

Patterns of involvement in negative behaviour & profile of the college youth at risk

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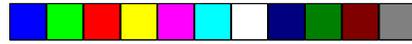
ABSTRAK

Belia merupakan tunggak sesebuah negara dalam merealisasikan wawasan yang diimpikan. Jika rosak mereka, maka runtuhlah negara. Kajian menunjukkan peratusan belia yang terlibat dalam tingkah laku berisiko semakin meningkat hari demi hari. Fenomena ini amat membimbangkan. Sehubungan dengan itu, satu kajian berbentuk survei telah dijalankan ke atas 658 pelajar kolej universiti dan universiti awam. Dua soalan kajian telah diketengahkan: 1. Apakah bentuk aktiviti berisiko yang telah dilakukan oleh pelajar? 2. Adakah terdapat perbezaan antara etnik, jantina dan tempat dibesarkan dalam penglibatan aktiviti berisiko mereka? Hasil kajian ini diharapkan akan memberi sumbangan signifikan kepada Kementerian dan agensi berkenaan agar langkah-langkah bersesuaian boleh diambil untuk membentasi aktiviti negatif tersebut dan program intervensi boleh dilaksanakan untuk membantu belia negara.

INTRODUCTION

Social ills or deviant behavior among the Malaysian youth has always been the concerns of many quarters including the policy makers and educators. It seems a common issue for all ethnic groups in the country. While there have been studies that address social problems among the youth, comparative analysis of college youth involvement in negative activities across ethnic groups, gender, and place where youth were brought-up is lacking. To address the gap, this paper reports the patterns of involvement in negative behavior among college youth by ethnic group, gender and place of brought-up by analyzing a portion of the data collected in a national survey on interethnic relations involving youth.

The concern for the social ills involving youth is legitimate as of the 26.2 million Malaysian in 2005, about one fifth (20%) are in the age group of 15



to 24 years. These are the 'Generation Y' or the Internet generation youth. They are exposed to numerous new media and technologies, and hence, have greater access to good as well as bad information. In addition to the technological advancement, cultural changes that are occurring also provide the context for youth development. Those youth lacking of development asset are more likely to be involved in risk behavior. There is a concern that the number of youth at risk in the country is on the rise. Several studies conducted in early 2000 found that a segment of the youth population in Malaysia are involved in negative behavior such as drinking alcohol, gambling, cohabitation, 'bohsia', pornography, loafing, truancy and gangsterism (Azimi 2005, Family Development Foundation 2002). While these social problems are bound to happen and are expected in a general youth population, the involvement of college youth should be of particular concerned and is less tolerated.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Youth must be viewed within the context of the environment in which youth interacts. In addition, the fact that development occurs across the life span, youth must be viewed within the appropriate developmental stage. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Perspective claims that development is a function of the interaction between the person and the environment (Lloyd 2002). One of the systems that represent the context for development is the immediate surrounding of a person where interaction occurs between the developing person and the environment. As summarized by Lloyd (2002) typical components of a micro system for an adolescent or youth include interpersonal relationships with family members, a peer network, and other social groups such as neighbours. The media environment is another important element in the microsystem. Young people today are growing up in a world unlike anything previous generation experienced. Youth today live in a world of rich media environment; they develop in an environment saturated with technology, and mass media imagery. They have greater access to more form of communication than ever before. It has been widely acknowledged that the youth spend a substantial portion of their waking time with media. The new media and communication technology provide youth with an array of things from the latest scientific discovery to surrogate friendships, virtual sex, and violence. The Internet, particularly, has become youth companion and main source of various information, hobbies, relationships and things of personal interest. Beyond concern of media violence, which has been extensively documented in the media violence literature, studies have also examined the consequences of media exposure in other areas such as interpersonal hostility, disrespect, callousness and incivility. Media effect on youth sexuality is another area less studied.

The media are a powerful force in the socialization and cognitive development of youth. This is not to say that the media are more powerful than other influences such as parents, peers, and school. There have been numerous studies examining the implication of media and new communication technology on youth development. There is overall agreement that the mass media and the new technology do exert some influence on the development of youth (Singer & Singer 2001). The mass media and the ICT devices of the 21st century provide new and greater opportunity for learning appropriate and inappropriate socio-cultural behavior and practicing these new behaviors cognitively without risking peer rejection. The mass media and new communication technology have become one of the most prevalent ways in which youth gather information about their environment, including societal attitudes towards high-risk behavior involving sexuality, drug and alcohol consumption, and smoking. Scholars generally recognize that the media's important role in the health and well-being of youth. One core developmental task of adolescence is establishing a sense of identity or place in the society. Brown & Cantor (2000) suggest in her articles that adolescence and youth often choose media based on how they see themselves and who they want to be. Although the media have the potential to provide positive images for youth, adolescence often identify with media characters who engages in unhealthy behavior such as drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, or engaging in unprotected sex.

