A PATH ANALYTIC STUDY OF THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT INFLUENCES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT, SELF-ESTEEM, AND SELF-EFFICACY, BEING MEDIATED BY COPING STYLE, ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF MYANMAR ADOLESCENT DOUBLE ORPHANS IN SHAN STATE

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Abstract: The present study examined the direct influences of social support, self-esteem, and self-efficacy on academic performance, as well as their indirect influences, being mediated by problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping among double orphans aged 11 to 15 years residing in orphanages in Shan State, Myanmar. A total of 277 middle school students recruited from 18 orphanages via systematic sampling participated in the study by voluntarily responding to the study's questionnaire. Path analysis indicated that for the double orphans in the study, only their reported level of self-efficacy were found to have a direct influence on their academic performance. The findings yielded no significant indirect influences, being mediated by the variables of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping style, for the three exogenous predictor variables of social support, self-esteem, and self-efficacy on the respondents' academic performance. The study's findings were discussed in terms of the implications they hold for how double orphans in Myanmar cope with stressors they encounter in their lives.

Keywords: Social Support, Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, Coping Styles, Academic Performance

Introduction

Quality of performance in academia demands physical well-being as well as social, emotional, spiritual, and psychological well-being. Education is viewed as a basic human need, an integral part of the quality of life, and an important factor that determines the future of the world. Academically successful students are the key to future challenges and opportunities in the future. However, not all students have equal capacity in achieving academic success. While many factors do predict academic success, such as intelligence and learning styles, there are others such as family structures and personality problems that can act as barriers (Zimmerman, 1995).

Jubber (1994) found that there is an association between school performance and parental structure in that children who live with both parents perform better academically. Jubber concluded that "the single parent and any other type of parental structure affect school performance more negatively than does the two parental structures" (p. 139). This conclusion suggests that children and, in particular, orphans may be at risk academically. Losing one's parents is one of the most painful experiences for a child in his/her life. When a child becomes traumatized by the loss of his/her parents, development often become uneven or damaged over many areas of functioning (Farber & Egeland, 1987; Clay, Bond & Nyblade, 2005; Germann, 2004), often leading to psychological consequences such as sense of insecurity, helplessness, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, and academic difficulty (Luthar, 1991; Luthar, Cicchctti, & Becker, 2000). The combination of these psychological consequences may result in higher engagement of health risk behaviors such as dangerous alcohol use, drug use, suicidal ideation, or violent behavior (Wild, Flisher, Bhana, & Lombard, 2004). Engaging in such negative behaviors may further influence adversely their school attendance and academic performance (Kruger & Richter, 2003).The present research attempted to determine whether the poor academic performance evident among the targeted double orphans was due to their poor level of social support, low self-esteem, and low self-efficacy. Additionally, this study attempted to explore how these three variables may be related to the double orphans' academic performance indirectly being mediated by their coping style.

Social Support

Social support refers to the experience of being valued, respected, cared about, and loved by others who are present in one's life (Gurung, 2006). The loss of social and family support such as the lack of relationship with others, loss of emotional safety net, and lack of family components are probably the most important direct consequences of being an orphan**.** The experience of loss of family and social support for orphans could lead to internalized emotion (depression, anxiety, and poor self-esteem) and externalized emotion such as dysfunctional behavior (Makane et al., 2002). Children who reside in orphanages lack human warmth, care, and positive emotional contact from others. Family and peer support with emotional warmth and acceptance have been found to be associated with less psychological problems, less delinquency among students, higher grades, and better academic achievement (Silbereisen & Todt, 1994). Yasin and Dzulkifli (2011) examined the relationship between social support and academic achievement among

