PROCEEDINGS BOOK

of

International Conference on Psychology in Health, Educational, Social, and Organization Settings

Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, 21-23 November 2013

“Psychology in Changing Global Contexts”

Faculty of Psychology
Universitas Airlangga
PROCEEDINGS BOOK
International Conference on Psychology in Health, Education, Social and Organizational Settings (ICP-HESOS)
“Psychology in Changing Global Contexts”

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Publisher:
Unit Penelitian dan Publikasi (UP3)
Psychology Faculty Universitas Airlangga

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First Edition:
2013, 1015 pages. 15 X 21 cm
ISBN: 978-979-99555-7-9

Printed by:
Psychology Faculty Universitas Airlangga
Printed in: Surabaya, Indonesia

All articles in the proceedings of International Conference on Psychology in Health, Education, Social and Organizational Settings (ICP-HESOS) year of 2013 are not the official opinions and standings of editors. Contents and consequences resulted from the articles are sole responsibilities of individual writers, and it is protected by the law
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# TABLE OF CONTENT

Remarks from Rector of Universitas Airlangga ....................................................................................... i
Remarks from Dean of Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Airlangga ................................................... ii
Remarks from The Technical Committee Chair ..................................................................................... iii
Foreword from The Scientific Committee ............................................................................................. iv

**Key Note Speakers**

1. How to Discover Real Emotional Reaction to Advertising about Using Biometric Measurements in Advertising Testing (*Dominika Maison*) .................................................................................. 1
2. CxO Global Studies - Leading large scale Organizational Transformation (*Hora Tjitra*) ............... 8
3. Positive Ageing means Ageing well for both Self and Others (*Sik Hang Ng*) ............................... 9
4. Collaborative Problem Solving (*Esther Care*) ...................................................................................... 16

**Participants**

5. Psychological Concerns of Malaysian Gifted Learners: Implications toward School Counseling Services (*Abu Yazid Abu Bakar, Noriah Mohd Ismail*) ................................................................................. 21
6. Literature Review of Psychological Capital And Employee Engagement (*Aditya Nanda Priyamati*) ................................................................................................................................. 27
7. Parental Involvement and Mathematics Ability in Elementary Students (*Hazira Qadezy*) ........... 33
8. The Relation Between Minding in The Enhancement of Closeness With The Marital Adjustment on Soldier’s Wife (*Hendra Prakoso, and Akbar Fajri*) .................................................. 39
9. Effectivity of Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Young Adult Women with Chronic Insomnia (*Theosophia Nathas, Puspita Cintaningtyas, Henry E. Wirawan, and Denrich Syuradi*) .................. 43
10. The Relationship of Emotional Maturity and Conformity with Verbal Aggression (*I Gusii Ayu Agung Noviakayati, Arief Nurtjahyo*) ................................................................. 49
11. Relationship between Conformity and Solidarity with Attitude of Menyambraya on Balinese (*Nyoman Angga Wirana, Chittra Dhyana Prasmatari, I Gusti Ngurah Dwiputra Widianta, Ariasa Handoko Pratama, Nicholas Sinarmata*) ........................................... 55
12. Students’ Perceptions and Expectations of The Tutor against Student Motivation and Learning Outcome Improvement (*Ameha Febriani, Ika Safariani, Moh Zainuri, and Sulkah*) .................. 58
13. Intrapreneurship and Demographic Factors in The Teaching Profession (*Jimmy Ellya Karmawan*) .... 64
14. Marital Satisfaction, Communication Patterns, and Couple Map Perceived by Balinese Women in Their Marriage (*Made Diah Lastari*) ............................................................................. 69
15. The Effects of a Token Economy System to Decrease Disruptive Behaviors of Children with Visual Impairment (*Maria Heden Suprapti, and Febi Ayu Mayangwati*) ................................................... 75
16. The Influence of Self Control Training to The Level of Internet Addiction in College Students (*Ena Krisnawati, and Mira Aisyah Rachawati*) ........................................................................ 81
18. Linguistic Experiences of Adult Dyslexic Learners (*Ariel E. San Jose*) ............................................. 93
20. Psychological Well Being Reviewed Of Single Types and Sexes (*Nanik, Harianti Hartianti, Yohana Christie, and Dewy Muliyono*) ..................................................................................... 105
21. Effectiveness of Music Therapy in Lowering of Postpartum Depression (*Rabu Istal APranti, and Ratna Syifa’Ar Rachmahono*) ....................................................................................... 110
23. Involvement in School Extracurricular Activities And Soft Skills: A Comparative Analysis Between Students Interested And Not Interested In School Extracurricular Activities (Mohamad Ahmad)

24. Profiling Facebook Users: Who is The Open-attentive User in Facebook? (Rahman Ardi, and Dominika Mabon)

25. Evaluation of Stress and Coping Styles in Patients with Metabolic Syndrome in Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia (Nor Fadhilah Abdullah, Radziiah Mohd Fauzi, and Sakinah Harith)

26. Corporate Culture, Perspectives on Theory and Practice, Compare and Contrast Indonesia and The Netherlands (Nugroho Dwi Priyohadi)

27. The Mapping of Aggression Causal Factors on Political Party Participants (RR. Amanda Puscai Rini, Astrid Lingkar Mandas, and Wafiy Sefiah)

28. Gender Differences in SCD Crises: Implications for Genetic Counseling and Psychotherapy (Olubawoyin Olumepin)

29. Psychosocial and Medical Intervention toward Pregnant Woman in Order to Understand the Mental and Physical Defect of Newborn Baby (Rufus Patty Wutu, Maximus Biae Dae, and Petrus Yulis)

30. What Happened When Suicide Trial Occurred (Sarah Kartika Prajwi, Razi Prajwi, Risvandi Dwi Setyawati, Ahmad Sulthan H, and Sri Krismonthaya)

31. A Comparative Study of Marital Satisfaction Between Indonesian and Chinese Wives (Sri Wahyuningsih, Nurlika Endah Karunia, Hildha Prajwi, Tasya Muhdhaq, and Qiong Cao)

32. Employee’s Satisfaction Impact on Employee’s Performance: The Case of Fan Industry from Pakistan (Tasya Muhdhaq, Ma Jianhong, Muhammad Saleem, and Muhammad Ashraf)

33. Correlational Study of Anxiety Level and Sleep Disorders Among Medical Students in Bali Approaching Examination (Tri Eka Carina, Ida Ayu Gede Huri Dhara Sasmita, and Nicholas Simaron)

34. Meaning of ‘Science’ and ‘Religion’ Related to Indigenous Knowledge of Human Origin and Life Course Among Indonesian and Chinese Student (Tommy, and Ganesh Bayaua Putra, Qianwen Wu, Xinjiao Wang, and Wara Anggara)

35. Life Satisfaction in Multicultural Society: Effects of Ethnic Diversity of Social Network and Ethnic Density (Margaretha, and Wilia Vottorbergh)

36. Gender and Attachment to Mother Predict Adolescent’s Pride (Felicia Anindita S. Purri, Fitriana Rinta Ferdian, Cornelia Sintis Widyatmoko, and Elizabeth Haksa Mayawati)

37. The Effect of Training Program of Kader Pos Panti to Enhance Emergent Literacy Development through Dialogic Reading Activity (Tri Puji Astuti)

38. The Use of Self-Management Strategy to Increase Self-Regulated Learning in the New Students of Psychology Faculty at Airlangga University (Aji Bagas Priyamboe)

39. Appreciative Inquiry to Increase Employee Engagement (Roven Aryunia)

40. Depiction of Physical Disability Worker (Danela Mordias, and Joella Maria Ferkiana)

41. The Effect of Daily Activities and Money Spent Toward Happiness among Teenagers Living in Slum Areas (Meta Zohro Aurelia, Achmad Chusriar, and Rizky Amelia Zehn)

42. Decision Making Styles among Account Officer Based On Risk Attitude and Salesperson’s Customer Orientation (Rosyanty Puspita Aditya, and Fendy Suhariadi)

43. Islamic Education: The Philosophy, Aim, and Main Features (Rosdottul Firdausi Binti Fatah Yasin, and Mohd. Shoh Jami)

44. Enhancing the Quality Performance through Training Method in Floating Health Center KM. Mook Manna Bulan District West Kutar (Erminda Erisma)

45. Stressors, Manifestations, Self-Management Styles and Communal Support Groups among Metropolis Singles: A Basis for a Proposed Human Resource Quality Of Life Enhancement Program (Domino Obana Barcarce)

46. Problem-Solving Therapy to Reduce Emotional Distress on Cancer Patients Who Undergoing Chemotherapy (Phebe Illenia Suryadina, and Nurid Harina)

47. Study Styles of Conflict Management and Self-Efficiency with Burnout among Principals of Governmental Schools (Aida Mehdar, and Hanina Halmatus Saradijah Hamon)

124

131

141

151

156

162

175

180

184

188

198

298

214

216

223

233

240

249

255

260

265

274

278

286

291
48. Potency and Problems of Kemuning (Indonesian Apprentice in Japan) Towards Independence (Cholita Haeri, Dimas Argo, Tika Miyafahli, Irwan Putri Bethaizah, Uthina Estian) ................................................. 296
49. Description of Adolescents Resilience Who Live in Prone Areas to Occur Human Trafficking (Dany Effendi, and Ike Herdiana) ................................................................. 300
50. Self-Efficacy in Entrepreneurship Among The Students (Dewi Mamatnunah, Nursi Sih Widianti, Putri Aquarismawati) ................................................................. 305
51. The Relationships Among Ethnic Prejudice, Centripetal-Centrifugal Tendencies and Interpersonal Attraction Native Children toward Chinese (Dyana Evita Sianti) ............................................................... 311
52. What Are Men's Characteristics That Make Women Attracted? A research about men's physical attractiveness according to women in Jakarta: a pilot study (Edward Anrdiyanto, Gisca Syualindi, and Sotila Tioi) ................................................................. 318
53. Effect of Exercise on Patient with Diabetes Mellitus: A Case Study of a Patient with Type 2 Diabetes (Andreea Kusumowardani, and Firmano Adi Nurcahyo) ................................................................. 323
54. Preparation of The Happiness Module to Improve the Quality of Life of The Odapan in Syamsi Daha Foundation Bandung (Farida Cerdias, and Milda Yanuwarani) ................................................................. 327
55. Training Design to Stimulate Application of Clarity Standard on the Elements of Thinking to Improve Quality of Response (Fida Nirmala Nugrahita) ................................................................. 333
56. Hope of the Student from Divorced Family (Nur aini Azka) ................................................................. 341
57. Indonesian Youth Micro Expression On Premarital Sexual Behavior Topic (Fransiska Linda Suwolwati, Christ Billy Aryanto, Amadele Wenas, Anissa Arrindita, Michael Kendo, and Vinaentia Arrinatha) ................................................................. 345
58. Relationship Between Organizational Culture and Competence With Employee Performance - Survey in the Office of Tanjung Perak Port Authority (Innyanur Robbani) ................................................................. 350
59. Coping Strategies To Satisfied Psychological Needs Women With Postpartum Depression (Istiqomah, Latipun, and Cahyaning Sugiyono) ................................................................. 358
60. A School-Based Radio Program in Psychology: A Phenomenological Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses (Dan Albert D. Merai, and Juan Victor P. Pastiscal) ................................................................. 365
61. Description of Adolescent Sexual Behavior Associated With Increased Of Human Trafficking Cases In East Java A Pre-Eliminary Study (Rethro Ayu Astrini, Ike Herdiana) ................................................................. 371
62. The Importance of Smile And Laughter: A Physical Sign of Happiness to Promote A Good Health Condition of Patients Suffering From Any Kind of Disease (Rafiu Puspi Wunin, Maximus Blaelc, Petrus Yuliis, and Wilibaldus Daninggara) ................................................................. 378
63. Pattern Quality Relation Between Leader and Member In A Team (Elly Yulikari) ................................................................. 382
64. The Exploration Study About College Adjustment of Freshmen (Russeno Arjanggi) ................................................................. 387
65. The Difference of Meaning of Work Between Chinese and Indonesia Employees and its Effect on Work Engagement and Workaholism (Rui Yong, Jianhong MA, Chuncao YANG, Friksen Christian, Karma Indra, Risna Tiara, Sus Budiharto, Retno Kumolohadi, and Siti Hadjar Nurla Istiqomah) ................................................................. 392
66. Balance Relationship in Parent Marriage, Parenting Effectiveness, Deviant Peers and The Tendency of Externalizing Behavior on Adolescents (Sliti Attiyatul Fahrii) ................................................................. 401
68. The Effect Of Social Stories On The Pragmatic Communication Skills Of Children With Asperger Syndrome (Sheila Tanwidy, and Anisa Karika) ................................................................. 414
69. Psychological Dynamic In Gay's Practicing Heterosexual Relationship (Hangga Diputra) ................................................................. 419
70. Psychological Conditions of Junior School Students Who Will Participate in Scholastic Aptitude Test in Surabaya (Ahmad Fauzy, Mufidatul Husna, Mochamad Dahlan, and Tanfus Syahwan) ................................................................. 426
71. Trust, Intercultural Competence and the Influence of Perceived Cultural Distance of Indonesians and Americans in China (Alexander Scott English, and Ma Jianhong) ................................................................. 433
72. Social Interaction on Gifted Child (Alisa Nurfatih) ................................................................. 441
73. Cross-Cultural Emotion Recognition of Angry and Happy Face between China and Indonesia samples (Yudiarso, A., Herdianto, CR) ................................................................. 447
74. The Self-Readiness of Junior High School Students Facing Academic Aptitude Test (A.A.A. Intan Kemala P., Andri Sukristyono, Fadhilah Rahmatati, and Hernawan B.) ................................................................. 452
75. Factors Influencing Individual Performance in An Indonesian Government Office That Carries On Bureaucratic Reformation (Azizatul Munawwarah, Corina DS, Rianoputri) ................................................................. 456
76. Student Coping Strategy Based On Personality Type, Learning Style And Gender (Niken P. and Muhammad Riza) .............................................................................................................. 461
77. The Influence Of Teacher's Determination On Curriculum 2013 Toward The Teacher's Performance Of SMP Negeri 10 Surabaya (Nadya, Suhung Muna, Agung Adi Rianto, and Asiyah Fadjawati) .................................................................................................................. 468
78. A Literature Review on Developing Reading Kiosk Concept for Nurturing Reading Habit among Youth (Mirahida Binti Murad, Masror Bin Ibrahim, Nurhayati Binti Abdul Malek, Fadziah Binti Abdullah, and Khairasy Syakirin Has Yun Hashim) .................................................................................................................. 473
79. Psychological Problem of Children Who Live in Poverty (Yuni Nurhamida) .................................................................................................................. 483
80. Teacher's Affective Commitment - A Study of High Schools and Vocational High Schools Teachers) (Umi Amugerah Izzati) .............................................................................................................. 487
81. Empathy and Bullying: A Meta-Analysis Study (Tri Rejeki) .................................................................................................................. 493
82. Family Support; An Overview to Protect Teens from Human Trafficking - A Preliminary Study (Sekar Kirana Hernianto, and Ike Herdiana) .............................................................................................................. 496
83. Factors Influencing Students' English Language Anxiety (Norshima, Z. S., Nur Hidayatul Husna, M., Ahmad Fahmi, and A. Annah Saayah, I.) .............................................................................................................. 502
84. The Relationship Between Self-Regulation and Career Planning of Balinese Teenage Girls (Ni Luh Arick Istriyanti, and Nicholas Sinarmata) .............................................................................................................. 510
85. The Impact of Self Development Education to the Self Esteem of the Students of Bina Nusantara University Jakarta (Frederikus Fios, Ch.Megawati Tirtawinata, and Marty Magda Pane) .............................................................................................................. 518
86. A Descriptive Study About Teacher's Level of Work Anxiety As A Result of The Policy of Teacher Rotation and Its Psychological Impact on Potentially Rotated Teacher In SMPN1 Surabaya (Devi Nurminindyah, Eva Indrasari, and Chandra Rohma Septin) .............................................................................................................. 524
87. Social Competency of Gifted Students Viewed From Parental Social Support (Supigati, Rini) .............................................................................................................. 532
88. Application of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to Reduce the Symptom of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in Young Adult (Silvina Eko, Henry E. Wirawan, and Sandi Karusami) .............................................................................................................. 538
89. The Relation between Communication Skill with Psychological Well Being for People with Hearing Loss (Sinta Yudistia Wisesunti Sojiyan) .............................................................................................................. 543
90. Effects of Different Types of Gender-stereotype Threat Activation on Letter Fluency Performance in Men and Women (Sri Wulanardi, Dommy Hendrawan, and Andi Supardi S. Koentury) .............................................................................................................. 548
91. Self Leadership in Students Who Working on Thesis (Nur Rachma Asyah Paturi) .............................................................................................................. 556
92. Self-report of Students Attending Counseling Class on Mindfulness Training (Caesilia JW, and Tohanis Franz La Kahija) .............................................................................................................. 560
94. What Causes Ego Depletion on Students? An Exploratory Study (Anna Undawarti) .............................................................................................................. 568
95. The Relationship Between School Formality Culture And Student Learning Style Towards Students Academic Achievements (Azizi Yahaya, Goooh Mo Lee, Halimah Mafid) .............................................................................................................. 575
96. Peer Acceptance and Self-Concept Were Reviewed From Degree of Disability & Quadriplegic Child Sex in Inclusions in A School Setting (Bibi Mulyana) .............................................................................................................. 582
97. "KEMBANG KUNCUP" An Alternative Model of Positive Body Image Promotion for Female College Student (Andrian Lien, and Cicilia Larasati Rembelen) .............................................................................................................. 588
98. The Analysis of Factors Influencing Depression in Madurese Teens Dynamics in The Framework of Social-Cultural Psychology-Madura (Diana Rahmasari) .............................................................................................................. 597
99. Driver Psychology: Character and Personhood of Selected Drivers of Dasmorinas, Cavit and Their Relations to Self-Actualisation (Enfracio Stoico Calderon Jr., and Ariane Bunaga Dimatidor) .............................................................................................................. 606
100. Shame Mediates Attachment and Submissive Behavior in Adolescents (Fiona V. Damani, Maria
Kristianti D. N. Widodo, Marlina Sutandak, and Cornelius Siswo Widjatmoko, and Elisabeth
Hakim Mayawati) .......................................................................................................................... 612

101. The Correlation Between Self-Focusing Person and Students Entrepreneurship in Surabaya
(Tuzzaahra Autia, Nurul Aini, and Cholochidul Haidi) .................................................................. 618

102. Developing New Norms of CFIT in Indonesia (Fitri Andriani and Prameti Pradna Paramita) .... 621

103. The Effect of Using SCAIPER and Sketching Ideas as Strategies in Developing Ability of Art
Creative Design of Students in Ninth Grade Level (Roem Thabet) .................................................. 624

104. Psychoeducation Effectiveness in Increasing Knowledge and Skill of Children Developmental
Early Detection among Posyandu Balita and PAUD Cadres in Puskesmas Pucang Sewu (Desy M.
Aditia, and Ika Yuniar Cahyani) .................................................................................................... 637

105. Psychology Class for Volunteers of Early Childhood Education in Surabaya for
increasing knowledge and skills of volunteer in early childhood education posts in East Java
(Endah Mastuti, Nurainy Faridhana, Margarethta, and Atika Dian Ariana) .................................... 643

106. Organizational Change in Airlangga University To Achieve World Class University (Fendi
Suhariadi, and Devi Syarijah) ........................................................................................................... 646

107. Relationship Between Peer Attachment and Adolescent Emotion Regulation of Boarding
School's Students SMA Negeri 10 Samarinda (Miranti Rasyl, and Devi Rino Sumana) ................. 653

108. Developing Story Learning Design through Self-Directed Learning Process by Teachers of Early
Childhood Care and Education (Rudi Cahyono) ................................................................................. 658

109. The Relation Between Religion and Cooperation In The Common-Pool-Resource Dilemma (Ke
Liao, Shixian Yu, Yidi Hong, and Peiwei Wang) ................................................................................ 664

110. Intervention Mapping: proposing a protocol of health promotion program to develop breast
cancer early detection program (Triana Kesuma Devi) ................................................................. 668

