

HOW DO MOTHERS NURTURE LOVE VIA PARENTING?

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ABSTRACT

Love and compassion are two of the most persuasive emotional attachments in the family. Mothers' true love empowers children's survival in the world and hereafter. Thus, this research aims to understand on how the Malaysian award winners for exemplary mothers category (Ibu Mithālī) show their love and mercy to their children in order to develop parent-child attachment. To answer the research question, research was done using Grounded Theory approach. As a result, three main themes have emerged: physical touch, emotional touch and spiritual touch. Love and mercy from mothers are pertinent in child development. Therefore, mothers should nurture their children with love and compassion to balance firm discipline and strict rules in the family.

Keywords: Love, family development, exemplary mother, parenting.

INTRODUCTION

Love is the most important essence of family well-being. Love in family strengthens family attachment and strengths. Parental love especially from mothers gives positive impact in child growth and development. Children with loving mothers are more likely to have high self-esteem and higher academic achievements than their counterparts (Jamiah, 2013). However, the question arises: what is the best practice of parental love? How should the mothers portray their love and compassion towards their children? Thus, the research was carried out to understand how exemplary mothers, the National *Ibu Mithali's* award winners, shower love and compassion to their children without spoiling them.

Literature Review

What is Love?

A novelist, Lisa Apegnanesi perceives love as an unruly emotion (Webster, 2012). Love has

no age boundary. Anybody can fall in love either he is a little baby, a toddler, a teenager, an adult or an old man. However, the energy of love is less when people get older. Turgenev in his novel said that he never had a first love but he began with the second. The first love is for his mother or career (Webster, 2012).

Al-Ghazali (2009) in "The Alchemy of Happiness" defines love as a tendency to engage in something delightful. He also defines love as an attraction to the mind which pulls toward something interesting and gives peace. When the attraction is strong and firm, then the love will get deeper. Al - Jawziyyah (1997) defines love (*mahabbah*) as something sacred, calm, strong and peaceful. It also refers to painful feeling when a person falls in love particularly in situations of deep longing for loved ones.

Through this, one's love towards someone or something becomes very exciting and at the same time, a wave of emotion is created in the hearts of lovers. Love is also known as '*hawa*' which is a tendency, and a deep desire for a

loved one. Al - Jawziyyah (1997) establishes that there are nearly 60 words related to (feeling) love like *al-^cAlaqah* (bond), *al - Shubwah* (longing), *al - Wajd* (love with sorrow) , *al - Khallah* (love deep) , *al - Tatayyam* (devotion) and *al-^cIshq* (fire of love).

In psychological perspective, according to Maslow (1970), love ranges from self, family to society. He believes that people feel lonely when friends, family and loved ones are not with them. Individuals desire to have relationships and a to belong to safe place in the the company of others such as family. When there is an emergence, or the sense of desolation from love, people will easily feel sad for feeling ignored, pushed aside, and deprived of romance. According to Rubin (1970, 1974), love consists of three components namely intimate relationship (intimacy), refinement (the desire to be together) and caring (responsible for the goodness and happiness of the loved ones).

Love in Family

Love according to Islamic study can create awareness in a Muslim to maintain and strengthen the family institution by [preserving] the teachings of Islam, which lead to the question of love. The family institution can be strengthened with the involvement of parents in ensuring that their children receive enough love and affection from home. This is one of the factors that lead to moral decadence among adolescents because they are not getting the attention and the affection that they should get at home (Salamatussaadah & Nor Ba'yah, 2009).

Studies conducted by Siti Nor Yaacob (2008) find that family is the most basic social context in the development of an individual. Therefore, the processes occurring in the family, such as communication, intimacy, understanding and support among its members are critical to adolescents' psychosocial well-being. A good family brings the feeling of comfort to teens and young adults in order to meet the needs of biological, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being.

Hence, to handle the phenomenon of divorce and moral decadence, fostering the cultural understanding of Islamic teachings of love

between husband and wife and among family members should be promoted. Indeed, efforts should be undertaken to preserve the family institution that begins with the process of finding a life partner, maintaining harmony in the household, and committing to the relationship until the end lives, and sustaining prosperous life in the hereafter.

Maternal Love

A mother's love for her children is priceless, unconditional and is something that never dies. She is a person that you can count on, and her care is like a beautiful rose that shall never perish. Mother's love can be articulated in many ways and she would do anything for her children. Sometimes, this love can be regarded as a way for the mother to mould her children into what she believes is the "right" way to behave. At other times, the mother is trying her best to make sure that her child is doing her best.

A mother's love remains a very strong bond not only during the children's childhood years, but even after they leave home and get married. Mothers are pressured with many roles in handling their children such as disciplining their children until they are perceived as 'unloving' mothers (Websters, 2012). Compassionate love enables mothers to establish positive socialization context with their children. It will also help the mothers to reduce their stress [although] even though they are in a difficult situation (Miller, Kahle, Lopez, & Hastings, 2015).

A recent study conducted by Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Mo., discovers that school-age children with larger hippocampus in their brains are those who are nurtured early in life. What is so significant about it? Indeed, the hippocampus is vital for learning, memory and appropriate response to stress. Also, the bond of attachment between a mother and child lays the foundation for social, emotional and cognitive development.

A mother's love is important for children's survival whether the mothers are their biological parents or non-biological parents. Breastfeeding is one of the ways to show love to the children, but not many mothers are

willing to sacrifice their time and their body shape for that. Oxytocin is a special hormone in human being that facilitates uterine contractions during birth and milk ejection during nursing (Carter, 1998). Hypothalamus produces neuropeptide and releases it in human brain (Landgraf & Neumann, 2004).

Scientists find out the relationship between oxytocin and bonding formation between the children and their biological parents. However, oxytocin can also be produced among non-biological parent or the foster parents through many ways. For example, cuddles, interaction and play stimulate foster mothers' brain activity to produce more oxytocin especially after 2 months of interaction.

Parental love is a prerequisite to the success of human being on earth. The famous Malay expression, "Mother's Love leads to heaven, love the father at all times" reflects the high value of parental love. The earliest love a man receives is from both his parents. Without parents, humans would not exist in the world. Their sacrifice is countless, giving children shelter, food, drink, love, money and everything they could to see their children grow up and become useful people (Syaidatun, Abidah & Nurul Aida, 2011).

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted using grounded theory approach in qualitative research methodology. In-depth interview was done with three mothers who won *Ibu Mithali* award at the national level and eight of their children. Besides, observation and document analysis were also done to support the data for triangulation. Data was then analysed using thematic analysis, where the data was coded and gathered with previous theory to build a model in order to understand the methods how exemplary mothers shower their love and affection towards their children.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Love and affection are the key ingredients in children's education (Sidek, 2010). It is the innate goodness (*fiṭrah*) of parents towards their children (Abdullah, 2010). The existence of this nature is very important for positive

child development (Abdullah, 2010). Children need adequate love, care, attention and affection from adults. Without proper care and love at home, children will seek attention elsewhere. As such, *Ibu Mithālī* are expected to devote their love to the children in every possible way. Based on the findings, it can be deduced that Ibu Mithali nurture love towards their children in three ways: physical touch, emotional touch, and spiritual touch.

Physical Touch

Ibu Mithali's physical touch encompass kiss and hug, health care and food preparations.

Kiss and Hug

Parents should kiss and hug their children when they are young as a token of love and affection, as exemplified by the Prophet. When a companion of the Prophet admitted that he had never kissed his children, the Prophet said that the love was torn from the heart. The Prophet's view is different from the traditional Malay parents who seem reluctant to show affection to their children fearing that it would make them lose respect towards the parents.

Nonetheless, the exemplary mother in this study known as Madam Maimon builds attachment with her children through kissing and hugging when they were small. However, when they grow up, she stops the act of kissing and hugging.

She hugged... kissed... but that was when we were small... when we had grown up... there were no more hugs and kisses.
(Mrs. Azizah, Former Headmaster, Late Madam Maimon's daughter).

According to her children, they felt very ashamed to kiss the mother during their adolescent years. However, when they were older, they took the initiative to kiss and hug her.

When we have all grown up and become older, (only then) we take initiative to hug her, (but) during secondary school we were embarrassed...

(Mrs. Azizah, Former Headmaster, Late Madam Maimon's daughter).