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undergraduate students, and found that social support is positively associated with academic achievement.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to an individual's global evaluation of the self and to the individual's self-image or self-worth. Self-esteem is also defined as the temperament to experience oneself as being worthy of happiness and being competent to cope with the challenges of life (Simon & Schuster, 1997). A child growing up outside of a family lacks unconditional love and the lack of parental support leads to the development of negative attitudes towards oneself, in practically all aspects of the orphan's life. According to Zivor (2007), orphans experience lower general, social, academic, and parent-related self-esteem. Furthermore, self-esteem has a significant influence on orphans' level of achievement and on their ability to overcome and adjust to environmental stressors. Self-esteem is an important construct for everyday living, particularly for children who are already facing many life challenges. For orphans, though, it is often short-circuited not only by the loss of their parents but also by neglect, abuse, and underfeeding in orphanages. The combination of low self-esteem and negative environmental factors such as inconsistent nurturance, poverty, social isolation, and stigmatization may result in higher engagement of health risk behaviors such as dangerous alcohol use, drug use, suicide ideation, or violence (Wild et al., 2004). Engaging in such negative behaviors may further influence adversely their school attendance and academic performance (Kruger & Richter, 2003).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is an individual's evaluation of his or her ability or competency to perform a task, reach a goal, or overcome an obstacle (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory, a student's motivation to succeed, perform, and do well on a variety of tasks and situations are essentially mediated or influenced by how strongly he/she believes in his/her own capability. Having either high or low self-efficacy can increase or decrease the student's performance on a variety of tasks. Orphans can raise their level of self-efficacy from affirming feedback received from peers, teachers, and adults in their lives (Salami & Carolyn, 1999). Possessing high self-efficacy, therefore, may be a necessary trait for orphans in order to deal with their adverse life challenges.

Coping Styles

Coping response refers to dealing with emotional distress or modifying the problem, or to attempts to do something about existing stressors (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998). Folkman and Lazarus (1980) noted that the structure of coping can be categorized into problem-focused and emotion-focused coping in order to understand their functions. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), problem-focused coping is directed at changing the situation and dealing with the problem. Emotion-focused coping is intended to moderate the emotional stressors produced by exposure to a stressor. When people are unable to solve a problem, they tend to adopt emotion-focused coping such as giving up, temporarily putting aside, maintaining distance, and avoidance, among others. For orphans, the loss of both parents is one of the most painful of human experiences. This often involves facing up to their loss and finding ways to move on (Tolan & Gorman-Smith, 1997). Effective coping strategies help students to become more successful in school via their positive impact on academic performance.

Interrelationships between self-efficacy, self-esteem, coping styles and Academic Performance

Lane, Lane, and Kypricnou (2004) explored the interrelationships between self-esteem, self-efficacy, academic performance, and previous performance accomplishments. Their results showed that self-efficacy and self-esteem both influence academic performance. Kiyiapi (2007) examined the psychological impact of being orphans in Western Kenya by examining and analyzing the extent to which coping, self-efficacy, and social support protected the orphans from the negative impact of orphanhood. The findings showed that depression is significantly related to social support and coping, while self-esteem is associated with self-efficacy.

Figure 1 presents the study's conceptual framework showing the direct influences of social support, self-esteem, and self-efficacy on academic performance, as well as their indirect influences, being mediated by problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

Conceptual framework

(See figure 1 on the next page)

Research Questions

From the conceptual framework, the following research question was drawn:

Do social support, self-esteem, and self-efficacy impact on the academic performance of double orphans in Shan State, Myanmar both directly and indirectly, being mediated by their coping style?

Research Hypotheses

1. Social support, self-esteem, and self-efficacy will have direct positive influences on the academic performance of double orphans in Shan State,
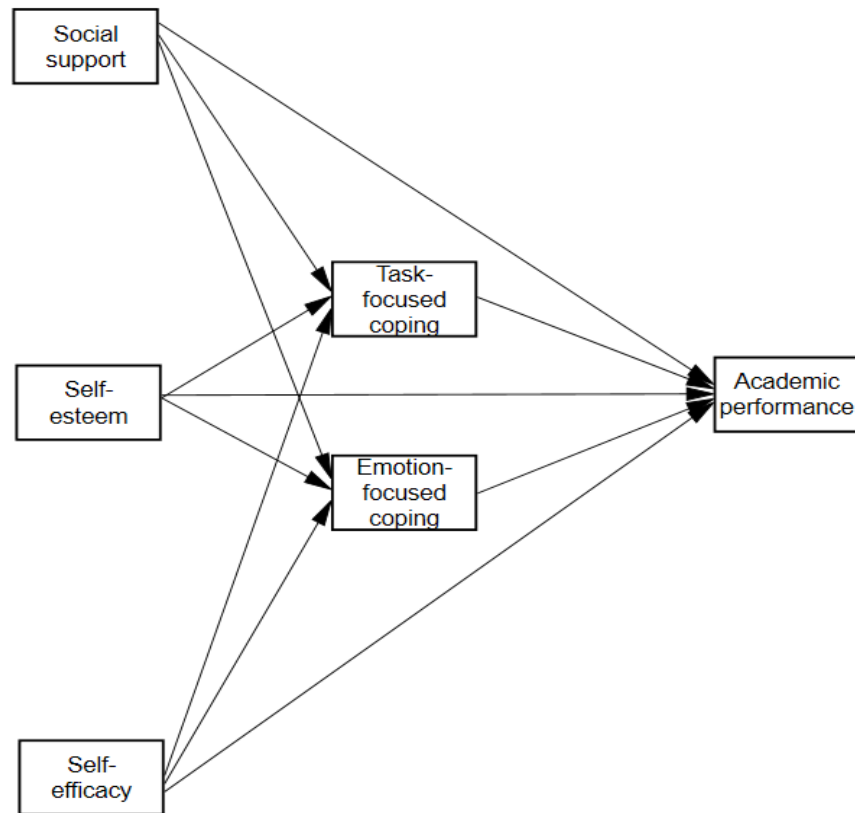
Figure 1: Path Model of The Hypothesized Direct and Indirect Influences of Social Support, Self-Esteem, and Self-Efficacy, Being Mediated by Coping Style, on The Academic Performance of Myanmar Adolescent Double Orphans

Myanmar such that the higher the orphans' perceived social support, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, the higher their academic achievement.

2.   Social support, self-esteem, and self-efficacy will have indirect relationships with the academic performance of double orphans in Shan State, Myanmar such that the higher the orphans' perceived social support, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, (a) the more they will employ problem-focused coping style (and the less they will employ emotion-focused coping style) and (b) the more they employ emotion-focused coping style (and the less they employ problem-focused coping style), the higher their academic achievement.

Participants of the Study
The participants of the study (*N*=277) were double orphans (males: *N*=148; females: *N*=129) currently living in orphanages in Shan State, Myanmar. Their ages ranged between 11 years to 15 years.

Questionnaire
The questionnaire consisted of 5 parts.

Part 1 consisted of items written to tap the respondents' demographic characteristics of gender,

age, previous resident and grade level. This section also contains a measure of the respondents' academic performance which was assessed using the student's average mark secured by the previous examination for the subjects of Myanmar, English, Mathematics, Geography, History, and General Science. It should be noted that the schools the orphan students attended would not release their scores. Hence, the students were asked to write down their scores in these six subjects for the previous examination held. Many of them reported original scores from 100.

Part II consisted of the 11-item Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley in 1988. This scale assesses respondents' belief about the level of social support that they receive from family, friends, and significant others. Each of the 11 items was to be scored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*, with high scores indicating higher level of perceived social support. The scale has reported internal reliability ratings (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from .81 to .93 (Zimet& Farley, 2003).

Part III comprised the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), developed by Morris Rosenberg

in 1965, and later revised in 1989. Each of the 10 items was to be rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 4 = *Strongly agree*, with high scores (after re-coding for negatively-worded items) indicating higher self-esteem. The scale generally has high reliability; test-retest corrections are typically in the range of .83 to .88, and Cronbach's alpha for various samples are in the range of .77 to .88 (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1993; Rosenberg, 1986).

Part IV consisted of the 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), developed in Germany in 1979, according to Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The scale aimed to tap human self-efficacy in planning, organizing, and performing various tasks in different fields of life. Each item of the GSE was to be rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1= *Not at all true* to 4 = *Exactly true*, with higher scores indicating greater level of perceived self-efficacy. The GSE has been demonstrated to be very reliable across samples in 23 nations, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .76 to 90, with the majority in the .80s.