111. Understanding the Role of Job Satisfaction, and Leadership Style to Organizational Commitment
(Wusari L. H. Mangunjaya) .............................................................................................................. 674

112. The Relationship Between In A Just World And Spiritual Faith - in the context of cross-
cultural (Yuan Cheng, Xinxuan Shao, Yuqi Wang, Rahaju Soerdjono, Sukamto Monique) ............ 678

113. Knowledge And Implications Of Emotional Intelligence Towards Leadership Skills: An Analysis
On Employees In Public Sector (Siti Nurflaziah Abdullah and Zulkifli Abdul Latif) ......................... 682

114. Psychological Well-Being of Addiction Counselor in Rumoh Guntanyoe Banda Aceh (Cut Risika
Alina, Nuckie Yulandari Hayyan Nisa) ............................................................................................ 689

115. Distribution of Valence in Friendship Based on Twitter's Status Updates (Ichan Amanda, Roby
Muhammad, and Harry Susianto) ...................................................................................................... 692

116. Marital Satisfaction, Social Support, and Social Stress: A Cross Cultural Comparison Between
Indonesian and Chinese Wives (Nurlita Endah Karunia, Sri Wahyuningsih, Tayyiba Mushtaq,
Qiying Cao, Lu Xing, Hidha Pratiti) ............................................................................................... 700

117. Effectiveness of Behavior Modification with Self-Control Strategies On The Behavior of Tuak
Drinking (Erinda Mariahandy Manurung, and Rodulai Astenah Siregar) ........................................... 706

118. Wellbeing among Elderly in Indonesia and China (Sethasih Go, Jatiek Pudjihardjo, Rinka
Wijaya, Adi Satria Indramawan, Tayyiba Mushtaq, and Xuetao Chen; Xiaoyu Feng) .................. 710

119. Relationship Between Job Stress And Job Satisfaction of Employees in The Company X
(Felmary, and Sukma Rani Moerkordjono) ....................................................................................... 714

120. Body Dissatisfaction and Body Change Behaviors among Indonesian and Chinese College
Students (Monique Elizabeth Sukamto, Nurlita Endah Karunia, Jiaosheng Zhang, Shiyao Zhang,
and Sylvia Santoso) ......................................................................................................................... 719

121. Suicide and self-harm: agency and the shaping of social relations in southern Sri Lanka (Maurice
Said) ...................................................................................................................................................... 725

122. Correlation between Situational Strength and Conservation Values
with Authoritarianism in Civil Servant at Institution A (Triyo Utomo, and Santi’i) ................. 731

123. Occupational Stress, Job satisfaction, and Self-efficacy among Indonesian and Chinese
employees (Verina H. Secapramana, Tayyiba Mushtaq, Rikesh Guo, Yanlei Wang, and Nur
Parida Arifianti) .................................................................................................................................. 739

124. Quality of Work Life (Verina H. Secapramana, and Marsellus Sampe Tondok) ....................... 741
125. Problems and Needs of Counseling and Guidance Services in Hostel School Student in Sekolah Menengah Teknik Johor Bahru (Aziz Yahaya, Gooh Mo Lee, and Halimah Maalih) ........................................... 750
126. Different Perception of Working Relationship in Intercultural Working Team (Teng Shentu, Verina Halim, Jatie Kusmiati Kusna, and Jatie Kusmiati Kusna) ................................................................. 757
127. Cross Cultural Study About College Adjustment Study Of China & Indonesian College Students: “How Qualities Of Family Contribute Social Adjustment” (Seerjantori Rahaju, Alexander English, Uly Gusnarini, Anastasia Dewi, Jiang Jing Xin, Anita Verina, and Wen Xue Qi) ................................................................. 775
128. Effective Communication Training to Decrease Shyness on Immigrant Students in Surabaya (Endah Purwanti, Mariyani Husen, Nanik Chruma Sari, and Sapto Mevingsih) ......................................................... 780
Mothers' Acceptance Process Towards Impaired Children With Cerebral Palsy

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Abstract. This research examines acceptance process on mothers who have impaired children with cerebral palsy. Participants in this study are two mothers. Their children with cerebral palsy aged 12 and 14 years old, both live in Surabaya. Qualitative method with intrinsic case study was used to analyze both participants. The result indicates that coping strategy and social support play an important role in both mothers’ acceptance process. Differences in coping strategy and social support fulfillment though resulting in unique acceptance condition for each mother. There are other factors, internal and external factor which influence differences in coping strategy conditions thus resulting in mothers’ acceptance condition. Those internal factors are personality, religiosity, and value of having a child. Whilst, external factors are demographic and cultural background.

Keywords: acceptance, cerebral palsy, social support

INTRODUCTION

Not all mothers are blessed with normal children. Some of them are given children with special needs. Children fall on this category have several impairments, physical and/or cognitive. One of those special needs is cerebral palsy (CP). Cerebral palsy is a motoric disorder occur on the child due to brain damage before, during, or after labor. The brain damage affects motoric system resulting in insufficient coordination, poor balance, and abnormal movement pattern (Miller & Bachrach, 1995).

