects. Participants complained about having limited access to learning specific life skills and exposure to new environments.

a) Learning different culture

F1 and M1 shared their interest in travelling after their release from the shelter home. Though they differ in their purposes for travelling, they mutually agreed that travelling could give them additional insight into arts and culture. As they have limited opportunities to learn about other cultures at present, knowing about other cultures would give them a better understanding of what is being talked about universally in social media.

"...my hope is that I want to learn English and to travel to Korea, USA. To go to that famous place Jeju Island. I want to learn their culture" (F1)

"...I want to go travelling and bring my brother to Japan. Lots of animation there and he would like it. I am able to explore other kinds of animation that my brother will be interested in and the course that he wants to learn. To make him competent. I will support his interest..." (M1)

b) Financial management skills

Participants addressed their concerns on managing money wisely and it was repeatedly shared in the group discussions. Although the participants were aware that one way of managing money is by listing down the items before buying, they lack any clear plan on budgeting and prioritising their personal expenditures.

"I'll manage my money wisely and before buying anything, I'll decide which stuff that I want. Put it in the list but I seldom use the list, I used to think first what I need to buy..." (A1)

"Hundred that I have will be used to buy soap, others, clothes, shoes, diary. I like to scramble and write. I will express my feelings when I am sad, happy, fierce, I will write. I don't like to share it with people since they will tell others about it..." (F1)

"...ways to save money for example if we receive a salary worth RM 1000 and more, my brother advises to keep RM 50 for saving and use it for emergencies..." (M1)

c) Self-regulation skills

Lack of opportunity to learn the skills to regulate oneself has made the participants deficient in life skills that are basic to adult living like making plans, banking transactions and many others.

"I don't know how to own a house, buy a car. I need to learn it. Over here, I cannot buy all these things, receive different treatment..." (FK1)

"If possible I want to have a house near to Shah Alam stadium. But, just like M1, I don't know how to withdraw money from the bank..." (FK1)

"My brother said my plan has no support. Support means back up. He said if I choose this way, I have no plan B to back it up and it is easier for others to take advantage of me..." (M1)

d) Limited working experiences

Working opportunities also have become limited at the shelter home. According to M1, F1, and A1, they are constrained by the regulations and protection protocols, thus limiting their chances to acquire working experiences while they are at the shelter home.

"...if possible I want to try out and find a job vacancy. I want to experience going to the shop and ask 'is there any vacancy here?' I want to ask her myself because I am afraid when I grow up later I will have no confidence to enter the shop and ask 'is there any vacancy?'" (M1)

"I need to attend a job interview, find a job vacancy. First, I want to work at the café, learn to bake cookies. I want to find a job vacancy at the boutique, become a boutique assistant..." (F1)

"...in the future, I want to learn how to own a café. So the best way to make sure it happens is to learn how to run a café..." (M1)

"...I want to work at PSBD. I want to work with the department and find the experience" (A1)

e) Decision-making process

Making decisions under the supervision and guidance of an older adult may be easy for some teenagers. According to M1, limited guidance from others had hindered her from proper planning and decision-making for herself; she expressed her feeling about her direction, thus:

"I have thought of this thing, but I cannot find the way to solve it because I've no experience to deal with this all. I often think that way and that is what makes my brother always mad at me..." (M1)

Theme Three: Mixed feelings

Different experiences trigger different sorts of feelings in each individual. Participants shared several feelings associated with their past experiences and anticipated future independent life. Mixed feelings discussed by the participants include feelings of sobriety, worry and missing their loved ones.

"My hope in the future is to find where my father is and where my mother's grave..." (M1)

"I feel like I want to be released much later. I've missed this place already..." (D1)

"...thinking of being released from here made me keep thinking about my cat. Where to throw him away..." (FK1)

"For me, when my cat died last time, I didn't eat about a week because I was so sad" (M1)

"I've lost my mother; I've lost my father. My mother is no longer here. My father is still alive, not gone but I have no idea where he is..." (M1)

We have considered foster parents like our own mothers. The closest one is mama L. I've considered mak M to be my mother too" (F1)

DISCUSSION

This study explored the overall concerns and strategies among teenagers as they transition towards independent living. Some of the challenging experiences discussed by the participants relate to the risks and uncertainties of relationships encountered, confusion and mixed feelings, and overwhelming emotional experiences while staying in the shelter home. These findings will be of interest to social workers, counsellors or psychologists, and shelter home administrators in order to propose newly

developed modules for the preparation towards the transition process for the adolescents. Moreover, other professionals, researchers, policymakers and related agencies might be of interest with the findings gathered in order to collaborate and expand further findings relating to issues and challenges of the adolescents therefore current system administration of shelter homes are reviewed and improved.

Relationship issues involving communication barriers between adolescents and their guardians were found to be consistent with a previous study (7). Another study pointed to the issue of the restriction imposed by rules that are executed with the purpose of inculcating a positive attitude among the children (23) (29). Findings gathered from this study also highlighted the nature of living conditions and issues encountered by the adolescents throughout their stay in the shelter home. These findings also highlighted the challenges and anticipated concerns they may be facing after transitioning out from the place. These findings seem similar to the by (26) (10) in relation to child's spectrum of well-being and living of children inside residential care in one of the shelter homes in Malaysia.