Part V consisted of the 48-item Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS), developed by Endler and Parker in 1990. The CISS is a self-report measure of emotion-oriented coping, task-oriented coping, and avoidance-oriented coping. For the purposes of the present study, only 'task-oriented' (problem-focused) and 'emotion-oriented' (emotion-focused) coping factors were used. Each of the 32 items was to be scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= *Not at all*, 2 = *Seldom*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 4 = *Often*, and 5 = *Very much*, with high scores indicating higher frequency of usage of that coping style.

Data Collection Procedure
The following procedural steps were undertaken during the data collection period.
1. The researcher obtained formal permission from the Head of orphanages in Shan State, Myanmar to collect data from the double orphans.
2. A pretest of the Burmese version of the survey questionnaire was conducted on 10 double orphans who were recruited through convenience sampling. The pretest exercise was conducted to check for any difficulties respondents may have with regard to the questionnaire directions and item statements.
3. After the pretest, the researcher proceeded to conduct the actual study after receiving permission and informed consent from the participants.
4. After collection of all the completed questionnaires, the researcher individually inspected the questionnaires to check for possible errors for exclusion. Only valid questionnaires were subjected to statistical analysis.

Results
Initial reliability analysis indicated that the computed Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all five scales (self-efficacy, self-esteem, social support, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping) ranged from .43 to .74.

Path analysis: Test of hypotheses
Figure 2 presents the results from the path analysis.

(See Figure 2 on the next page)

Results showed that for the study's Burmese double orphans, only their reported level of self-efficacy was found to have a direct influence on their academic performance. Thus, the higher their reported level of self-efficacy, the better their academic performance (in terms of their overall average grade marks), (Beta=.13), t=1.96, $p \leq$.05. Perceived self-esteem and social support were not found to relate directly or significantly to the criterion variable of academic performance (p>.05).

The findings yielded no significant indirect influences (being mediated by the variables of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping) for the three exogenous predictor variables of social support, self-esteem, and self-efficacy on the respondents' academic performance. Nevertheless, the findings showed that all three predictor variables of social support, self-esteem, and self-efficacy exerted significant influences on the mediator variable of problem-focused coping. Thus, the higher their reported levels of social support and self-efficacy, the more they reported employing the problem-focused style of coping (Beta=.11), t=1.96, $p \leq$.05; (Beta=.35), t=6.14, p<.001 respectively. The higher their reported level of self-esteem, the lower their reported employment of the problem-focused style of coping (Beta=-.14), t=-2.53, p<.05. Perceived self-efficacy was also found to be related positively and significantly to emotion-focused coping. Thus, the higher the respondents' reported level of self-efficacy, the more they reported employing the emotion-focused style of coping (Beta=.15), t=2.42, p<.05.

Summary and Discussion of Findings
Results obtained from the path analysis showed that only the double orphans' self-efficacy has a direct positive influence on their academic performance, such that the higher their perceived self-efficacy, the better their academic performance. Smith and Betz (2000) suggested that self-efficacy is an individual's confidence in her or his ability to engage in successful
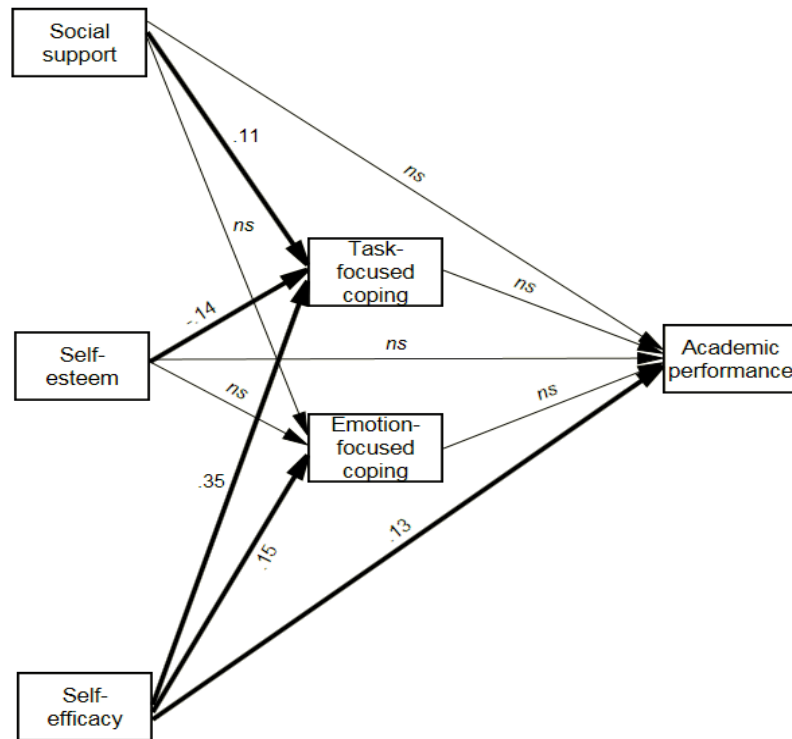
Figure 2: Path Model of Myanmar Double Orphans' Academic Performance as A Function of The Direct and Indirect Influences (Being Mediated By Their Coping Styles) of Their Levels of Perceived Social Support, Self-Esteem, and Self-Efficacy (Ns=Non-Significant)