From a developmental perspective, it is important to note that the behavior of the youth lay in the physical bodily changes and emotional upheavals caused by social and economic changes. Such physical, emotional, social and economic changes in the youth themselves and its environment gave great challenges to them which give rise to strong feelings of excitement and anxiety, which all help the youth to develop newer skills and increase feelings of competence within them. However, in some instances as a result of the changes as well as due to certain difficulties within the person or with his family or school, a few of these youngsters manifest behavior that is deviant, abnormal and distressing. It is also recognized that the period of youth is transient, characterized by typical trials and tribulations. Many of the problems stem from the sudden physical and psychological changes that occur in an individual and the need for the person to gear up to cope effectively with them. During this period too, the socio-cultural milieu plays an important role in making the youth subscribe to different values, other than the ones subscribed to by the culture. In fact, this is the time when the youth starts questioning the established norms and perceives him/herself somewhat differently from the adults around (Vimala & Shalini 2001). Most of these problems may be thought of as developmental disturbances and produce lapses in normal functioning and bring about sweeping changes in behavior, which are often considered deviant. Deviant in this context

refers to negative behaviors, such as drugs taking, alcohol addiction, pornographic, sexual intercourse, gangsterism, vandalism, gambling and theft. Such negative acts may be carried out individually or with a gang.

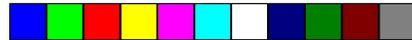
The growth and development of ICT generation of youth is accompanied with the processes of globalization and modernization. Hence, the youth faces scores of challenges. Thus, it is not disturbing to claim that the youth population today is increasingly exposed to greater risk. Due to rapid growth in ICT and globalization, today's youth also risk confusion in their identity resulting in being 'connected and yet disconnected' with their immediate environment. Consequently, they are easily caught in negative behaviors. Furthermore, current social circumstances such as a lack of focus on positive youth development programs, a lack of parental guidance, and a globalize media contents place many more of today's youth at risk for adverse developmental outcomes, such as engagement in problematic behaviours and has affected youth cultural styles and popular culture in a lot of different ways.

The trend in a growing increases of social problem among youth and the age of youth involved in negative behavior have raised a lot of concern among various quarters. It was reported that criminal cases in Malaysia involving juveniles has increased by 62% from 2408 cases in 1980 to 4012 cases in 1995. In the period of 1990-95, 60% of the juveniles cases involved youth between the ages of 16 to 18 years. Almost 35% involved children between 13 to 15 years old, while 6% involved children between 10 to 12 years old (Malaysia 1997). Research indicated that where there is a hostile and rejecting relationship between parents and youth, there is greater chance for deviant behavior to occur. Therefore, deviant in a youth is not only serious but also indicates a lack of insistence on even a minimal level of moral values or break down in relationship within the family, in school and society. This if allowed to continue, may end up in a number of more serious crimes as they move on to early adulthood. A research conducted by Azimi, Turiman & Ezhar (2003) indicated that higher percentages of youth are engaging in risky behaviors as they leave youth and enter into early adulthood. Therefore, it is crucial to curb the negative behaviors among youth before it is too late and became a norm of behaviors.

In examining the involvement of youth in risk behavior, it is also worthwhile to explore how ethnicity, gender and place where the youth were brought-up relate to patterns of involvement in negative behavior among the youth. Ethnicity, gender and place where youth were brought-up are some of the factors thought to have bearing on development of the youth. As pointed by Lloyd (2002) the development of cognitive or social abilities of youth is likely to depend on multiple factors in addition to personal cognitive resources, including adolescent's gender, and ethnicity.

In Malaysia, where multiethnic society consisting of various religion and cultural background co-exists, it is necessary to identify the patterns of involvement in negative behaviors among the youth across ethnic. This is because such information has practical implications. Inaccurate or faulty stereotyping of youth by their involvement in negative behavior is problematic, and it allows unhealthy perceptions and attitudes towards members of other ethnic groups. Furthermore, there is a considerable body of literature suggesting that family structure, norms and culture differ substantially among different ethnic groups, and that these certainly influence on youth development. Accordingly, it is logical to expect that patterns of involvement in negative behaviours amongst different ethnic youth could be different.

