

SOCIAL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AT MELAKA

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile delinquency is one of the social problems that teenagers nowadays face and involved is quite alarming. The aim of this study is to find out the public's perception on the factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency at Urban Transformation Centre (UTC), Melaka. The factors identified are family, socioeconomic class and educational experience. For this study, the researchers used the convenient sampling as the sampling technique. There were 361 responses collected via questionnaire. Various analysis methods were used to analyze the data gathered, including descriptive statistical analysis, reliability test, Spearman's Rank Order Correlation, and Multiple Regression. The result of the study showed that the public perceived positively on the factors contribute to juvenile delinquency and educational experience was found as the most significant factor that affects the public perception on juvenile delinquency. This study hopes to bring forth importance for the public to understand the nature of this matter and play an active role in educating the adolescents.

Key words: Educational Experience, Family, Juvenile Delinquency, Socioeconomic Class.

Introduction

Social problems is one of barriers in building an excellent nation. The negative conduct of some of the members of the society will eventually affect the system, economy, culture and societal development of a country. There are various types of social problems and one of them is juvenile delinquency. Law breaking among teens is reported to increase from time to time. The occurrence of the problem is critical and should be viewed thoroughly since the younger generation is the prime mover towards creating a better place for the country (Abd. Wahab, 2006).

Juvenile can be viewed differently, based on age and group. From the legal point of view, juvenile is considered as "a person under the age of 18 years and below" and the age of criminal responsibility at the age of ten (Child Act 2001, Section 2; as cited by Abd. Wahab, 2006). However, there is a special justification for the crime conducted by a juvenile above the age of 10, but has not reached the age of 12. According to the Penal Code, Section 83, a child between 10 years old, but is less than 12, may not committed a crime if he/she is proven not to have any capability to think maturely over his/her act, neither in terms of the situation nor the consequences (Anita, 2008; Nasimah, 2013). As for the Prison Act 1995 (Act 537), Section 2(2), a juvenile or a young offender is defined as a "prisoner who is under the age of 21 years" (Abd. Wahab, 2006). From the definitions attained, it can be concluded that a juvenile can be referred as a young person at the range between 10 to 18 years old, and can be convicted to a crime as early as 10 years old. Nonetheless, it still depends on the state of maturity of the child when a crime is committed.

Juvenile delinquency is viewed as an offending action conducted by the adolescents at a certain range of age (Nasimah, 2013). Parental alcoholism, family break-up, abusive condition at home, death of parents (due to criminal violence) and poor housing condition are among the tough environment some adolescents need to live in (Department of Economist Social Affairs, 2003). Adolescents who live under these condition are those believed to be at higher risk to commit crimes or to conduct offences. In short, it is not easy for the young people to avoid from behaving badly, especially if they need to survive in unwanted situations in their life.

In Malaysia, the statistics of juvenile delinquency is increasing year by year. Teenagers' involvement in crimes is getting bolder each time. It can be viewed in several articles published in the mainstream newspapers. For instance, the number of cases involving juveniles in Penang from January to April 2014 has raised 231 per cent if compared to the same period the year before, i.e. from 29 cases in 2013 to 96 cases in 2014. In addition, Penang Police Chief, Datuk Abdul Rahim Hanafi, stated that their involvement was not only in petty crimes, but it includes gangsterism, robberies, and even recruiting new members to commit crimes (BERNAMA, 2014). Besides, the statistics from Court Registrar (2003 to 2008) showed that the number of juveniles arrested for criminal offences has increased from 240 to 370 per 100,000 of population aged 10 to 18 years old (Ministry of Women, Family & Community Development & UNICEF Malaysia, 2013). The upsurge of juvenile involvement in crime is not a good sign. Again, some factors need to be studied in-depth in order to understand the reasons behind the alarming numbers of criminal offences committed by them. From the research, there are three main factors that had been recognized towards this juvenile delinquency.

Research Design

There are three factors identified that contribute to juvenile delinquency. These factors are family, socioeconomic class and educational experience.

Family

Adolescents are vulnerable to problematic behaviour if there is something wrong with their family. It is related to dysfunctional family settings which is characterised by conflict and inadequate parental control (Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 2003). There are several conditions that lead to the family breakdown, for instance, parental divorce (Faircloth, 2012), lack of affection and companionship by parents (Abd. Rahim, et al., 2006) and using aggressive and violent parenting way in educating their children (Noraini, 2002).

Moreover, the family role is also important in developing basic social and religious values among the adolescents and youth. According to Furrow, King and White (2004), religious young people are less likely to get involve in deviant behaviour and living more on a good life such as having a good academic achievement. This is because good behaviour is closely related to good religious practice (Abd. Rahim, et. al., 2006).

Socioeconomic Class

According to the Department of Economic & Social Affairs (2003), weak socioeconomic development is another reason for adolescents to misbehave. It is related to unemployment and low income among them, where both conditions will increase the likelihood of teenagers committing any criminal offences. The weaknesses of socioeconomic development includes poverty and facing financial difficulties.

