

**Case 1
The Teo Family****Brief Background**

The case was referred by the Housing & Development Board (HDB Bukit Merah Branch) in December 1991 as they were unable to pay for their rent and utilities. The arrears accumulated at that point were as follows:

Rent	\$313.00
Conservancy charges	\$150.00
Legal costs incurred by HDB	\$ 80.00
Utilities	\$121.00
Total debts	<u>\$ 664.00</u>

The case worker placed the family on the Rent and Utilities Assistance Scheme (RUAS) for 6 months from January to June 92 and as such, the rent arrears and the legal costs were written off. Assistance was approved based on the caseworker's assessment that Mr. Teo, the father was unable to secure employment as a labourer because of poor health. Also, his lack of work skills made it difficult for him to secure alternate employment that was less physically demanding. In short, RUAS was meant as a reprieve to enable Mr. Teo to regain his health.

During the period the family was on RUAS, the caseworker provided employment counselling for Mr. Teo, placed his children in the Centre's learning programmes as well as secured an educational grant for the eldest child who was in school. At the case review, the worker felt that adequate support had been provided and the welfare of the children has been looked into. The caseworker also assessed Mr. Teo's health to have improved deeming him fit for employment. Not wanting to encourage long-term dependency, the caseworker recommended that RUAS be terminated.

8 months after RUAS was terminated, the family was issued a *notice to quit* by the HDB for rent arrears. This time the caseworker was presented with the following debts:

Rent	\$ 607.50
Utilities	\$ 142.45
Medical bills	\$ 521.00
Total	<u>\$127 0.95</u>

Taking into consideration the welfare of 3 young children, the caseworker reinstated the family on RUAS. The family received assistance for rent, utilities and conservancy charges from March to

August 93. Following which, the caseworker terminated assistance for rent and conservancy charges with the intention of pressurising Mr. Teo to work more regularly. Thus, the family continued to receive assistance to defray the utility charges from September 93 to August 94.

The continual monthly assistance of a \$45.00 voucher for utilities seemed to offer the family a sense of security and probably helped strengthen the rapport staff had with them. Mdm Chan confided in the caseworker a variety of problems. She reportedly had an abortion and her spouse had to borrow \$600.00 from a loan shark partly to pay the abortion fees. Moreover, spousal arguments increased and they were mainly over the husband's inability to provide. Mdm Chan also complained that her husband frequented bars and spent his money on drink. The possibility of a separation was raised by Mdm Chan but she later felt that it would not be easy for her and her children to fend on their own.

In September 94, the family received another eviction order for owing \$1196.00. The family would also have had to pay an additional \$1230.00 being legal costs if they were unable to settle the arrears immediately. Again, for the benefit of the young children the caseworker reinstated the family on RUAS for 6 months.

In January 95, Mdm Chan complained about her eldest daughter's strange behaviour. In the middle of the night, the girl would claim to hear the radio or people talking. Also, her teacher at school reported that the girl laughed to herself in the classroom. Mdm Chan and her husband brought the girl to consult a temple medium. The medium provided some paper talisman that was to be mixed with water for drinking and advised the parents not to pressure their daughter.

Over the next few months, this concern remained. We also observed that Mdm Chan telephoned the Centre incessantly on a daily basis. Her anxiety over her daughter became more pronounced and she appeared highly stressed and frustrated with her family situation. Sometimes, Mdm Chan's calls would be about marital conflicts and at other times, about trivia family decision such as choosing the children's clothes. As such, we became concerned over 2 issues :

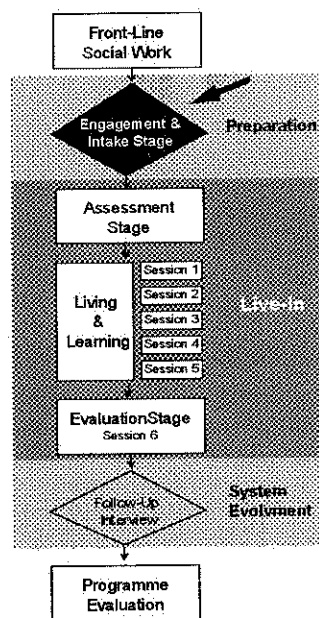
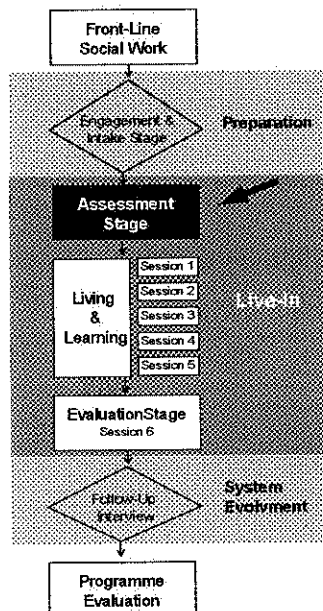
- Mdm Chan and her family's well being;
- Mdm Chan's seemingly over dependency on the Centre.

Hence, in June 95 the Centre offered the family the opportunity for live-in therapy to address the various issues that may be troubling the family.

Case 1 at a Glance

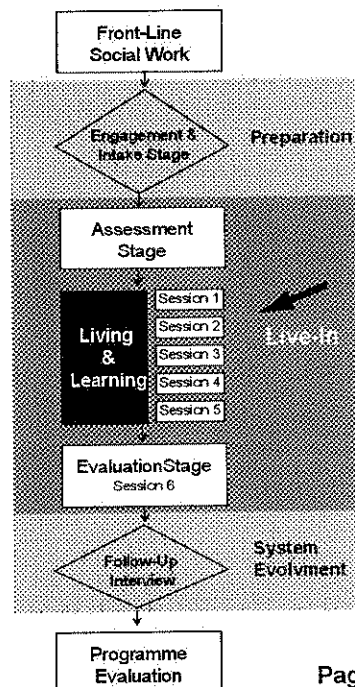
No of persons served	5	Language used in Therapy	Hokkien
Type of Housing	2 room rental flat	No. of live-in days	4 days 3 nights
Ethnicity	Chinese		

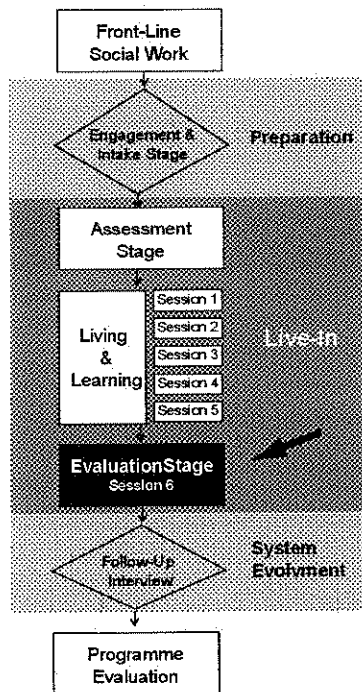
STAGES 1 & 2			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	110895	Home Visit	1 hr
2.	160895	Pre-intake Assessment	1.5 hr
3.	230895	Intake Interview	1 hr
Sub Total			3.5 hr



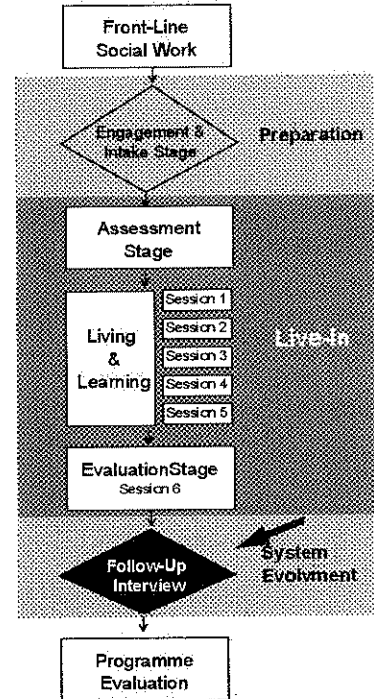
STAGE 3			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	040995	Pre-therapy Assessment	3.5 hr
Sub Total			3.5 hr

STAGE 4			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	040995	Session 1	1 hr
2.	050995	Session 2	2 hr
3.	050995	Session 3	2 hr
4.	060995	Session 4	1 hr
5.	060995	Session 5	2.5hr
6.	060995	Closing Activity	2 hr
Sub Total		Sessions	8.5hr
		Others	2 hr





STAGE 5			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	060995	Evaluation Session	1 hr
Sub Total			1 hr



STAGE 6			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	101095	Follow-up Interview	0.5hr
2.	101095	Staff Discussion	1 hr
Sub Total			1.5 hr

Total 20 hr

Programme at a Glance
Date: Monday, 4 to Thursday, 7 September 1995
Venue: NTUC Changi Holiday Flat

Time	Day	4 Sep 95	5 Sep 95	6 Sep 95	7 Sep 95
Morning			10.00 a.m. • Session 2 Family Trip to Pulau Ubin	10.00 a.m. • Session 4 Review Children's Therapeutic Home- Work	10.00 a.m. • Check-out 11.30 a.m. • Back at NC / Home
Afternoon		12.30 p.m. • Family picked up from flat 1.30 p.m. • Welcome lunch at Changi Pt • Orientation of Changi Village 2.30 p.m. • Check-in • Assessment Stage 4.30 p.m. • Family Time	12.00 p.m. onwards • Family Time	1.30 p.m. • Session 5 4.00 p.m. • Break	
Evening		7.00 p.m. • Dinner with Staff 8.00 p.m. • Session 1 9.00 p.m. • End of Day	7.30 p.m. • Session 3 Initial Assessment Results 9.00 p.m. • End of Day	8.00 p.m. • Session 5 Closing 8.30 p.m. • Closing Activity Trip to Changi Airport 11.00 p.m. • End of Day	

The Key Players

The Family

The Teo family comprises 5 members and lives in a 2 room rental flat:

Mr. Teo

A daily rated labourer who works at a warehouse 2 to 3 days a week. Depending on the amount of work, he is paid between \$30 - \$60 for a day's work. Mr. Teo has never had any other form of employment. Over the last few years, work opportunities have reduced because of his age, poor health and the modernisation of warehouses. Mr. Teo has a teenage daughter from a previous marriage but does not have any social links with her or his ex-wife.