Cerebral palsy on children can be a significant stressor for a mother as the caregiver. Stressor comes from child’s condition is revealed by Vijesh and Sukumaran research (2007). From fifty mothers with CP children, 16 mothers were identified to have mild stress, 23 mothers are on moderate stress, and 11 are on high stress. Vijesh and Sukumaran continued, the most affecting factor in the stress is pessimistic views towards their children disability and problems appear within their family.

Almindag, Iscan, Koksal, Ercin, and Ege research (2007) on 52 mothers with CP children also found high level of depression and anxiety. Not only that, Sajedi, Alizard, Malekshosravi, Karimlou, and Vamegi (2010) on 43 mothers with CP children aged above 8 years old found that mothers with CP children on various types have a correlation with an increased on prevalence and severity level of depression symptoms.

Among mothers, it is common for them to deny or reject their children’s condition. It is stated by Geralis (1998) that a lot of parents continually deny their CP children’s condition. They keep hoping that their children do not have CP. It was supported by a survey (Zhang & Liu, 2010) on 26 mothers with CP children which showed that most mothers could not accept their children having CP. They added, stress adding factor is the lack of information about CP.

Acceptance itself is a stage which an individual realizing that nothing could be done to change a reality into something desired other than accept it (Ross, as cited in Davis, 2009). With that, author predicts that mothers need a coping strategy as a way to help them while taking care and nurturing their children with CP. It is also wished to help mothers on fully accepting their children.

Coping is a stress management process for a situation deemed as difficult or overbearing individual’s resources and a way to control environmental and personal condition (Lazarus & Launier, as cited in Ogden, 2007). Its main goal is to reduce stressor faced by individuals. Ogden (2007) explains that coping, in relation with stress context, reflects individuals means in interacting with stress and trying to be back normal. Author predicts if mothers’ coping are effective, it will help them to achieve
acceptance towards their children condition. In Pain research (1999), it showed majority of 20 parents, consisted of five pair of parents and ten mothers having children with certain disability, need other people to share their stories and to gain information as their emotional coping. Pain's research also showed parents need the presence of other people or it can be said social support is a coping as well.

Social support itself is a resources owned by someone to help them see that stressor they have is manageable (Ogden, 2007). In Heiman (2002) research, from 32 parents of children with special needs, most parents highlighted the need of social support and resources which would affect parental acceptance, optimism, realistic view towards children, and give positive affirmation for their children. This finding may express that social support is one of important factors needed by mothers to select coping strategy and to give positive impact on mothers' acceptance process towards their children condition with cerebral palsy.

Departed from those notions, in this research, author wants to reveal mothers' process in achieving acceptance towards their children condition with cerebral palsy. During the whole process, it can be asserted that coping strategy and social support play a big role. This changing an achieving process in acceptance will be observed in this research.

**METHOD**

This research uses case study approach with interpretive paradigm. Author wants to observe from mothers’ perspective on building meanings and understanding internal events within mothers for having children with CP. Thus, this research will not aim for generalization but on subjective meanings. Participants in this study are two mothers called ‘Fefe’ and ‘Fafa’ of impaired children with CP, both children aged 12 and 14 years old in Surabaya. Data gathering techniques were interview and observation to both participants and significant others.

Fefe is 39 years old woman, has Chinese ethnicity, and has three kids. The youngest are twin daughters and one of them is having CP. The CP was identified when she was 7 months old and it was caused by a severe seizure when she was on her third month. Fafa is 50 years old woman, has Chinese ethnicity, and has two kids. The older is a daughter while the younger one (10 years age gap) is a son. Her son was diagnosed with CP when he was six months old. Fafa was in Samarinda during that time.

**RESULT**

Fefe and Fafa have children with different types of CP. Fefe’s daughter has a hypotonic type marked with limp body and could develop to be spastic type. Hypotonic may also occur with seizure at any time. Fafa’s son has a spastic and anethetoid type. This type is marked with rigidity in body and facial muscle, difficulties in controlling movement, and speech. Fafa’s son cognitive ability can be classified as normal, equal to children at his age while Fefe’s daughter can be justified as non-functioning. Fefe’s daughter need more attention and extra care because at any time she could experience seizure and as much as possible it has to be avoided. Seizure will damage the brain functions further. On the other hand, Fafa’s son condition requires extra energy to carry her son for his mobility. This different characteristics of CP lead to a different acceptance stages. The following will be described how each mothers develop their acceptance on their children’s condition.

**Fefe and Her Social Cope**

Fefe’s daughter experienced a severe seizure when she was three months old. It caused a brain damage. Her daughter became regressed like a baby she was who could not do anything. Whereas before seizure, she could hold her head up. When it occurred, Fefe and her husband brought their daughter to a pediatric. The pediatric could not clearly explained her daughter’s condition but suggested therapies. That time, Fefe believed that through therapies and medication her daughter could recover. Day by day, Fefe spent her time by taking care of her daughter and it changed her life completely. She became restless and agitated because unknowingly the seizure attack could happen on her child. Fefe felt distressed, tired, and confused. Luckily, her husband accompanied her during those times. Fefe and her husband didn’t stay still and kept on looking for information about her daughter’s sickness and what kind of treatment can be given. Information gathering was done through Internet, seminar, and friends.