Financial causes the juvenile to commit crimes such as snatching and stealing (Nadzriah, 2013). This kind of situation forces them to behave badly as they are unable to walk away from this circumstances or work to improve their family's living standards.

Educational Experience

Education is known as one of the powerful sources of having a good life. Some of the juvenile offenders in Malaysia portrayed low level of education, as stated in Table 1:

Table 1: Juvenile Statistic according to the Level of Education

Level of Education	Frequency
Not schooling	16
Standard 1 – 3	46
Standard 4 – 6	103
Form 1 – 3	298
Form 4 – 5	69
Form 6 and above	0

(Source: Prison Department of Malaysia, 2004; cited by Abd. Wahab, 2006)

Table 1 showed that majority of the adolescents who were involved in juvenile delinquencies were those who had low level of education. Thus, it is imperative for the young people to have good educational experience.

According to Sutherland (2011), school environment plays a major role in influencing the teenagers development as it helps to shape their sense of opportunity and self-worth. It is a venue for them to learn about possessing good values, attitudes and skills that are essential their later economic and social life. Furthermore, engagement with the school and its system and providing a safe schooling environment will lessen their involvement in crimes and delinquencies (Mooney, et.al., 2012).

Objectives Of The Study

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To identify whether family is a factor contributing to juvenile delinquency.
- ii. To determine whether socioeconomic class is the factor related to juvenile delinquency.
- iii. To study whether educational experience is the factor correlated with juvenile delinquency.
- iv. To identify the most influential factor contributing to juvenile delinquency.

Methodology Of The Study

In this study, the researchers incorporate quantitative approach and cross-sectional study, in which the hard data was collected via questionnaire and was gathered only once throughout the Study period. The targeted respondents were Melaka citizens.

Convenient sampling technique was used by the researchers to collect the data since the targeted respondents were the public who live in Melaka. The number of respondents was determined through Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and Cohen (1969) guideline on sampling size decision (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Based on the guideline, the sample size determined was 361 respondents.

A set of questionnaire was used to gather necessary data for the Study. It was divided into three major parts, as summarised in Table 2:

Table 2: Summary of the Questionnaire Designed for the Study

Part	Classification of Questions
A	Demographic Information
B	Public Perception on Juvenile Delinquency
C1	Factor 1 – Family
C2	Factor 2 – Socioeconomic Class
C3	Factor 3 – Educational Experience

After the data was collected, it was analysed based on the objectives of the Study. The approach used for the analysis is presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Data Analysis Approach for the Study

No.	Objective	Variables Involved	Statistical Approach
1.	To identify whether family is a factor that contributes to juvenile delinquency.	Family and Public Perception on Juvenile Delinquency	Spearman’s Rank Correlation
2.	To determine whether socioeconomic class is a factor that is related to juvenile delinquency.	Socioeconomic Class and Public Perception on Juvenile Delinquency	
3.	To study whether educational experience is a factor that is correlated with juvenile delinquency.	Educational Experience and Public Perception on Juvenile Delinquency	
4.	To identify the most influential factor that contributes to juvenile delinquency.	Family, Socioeconomic Class and Educational Experience	Multiple Regression

Result And Discussion

The respondents for this study comprises of Melaka citizens. For this study, 361 questionnaires were distributed and all of them were responded properly. The result of all findings in this Study were presented through several tables, followed by their interpretations and discussion.

Demographic Profile

Descriptive statistic was used to analyse the demography of the respondents involved in this study. The demographic profile is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Demographic Profile for the Study (n = 361)

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	174	48.2
Female	187	51.8
Age		
Less than 18 years old	54	15.0
18 to 23 years old	146	40.4
24 to 30 years old	91	25.2
31 to 40 years old	30	8.3
40 years old and above	40	11.1

Based from Table 4, majority of the respondents are aged between 18 to 23 years old. It comprised of 146 out of 361 respondents (40.4 per cent). There were 25.2 per cent aged between 24 to 30 years old, 15.0 per cent aged below than 18 years old, 11.1 per cent aged more than 40 years old and the lowest percentage aged between 31 to 40 years old. It was also observed that the number of female respondents in this study was higher than the males (female = 51.8 per cent and male = 48.2%).

Analysis Of The Objectives And Discussion

The data gathered was analysed (as mentioned in Table 3) and it was interpreted and discussed based on the objectives of the Study.

Objective 1: The Relationship between Family and Public Perception on Juvenile Delinquency

Table 5: The Relationship between Family and Public Perception on Juvenile Delinquency

		Family	Public Perception on JD
Family	Spearman’s Rank Correlation	1	.497**

**Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

The analysis showed that there was a significant positive relationship between family and public perception on juvenile delinquency ($r = 0.497, p < 0.01$) (Table 5). It could be said that family did contribute something to the occurrence of juvenile delinquency, based on public perception.