Generally, children are easily influenced by the people they admire the most. Another exemplary mother, Madam Kalsum, has a very close relationship with her children. In this sense, she becomes the best educator for her children. She hugs her children without fail and the children would hug her back.

Mom is the nearest educator for children... in the child's heart... that was why that we would at first shake her hand, and then we would hug her.
(Ustaz Ashraf, Lecturer, Madam Kalsum's son).

For Madam Awiah, her love for her children blossom naturally. She openly demonstrates her love towards them with a kiss. As a matter of fact, she still kisses her sons even in public.

Mother's compassion with children is natural... although they have all grown up, I would still kiss them. That is my way of showing true love.
(Madam Awiah, the 10th Ibu Mithālī).

Health Care

Children need special attention and intensive care for speedy recovery. In this regard, Madam Ayot is very particular about the health of her children. Whenever they were sick, she would accompany and look after them.

According to Sidek (2010), the acts of loving and tender care show that mothers love their children. It is also very crucial to nurture continuous love, care and mercy that are needed to develop positive characters in the children (Sidek, 2010).

Whenever we were sick or down with fever, she took good care and stayed with us.
(Dr. Ahmad, Dentist, Late Madam Ayot's son).

Madam Wan Mas treats her children with so much love and she would even provide special food whenever they fall sick.

Nik Amrah still remembered that his mother would feed him the favourite bread when he was down with fever. As she petted the head of the sick child, Wan Mas would give bread and supplication for the healing process.
(Nik Safiah & Rokiah, 2004).

Madam Ayot still looks after her children and care for her children even when they have grown up and are married with families. This demonstrates her never-ending concern of the children and their well-being. Furthermore, the children would still require advice and attention from the mothers in every phase of their lives. as they face different challenges at different stages of their life. Therefore, mother-child attachment is very much significant.

Even though all of children have grown up and start their own family, she (my mother) would always prioritize and give fullest attention to their wellness.
(Dr. Ahmad, Dentist, Late Madam Ayot's son).

Findings show that madam Ayot would take the initiative to take care of her children and their families as well. She would be looking after the health and welfare of her own children and their spouses.

For example, she would ensure her daughters and daughters in law received a proper care and supervision during maternity. She did this even though it was beyond her capabilities.
(Dr. Ahmad, Dentist, Late Madam Ayot's son).

Pregnancy, birth and maternity are the most difficult period for any young mother. During this time, they require proper health care for immediate recovery while the babies are well taken care of. Young mothers would often

suffer from post-baby syndrome or the 'baby blues'. As such, it is highly important that their physical, spiritual, and psychological health is observed to prevent any negative implications. In this regard, *Ibu Mithālī* would share their skills and expertise to ensure that these young mothers get through difficult times without untoward incidents. To relate this with *Ibu Mithālī*, Madam Esah took good care of her children during their maternity period. She concocted traditional prescription, massaged and took good care of her children and grandchildren.

Mom (was knowledgeable) when it comes to herbs... for delivering (a baby) purposes... for massages, she was the expert.
(Mrs. Rosilah, Teacher, Madam Esah's daughter).

Madam Esah always prepares adequate supply of herbs for their needs particularly because she has many daughters, daughter-in-laws and granddaughters. During confinement, she would also look after them and provide necessary assistance. This shows that *Ibu Mithālī* are very concerned about the welfare of their children and grandchildren. Although Madam Esah has aged, she still takes the initiative to care for her children following traditional methods, at her best ability.

These herbs were specially prepared for her children and the grandchildren... if they stayed here, (then) she would take care of them during maternity...
(Mrs. Rosilah, Teacher, Madam Esah's daughter).

Preparing Favourite Meals

Everyone has a favourite food. *Ibu Mithālī* knows the favourite food for each of their children. At any given time, *Ibu Mithālī* would show her affection to the children by preparing their favourite food.

Each individual requires specific attention. As such, in addition to keeping them well, Madam Ayot would prepare her children's favourite food when they are sick.

.. cook our favourite food.
(Dr. Ahmad, Dentist, Madam Ayot's son).