However, findings from this study also highlight the struggles faced by the participants in terms of growth and skills they are facing which then contributed to be the life problems they will be facing after leaving the shelter home, namely financial matters or adjustment to cross-cultural differences. The lack of competencies or skills will be difficult for the adolescents when it is a required skill that they will be using upon employment and socialisation. The detrimental effect caused by such factors from a previous placement may be affecting cognitive, social, social, health, and academic wellness as per discussed by (20) (15). Similarly, findings from previous studies were shown in this study in terms of interpersonal relationship issues that occurred between participants and the people surrounding them (17) (22) (23).

Contrary to the previous study, other studies found that the relationship between siblings, caregivers and residents was positively enhanced with the appearance of immediate family members (1) (26) (33). However, consistent with previous studies, issues on career direction and tertiary education were found among adolescents in foster care (26); evidently, inadequate guidance on these issues has led to improper decision-making among the teenagers, resulting in complications involving physical stability, mental wellness, and behavioural concerns, after transitioning out from state care (24). This study was found to be consistent with previous research which indicated that preparation regarding personal necessities, particularly on finance and expenditure, was of paramount importance (32) (8) (27). However, this study found strong bonding occurred between participants and siblings, which was dissimilar

to previous studies that found adolescents in foster care had difficulties connecting with a sibling or biological families (34). This is tallied with the insights gained with regards to adolescents in foster care facing several placements, legal issues, lack of learning opportunities (3) (20), financial limitations (32) and mixed feelings (38).

The dreams and hopes shared by the participants were discussed with reference to the findings by (34), concerning the resilience of adolescents in adjusting and coping with living conditions outside the town and sustaining their safety and security living alone. Similarly, it is indicated that adolescents with weaker self-esteem and self-efficacy will face coping difficulties when they are out on their own, without solid preparation physically, mentally, and behaviorally (24). Arnett coined the term "emerging adult" to depict the transition phase from late adolescence going into early adult life, which demands shouldering great responsibilities in life, and unlike other adolescents, teenagers from shelter homes are forced to enter into instant adulthood and learn to adapt and cope with living independently faster than their counterpart (4). Proper group modules involving guidance, activities, programs, and module development were recommended by several studies (27) (8), in order to assist the adolescents in orphanage homes to be able to learn how to cope with challenges, prevent substance abuse and illicit activities, and establish healthy relationships (31). In sum, as teenagers in shelter homes grow positively in terms of developments similar to their counterparts, however, social and psychological developments may be different for them as those aspects of development require continuous support and resources for them to meet the ends.

CONCLUSION

From this finding, issues on relationships, lacking of skills, competencies and mixed feelings were discussed entirely by the teenagers. They shared generally the existing challenges that they confront while living inside the shelter home and anticipated the challenges that they would face when they transitioned out.

The findings could shed light and assist governmental organisations like the Social Welfare Department (e.g. JKM), the state religious department (e.g. Jakim, JAIS), and the National Registration Department to initiate proper modules for teenagers residing in shelter homes. Among the appropriate actions that can be implemented would be to have adequate support personnel to assist the children and teenagers in fulfilling their basic needs in terms of establishing meaningful relationships. Having a meaningful relationship with staff or foster parents would ensure that the teenagers gain appropriate guidance from the adult figures that they trust. In addition, relevant coaching programs to enhance skills and competencies on basic know-how of financial management, savings and banking procedures, and planning personal cash

flow, would be useful to prepare the teenagers to be self-reliant and self-efficacious.

These sorts of guidance and coaching would go a long way to enhance their financial literacy and social – cross cultural competency so that they might not end up recklessly splurging their hard-earned cash on inessential luxuries; they would, in fact, learn the precious habit of delaying gratification, to cultivate the virtue of self-discipline and start saving and planning their money wisely. Meanwhile, modules from the religious department could assist the teenagers to instil and strengthen their spiritual and religious aspects through carefully designed programs and activities based on the religious based guidelines to consolidate their religious belief and faith while living independently outside the shelter home. Strong religious faith and rituals would be helpful for coping and facilitate them to make wise life choices without neglecting their religious belief.

Furthermore, in regards to identity registration, the National Registration Department could assist the teenagers without appropriate national identity records to go through their challenges by providing them with proper documentation, particularly their identity and personal records and to ease their journey in independent living.

Implication of the findings towards counselling would be best for module formulation for adolescents as part of the 'exit-policy' plan of actions. Since the respective participants and other participants as well are yet to be categorised to be youth, guidance and preparation in terms of emotional and psychological should be given so that they could be mentally prepared for the challenges they will be facing upon leaving the shelter home without the appearance of any immediate significant others in their life. The module of group counselling can be part of significant programs in the shelter home to be completed by participants while living there hence the shelter home within government jurisdiction is highly looked up to by the community in terms of taking care of these adolescents' psychological and physical welfare.

Recommendations for future research can be expanded in terms of the variety of research designs, including the longitudinal approach, case study approach, narrative interview and grounded theory, with the aim to understand the phenomenon extensively. Further exploration on the issues is needed to understand other issues and concerns regarding living on their own outside the shelter home. A deep understanding of the challenges faced by the teenagers may assist the professional to develop a validated and reliable module to prepare the teenagers on how to face the challenges wisely and confidently. In a nutshell, it is the obligation of the community, society and relevant parties to assume the responsibility to assist the teenagers in going through the challenges and issues with close guidance

and supervision, thus steering them away from getting involved with unhealthy activities or legal issues, once they are outside the confines of the shelter home, alone and unguided.

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