This information gathering by Fefe was a part of coping strategy. It is a coping approach with problem-focused coping goal. Big support from her husband made Fefe felt lighter. Her husband also said that he felt the need to support his wife.
Based on information gathered, Fefe and her husband had predicted that their child was impaired with CP due to similar characteristics. But, they didn’t dare to diagnose that because the doctor did say nothing. After looking for information from friends, Fefe and husband took the initiative to move the treatment to a doctor who specialize in handling children with special needs. From there, Fefe knew exactly that her daughter had CP and that time her daughter was 7 months old. After they knew it, they were not really surprised because they had the prediction before. Fefe still felt sad though but she could not runaway from the fact. Her daughter had CP. It took one month for Fefe to process herself to be open with her daughter’s condition. She was supported by her husband and her own character that is open to unwanted things in her life.

Various therapies underwent for her daughter. Fefe even bought an expensive supporting tools. She bought an immensely expensive medicine to control the seizure. All those medications are within reach because Fefe’s economic is considered as middle-up. She lives also in a big city which makes any current medications accessible. Fefe also was supported by her husband and her mother while taking care of her children. Fefe’s mother often came up to look after her daughter with CP.

Material readiness and close support from relatives are factors supporting coping. Quinn and Gordon (2011) said that psychological support and material readiness give power to the mother during the initial process of taking care her child impaired with CP.

After Fefe could pass through her daughter’s condition, Fefe could not resist that she made a vow. If her daughter’s is cured, she will celebrate it. But then, she realized that she had to accept what is given to her by God. This view is supported by her religiosity and her faith on Buddhism teaching about accepting that is important part in living this world. The importance of accepting stressed by Fefe is coming from her faith. It is one of coping strategies which aimed on emotional focused coping.

"Yeah, given by God a child like Nana, it means God trusts me to have a child like Nana. I think it that way to comfort myself..." (Monday, 23 July 2012)

With emotional focused coping which stressed on acceptance, it made Fefe easily living day by day taking care of her daughter. Up until her daughter reached 5 years old, Fefe continued to focus on taking care by her own. She could not freely go out and it was often she could not go out with the rest of the family because she had to take care her daughter.

After five years, Fefe opened up her mind that she had to live her own life. This was because her husband made her realize not to drowned with her daughter’s condition. Fefe’s younger sister also kept telling her the same thing. Fefe finally opened up and started to seek help from sitter to take care her daughter with CP so that she could take care of her other children and have activities with her own friends. This was also heavily supported by her trait, open to things and accepting. This kind of help is also a coping strategy, problem focused coping. Taanila, Syrjala, Kokkonen, and Jarvelin (2002) said that children sitter is a way of coping strategy and a right choice to support parents in adapting with their child’s condition.

After Fefe believed and willing to seek for help from a sitter to take care her daughter, Fefe felt better. This better condition also affected Fefe’s emotional state that could truly accept her child with CP presence. This acceptance was achieved because of those coping strategies applied by her and the presence of social support surrounding Fefe. Appropriate problem focused coping and emotional focused coping were used while taking care of her child. It is resulting a positive impact on her acceptance. It is as stated by Draper (2009), the more defence mechanisms used by the mother dealing with her child with CP, it will give more positive results. Draper continued, those conditions should also be supported by adequate facilities as the lack of facilities will influence mother’s coping style. Other than that, Fefe was also supported by her neighbour. They empathize and give encouragement to her. It is not rare Fefe’s friend come to her house and lift up her spirit to accept her child’s condition.

Fefe also valued on having a child as a mean to fulfill her loving nature, which Fefe does not ask for return. She just wishes her child to be in a better state, it makes her feels happy too. This value helps her to achieve a better acceptance. The chart below will explain:
Fafa and Her Spiritual Cope

Fafa’s happiness stopped abruptly and turned into deep sadness. When it was his sixth month, Fafa’s son suddenly got diarrhoea, and feverish, 37.5°C. Fafa was in Samarinda that time and took her child to hospital right away. Next day, the diarrhea was stopped, but her son became like a baby again. The doctor who took care of her son did not explain anything but said her son got a CP due to virus. But, the doctor did not elaborate further what is CP and what had to be done. Fafa asked for explanation but the doctor replied harshly and even blamed her because she was late taking her son to hospital. Fafa was upset since she thought she was not late taking her son to hospital. She admitted that she felt messy, apprehensive, angry, confused, disappointed, and could not accept the reality. Crying was the only thing that Fafa did everyday. Luckily, on that condition, her husband accompanied her and tried to console her. But, Fafa and her husband did not understand what their son is going through.

After coming back from hospital, Fafa took care of her son by her own because her husband had to go out of town for work. Fafa abandoned her activities such as selling stuffs, church activities, and gathering with friends. She focused on her son with CP while her first child, aged 10 years old that time, can take care of herself. Fafa did not need to pick her up in school, feed her, or helped her studying. She felt depressed continuously, but she could not express it to anyone. She only could mention it to her husband through phone. Whenever she was sad and needed to talk, she would call her husband. But, Fafa did not get a direct support which was a helping hand, an actual presence from her husband, by taking care and nurturing their children. Fafa handled that thing alone. In the beginning, Fafa denied her son’s condition and went to various doctors and alternative medications.