Mdm Chan

This is also her 2nd marriage. A full-time homemaker, her main rôle in the family is the care of the 3 children and the maintenance of the home. Mdm Chan does not have any children from the earlier marriage. She can be described as having a bubbly personality and is usually the spokesperson of the family. Also Mdm Chan is able to seek help from appropriate welfare organisations, friends and relatives.

Peck Fong

The eldest child in the family is small built and relatively tall for her age. She uses spectacles and presents herself as having a very quiet and shy disposition. She is an average student and keeps a low profile at school and in the family.

Peck Choo

Unlike her elder sister, she is gregarious and very active. She entertains the family with her jokes, observations and antics. Compared to her elder sister, she seems to be doing better at school. Whenever possible, Peck Choo accompanies Mdm Chan everywhere.

Seng Koon

The youngest child enjoys special family attention because of his age and gender. He even receives more pocket money than his sisters. Seng Koon is as active and playful as any child his age.

The Staff

The Therapy Team

- Ng Bee Leng
- Gerard Ee

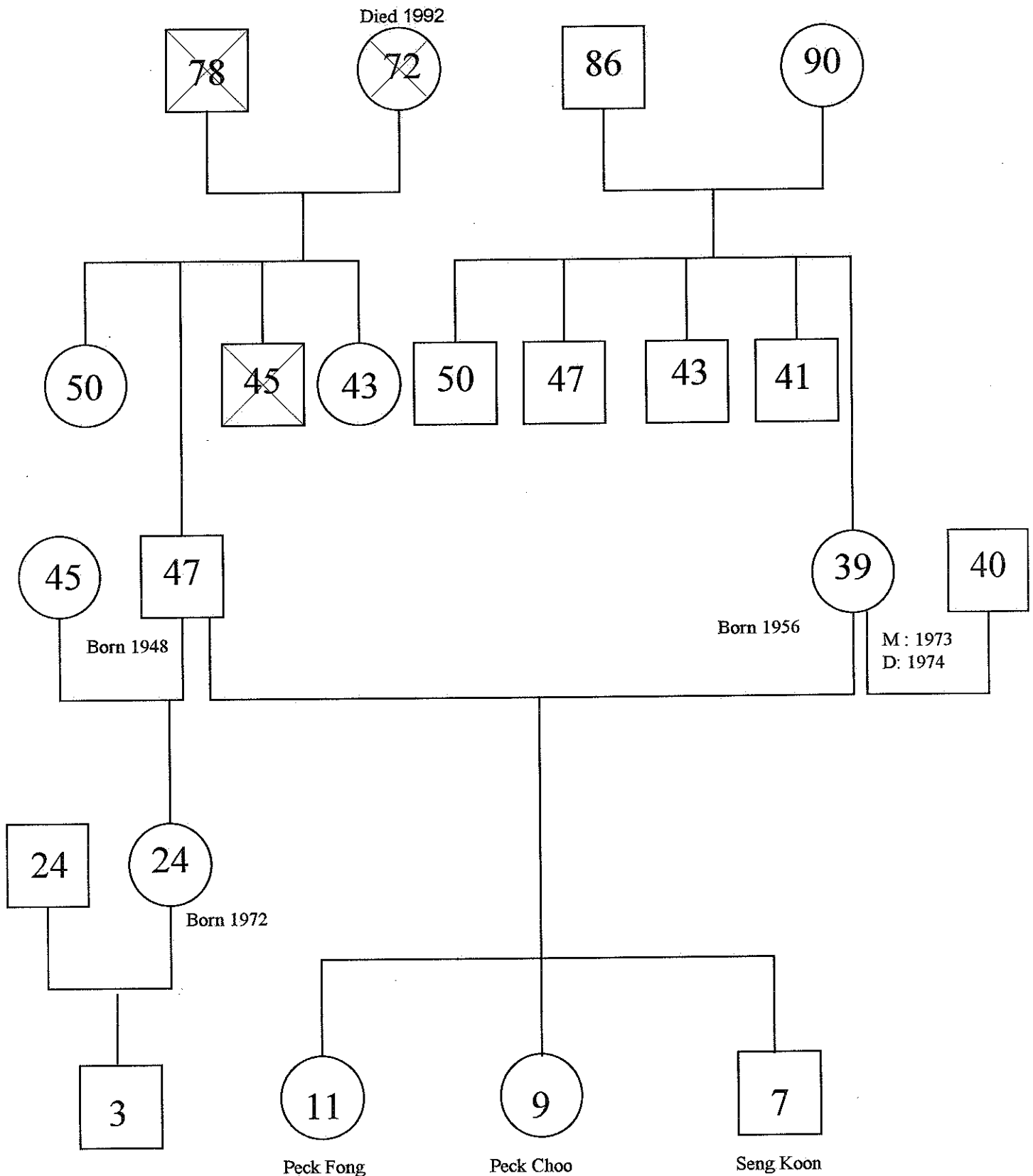
The Discussion Team

- Anna Tee
- Rebecca Tan

The Facilitator

- Tan Boon Huat

Genogram



Pre-Intake Assessment
Wednesday, 16 August 95, 4.00 pm - 5.30 pm

Present

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Rebecca

The symptom(s)/presenting problem(s)

- Mdm Chan is worried about her eldest daughter Peck Fong. She hears non-existent radio music and conversations in the middle of the night. Also, at school the teacher has reported that her daughter laughs to herself in class.

The client's explanation for the problem

- Mdm Chan thinks that Peck Fong is 'siao' / 'tao hong', i.e., crazy or 'not quite right in the head'. She also suspects that her daughter may be cursed or possessed by a spirit.

The client's attempted solutions

- The parents brought their child to a temple medium. Peck Fong was given some talisman in the form of yellow papers to dissolve in drinking water and the couple were also told not to pressure her too much.

The client's observation of consequences?

- Peck Fong may need to be institutionalised for mental illness or if she is bewitched the family will suffer much hardship.

The social worker's explanations for the problem(s) :

- **Relationship perspective**

☞ Peck Fong may be experiencing difficulties relating to her parents and/or siblings and is seeking a way of communicating with her family.

☞ The parents have an active sexual relationship and also seem to enjoy participating in outings and doing things together. Problem sharing/solving is a way of bringing them closer to each other.

☞ Mdm Chan is very resourceful and tolerant and these qualities could make her very attractive to Teo. As such seeking help for their daughter is a way of enhancing her attractiveness to her husband.

☞ The spousal relationship is unsatisfactory and Mdm Chan finds fulfilment in her mothering role. Her request for help is a way of maintaining her role as a mother.

- **Family background perspective**

✍ This is the second marriage for both of them. They could be staying in this relationship because they do not want to leave a marriage again.

✍ Mdm Chan ran away from her first husband and she could be grateful to Teo for his acceptance at a time when she was scared and vulnerable.

- **Cultural background perspective**

✍ Seng Koon being the youngest child and an only son, may be receiving more attention from his parents. The younger girl is also bright and clever and very much like Mdm Chan in character (i.e. sociable, bubbly, alert and sharp). Hence, in comparison Peck Fong may be considered slow, 'weird' and not to have brought 'much luck' to the family. Given the above, the eldest child could be neglected by her parents.

- **Clients' background perspective**

✍ Mdm Chan appears to be always looking for approval, attention and acceptance. She works very fast and is always ready for further instructions. This may imply anxiety, insecurity, loneliness or boredom. Hence, a constant need to be connected with people all the time. Perhaps too, she thrives on crises because she appears useful while her spouse appears useless.

- **Socio-economic background perspective**

✍ The family receives financial assistance and other practical help from the Centre. They may be anxious about the ceasing of such aid and by presenting such a problem, the family ensures continual contact with the Centre.

The function of the problem/symptom in the family

- The girl behaves strangely as an attempt to get the attention of other family members
- Teo's lifestyle has brought out Mdm Chan's resourcefulness. This could be a quality that keeps Teo attracted to her.

What maintains the problem/symptom

- The identification of the problem creates a bonding among the other family members which is unconsciously gratifying. This bonding at the expense of Peck Fong is legitimised by the family's open show of concern.

The social worker's observations of consequences of the problem?

- The girl may be wrongly labelled by the family and this will affect her psychological development.

Intake Interview

Wednesday, 23 August 1995, 5.30 p.m. - 6.30 p.m.

It's My Daughter You Should be Talking About!**Synopsis****Family**

- Teo
- Mdm Chan
- Peck Fong
- Peck Choo
- Seng Koon

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Rebecca

Pre-Session Information**Hypotheses**

Mdm Chan had confided in her caseworker that she was concerned about her husband's irregular employment habits. However, she made it clear that it was not an issue she wanted to discuss during therapy. The staff feel that Mdm Chan may use the intake interview to raise this issue with her husband.

Goals

- To define mutually acceptable goals for the live-in.
- To provide the opportunity for family issues apart from the presenting problem to surface.

Summary of Session

Coming for therapy was a completely new experience for the family. Initially, they adopted a cautious stance and were looking to the staff for direction. The children were apprehensive as they probably felt that they may be the reason their family was in the room. As for the parents, they had some difficulty presenting the problem clearly. Perhaps, besides their common concern for their daughter, there were other family issues that they have yet to agree on.

However, Teo firmly resisted when he sensed that the staff were hinting at the issue of the family's lack of finances. It was an issue Teo was not prepared to address and it became apparent that the only mandated issue for therapy was Peck Fong's abnormal behaviour.

Post-Session Findings

The goal of the live-in was for staff to make an assessment of Peck Fong's abnormal behaviour and to advise her parents accordingly.

Process Recording

The meeting started with the family looking expectantly at the staff to direct the session. Gerard started the session by thanking the family for coming to the meeting. He also asked if the family understood what the Family Learning Centre is all about. This was followed by an explanation that a few families with different problems are seen in one year. It was explained that if the family is agreeable, they would go with the staff to Changi where a 3-room flat would be booked for 4 days. The family was told that during these four days, staff would be prepared to help with any problems that they might have.

The programme was also outlined. After the four days at Changi, the family would meet the staff for a follow-up interview a month later. This interview would determine whether another live-in session will be required. The couple nodded and said that they understood.

The couple was then asked if they had any needs. Mdm. Chan replied that she wanted their children to be 'good' by the end of the four days. Teo nodded agreement. Mdm. Chan then told staff that Peck Fong had her head x-rayed because she had been having painful headaches that made her cry. The headaches occur approximately 2 to 3 times a month.

The staff also learned that Peck Fong is also afraid of going to bed with the lights off and she hears non-existent voices, music, and footsteps occasionally. The couple are afraid that there is a serious problem with the child.

Mdm. Chan went on to describe how Peck Fong would suddenly scream loudly. Gerard then tried to ask Peck Fong if this was true but Peck Fong hid behind her mother and did not want to say anything. However, Peck Choo contributed by corroborating the above facts and when questioned by Gerard, she informed that she too screams suddenly. Mdm. Chan then said that Peck Choo does not do this as often as Peck Fong. While this dialogue was taking place, the children played with one another. It was observed that Seng Koon frequently teased his sisters.

The couple said that they wanted professionals to observe Peck Fong's 'movements' further. They were unable to 'catch it' on their own and hoped that the staff involved would be able to assess if her behaviour is really abnormal.

When asked if he personally observed Peck Fong's behaviour, Teo said that he is often not at home and the children are normally asleep when he returns home. He hears about the girl's behaviour from Mdm. Chan. Peck Choo then interjected at this point to say that Peck Fong likes to sleep with 'dirty things.' When asked what these 'dirty things' were, Peck Choo, Peck Fong and Mdm. Chan all

said that they were things like dirty mattresses, and bolsters. All laughed. Perhaps Peck Choo did not like the manner in which her sister was the focus of attention and distracted everyone.

The family was then told that they could stop and say 'No' if they did not want to continue with the F.L.C. Programme. But, the couple reiterated that they wanted it for their children. They believed that it would benefit them. When asked for a decision, Mdm. Chan looked at her husband and Teo looked at her. Both did not seem to want to say the final 'yes' or 'no.'

The therapists felt that the problem definition was unclear and tried to communicate this to the family. Examples had to be given in order to get the client to understand this. The issue about the family being on welfare aid for the last 3-4 years was raised as an example. The couple was asked if they would still be willing to participate in the programme if they did not appear to have an apparent problem, and if the staff defined the family's problem.

Mdm. Chan's immediate response was to nod assent but Teo looked uncomfortable and unsure. He hesitated. Staff then further clarified that other issues may arise and asked if they would be comfortable discussing these issues. Teo then started justifying why the family income is so unstable by stating the nature of his work.

Gerard then clarified that the discussion of these issues did not necessarily mean that assistance would be terminated. The raising of these issues was meant to help the staff better understand the situation.

The atmosphere in the room was quite tensed at this point. Gerard then stated three ways of proceeding. The first was to go to Changi solely to address the issues dealing with the children. The second was for the staff to seek an understanding of family matters should there be nothing wrong with the children's behaviour. The third way would be to go to Changi and proceed with whatever issues that may arise. He stressed that what is important is to do what is useful to them.

Throughout this, the children were talking and moving near one another. They appeared physically closer to their mother. Teo sat slightly away from them. Mdm. Chan looked slightly troubled at this point. Gerard observed this and asked her what she was worried about.

Mdm. Chan then said that she is worried about Teo's unstable income and employment as well as the children. Should assistance be terminated, she fears that they will lose their accommodation. She was then reassured that discussion of issues would take place, not termination of RUAS assistance.

Teo then said that he understands that it would be a discussion of these issues and not a conspiracy among staff against him. There was assent from the couple regarding this and they agreed to continue with the programme.

This was followed by a discussion about the family's weekly expenses. Teo is the one who controls the money. He gives \$1.30 to the girls every day while Seng Koon gets \$2.00. The girls get \$2.00 on Wednesdays when they have tuition. The children have lunch and dinner at home. Teo uses \$15.00 for his transport and food while Mdm. Chan gets \$16.00 for the household expenses. Therefore, it was concluded that the family uses approximately \$144.00 for 4 days.

There was more energy in the room while this was discussed and the family was encouraged to use their own utensils and bring their own things(e.g. TV). They would be responsible for settling into the flat. The programme would be outlined the night before each day.

It was then agreed that the family would come up with a list of things they deemed necessary. They would also have to contact the staff a few days before the live-in session.

The session ended on this note and Teo started to move out of the room. The rest followed.

The Initial Live-in Assessment
Monday, 4 September 1995, 12.30 pm - 4.00 pm
When Will I See Him Again?

Synopsis

Family

- Mdm Chan
- Peck Fong
- Peck Choo
- Seng Koon

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard

Pre-session Information

Significant Events

Mdm Chan had been calling the office to inform the staff that her husband may not be able to join the family in the day because of work. Although in the intake interview, Mr Teo expressed that he would have no trouble taking a few days off, the staff told Mdm Chan that it was completely a family decision and it will not be held against them.

Hypotheses**1 Anxiety About Therapy**

Mdm Chan's contact with the Centre during this period was noted as anxiety. The therapy team came up with 3 possible causes:

- i. The unpredictable outcome of the forthcoming live-in therapy;
- ii. The fear that her husband would not be supportive of therapy; and
- iii. The dilemma of deciding whether to express her frustration with her husband's unstable income at therapy.

Hypothesis iii, was gathered by observing the family dynamics during the intake interview when this issue was briefly hinted at. Teo's behaviour at that stage was defensive and the atmosphere in the room was tensed.

2 Re-establish Leadership Position

Mdm Chan had always been the family spokesperson. At the intake interview, Teo demonstrated influence in varying degrees and Mdm Chan appeared to take the backseat. By maintaining contact she was attempting to regain influence on her dealings with the staff.

Goals

- i. To assess the extent of leadership Mdm Chan had in the family as well as her level of competency as a leader;
- ii. To assess the role Teo plays in the family; and
- iii. To assess Peck Fong's behaviour within the family and to determine if she may be severely 'disturbed' as reported.

Summary of the Session

The family appeared reasonably well prepared for the live-in. They packed the necessary cooking utensils and were ready when the staff arrived to pick them up. Teo, was significantly absent. This affected Mdm Chan more than the children.

For the children, the 'natural' manner in which the assessment stage was conducted allowed them to be themselves. The observed interaction between them provided much useful information and clues to the defined problem. As for Mdm Chan, the 'natural' setting allowed her to portray a more quiet and reticent side of her personality.

The various tasks that were required of the family such as carrying the baggage, checking the facilities and so forth provided an effective and non-intrusive, non-threatening context for the staff to assess the family dynamics.

Post-Session Findings

- i. Teo may play a bigger part in Mdm Chan's life than was imagined. He may be the non-involved parent but he appeared to have much influence and affect on Mdm Chan even in his absence.
- ii. Mdm Chan did not appear as confident or as competent discharging her parental duties in both child and household management.
- iii. Despite being the eldest, Peck Fong was experiencing difficulty within her sibling sub-system. The hierarchy determined by age was overshadowed by factors such as the personality of Peck Choo and the gender of Seng Koon. However, she did not display any behaviour deemed abnormal.

Process Recording

The family was ready when the staff arrived. Except for Peck Choo who donned a pretty frock, the rest were in shorts and T-shirts. Mdm Chan informed that Mr Teo was at work and he would make his own way to the holiday flat in the evening. He had given instructions for the rest of the family to proceed as planned and Mdm Chan would have to page him to provide directions.

Apart from their personal effects, the family packed some cooking utensils and rations. Mdm Chan explained that she preferred to 'be prepared' in case the market at Changi did not have food to their liking or their prices too expensive.

Mdm Chan appeared a little hesitant and awkward as she explained to her curious neighbours that their family was leaving for a camping trip at a holiday chalet. In bated breath, she confided to us that her neighbours were 'busy bodies' who were slightly envious that her family could afford a holiday. As for the children, they seemed appropriately excited and helped Mdm Chan with the baggage.

The to Changi was r uneventful. One could not help feeling a sense of anxiety in her voice as Mdm Chan reiterated the reason Mr Teo was absent. The children's excitement did not last long; after looking out of the windows for a while, they sat quietly as they rode along East Coast Expressway.

Things livened up a little when the group reached Changi. The welcome lunch at Changi Point Hawker Centre did the trick. At lunch, Mdm Chan was given the agreed live-in subsidy of \$150 and she heaved a sigh of relief as she received it. It dawned on the staff that Mdm Chan may have been feeling insecure about their agreement. However, the matter was not pursued as it would have been culturally insensitive and impolite.

After lunch, the family was brought to their flat. They were instructed to inspect the physical facilities against a check list. Mdm Chan left the task to her daughters and went about setting up the stove and arranging her rations.

The staff intervened at this point by instructing Peck Fong to take charge. Peck Choo spontaneously joined in and when the task was done, all 3 children left with Bee Leng to the caretaker's office. Peck Fong carried out her responsibility well as she explained to the caretaker about a small fault with one of the air-conditioners. However, when everyone returned to the flat, it was Peck Choo who reported the happenings to Mdm Chan. Only upon Bee Leng's prompting did Peck Fong explain to Mdm Chan about the fault with the air-conditioner.

All this time, the children were very excited about their 'new' home. Mdm Chan, on the contrary did not appear impressed. In fact, she appeared rather pre-occupied as she went about setting up the kitchen. She left the kids to settle in by themselves. Apart from a loud but weak attempt at influencing the sleeping arrangements she was doing her own thing. Mdm Chan wanted 'everybody to sleep together' although there were 2 bedrooms. The children were momentarily quiet when she bellowed her order but without her noticing, they organised separate sleeping arrangements for themselves.

As she went along her chores, Mdm Chan was reprimanding herself under her breath for forgetting glasses, and other crockery. She also started complaining about her husband's inability to confirm a meeting point. She was not sure if she had to meet him at Joo Chiat or Changi Point. Mdm Chan appeared anxious and disturbed. She paged her husband repeatedly although she informed the staff that her husband would take a while to reply as there was no phone where he worked. Also, characteristically, Mdm Chan insisted that the staff team join the family for dinner. She had brought more than enough rations for everybody and it would go to waste if they did not participate.

As the staff made our way out of the flat, they explained that the family needed space and time to be by themselves in this new environment. Mdm Chan was reluctant to let them go and enquired how she may reach them. The staff then reassured her they would be back for dinner at 7.00 p.m. and the first session will be at 8.00 p.m.

We Have No Favourites! Right? Monday, 4 September 1995, 8.00 p.m. - 9.00 p.m.

Synopsis

Family

- Mdm Chan
- Teo
- Peck Choo
- Seng Koon
- Peck Fong

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard

Pre-session Information

Hypotheses

During the Assessment Stage, Peck Fong appeared a little shy and socially awkward compared to her siblings but otherwise very normal. As such, the therapy team observed that there may be other issues that the family may address apart from Peck Fong's 'craziness.' Also, Mdm Chan appeared to have many other unspoken concerns. Hence, the therapy team felt that the mandated presenting problem, may actually spark off other issues. Below were the possible options the therapy team highlighted in preparation:

- i. Spousal conflict over Teo's irregular employment and unstable income;
- ii. Disagreement between the parents regarding child and household management issues.

The therapy team also identified the following goals for the session:

Goals

- i. Increase Teo's level of involvement in therapy.
- ii. Clarify roles and responsibilities among family members.
- iii. Further develop the of assessment of Peck Fong.
- iv. Depathologise Peck Fong's abnormal behaviour.
- v. Address Mdm Chan's incessant telephone calls to the Centre.

Summary of the Session

It began sluggishly but picked up after about 20 minutes. Being the introductory session, Teo and Mdm Chan participated cautiously. The children were more spontaneous and were offering more information than the adults. The session was useful in helping the therapists better understand the dynamics between family members, in particular the relationships between Peck Fong and the rest

Post Session Findings

- i. Teo will co-operate if he is not threatened. Teo was given the benefit of the doubt for arriving late for therapy. This move seemed to accord him the due respect as the head of household. As the staff focused solely on issues related to the children, his level of participation gradually increased.
- ii. Teo is the breadwinner while Mdm Chan manages the household and the children. Both Peck Choo and Seng Koon have special attachments to at least one parent but Peck Fong is isolated. She does not seem to have any strong attachments to any of her family members. Also, it is probable the mistakes of her siblings tend to be overlooked or downplayed.

- iii. It became more evident that Peck Fong is scapegoated as the person with the problems. Perhaps, Mdm Chan and Teo need to see her as a needy child in order to accord her some attention. Her other 2 siblings seem to have no difficulty attracting the affection of their parents.
- iv. Seng Koon's stealing was raised. This was an attempt to shift the pathology away from Peck Fong. Peck Fong's behavioural change in response to the intervention indicated that our move was helpful.
- v. There was no opportunity to address Mdm Chan's incessant calls to the Centre. However, her anxiety and her outward dependence on Teo suggest that she has a dire need to cling on to some form of security. Perhaps in this case, a friendly NC at the other end of the telephone line. Left on her own, she was not the confident, resourceful and bubbly personality that she presents herself to be at the Centre.

Process Recording

S *tarted* at 8.00 p.m. sharp with a warming-up exercise. Teo had yet to arrive from work but the staff decided to treat his absence as a possible therapeutic entry point that may prove useful later and went ahead anyway.

The family was introduced to a problem solving exercise that required them to stand in a circle, reach for the hands of those opposite them and get themselves entangled. The objective of the exercise was to untangle themselves without releasing their grips. Initially, the family was lethargic. Mdm Chan appeared slightly uncomfortable playing a game and indicated her reluctance to begin without Teo by offering to delay the session.

At the end of the exercise, the children seemed energised and waited in anticipation for more. When the staff indicated that it was time to sit down and talk with each other, they suggested to do it in the air-conditioned comfort of the bedroom. Hoping to strengthen co-operation, their suggestion was accepted. It was a bad decision.

Everyone was lazing around and the atmosphere was just not conducive for any 'work.' The pace was sluggish and Seng Koon decided to raise the tempo by bouncing himself on the bed. Luckily, 10 minutes into it the session was literally saved by the bell. The phone rang and Mdm Chan bounced up on her feet. Within seconds, she returned to the bedroom declaring that she needed to pick up Teo who was downstairs. This sparked off a brief verbal tussle between Mdm Chan and the staff as they wanted to continue the session with the children. However, despite the confusion generated, Peck Choo left with her as though it was the only and most appropriate course of action for her. When Mdm Chan and Peck Choo were away, Peck Fong was asked if she was usually left out.

Though mildly put across, her answers appeared to confirm this observation. Mdm Chan returned within 5 minutes and the family was instructed to continue the session at the hall.

The session resumed with the intention of clarifying the boundaries, roles and tasks between family members. To keep the momentum, staff decided to engage the children although Mdm Chan and Teo were at the dinner table about 2 metres away. Mdm Chan was fussing around Teo, serving him like a king and updating him on the day. Teo was seated facing the therapists and observing the proceedings intently while half-listening to his wife. It was as if this man was slowly regaining his strength and orientating himself to this new environment and unfamiliar proceedings. Teo was assessing the therapists and the whole process of therapy.

The children were reluctant to answer when asked the purpose of the camp(live-in). For a few awkward moments they appeared at a loss for a reply. Then they looked incredulously at the therapists as though it was such a stupid question to put forth. At this point, Mdm Chan speaking from the dinner table mentioned something about 'the camp being for the children.' Instantaneously, Peck Choo picked up the cue and said that it was all because of Peck Fong. Was Peck Fong mad or not? That was the question to be answered at the end of the camp. The children broke into nervous giggles immediately.

After this, the children warmed up and offered information spontaneously. The mood became upbeat and it was confirmed that Teo is very much on the peripheral of the family. His role is that of the breadwinner and is hardly involved in child or household management issues. He will only intervene in such matters at Mdm Chan's request.

Teo cautiously inched his way towards his children as the mood became more upbeat. He smiled openly at the children's candidness and glowed with pride at their confidence while speaking with the therapists. Calmly and quietly, he placed himself on the sofa and Mdm Chan joined him. At this point, the therapists acknowledged their presence with an appreciative nod. The therapists wondered if Mr Teo's sequence of behaviour was indicative of the nature of his involvement with the family but did not pursue this thought as it was deemed too threatening.

Questions directed at establishing the nature of relationships between family members revealed interesting differences between the perspectives of the children and their parents. Both parents denied preferring any particular child but the children declared Seng Koon and Peck Choo as the respective favourites of Teo and Mdm Chan. Mdm Chan and Teo appeared a little taken aback by their children's observations but they both smiled broadly and the room atmosphere evolved into one of gentle teasing among friends.

Moments later, Mdm Chan admitted that Peck Choo was indeed her favourite. However, she added that Peck Fong does not get beaten because she will become sick. The therapists then asked, 'Since Peck Choo is Mdm Chan's favourite and Seng Koon is close to Teo, who is Peck Choo close to?' Mdm Chan responded by saying that Peck Fong was actually Teo's favourite child. Her response was not greeted by any affirmation from the others so a closed question was asked, 'Is Peck Choo the person that looks out for Peck Fong?' Again, no definite answer was forthcoming and the therapist concurred that Peck Fong may be isolated within the family.

The family appeared to be hearing about Peck Fong's isolation for the first time. There was a sense of discomfort as everyone was searching within themselves for an appropriate response. Even Peck Fong found herself in a spot. Now that her difficulties have surfaced, she continues to be a source of discomfort for the others.

Sensing Peck Fong's predicament, the therapists switched the family's attention to the other children by asking if they gave their parents any causes for concern. Seng Koon's stealing was raised. On a few occasions, Seng Koon had stolen from his parents. Peck Choo, as usual filled in on the details. She presented the facts in an adorable manner that was so charming that even Seng Koon took no offence. Peck Choo was presenting herself as a very perceptive child who had a succinct overview on all family matters.

Mdm Chan and Teo really enjoyed listening to Peck Choo. Peck Choo was definitely a source of joy and very loveable. Half smiling, Mdm Chan and Teo attempted to show their disapproval of Seng Koon's behaviour. The verbal content directed at Seng Koon was disapproval but their words and their smiling faces did not seem to fit. What message was Seng Koon getting about stealing?

Peck Fong appeared more relaxed when the attention was on Seng Koon. She was lively, no longer withdrawn and volunteered information freely. She was different. It was nearing 9.00 p.m.; the therapists informed that at 10.00 a.m. the next morning, Teo was to bring the family on an outing to Pulau Ubin. The staff explained that the outing would assist us in the assessment of Peck Fong. Mdm Chan was apprehensive but looking at her children's enthusiasm and Teo's acceptance of the task, she found it difficult to be a killjoy. The staff thanked the family for their co-operation and left as the family switched on the television.

Peck Fong? Oh, Here She Is.
Tuesday, 5 September 1995, 10.00 a.m. - 12.00 p.m.

Synopsis

Family

- Mdm Chan
- Teo
- Peck Choo
- Seng Koon
- Peck Fong

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard

Pre-Session Information

Hypotheses

Compared to her siblings Peck Fong receives significantly less attention from her parents. From a systemic point of view Peck Fong's reported abnormal behaviour may be explained as follows;

- i. She is troubled by her parents' preferential treatment of her siblings and being unable to articulate her pain, she daydreams and screams to relieve the tension within;
- ii. She behaves as reported in the hope of diverting her parents' attention towards her;
- iii. Both of the above may be true in varying degrees and it may not necessarily be a conscious effort on Peck Fong's part.

By prescribing the family the task of making a day trip to Pulau Ubin, we would be able to better understand if the family dynamics actually sustain the above hypotheses.

Another hypothesis was that Peck Fong's reported problem was a red herring. Mdm Chan was observed to be uncharacteristically quiet and lacking in self-confidence. She seemed more concerned about her husband's absence than the presenting problem. This made us wonder if she actually wanted the live-in for her daughter or her husband.

Goals

- i. To conclude our assessment of Peck Fong.
- ii. To observe the family dynamics.
- iii. Address Mdm Chan's uncharacteristic subdued behaviour.

Summary of the Session

The session was cut short by the family as they had other ideas for recreation. However, it was sufficient for staff to achieve their goals and test their working hypotheses. The parents were unaccustomed to the harsher than usual environment of the island they visited. They were rather disappointed by the island's lack of facilities and decided that it was not conducive for their children. Perhaps their personal discomfort affected their assessment as from what we saw, the children were rather thrilled by the boat ride and would have explored the island further.

Post-Session Findings

- i. Peck Fong is able to assume responsibility competently. However, she is stressed because she has been appointed a parental child by her parents but does not receive due recognition. Perhaps, her parents do not recognise her competence as Peck Choo tends to overshadow her. Nonetheless, it is clear to all in the family that Peck Fong is the eldest child and there are certain implicit expectations of her.

- ii. The staff observed that Peck Fong is frequently expected to give way to her younger siblings. The parents' preferential treatment of her siblings reinforces this expectation. The staff also observed Peck Fong accepting her relative lack of attention resignedly. Perhaps she has learned that big sisters were supposed to make big sacrifices.
- iii. The family dynamics raise many concerns. It is definitely not easy for Peck Fong to be treated like an invisible child. Her basic needs are met but the lack of attention to her affective needs may in the long run affect her overall development.
- iv. Mdm Chan is primarily in charge of child-minding but during the outing, she did not override any decisions made by Teo. Moreover, she actually referred most decision-making to Teo. It appears that she is only in-charge as far as Teo is absent. It could also mean that Mdm Chan finds it very difficult to disagree with Teo and fears that a small disagreement may spark off other issues that they both are not ready to deal with.
- v. Mdm Chan displayed anxiety over the boat ride but other than that she was back to her usual self; loud and boisterous when minding her children. As such, the team did not raise the issue as she may find difficulty connecting with their concerns. They also may have been deemed inquisitively rude should they have proceeded as planned. Thus, developing further resistance.
- vi. The early morning trip to Joo Chiat Market and their discomfort on Pulau Ubin suggest that Teo and Mdm Chan may find it difficult adapting to new experiences. We as therapists must remember to keep therapy as 'natural' as possible. The observance of family hierarchy and the positioning of ourselves as 'guests' would be strategies that elicit co-operation.
- vii. The outing was an effective context to observe to family. Unlike an interview, they were more of their natural self once they settled down. During an interview, the therapist may track certain information expressed in the hope of seeking clarity. Sometimes, the family would be unable to follow the trend of thought as they are not used to cognitive effort. However, in the context of an outing, the staff were able to observe behaviour that may be highlighted later as a therapeutic entry point. For example, the photo-taking incident revealed that Peck Fong had to stand alone. The family would find it difficult to challenge a photograph and at the same time would probably find it easier understanding the therapists when they concretise issues with actual incidents.

Process Recording

When the staff arrived at the flat, Teo was absent. According to their plans, Teo was to have played a significant part in the next session. So momentarily, they were a little taken aback but Mdm Chan and the children clarified that Teo was at the hawker centre for a cup of coffee. Curious, they enquired if the family had run out of coffee but learned that it was Teo's habit to have his morning coffee by himself.

At the same time, Mdm Chan informed that Teo was shopping for a swimming costume for Peck Fong. She added that Peck Fong enjoyed swimming and had outgrown her old one. It was an intentional comment and the staff wondered if the parents had given some thought to the previous night's session and were trying to compensate Peck Fong for the lack of their attention. Even if it was not so, they were happy Peck Fong was getting some positive attention.

While waiting for Teo to return, the staff also learned that the whole family had breakfast together. Nothing unusual except that Teo and Mdm Chan got up at about 6.00 a.m., dragged their half-asleep children to the bus-stop and travelled to Joo Chiat to do their marketing. The staff stared incredulously, Joo Chiat market was at least 18 km away and right below their flat was a market and a hawker centre. Why would this family travel some 18 km in darkness before the break of dawn for a facility that was right below their noses?

Obviously Mdm Chan could not understand their incredulity and as a matter of fact, reported that they were more familiar with Joo Chiat market as they had frequented the place before. 'Who knows what this market will be like?' she quibbled. Mdm Chan appeared rather proud of the family's early morning manoeuvre and the staff thought it was best to contain their puzzled thoughts and accept her explanation before they became disrespectful.

Teo was greeted by the children's excitement when he returned. However, he did not have Peck Fong's swimming costume as he claimed that it was much too expensive at the shops below. Then Teo and Mdm Chan were instructed to pass \$10 to Peck Fong explaining that Peck Fong's ability to assume responsibility needed to be assessed. The \$10 was the children's pocket money for the day and Peck Fong was to hold the purse strings for the day.

The family took some water bottles and within seconds was out of the door. At the ground floor, Mdm Chan realised that they had locked themselves out. As the children were familiar with the warden's office, Bee Leng instructed Peck Fong to get the spare key. Peck Fong was intentionally chosen because she could surely carry out the task as she had demonstrated competence when handling the checking-in procedures. Thus, this intervention was to observe the family's response to Peck Fong's competency.

However, Peck Fong had to share the limelight with Peck Choo. Although it was her sister that was specifically asked, Peck Choo was first off her feet and before anyone could respond, both of them had run up the stairs. While the girls were at their task, Anna teased Mdm Chan about her absent-mindedness. 'Perhaps you are as happy and excited as the children,' Anna quipped hoping to ease her anxiety. 'We are just not used to locking our doors. Even if we didn't take our keys with us, we can get into our flat by putting our hand through the window to unlock the door.' Her reply was a firm reminder that the live-in environment we created was at best artificial.

On the way to the jetty the children directed trivia questions to the staff treating them like relatives or family friends. Conscious that they did not become enmeshed with the family, the children were instructed to redirect their questions to their parents. At the jetty, Mdm Chan was visibly anxious.

Perspiration rolled down her face and after wiping herself dry, she vigorously applied hong yue (Chinese medicated oil) on her temples and above her upper lips.

'How long would the journey be? I cannot stand boat rides and I will feel giddy and vomit if there is too much shaking' Mdm Chan turned to Anna who reassured her that the journey would be about 10 minutes and the sea was calm. Mdm Chan's fears were not to disappear so easily, she was self-absorbed with anxiety.

The children were oblivious to their mother's anxiety and were enjoying themselves peering into the water below looking for fish. Again, Bee Leng delegated responsibility to Peck Fong by having her enquire about the boat fares. She did so competently but was unnoticed as Teo was occupied ensuring Seng Koon's safety and Mdm Chan was finding comfort in the company of Peck Choo.

At the jetty, Teo took charge. He was every bit the family's knight in shining armour holding everyone's hand tightly as he led them up the boat. The boat was a 7 metre wooden vessel that was about 2 metres wide with benches facing each other and a sitting capacity of 12 persons. On board, Seng Koon was seated next to Teo while Peck Choo was with Mdm Chan. Peck Fong was on her own but did not appear too bothered and seemed resigned to her position in the family.

The boatman collected the fare and the family offered to pay for the staff but they insisted otherwise. The staff were consciously trying their best to create boundaries but it was not an easy idea for the family to comprehend. They tried explaining that they had to be alone so that a better assessment of Peck Fong could be made but their intentions were interpreted as rejection.

Teo and Mdm Chan were tensed when the boat started to move. Both of them kept requesting their children to remain nearby. A strong scent of camphor pervaded the sea breeze as Mdm Chan continued her medicated oil routine. About 3 minutes into the journey, there was a slight jerk. Instinctively, Teo grabbed Seng Koon and held him close while Mdm Chan put her arms around her daughters.

Trying to ease the tension, the staff offered to take a photograph for the family. Everyone liked the idea and started organising themselves. Teo and Mdm Chan moved closer to each other hugging Seng Koon and Peck Choo respectively. Peck Fong just positioned herself in front of them as we asked them to smile into the camera. Everyone smiled broadly except Peck Fong who looked blankly into the camera.

At the island, the family were reminded to assume full autonomy. Initially, they continued to look at the staff expectantly but got the message when they were ignored. The staff moved to a coffee shop nearby for a drink. From there, they we observed the family checking out the nearby shops. They also walked a short distance along one of the tracks and eventually decided to make their way back. About half an hour later, they came by the coffee shop and sat at a table near the staff. Teo and Mdm Chan complained about the hot weather and the deserted nature of the island. 'This place is so boring, nothing to see and so dusty!' Mdm Chan exclaimed while Teo nodded continually in agreement.

Every time Mdm Chan spoke, Peck Choo echoed her. Peck Choo would nod her head and reaffirm Mdm Chan's statement by agreeing. 'Yes, it's so hot and Seng Koon wants to go to the playground' or 'Won't it be nice if we were at the playground now?' Peck Choo would speak up without directing her comments directly at anyone. She would also be the first to respond to Mdm Chan's questions even though Mdm Chan may be seeking the opinion of the other children.

The family also brought some biscuits and other tit-bits for the children to have with their drinks. Seng Koon refused them and insisted to have a sugar coated bun. There was none at the coffee shop and Mdm Chan dutifully went searching for them after Teo suggested that the provision shop nearby may have them.

Mdm Chan returned with the bun shortly. After that, the family bid the staff goodbye and said they will return to the mainland after they burned some joss sticks at the temple. The staff returned the pleasantries and wished them a good day.

Whew! I Am Not Mad

Tuesday, 5 September 1995, 7.00 p.m. - 9.00 p.m.

Synopsis

Family

- Mdm Chan
- Teo
- Peck Choo
- Seng Koon
- Peck Fong

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard had to leave for a meeting at NC

Pre-Session Information

Hypotheses

Peck Fong was not abnormal as reported: If the issue about her madness was not concluded quickly, there may be unnecessary prolonged stress for Peck Fong. Also while the issue remained alive, it reduces the possibility of the family raising other issues troubling them. It appears that homeostasis in the family system will be maintained by the priority of putting Peck Fong's well being above other issues. Having the children come first is culturally inappropriate and is difficult to challenge.

It is maintained that Mdm Chan is troubled by other family issues and it would be helpful to provide the opportunity for her to raise them if she so desired.

Goals

- To de-label Peck Fong as an abnormal child.
- To re-establish Peck Fong's position in the family hierarchy.
- To facilitate the family to shift their concerns and to address other issues.

Summary of the Session

The session was built around the assessment findings of Peck Fong. The findings showed Peck Fong to be a normal child with a quiet personality who is competent in discharging her duties and responsibilities. The early part of the session focused on Peck Fong's normality and strengths. The strategy used was to highlight certain of her characteristics that were similar to her parents. This re-connected her to her parents and helped her parents view her personality positively.

Next, she was positioned as a sensitive and caring eldest child who looked after her siblings competently to build on her strengths. Her maturity, thriftiness and sacrifices were highlighted to strengthen her position in the family hierarchy. To consolidate, the parents were asked to openly express the degree of agreement with our assessment. Both gave a very positive response that reinforced Peck Fong's normality. The session ended with the staff providing some homework as a means of facilitating the raising of other issues later.

Post-Session Findings

- Generally, we got top marks for our assessment. We think that our assessment gained credibility because of the significant amount of time spent with the family. The live-in context pre-empted the family from countering our assessment with the common argument, 'But you don't see our child outside therapy, how can you be so sure?'
- Peck Choo was visibly happy that her elder sister was verified normal. Our assessment appeared to relieve the a tension within her. Perhaps she was torn between supporting her parents' view and the positive experience she has of her sister.

- iii. The family accepted our view that Peck Fong was a competent elder sister and was intelligent in her own way.
- iv. The family took the assessment result seriously and remained focused on the issue. They did not raise any other issues and appeared contented when we finished our presentation. It may imply that they are not willing to extend the mandate for us to move beyond the presenting issue.
- v. Without Gerard's presence, Teo appeared more his usual self. Perhaps, he has simply settled in but we are more inclined to think that he is more cautious with a male therapist. To continue engaging him in therapy we must be sensitive to his fears and discomforts

Process Recording

The table was set as Mdm Chan welcomed the staff and announced that dinner was ready. The staff were exasperated as they had specifically instructed her not to prepare dinner because they would be eating by themselves. They were very particular about drawing clear boundaries with the family because Mdm Chan used social events as a means of curry favouring.

In a sense, they were trapped because by refusing her invitation they may create a scene that would be difficult for the children to understand. On the other hand, by accepting they may be sending Mdm Chan the signal that they were pleased with her efforts at curry favouring. Finally, they decided behaving in a socially appropriate manner. They gave Mdm Chan the benefit of the doubt, thanked her for her hospitality and ate the food. They acted in a way they thought would be helpful and decided that their therapeutic point could be saved for later.

After the meal Bee Leng sat on the floor using the coffee table as a desk. Mdm Chan was seated comfortably on the sofa and the children were on the floor less than 1 metre away from the television with their eyes glued to the screen. Mdm Chan's attention was divided between the television and trying to make small talk with Bee Leng. Teo was near the kitchen drawing on a cigarette and when Bee Leng asked the children if the session could start he interjected that the programme would be over soon. Sensing the family's discomfort, Bee Leng and Anna excused themselves and left the flat for a while.

The therapists returned just before 8.00 p.m. Bee Leng went back to her previous position and Anna sat next to the television. The television was switched off and Teo was seated next to Mdm Chan, both on separate settees that were joined to appear as one. Seng Koon was entertaining himself examining the video camera. At first he was standing behind the camera looking into it and when Bee Leng noticed him, he immediately stood in front of the camera making faces and prancing around. With his eyes looking straight into the lens, he hopped onto Bee Leng's 'writing' table and perched right in front of her.

The girls were hiding in the bedroom. When Teo called out for them, Peck Choo came out requesting Teo to have the session in the bedroom. Bee Leng refused and she left to fetch Peck Fong. While seated, Teo mildly organised the children by telling them not to waste the staff's time.

When the girls returned, Peck Choo sat on a settee and Peck Fong on the floor next to her. Both were facing Bee Leng expectantly. Speaking in Hokkien, Bee Leng began by recapping that the parents had sought our help to provide an assessment of Peck Fong. She explicitly stated that the family was concerned if Peck Fong was mad. At the mention of madness, Peck Choo giggled nervously. Bee Leng continued by asking if they were ready to listen to the results. The parents nodded while the girls were silent and did not quite know how to respond. Perhaps they were fearful of what would be said, especially Peck Fong.

Bee Leng proceeded by attempting to remove Peck Fong from the position of scapegoat. Her initial comments were intended to 'equalise' the personalities of Peck Fong and Peck Choo. Peck Choo being more spontaneous and articulate often hogged the family limelight. Thus, Peck Fong being more reserved was often unnoticed or regarded weird. 'Peck Fong is a very intelligent girl,' the tone of our findings was set by this statement. 'Hers is a quiet intelligence unlike Peck Choo's lively version but somewhat similar to Teo who is also quiet but has very keen observation skills that enable him to speak and act at appropriate moments.' Teo leaned forward as this observation was put to the family. Bee Leng elaborated on this point by relating an incident at Seng Koon's birthday party that she had attended. Peck Fong observed Anna looking for chilli sauce and without being asked got it for her.

Looking at Mdm Chan, Bee Leng continued 'This does not mean she is not similar to mother; Mdm Chan is very good at looking after everyone, big or small in the family and Peck Fong has a similar caring attitude like mother.' Then, Bee Leng related how she was impressed with Peck Fong during the checking-in procedures. It was Peck Fong's responsibility to check the flat but Peck Choo wanted to join in and snatched the form away. As with other kids, Bee Leng expected a row but Peck Fong handled it maturely by co-operating with her sister. 'So, just like you Peck Fong cares a lot for Peck Choo' was the punch line delivered for this section of our 'findings'.

Mdm Chan and Teo were quiet all the time Bee Leng was speaking. They appeared to take the assessment very seriously and did not interrupt. Because they were quiet, the staff thought that their findings could be strengthened by elaborating with other observations. The photo-taking incident on the boat to Pulau Ubin was raised. As a conversation starter, Bee Leng asked Teo and Mdm Chan who were they holding when we were taking the family photograph. After they answered, Bee Leng asked them if they remember where Peck Fong was standing. It was a mild confrontation as the intention was to present Peck Fong as a competent elder sister ever willing to make sacrifices for her

younger siblings. Perhaps to divert criticism about favouritism, the parents accepted the observation and started to offer comments that affirmed the assessment. 'Yes, Peck Fong is quiet and she is thrifty too' Teo spoke. The staff then learned that Peck Fong returned the money entrusted to her in the morning to Mdm Chan. Teo gave other examples of Peck Fong's thriftiness and the staff latched on to his examples to reaffirm her position as a responsible and caring elder sister.

For about ten minutes, Teo and Mdm Chan continued to offer various comments about their daughters noting their differences. Often they echoed each other's view and it was as though they were digesting the information and were thinking aloud. The staff repeated the points they made earlier in different ways. In short, they were reinforcing their assessment that Peck Fong is a sensitive and caring elder sister who has a quiet personality but is very competent in discharging her duties. She is also intelligent and in their opinion not 'mad'.

Finally, to round up Bee Leng asked Mdm Chan, Teo and Peck Choo to describe in percentage how much of our assessment did they accept. Mdm Chan reported 80% and Peck Choo 100% while Teo did not give a figure but told Bee Leng 'All that you have said is correct.' Seng Koon's opinion was intentionally not sought so as to maintain his place at the bottom of the family hierarchy. Often, because of his gender he received privileges not accorded to his sisters. Anyway, all through the session Seng Koon was sharing the coffee table with Bee Leng engrossed with his crayons.

The session ended with Bee Leng allotting the family some homework. Teo and Mdm Chan were to give the assessment further thought and the children were to draw two pictures of their family. One of the present and the other describing how they would like to be. After the appointment to meet the children the following morning was made, the children left for their room with crayons and paper. Bee Leng and Anna lingered on for a little while making small talk with Teo and Mdm Chan and excused themselves when the 9.00 p.m. soap began.

A Nice House and We Will Live Happily Ever After

Wednesday, 6 September 1995, 10.00 a.m. - 11.00 a.m.

Synopsis

Family

- Mdm Chan
- Peck Choo
- Seng Koon
- Peck Fong

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard

Pre-Session Information

Hypotheses

Since she has been assessed normal, Peck Fong would like to articulate her unhappiness about the preferential treatment received by her siblings. The family drawing would provide her an alternative medium of expression and create the platform for addressing the issue. It is thought that sibling rivalry could be a possible issue.

Also, the family drawing could also be a tool to bring out the parent-child relationships or even shed some light on the marital sub-system and Mdm Chan's constant anxiety. Perhaps Mdm Chan's anxiety is a result of her socialisation in her family of origin. In a way, the family drawing could be a prelude for the therapists to proceed with 'family of origin' work.

Goals

- To help the family address possible conflicts within the sibling, marital and parent-child sub-systems.
- To set the stage for family of origin work.

Summary of the Session

The session centred on the children's homework. The staff did not enquire about the parents' homework as Teo was not around. The children did their homework conscientiously but instead of focusing on family relationships, their drawings expressed their material want. The therapists tried linking the presented material to relationship issues but concluded that it was not the children's agenda. As the pre-session hypotheses did not fit and goal (i) was irrelevant, the therapists proceeded with goal (ii). The children were engaged in drawing a Genogram. The Genogram was intended as a means of encouraging Mdm Chan to speak about her family of origin at a later session.

Post-Session Findings

- The children did not indicate in any way that they may be troubled by conflicts within the sibling, marital or the parent-child sub-systems. Also, they were unaware or not bothered by the fact that both their parents were previously married. At this point in time, the children are generally contented with the family.
- Although contented with family life, the children were very aware of their disadvantaged socio-economic status. Unlike their parents, they were more optimistic of leaving the low-income community. The stay at the live-in facility has offered them the experience of living in a home with more amenities and perhaps, hope.

The children appear to have little knowledge about their extended family. Where the care of the children are concerned, there is no extended family involvement.

- Mdm Chan's trip back home in the early hours of the morning suggests she is very uncomfortable with new experiences. It appears she has a need to be occupied all the time. Perhaps, her continual need for action is a means of coping with the anxieties within her.

Process Recording

*T*here was a playful lightness in the air. The children were in good spirits as they rushed off to get their drawings the moment they met the staff. It was show time, they had butterflies in their stomachs but yet it was clear they were waiting to perform. There was happy banter as they stayed in the bedroom putting the finishing touches to their works of art.

Mdm Chan reported that Teo had left for work and would return in the evening. The staff simply commented that he must have left early and accepted the information without dwelling further on the issue. Although Teo did not commit himself to the morning's session, they were not surprised he chose to work instead. Their instincts as therapists sensed that Teo did not want to risk staying in therapy lest a can of worms be opened. Unlike her children, Mdm Chan appeared a little tired but she brushed aside the observation and maintained that she was fine.

However, the reason for her tiredness was revealed. When Teo left for work at about 5.30 a.m., Mdm Chan accompanied him. Together with the children, the couple lugged some cooking utensils and made their way home by bus and the MRT. Mdm Chan explained that she needed to make sure her home was all right and she wanted to save the staff the trouble of sending her utensils home. She added that she had difficulty sleeping anyway. Mdm Chan and her children had breakfast near their home and were back at the flat by 9.00 a.m.

It was Day 3 and the live-in was already tiring the staff out yet Mdm Chan had the energy to trot around the island before daybreak, it was difficult making sense of her actions. Initially, the staff asked why she bothered since the van will pick everyone up, equipment and all the next day. But, they caught themselves and simply put it all down to her vast reservoir of energy. Questions swarmed in their heads as the staff fought back their reactive instincts to confront her reasoning. They wanted to remain respectful and be the polite guests as they were not prepared to act otherwise. Perhaps Mdm Chan wanted to be with her husband or maybe she wanted to make sure he actually went to work, it was anybody's guess. And, it was better to be safe than sorry because the probing may turn out to be an interrogation.

It took a while for the children to come out of their room. They took their assignment seriously and wanted to make sure everything was fine. Gerard sat on the floor waiting while Bee Leng went into their room with the video camera switched on. Realising that they were being recorded, they mildly protested and decided to leave the room. They finally settled down and placed their drawings in front of Gerard. A casual and lively atmosphere was created as the kids were encouraged to sit in any way they felt comfortable. Soon, Gerard and the kids were hovering around the drawings while Mdm Chan sat on the floor about 1.5 metres away observing the proceedings. Her children's laughter and

excitement were infectious and as she lightened up, she leaned back against the wall and smiled at the happy chaos.

'I like them very much but they're all very same, you copy each other or what?' Gerard playfully confronted the children. The children were in tune and laughed at the accusation. Looking at the drawings, Gerard did not quite know what to make out of them. 'What did Bee Leng ask you to draw?' he sought clarity. 'Our family!' the children shouted in unison. 'What did Bee Leng ask you to draw about your family?' he tried again. This time the children were unable to respond so quickly because of their lack of language. Gerard helped by asking about the line that seemed to divide all their drawings. 'This one first and that second family' Peck Choo tried her best as she pointed to the drawings. Latching on to her explanation, the group finally agreed on the words 'now' and 'next time'. These adequately described the family's current situation as they saw it and the future as they hoped it to be.

Gerard was confused with the drawings because he expected the children to draw family members as he is accustomed to whenever he saw this technique being used with children. However, instead of people there were buildings, roads and swimming pools. Their pictures portrayed the physical conditions they were living in against their dream homes. These children understood their family to mean their living conditions.

Observing family hierarchy Gerard began looking at Peck Fong's drawing. For the family of the future, Peck Fong drew a big house with a garden and a shopping centre nearby. At the corner of her drawing there was a smiling sun which she described as Grandpa Sunshine. Peck Fong explained that her dream house had 6 rooms of which one was a study room and another a toy room. The rest were bedrooms and there had to be a big kitchen so that mother would be pleased. Peck Fong was clearly concerned only with the physical amenities. She wanted us to view her drawing literally and did not make sense of our attempts to enlarge her perspective by introducing symbolic meanings. For instance, we asked if the smiling sun meant anything special but she simply replied that Grandpa Sunshine was always supposed to smile. She also fairly distributed one bedroom to the parents and one each to all the children.

As usual, Peck Choo interrupted while Peck Fong was being attended to but each time she was gently told to wait her turn. At one point, Mdm Chan even told her to have some manners and let her sister finish. This was indeed uncharacteristic and the staff were glad that this time, Peck Fong did not have to sacrifice attention accorded to her. Peck Choo's drawing was in the same vein. She preferred condominium living with a private swimming pool. Slightly less time was intentionally accorded to her and she was similarly concerned with improving her living conditions. Seng Koon had his turn and as we looked briefly at his drawing his sisters explained on his behalf. Basically, he

shared the same dream as his sisters. The attempts to explore family relationships with the drawings did not turn out quite the way expected. So Gerard praised the children for their efforts and asked them to autograph their work. Finally he sought their permission to keep the drawings and thanked them when they agreed.

After keeping the drawings, Gerard decided to gather information about the family tree from the children. He was hoping the exercise would churn out information helpful for therapy. A piece of paper the size of a poster was placed on the floor and he addressed the children 'In your drawings, you have shown me the nice houses you wish for but you did not show me who would be living there.' Peck Choo immediately replied 'Aiyah! Forgot.' Then, Gerard explained that the next part of the session will be spent getting a better picture of the Teo family.

'Who knows how to draw your papa's head?' In character, Peck Choo obliged immediately. She made a circle on the paper and Gerard coaxed her on by asking her questions about the facial features. It was a big game to the children and they were having fun. Seng Koon giggled uncontrollably at every addition Peck Choo made to the drawing and Peck Fong was offering suggestions and encouraging her. Participation level was high and the room was continually filled with children's laughter.

In the same fashion, Peck Fong drew Mdm Chan. After that, Gerard joined the hands of Teo and Mdm Chan and drew a lineage line. The children caught on and were able to identify their place in the lineage. Each child took turns to draw themselves. Interestingly, when it was Peck Fong's turn, Seng Koon remarked that she should draw herself proportionately bigger than her siblings because 'she is big'.

The next move Gerard made was to ask if there were others in the family such as cats, dogs or birds. He was keeping the mood light before enquiring if there were uncles and aunties. The children initially said no but decided to explore further when we asked if mother had any sisters. Peck Choo replied yes to the question while Mdm Chan denied. Peck Choo sprung up and ran over to consult Mdm Chan. Not much was thought of the confusion but after the session the staff learned that Mdm Chan is very proud of her wedding photographs from her first marriage and keeps them at home. Previously, she had explained to Peck Choo that the woman in those pictures was her sister.

The game continued and soon the staff had a three generation family tree with names and ages accurate only as far as Mdm Chan's memory permitted. The Teo Family Tree was written proudly in Chinese and urged by Gerard, Peck Fong made a presentation in front of the video camera. A round of applause followed and the session ended.

High Anxiety**Wednesday, 6 September 1995, 1.30 p.m. - 4.00 p.m.****Synopsis****Family**

- Mdm Chan

Staff

- Bee Leng

Pre-Session Information**Hypotheses**

Mdm Chan appears to be uncomfortable with new experiences and keeps herself continually occupied with various tasks. An example would be her early morning trips to places of familiarity. This need for constant action is perhaps a means of coping with her many anxieties.

It may be possible that some of Mdm Chan's anxieties could be linked to experiences and to her family of origin. The inconsistencies in the Genogram drawn up in Session 4 could be a means to clarify and explore these issues in greater depth.

Goals

- To address Mdm Chan's continual anxiety.
- To explore Mdm Chan's family of origin to ascertain if her experiences may have contributed to her high level of anxiety.
- To affirm Mdm Chan for daring to do things differently despite her anxieties.

Summary of the Session

The children went swimming with Gerard while Bee Leng and Rebecca sat with Mdm Chan on the beach. Mdm Chan was very anxious about the children because she has a fear of the water and repeatedly called out to them to be careful. Bee Leng explored with Mdm Chan her fears and anxieties about the water. She also spoke about her anxieties over the children and fears and experiences as a child. Mdm Chan's two marriages were also discussed. Finally, Mdm Chan was affirmed on her courage in taking the boat-ride to Pulau Ubin and in allowing the children to go swimming despite her fears. The session ended when Mdm Chan managed to get her children out of the water and returned to her flat in case her husband returns early.

Post-Session Findings

- Mdm Chan's anxiety was very apparent. She was not able to fully concentrate on the session because she was worried about her children who were playing in the water. She was not ready to address her anxieties and fears at that point.
- Mdm Chan was able to see Peck Fong's behaviour in a different light when similarities between that and her timidity and fears as a child were drawn.
- Mdm Chan accepted the affirmation made of her courage to take the boat-ride and to allow her children to go swimming despite her fears and anxieties.
- The session was an opportunity for the therapists to experience the client differently. A greater understanding of the client and her socio-cultural-family background was achieved.

Process Recording

The weather was fine for a day at the beach. Mdm Chan and the children had already packed their clothes, towels and soap when the staff arrived.

The children were very excited and chattered happily all the way to the beach. Mdm Chan was rather subdued and was quiet during the walk. She acknowledged that she was worried about her husband. She was not sure what time he would return and did not want him to return to an empty flat. Moreover, Teo did not have the key to the flat. However, on being assured that the family could return to the flat by 4.00 p.m., she appeared to relax and talked more readily.

On reaching the beach, Bee Leng, Rebecca and Mdm Chan laid out the mat under the shade and sat there. The children and Gerard went swimming. As the children ran excitedly into the sea, Mdm Chan looked at them with much anxiety and called out to them repeatedly to be careful and not go too far out. Bee Leng noted her anxiety and assured Mdm Chan that Gerard will take good care of the children. Despite the reassurance, she still looked anxiously out to the children who were playing happily in the water.

Bee Leng then proceeded to explore with Mdm Chan about her fears and her anxiety. Mdm Chan revealed that she had always been timid and easily frightened as a child. She used to have nightmares and would also scream loudly for no apparent reason. Bee Leng then pointed out that this was not very different from Peck Fong's fear of the dark. Mdm Chan agreed.

Mdm Chan also revealed more of her family history. She was the only girl among four brothers and was always well sheltered by her parents and brothers. She had a fairly happy childhood and as she grew older, her fears lessened and she became more courageous in facing life.

However, Mdm Chan's fear of the water remained and she continues to experience anxiety when either she herself, or her children are in the water. Bee Leng then affirmed Mdm Chan's courage in taking the boat to Pulau Ubin the previous day, and in allowing the children to go swimming despite her fears. Mdm Chan then expressed that aside from her fear of water, she was also accountable to her husband for her children's safety. He is usually the one who takes the children swimming and he assumes the responsibility for the children in the water. This experience was therefore different from previous family practices.

Bee Leng went on to explore Mdm Chan's relationship with her husband by asking her how they met. Mdm Chan relaxed more at this point, and started to lie back and eat melon seeds as she told her story.

Mdm Chan related how unhappy she was with her first marriage. She ran away from her husband in Malaysia and came to Singapore. However, she still keeps a copy of their wedding photograph. She acknowledged that she told her children that it was her sister when the children asked her who the woman in the photograph was. She did not want them to know that she had a previous marriage.

She met Teo while she was in Singapore. Both of them took the same bus to work. One day Teo alighted at her bus-stop and followed her for a short distance. She claimed that she was not frightened by this man following her. After a while, Teo walked over to her and asked her for a date. Mdm Chan agreed because she did not find him repulsive. After dating for some time, they got married. However, this time her wedding was not as grand as her first wedding. They merely performed the tea ceremony and no photographs were taken. The reason Mdm Chan gave was that this being Teo's second marriage as well, he did not see the necessity for a grand celebration. There was a hint of sadness in Mdm Chan's voice as she said this.

Noises from the children in the sea distracted Mdm Chan. From the beach we could see the children chasing one another in the water and Seng Koon was on Gerard's shoulders, ready to plunge into the sea. They appeared to be enjoying themselves immensely. However, Mdm Chan again called out to the children to be careful and not to be too playful in the water.

After observing the children in the water, Mdm Chan could not settle into the conversation again. She looked at her watch and exclaimed that her husband could be back anytime. She wanted to return to the flat but would not leave till her children were out of the water. So she walked over the water's edge and called to the children to come up.

The children, after some intense efforts to enjoy the water for a while longer, got out of the sea. As the mat was folded up and the group proceeded towards the public toilets, Mdm Chan said that she will return to the flat first because her husband could be back already. Gerard and the children then proceeded to have a quick shower while Bee Leng and Rebecca waited. The children all excitedly voiced their happiness and enjoyment of the afternoon.

The children were then brought back to the flat and it was arranged that all would meet for a last session that night. This would be followed by a trip to the Changi Airport, if all were agreeable to the idea.

This Flat is Great for Hide and Seek?
Wednesday, 6 September 1995, 8.00 p.m. - 9.00 p.m.

Synopsis

Family

- Teo
- Mdm Chan
- Peck Choo
- Seng Koon
- Peck Fong

Staff

- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Rebecca

Pre-Session Information

Hypotheses

Over the last 3 days, the family did not raise any other issues apart from the presenting problem. This either implied that there were no other issues or that they were not giving the mandate for them. However, the staff team continued trying very hard to facilitate the raising of other issues and this may have detracted the family from the presenting problem or diluted their assessment. Thus, there is a need to re-focus the family on the issue and to consolidate the staff's intervention.

Goals

- i. To assess the impact of the staff's interventions.
- ii. To reinforce the staff's assessment of the presenting problem.
- iii. To terminate the live-in.

Summary of the Session

The first part of the session dealt with the family's likes and dislikes about the live-in. Then the therapists consolidated their interventions by drawing out the family's learning points and by introducing another expert opinion to support their assessment. Finally, the therapists terminated by highlighting the positives within the family. The intention was to acknowledge the contributions of family members during the live-in and to raise awareness of inherent strengths within the family.

Post-Session Findings

- i. The family explicitly indicated that they did not regard Peck Fong as abnormal. Concerning the presenting problem, the family appear satisfied with the results and the work of the staff team.
- ii. The strategy of introducing another expert opinion to consolidate the staff's assessment and interventions was successful because of a combination of the following factors: careful timing and pacing of the delivery; and family members were more receptive to the message because they received positive regard.
- iii. The airport trip was a helpful closing activity. It was appropriate to terminate positively.

Process Recording

By now, discussions were almost second nature for the children. Without much prompting, they joined Gerard as he sat on the floor. Perhaps they were more comfortable with him after the afternoon swim. 'Okay, this is the last session for the camp and we want to know what you liked and disliked.' The girls pondered while Seng Koon lounged deeper into the sofa half-asleep.

'So difficult to remember' Peck Choo replied as Gerard instructed them to start with the dislikes. After thinking hard, Pulau Ubin was mentioned as a dislike. The likes were easier to list. They liked the comfortable, spacious and clean flat, the air-conditioning, the heated shower and swimming. They particularly liked the 2 rooms as they were great for hide and seek. By now, Teo and Mdm Chan had taken their places sitting next to each other. As usual, they took delight watching their children speak. 'We should be getting out of here soon. If not, these children will be spoiled and will demand air-conditioning at home too' Teo looked uncomfortable as he joined in.

Gerard then asked what they found interesting and the children replied it was the homework and the session reviewing their drawings. They simply explained that they had much fun during the session. Next Gerard asked if they had learned anything. 'Yes, I learned about Peck Fong's problem. She is not mad.' Peck Choo spoke. Teo continued, 'Peck Fong is quiet but she is not mad. She also has a different kind of intelligence from Peck Choo.'

To reinforce Teo's current perspective, Gerard reported that prior to the session the therapy team had met with a colleague who is a psychologist. He would have attended the session if he did not have to attend to some urgent family matters. Nonetheless, he too is of the opinion Peck Fong is not crazy.

After that, Gerard asked Teo and Mdm Chan about their feelings towards the camp. Teo said it was good for the children and it was not bad. Mdm Chan said it was good except for the headache she got on board the boat. Then, Gerard praised Teo for his commitment to his family. He added how he was impressed with the effort Teo took to leave for work early in the morning and for returning in the evening. His workplace was far away and despite being tired he returned. Also, he praised Mdm Chan for overcoming her fear of boat rides for the sake of her family and thanked her for trusting us with her children's safety during the swimming session.

As for the children, Gerard mentioned their sense of loyalty and concern for each other. He related how during the swim he tried to get Peck Fong and Peck Choo to play a trick on Seng Koon but was unsuccessful. Instead, the children ganged up against him.

Out of respect for the hierarchy, Bee Leng then asked the parents if they would like to visit Changi Airport with their children explaining that it was the staff's way of closing the camp and thanking them for their participation. They agreed and everyone left shortly.

We Are Fine, Thank You.**Tuesday, 10 October 1995, 5.00 p.m. - 5.30 p.m.****Synopsis****Family**

- Teo
- Mdm Chan
- Peck Choo
- Seng Koon
- Peck Fong

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Rebecca

Pre-Session Information**Hypotheses**

After the live-in, Mdm Chan continued to contact the staff regarding the family's inability to meet various expenses. These issues and needs did not require live-in therapy and were routinely dealt with by Anna, her caseworker. However, Mdm Chan attributed the lack of income primarily to her husband's reluctance to work more frequently. It sounded as if Mdm Chan was seeking assistance to help her address the issue with her spouse because she also confided in Anna her marital conflicts and unhappiness. Also, Mdm Chan was frequently enquiring about the follow-up interview. Thus, it is thought that these issues may surface during the interview.

i. Goals

- ii. To review the impact of the live-in.
- iii. To explore the possibility of a 2nd live-in.

Summary of the Session

It was an uneventful interview. Teo and Mdm Chan did not raise any new issues and the family appeared tired from Peck Choo's recent hospitalisation. Both reported that the family was contending with difficulties as usual and there was no need for a 2nd live-in. However, concerning Peck Fong, Teo expressed that he still agreed with the assessment and Mdm Chan said that she realised that she is not stupid. The concerns about Peck Fong were no longer an issue and as no new issues were raised, the family was thanked for their co-operation and participation. A video tape of the lighter moments during the live-in was presented as a token of appreciation.

Post-Session Findings

- i. The live-in seems to have addressed the presented problem adequately. The parents did not report any significant change but their perspective about their daughter has shifted. The father does not consider her abnormal while mother though not as convinced now regards her as intelligent.
- ii. The family was very clear about their intentions for participating in the live-in. When the presented problem was addressed, they were contented and reluctant to move on to other issues. On the other hand, the therapy team was trying to maximise the contact and continually tried to raise other issues. The family had their problem priority and did not feel the need to respond to the therapy team's efforts at facilitating the surfacing of other problems.

Process Recording

The family strolled into the meeting room at NC dutifully. Peck Fong and Peck Choo were on one side while Mdm Chan and Teo were at one end of the table facing Bee Leng and Anna. Seng Koon sat next to Gerard opposite the girls. Teo looked preoccupied and reported that Peck Choo had just returned from the hospital. She was suspected of having stones in her bladder.

'It's been about a month since the live-in, we were wondering if there has been any difference' Gerard spoke in Hokkien. 'It's perfectly okay if nothing has changed' he added. This was an unhelpful rejoinder as the family chose to latch on to it. 'It's very much the same' Teo offered. Bee Leng tried drawing him out, 'Hey! I thought work has improved' but Teo simply denied and said it was still three days work a week at the most.

Peck Choo and Peck Fong were ribbing each other. Peck Choo was moving an index finger in circles obviously making reference to Peck Fong's 'madness'. Peck Fong retaliated verbally and physically. She tried to catch Peck Fong's hand and counter accused Peck Choo of madness. The exchange was disruptive and we were glad when Mdm Chan repositioned herself in between them. However, the exchange continued as the girls used their mother's body to block off each other's blows.

It was going nowhere and Gerard had to ask the girls to let the adults speak. This brought enough order to address the parents briefly. Bee Leng recapitulated the assessment that Peck Fong is a quiet but normal and intelligent girl and asked if the assessment still holds. Teo said it did and Mdm Chan after some probing agreed.

Then Peck Fong was asked if she was happy at home. 'No!' Peck Choo replied for her immediately. The staff ignored her answer and continued to focus on Peck Fong. 'Don't know' she replied. 'Still all right,' she added. 'Do you think you're crazy?' Softly but surely her answer was no. 'We think so too!' affirmed Gerard.

'What have you observed of Peck Fong during the last month?' Bee Leng directed the question at the parents. Teo deflected saying he only saw the child in the evenings and it was routinely homework, television and bed. Mdm Chan tried and replied 'I see that Peck Fong is not a stupid child.'

All this time Peck Choo was distracting with complains of one sort or another and the pace of the session was tedious. Then Gerard explained that the purpose of the session was also to enquire if the family had other issues to address. Seizing the opportunity to close, Teo expressed that there was no

need for another live-in. Skilfully, he added that he was sure his kids would like another but there was really no need. Mdm Chan nodded and the staff decided not to continue exploring.

For the next two minutes or so, Teo spoke briefly about Peck Choo's health. When the opportunity arose, the staff interrupted by thanking the family for working with them during the entire period and presented a video tape of the live-in as a token of appreciation. The tape captured the family on their trip to Changi Airport and other lighter moments. The family was visibly excited and curious about the gift and the session ended on this positive note.