Madam Wan Mas is always concerned about her children's favourite meals. She would take the time to cook even though she has a maid. By doing so, she would feel the satisfaction of preparing the meals with her own hands. In addition, this would also ensure that the food is clean, fresh and nutritious. The time she sacrificed to provide the food was valued by her children as illustrated in the following excerpt:

She cooked, she observed what we like to eat... although she is a teacher and had a maid, but she (still) cooked.
(Mrs. Nik Mastura, Former Education Officer, Madam Wan Mas's daughter).

As a teacher, she still had time in the evening to care for the children and cooked her husband's and children's favourite food. At night, Wan Mas would be busy cooking and preparing food even after hiring a maid.
(Nik Safiah & Rokiah, 2004).

Madam Esah likes to cook until now, especially the favourite food of her children.

Hajjah Esah loves cooking, and even now, when her children, and their families return home, she would cook their favourite dishes. Her children's favourite dishes are banana cake, koci cake, and sun-dried anchovies in stir-fried sauce.
(Noor Aziah, 2011).

As for Madam Kalsum, she hires a maid at home, but she still prefers to prepare the meals herself. This allows her children to taste the food prepared by their own mother.

(She) cooked on her own, (she) prepared the ingredients

herself, (it was as if) we could taste the love and tenderness through her meals.

(Ustaz Ashraf, Lecturer, Madam Kalsum's son).

Besides cooking, *Ibu Mithālī* also buys food favoured by their children. For example, Madam Ayot would pamper her children with Milo, nuts and many other packed foods every month. The children enjoy this moment and perceive it as a luxury. This shows that, despite minimal income, *Ibu Mithālī* try their best to meet the request of their children and create harmony in the family. In the case of Madam Ayot, this makes all of her children feel her love.

Normally early of the month, and usually at night, we would sit together, drink Milo and eat nuts, fried seeds and other favourite food that our parents could afford. This is a luxury in our childhood.

(Dr. Ahmad, Dentist, Late Madam Ayot's son).

Madam Esah would also entertain any of her children each month after receiving her salary. She would take them to town and have lunch as a reward for their excellent achievement in school. It boosts encouragement for other children to excel in their studies.

Sometimes, (whenever) she wanted to cheer the children, and gave motivation. (Especially) If the salary were paid, she would bring one child at a time. My father would take me to Kuala Ketil whenever I did well and ranked no.1 in class. And, to go there, we would hire a car and he would pay for it... we would be very happy indeed for being able to score and rank no.1 in class. It is a reward.

(Mrs. Rosilah, Teacher, Madam Esah's daughter).

Emotional Touch

Empathy is vital to develop positive and healthy relationship. Empathy refers to appreciating other people's feelings and thoughts. The majority of *Ibu Mithālī*'s husbands are very strict in educating their children. Thus, the children are afraid of the father figure, especially whenever they encounter problems. Punishment brings negative impact to the children (Gonzalez-mena, 2006). Frequent punishment will make the children be more devious, experience reduced learning process and later become a model for aggressive behaviour. It will also prevent positive relationship between parents and their children. Thus, *Ibu Mithālī*'s care is needed to reduce negative effect of the punishment because healthy relationship is the basis for effective discipline which enables the children to get back on their feet after being reprimanded by their father.

Ibu Mithālī serve to balance the strictness of their husbands with their gentle, caring and sympathetic approach to the children. This prevents the children from falling into depression after being scolded or punished by their father. In other words, the gentleness of the mother balances the father's leadership character to develop the children with good ethics of conduct and high determination (Sidek, 2010).

Ibu Mithālī's children understand the reason behind their father's stern actions. They realize that their father's approach is a causal coherence. They also believe that the strictness is not driven by hatred and this made the children respect and fear the father figure when they were adolescent. Madam Kalsum balances her husband's firmness with her subtleness, love and understanding. This enables her to become a place for her children to seek comfort after being scolded by their father.

Because father was strict... we loved him (nonetheless)... we were afraid with him... so there was balanced... whenever father gets angry... we would seek comfort from mother.

(Ustaz Ashraf, Lecturer,
Madam Kalsum's daughter).

Children learn the most right after they make any mistakes (Gonzalez-Mena, 2006). Madam Wan Mas does not interfere when her husband reprimands her children. This shows her respect to the actions taken by the spouse. With that, kids would get a useful lesson on making mistakes. However, the teachable moment would be lost when punishment hurt the children (Gonzalez-Mena, 2011). In this context, Madam Esah would not allow her children who have been punished to feel lonely. At night, she would show her affection and love. This would make the children who are reprimanded to learn from their mistakes. At the same time, it would make them realize that *Ibu Mithālī* loves them despite their mistakes. *Ibu Mithālī* is also very understanding of their children's feelings of being hurt after being scolded by the father.

When it was the time to go to bed, she would be at our side, (especially) after dad caned us for being naughty; true indeed, she was always kind, and especially after being scolded by father... she was very understanding.

(Mrs. Rosilah, Teacher,
Madam Esah's daughter).

As a loyal wife, Madam Esah does not interfere her husband when he canes the children, but that does not mean she would care less. She would cry and weep quietly upon looking at her children after being reprimanded. She would then quickly mend the wounds caused from the beating. This illustrates her love even though she never says it verbally. It also shows that *Ibu Mithālīs* love their children very much as they love themselves.

... If my father caned us, she would cry, then she helped to treat the wound...

(Mrs. Rosilah, Teacher,
Madam Esah's daughter).

The husband of Madam Esah also concurs with Mrs. Rosilah statement. He realizes that Madam Esah has caring heart and sensitive soul. The nature of empathy shown by Madam Esah makes the children feel at ease and loved. This is important because at the adolescent stage, children who feel isolated and unloved

by their parents have high tendency to rebel and run away from home.

Makcik, she loves her child. If Pakcik beat (them), she would cry, her own way (without showing it).

(Mr. Sulaiman, Farmer,
Madam Esah's husband).

Spiritual Touch

Ibu Mithālīs also show their love by always observing the welfare of their children. They never stop praying for their children to achieve excellence in the world and the hereafter.

Ustaz Ashraf believes that his parents' prayers is one of the major factors contributing to his success. It gears up his spirit to continuously excel in whatever he does.

At that particular time, (I) depended so much on the blessing of my parents' supplication.

(Ustaz Ashraf, Lecturer,
Madam Kalsum's daughter).

Dr. Aminah believes that prayers performed by her mother is a motivating factor which provies peaceful minds during examination. She believes that her mother always prays for their success. Even after they are married, the children would still be in touch with their mother for blessings and support. This shows that *Ibu Mithālī's* relationships with her children is very much intact even after all of them start their families and live apart.

Every time (my) children are about to take any examination or test, regardless if they are married or not, they would never miss to call for the mother and seek her blessing.... (Nonetheless whether upon request or not) mother would always pray (for their success)...

(Dr. Aminah, Medical Doctor,
Late Madam Maimon's daughter).

Mr. Khairul too shares the same sentiment that his mother's blessing and prayer are the source of strength and motivation, which lead to their success. He believes that the accomplishment that they enjoy comes from the blessing of their mother who never fails to pray for their success and happiness despite her limitation in providing the luxury of life. The testament shows that prayer is a powerful mechanism for *Ibu Mithālī* to ensure the well-being of her children. This is consistent with the role of prayer as a weapon for the believers.

There were a lot of limitation (in providing the best care) but it was the blessing and the prayer of a mother (that ensure success).

(Mr. Khairul, Government Officer, Madam Alang Kamariah's son).

A loving mother would always pray for the welfare of her children even though they are hurt by the children's attitude and action. Prayer is an ultimate symbol of love from parents to their children. Prayer would result in the children to feel the intimacy and love showered by the parents.

CONCLUSION

In summary, mother's love and compassion is the most pertinent ingredient for child development. Since in the womb until adulthood, with the mercy of God, loving mothers shower their children with love and kindness. They nurture their children with love without expecting any rewards. As a Muslim, the most powerful motivation for human action is to get Allah's blessings. *Ibu Mithālīs* demonstrate their love and affection to their children in many ways. They would kiss and hug their children, provide good healthcare, prepare the best meal for the children, provide comfort, and pray for the success of each of the children. They continuously give physical, socio-emotional and spiritual touch to the children. As a consequence, the sincerity of love fosters the children's self-esteem, motivation, success, and well-being.

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