events. Thus, the challenges that the orphans face in their everyday lives could have inculcated in them a sense of high self-efficacy which helps them to perform better in critical situations such as school examinations.

The results from the path analysis showed that the double orphans' perceived social support, self-esteem, and self-efficacy did not exert any indirect influences, being mediated by their coping styles, on their academic performance. These findings are contrary to those obtained from past studies which have clearly demonstrated that effective coping strategies help students to become more successful in school via their positive impact on academic performance (e.g., Feenstra et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2006; Struthers et al., 2000). One possible reason why coping styles in the present study failed to predict academic performance may rest with the awareness that the orphans have about their orphanage education system. Simply, by being orphans and financially-deprived, they can only attend schools provided by the orphanages. These schools which are not properly financed provide an education that can only be described as poor, where discipline and proper teaching methods are not emphasized. When there are no chances for a better education, there is the recognition that no coping styles will be effective in affecting changes to a system that

promotes poor academic performance.

Another finding from the path analysis showed that social support and self-esteem exerted significant influences on the mediator variable of problem-focused coping. More specifically, the higher the orphans' level of social support, the more they employed problem-focused coping. Additionally, the higher their level of self-esteem, the lower is their employment of problem-focused coping. These findings point to the importance of both parental and social influences on the development of adolescents' self-esteem. With the double orphans, not only do they severely lack parental care and love but they also receive very little support from relatives, peers, and the communities, leading to poor self-esteem (Shipitsyna, 2008). Given the lack of social support, these orphans actively seek out anybody who they think can help them whenever they face difficult situations. This is in line with past findings which have shown that social support seeking is often linked to problem-focused coping (Tamres, 2002). For the present study's orphans, their tendency to employ a problem-focused style of coping reflects their desire to actively seek out assistance/social support to assist them to deal with the stressors they encounter living in orphanages.

A final finding from the path analysis indicated

that self-efficacy is positively and significantly related to emotion-focused coping. Thus, the higher the double orphans' level of self-efficacy, the more they resorted to emotion-focused coping. This finding may simply reflect the orphans' perception that, although they may be confident in their abilities to deal with the challenges they face in their orphanages, they also recognize the fact that many of these challenges are *beyond their control* and therefore are insurmountable. Thus, there is the retreat back to an emotion-focused style of coping, where the coping involves wishful thinking, avoidance, and the venting of emotions.

Conclusion

It is important for orphans, particularly double orphans, to understand that life is full of challenges and that lack of resources and a sense of hopelessness may lead to bitterness and anger if they simply withdraw and be defensive. Orphans need to be strong in order to face their problems and overcome them. They need to understand and accept that being an orphan is not the end of the world, and that it is not impossible to hope for a better future in spite of one's painful past. Orphans should recognize and appreciate the importance of education and strive to be the best student and citizen they can possibly be, with a view to becoming a productive member of Myanmar society in the future.

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