The result attained was similar to the previous studies conducted. Family role is important in determining the well-being of the adolescents. The methods that parents used to nurture and educate their children predict their behaviour. This perspective includes the involvement of parents in their children’s life, emotional affection, parenting style and supervision towards their children (Farrington, 2010). Moreover, the “criminalisation” of the family does contributes to juvenile misconduct, where the adolescents will learn the bad habit of the adult offenders in the family (Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 2003). However, in another research, parental divorce was a less significant contributor towards juvenile delinquency (Abd. Wahab, 2006). This implies that family plays a major role in determining the adolescents’ criminal behaviour, even though some other researchers found that it might not be a significant factor.

Objective 2: The Relationship between Socioeconomic Class and Public Perception on Juvenile Delinquency

Table 6: The Relationship between Socioeconomic Class and Public Perception on Juvenile Delinquency

		Socioeconomic Class	Public Perception on JD
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Socioeconomic Class	Spearman's Rank Correlation	1	.311**
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**Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

The analysis illustrated a significant positive relationship between socioeconomic class and public perception on juvenile delinquency ($r = 0.311$, $p < 0.01$) (Table 6). According to the public, socioeconomic class is one of the contributors towards juvenile delinquency. It is consistent with other studies, where socioeconomic class is seen as a status of an individual in a community. Low socioeconomic status seemed to affect negatively on social development and delinquency, especially when the adolescents are exposed to it since early childhood (van der Veen, 2002). Abd. Wahab (2005) also stated that poverty is usually linked to the criminal activities committed by the juveniles. Based on the statistics from the Prison Department of Malaysia (2004), 70.5 per cent from 2964 juvenile offenders were from low income family (i.e. earned less than RM1000 per month) (Abd. Wahab, 2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that socioeconomic class is one of the contributors of juvenile delinquency.

Objective 3: The Relationship between Educational Experience and Public Perception on Juvenile Delinquency

Table 7: The Relationship between Educational Experience and Public Perception on Juvenile Delinquency

		Educational Experience	Public Perception on JD
Educational Experience	Spearman's Rank Correlation	1	.492**

**Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Based on Table 7, it demonstrated that there is a significant positive correlation between educational experience and public perception on juvenile delinquency ($r = 0.492$, $p < 0.01$). The public perceived that educational experience influenced the adolescents to commit unruly behaviours. The result of this Study was similar to Abd. Wahab (2006), in which he found that majority of the young offenders possessed low level of education (see Table 2). In addition, low academic achievement initiated the delinquent behaviour among the juveniles, but not necessarily predicting the seriousness or continuation of the action (Zamora, 2005). This indicates, it is crucial for the adolescents to have good educational experience, since it is linked with their judgments and actions in the present and the future.

Objective 4: The Most Influential Factors Contribute to Juvenile Delinquency

Table 8: Multiple Regression of the Study

Variable	Standardised Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
Family	0.311	6.675	0.000
Socioeconomic Class	-0.015	-0.291	0.771
Educational Experience	0.386	7.212	0.000

Table 8 shows on the most influential factors that contribute to juvenile delinquencies as perceived by the public in Melaka. It was found that educational experience ranked as the most influential contributors towards juvenile misconduct, followed by family and socioeconomic class. It means that having a good education experience lessen the risk of the adolescents to be involved in any criminal activities. Aoki (2010) mentioned that higher school attainment reduced the number of crime among young people, since they have the legal/moral knowledge about the cost of criminal behaviour. Likewise, the juveniles who have low academic achievement at the age of 10, 14 and 16 years old tend to commit criminal actions at the age of 18 years old (Herrenkohl, et. al., 2000). These statements indicate that educational experience is an imperative factor to be considered in reducing the number of juvenile delinquency.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the three factors investigated i.e. family, socioeconomic class and educational experience contributed to juvenile delinquency in Melaka. Additionally, educational experience was found to be the most influential factor towards this issue. These results, however, only represent the views of the public instead of the real understandings of the juvenile detainees in any rehabilitation centres/approved schools.

The issue of juvenile delinquency is a world phenomenon as it is occurring around the globe. This social problem does not only affect on the safety of the public but also endangers the existence of credible young future generations. Even though this Study does not covers other factors such as peers' influence, urbanisation and migration, it is hope that the factors studied still have their impact towards adolescents' social development and well-being.

It is important to acknowledge the root cause of juvenile delinquency, especially by the society and the government. This is to ensure programmes and frameworks are established to overcome the involvement of adolescents in the criminal activities. Essentially, the efforts are not only to ensure proactive involvement of the local authorities, government and society to prevent their involvement in crime, but also to assist the young offenders in rebuilding themselves in order to fit into the society. This issue should not be neglected as the adolescents today need proper guidance to face the challenging world.

For future research, one can make a research on what are the effects of juvenile delinquency faced by the juvenile themselves and is the program made by the government to reduce juvenile delinquency effective or not.

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