Fafa’s effort to try various medications was a means of problem focused coping. Luckily, Fafa has a good economics. Her husband also trusted the decision on Fafa to cure her son. For two years, Fafa was in anger state. Fafa was in an emotional roller-coaster because of her son’s condition. It got worsen when the doctor and her mother blamed her. Fafa felt guilty and assumed she caused her son this problem.

Fafa’s condition overwhelmed with anger is common to mothers who have children with CP. Geralis (1998) said that a lot of parents of children with CP tend to blame themselves as the source of the tragedy befall on their children.

Her guilt was worsen because in Samarinda, people saw her as the cursed one for having a child with CP. People built gap with her after they found out her child is not normal. It happened because on the 90s, Samarinda was under-developed and people there still believe in mystical things. Unsupportive social situation made Fafa felt even worse and she did not know where to go. She even blamed God about her son.

Fafa decided to go to Surabaya for one year after knowing about alternative Chinese medicine that she found from Internet. Fafa went to Surabaya for one year. She lived in rented house together with her son. This alternative medicine is a problem focused coping. Fafa tried various ways and her guts was affected by her character. She was ambitious and stubborn. She kept on trying to cure her son.

From the alternative medicine, Fafa acquired explanation about her son’s condition. Fafa became
understand what is CP, how is her son's condition, and what need to do to maintain his condition. Palisano, Almarsi, Chiarello, Bagley, and Maggs (2009) research on 501 parents of children with CP showed that more than half participants need professionals service to guide them while nurturing and taking care their children. After one year, Fafa went back to Samarinda but she continued the therapy by buying therapy equipments for her son in Samarinda. Fafa also enrolled her son into a school for children with special need like autism, so her son can socialize.

As time goes by, her emotional state was still in up and down phase moreover she had to take care her child on her own. When she was tired, saturated, and upset, she felt downhearted. Crying was not a solution for Fafa any longer.

"I couldn't even cry now.... Now if I am being told to cry, I couldn't cry anymore. Truly. No tears. If people said, crying until tears drying out, that's true. I, I, now if crying, no tears come down. I can not cry any longer. (Monday, 30 July 2012).

When she felt down, emotional focused coping that she did was by going out of her house for a while or calling her husband. But she could only call her husband at night because her husband had to work. Other than her husband, she had no place to share because her mother was not supportive in dealing with her son’s condition.

After 7 years in Samarinda, Fafa’s first daughter wanted to continue her study in Surabaya. That time, Fafa thought that if she moves to Surabaya, she could seek for better treatment. In Surabaya, she found a school for children with CP, which was a YPAC (institution for disabled children). In this place, her questions were answered and it opened up her mind to accept her son’s condition. Fafa could see there are a lot of people have children with worse condition and she felt that she have a community to accept her, gather together with other parents of children with special needs. Here, Fafa could find a place for herself and her son because while they were in Samarinda, she rarely saw parents of children with special needs. They tend to hide their children.

From the institution (YPAC), Fafa could see that her child is her little cross that is given by God and she should carry it. She grew her spiritual perspective on her problem. This emotional focused coping brought positive impact on Fafa. She became calmer by seeing that Lord Jesus carried heavier cross and her son is only a smaller cross for her to carry. Whenever she felt down again, Fafa often begged to God to strengthen her. Fafa would pray to God and asked His consolation.

Fafa’s openness to her son’s condition and her emotional focused coping made her started to accept the condition. But, Fafa still could not completely accept her son’s condition. It was caused by her desire that exacted better progress from her child, to be more independent without realizing that it is difficult to achieve for her son. Fafa’s wish is backed by her age. She is 50 and she realizes that she is not as agile as before, to take care her son such as carrying her son. But she insists to not using a sitter for her son. Fafa does not want to use a sitter because she thinks that raising the child on her own could redeem her guilt. More than that, the value of having a child as something that she could be proud of is another reason why she wants her son to be more independent compared to other children with CP. This value to view a child as parents’ pride is influenced by family ethnicity and background. Chinese family tends to see sons as the pride of the family.

Jersild (1974) said that individual with acceptance could accept their own self, have realistic view on their condition, and valued themselves while calculating their own limitation. Based on explanations above, it could be seen Fafa’s acceptance is incomplete. She wants her son to have unrealistically better condition. Beside that, the lack of support from her significant others makes her stands still with her decision and conviction. This condition admitted by Fafa makes her feels tired and affects her emotions. It makes her feels even more down hearted. Further explanation see chart below:
DISCUSSION

Acceptance process on mothers of children with CP is unique. It is because each mother has different ways on achieving acceptance thus the acceptance conditions are unique to their experience. During the acceptance process for mothers, there are other important supporting factors. Those factors are coping strategy and social support. Those factors are further influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors are personality, religiosity, and values on children. External factors are demographic and cultural background. Differences in fulfilling those factors could affect mothers’ acceptance process. It could bolster or even hamper the process and changes in one factor could impact other factors. With that, it can be said that one factor to another are closely related thus it affects acceptance process on mothers toward their children’s condition.

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