# EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENTS WITH TRAUMATIC STRESS IN FAMILY THERAPY

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UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA

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# AUTHOR DECLARATION

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

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# ABSTRAK

Terapi keluarga sistemik digunakan secara meluas untuk menangani tekanan akibat trauma dalam kalangan remaja, namun pengalaman subjektif remaja itu sendiri sering dipinggirkan dalam ruang klinikal. Kajian kualitatif ini bertujuan untuk meneroka pengalaman hidup remaja yang mengharungi tekanan trauma semasa menjalani terapi keluarga sistemik dalam konteks sosiobudaya bandar di Lembah Klang, Malaysia. Dengan menggunakan reka bentuk Analisis Fenomenologi Interpretatif (IPA), data dikumpul melalui temu bual separa berstruktur bersama sepuluh orang remaja (berumur 13 hingga 16 tahun) yang pernah mengalami trauma yang signifikan. Analisis tematik mendedahkan empat tema utama. Pertama, remaja pada mulanya mengalami ketidakseimbangan kuasa dan rasa tidak kelihatan (invisibility) di dalam bilik terapi, namun keadaan ini pulih apabila ahli terapi mengamalkan pendekatan yang tulen, santai, dan peka budaya. Kedua, kehadiran ibu bapa pada awalnya mencetuskan kebimbangan serta konflik kesetiaan, tetapi berubah menjadi pemangkin pemulihan keakraban (attachment repair) apabila disusuli dengan empati dan tanggungjawab. Ketiga, intervensi bukan lisan (seperti terapi seni dan metafora) serta psikopedidikan mengenai neurobiologi didapati lebih berkesan dalam memproses trauma berbanding konfrontasi lisan secara langsung. Akhir sekali, faktor budaya tempatan terutamanya tekanan akademik (budaya tuisyen) dan nilai ketaatan kepada ibu bapa (mengelakkan aib) secara ketara telah menghalang pendedahan emosi secara terbuka dan memesongkan ukuran pemulihan sebenar. Kajian ini merumuskan bahawa model sistemik Barat perlulah diadaptasi ke dalam budaya tempatan dengan mengintegrasikan ruang dialog yang selamat, modaliti bukan lisan, serta menangani jangkaan akademik bagi memupuk pemulihan trauma remaja yang menyeluruh.

# ABSTRACT

Systemic family therapy is widely utilised to address traumatic stress among adolescents; however, the subjective experience of the adolescent is frequently marginalised within the clinical space. This qualitative study aims to explore the lived experiences of adolescents navigating traumatic stress during systemic family therapy within the urban socio-cultural context of the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Utilising an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with ten adolescents (aged 13 to 16) who had experienced significant trauma. Thematic analysis revealed four primary themes. First, adolescents initially experienced power imbalances and invisibility within the therapy room, which were mitigated when therapists adopted an authentic, approachable, and culturally attuned stance. Second, parental presence initially triggered anxiety and loyalty conflicts but acted as a powerful catalyst for attachment repair when accompanied by genuine empathy and accountability. Third, non-verbal interventions (such as art therapy and metaphors) and neurobiological psychoeducation were found to be more significant in processing trauma than direct verbal confrontation. Finally, local cultural factors, particularly intense academic pressure (tuition culture) and filial piety (the avoidance of aib, or shame), significantly hindered open emotional disclosure and distorted recovery metrics. This study concludes that Western-derived systemic models must be culturally adapted by integrating safe dialogical spaces, utilising non-verbal modalities, and challenging academic-centric parental expectations to foster genuine, holistic trauma recovery in adolescents.

# الملخص

يُستخدم العلاج الأسري النظامي على نطاق واسع لمعالجة ضغط الصدمة بين المراهقين؛ ومع ذلك، غالبًا ما تُهمش التجربة الذاتية للمراهق داخل الحيز السريري. تهدف هذه الدراسة النوعية إلى استكشاف التجارب المعيشية للمراهقين الذين يواجهون ضغط الصدمة أثناء العلاج الأسري النظامي ضمن السياق الاجتماعي والثقافي الحضري في وادي كلانغ، ماليزيا. ، تم جمع البيانات من خلال مقابلات شبه منظمة مع عشرة مراهقين (IPA) باستخدام تصميم التحليل الظاهري التفسيري .(تتراوح أعمارهم بين 13 و16 عامًا) ممن عانوا من صدمات كبيرة

كشف التحليل الموضوعي عن أربعة مواضيع رئيسية. أولاً، عانى المراهقون في البداية من اختلال في توازن القوى والشعور بالتهميش (اللامرئية) داخل غرفة العلاج، وهو ما تم التخفيف منه عندما تبنى المعالجون موقفًا أصيلاً وودودًا ومتوافقًا ثقافيًا. attachment) ثانيًا، أثار وجود الوالدين في البداية القلق وصراعات الولاء، ولكنه عمل كمحفز قوي لإصلاح التعلق عندما اقترن بالتعاطف الحقيقي والمسؤولية. ثالثًا، وُجد أن التدخلات غير اللفظية (مثل العلاج بالفن (repair والاستعارات) والتثقيف النفسي البيولوجي العصبي كانت أكثر أهمية وفعالية في معالجة الصدمة مقارنة بالمواجهة اللفظية المباشرة. أخيرًا، أدت العوامل الثقافية المحلية، وخاصة الضغط الأكاديمي الشديد (ثقافة الدروس الإضافية) وبر الوالدين (تجنب "العيب" أو العار)، إلى إعاقة الإفصاح العاطفي الصريح بشكل كبير وتشويه مقاييس التعافي الفعلية.

تخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أنه يجب تكييف النماذج النظامية المستمدة من الغرب ثقافيًا من خلال دمج المساحات الحوارية الآمنة، واستخدام الأساليب غير اللفظية، وتحدي التوقعات الأبوية التي تركز على الجانب الأكاديمي، وذلك لتعزيز التعافي الحقيقي والشامل من الصدمات لدى المراهقين.

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# ABBREVIATION

**Abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| AAMFT | American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy |
| ABFT | Attachment-Based Family Therapy |
| CAQDAS | Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software |
| CYS-Net | Community Adolescents Safety-Net |
| EMDR | Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing |
| FFT | Functional Family Therapy |
| IGCSE | International General Certificate of Secondary Education |
| IPA | Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis |
| MDFT | Multidimensional Family Therapy |
| MST | Multisystemic Therapy |
| PTSD | Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder |
| SPM | Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia |