

Survival strategies of single mothers among indigenous ethnics in rural areas: Case study in Kota Belud, Sabah

ABSTRAK

The number of single mothers in Malaysia is increasing. The census in 2000 showed that there were 620,389 single mothers within the country. This number increased in 2010 to 831,860 or 2.9 percent of the population. This shows an increase of 211,417 single mothers in the last 10 years. A total of 61,717 single mothers were based in Sabah in 2010. Despite vast research on single mothers in West Malaysia, little is known about the challenges faced by these individuals and their survival strategies in the rural areas of Sabah. A total of 244 respondents participated in this study, representing various villages and ethnic groups in the district of Kota Belud. Single mothers in this study identified at least three main challenges; some of these included generating income, caring, educating and disciplining their children and acting as both a mother and father figure to children. Other challenges included establishing and maintaining social support networks. One of the main survival strategies involves generating income by acquiring skills and training in order to become an entrepreneur or participate in small-scale businesses in their district. Single mothers also generate social support through family members and associations such as Persatuan Ibu Tunggal that provide assistance, social networking, advice, contacts, information about the availability of skills training and encouragement to get ahead. This study provides input for the development of a National Action Plan to empower single mothers in Malaysia and ensure necessary institutional support, effective policies and services to empower and lift these individuals out of poverty.