Correct understanding on the patterns of involvement of Malay, Chinese and Indian youths in negative behavior is necessary as it allows right intervention programs based on type of risk activities the different ethnic group are involved. Studies that attempt to profile youth involved in risk behavior, particularly educated youth at universities and colleges, in terms of their ethnicity is lacking. Thus, it is important to pin point what risk activities college/university youth are involved. In other words, who are at risk, and what kind of risk activities? Many previous studies on negative behavior among youth have not incorporated gender as a variable. Most of the studies generalize both male and female as a group of youth and mainly study the differences according to the age group. Studies in the west have found gender difference in some aspect of youth activities and development. Pamela (2002), for instance, reported that male college students were significantly more likely to binge, get drunk and subsequently experience more consequences from drinking, including hangovers, fights, driving under the influence, and damaging property as compared to females. Bettina, Kevin, & Darlene (2004) likewise observed that boys of the first year secondary (high) schools reported greater levels of problem behaviors. Males are more likely to cover their vulnerable feelings behind a display of hostility; while females are more likely to suppress anger, whether verbally or acting it out. Assuming the presence of differential patterns of involvement in risk activities across gender, then it is important to identify the type of risk behavior male and female college students are more likely to involve. Place where youths were brought-up is another probable factor that might explain for an observed difference in patterns of involvement in negative behavior among the youth. The influence of social environment on youth development has been widely recognized. The social forces that shape the character of rural and urban communities are different, and thus provide (or constraint) different developmental opportunities for youth. Informal social (primary group) relationships remain relatively more important for influencing the behavior of individuals who live in rural communities. This influence may serve as a buffer



that reduces the impact of societal trends on problem behaviors, but it can also mask recognition that problems exist. It has also been observed that the economic, social, and cultural forces associated with rising levels of crime, violence, delinquency, and gangs appear first in urban areas and then spread to the rural area. It is important to determine if background variable such as place of brought-up is related to involvement in negative behavior among the youth. Such understanding would enable youth development workers to plan better proactive positive youth development programs.

THE STUDY

Involvement of university/college students in risk activities is an important issue, however small the number is. Comparative analysis of their involvement by ethnicity, gender and place of brought-up is lacking. Therefore, the present study, accordingly posed two research questions: (1) What risk activities are college/university students involved, and (2) Are there ethnic, gender and place of brought-up differences in the patterns of involvement in risk activities among university/college youth. The findings of the study will provide insights into understanding the background of the university/college students at risk. Such information will be useful as input for youth development intervention program.

METHODOLOGY

The study reported here used a small portion of the data of a larger national study on “Youth as a foundation of unity: A study of inter-ethnic tolerance”. In the study there were questions about respondent’s involvement in negative activities. The study employed a survey design as it involves assessing perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of youth using a large sample. The sample for this study involves students from private institution of higher learning as well as students from public university colleges. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in groups and their participation was voluntary. They were reminded of the confidentiality of the survey. The survey took approximately twenty-five minutes to be completed.

SAMPLES

A random sample of 658 students currently studying in university colleges and public universities were selected for the study. A proportioned stratified random sampling was used in selecting the samples. Although efforts were made to get

samples representing a ratio of 5:3:2 Malay, Chinese and Indian students respectively, the survey eventually managed to get the samples in the ratio of 5:4:1 Malay, Chinese and Indian, respectively. Overall, the samples adequately represent the population particularly in terms of the demographic variables of interest, and adequate for a comparative analysis. Table 1 summarizes the pertinent demographic characteristics of the samples.

TABLE 1: Selected demographics characteristics of respondents

	Attributes	Statistics
Gender	Male	32.1%
	Female	67.9%
Age	Range	17-30 years
	Mean	22.1 year
Race	Malay	56.3%
	Chinese	35.9%
	Indian	10.5%
Place of brought-up	Urban	44.6%
	Sub-urban	29.2%
	Rural	26.2%

INSTRUMENT

The measure of involvement in negative activities involved asking respondents to self-report their involvement in negative activities. Respondents were given a list of negative activities and asked to indicate their involvement, as either never involve, occasionally involve or frequently involve. In the analysis, the responses were collapsed into two: never involved and involved. In addition with close-ended questions respondents were asked to report gender, ethnicity, place of brought-up, and participation in association. Age was measured with an open-ended question.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The first research question of the present study focused on university/college respondents' involvement in risk activities. As expected social problems among the respondents were not that widespread, suggesting the respondents have cognitive and social competence to engage in productive behaviours. The result showing a small proportion of the university/college students were involved in risk activities is not unreasonable because the respondents being educated youth are more likely to have the developmental assets that help deter them from getting involved in risk activities. Nevertheless, the results may not really reflect the actual situation and the study probably underestimated the proportion involved in risk activities the study could have suffered from social desirability effect. Therefore, the survey probably underestimated. A significant portion of the respondents, even though small, was involved in watching pornography, alcohol drinking, and gambling should be a concern to us all. As shown in Table 2, about 3 in every ten respondents had the habit of watching pornography, 3 in every ten were involved alcohol drinking, and 2 in every ten were involved in gambling. Thus, indicating that pornography, alcohol drinking, and gambling are top-three risk activities among university/college students.

TABLE 2: Proportion of respondents involved in negative behaviours (N=658)

Negative activities	Not involved (%)	Involved (%)
Watching pornography	77.2	22.8
Alcohol drinking	78.4	21.6
Gambling	78.8	21.2
Vandalism	86.7	13.3
Theft	89.0	11.0
Adultery	95.1	4.9
Gangsterism	95.3	4.7
Glue sniffing	98.2	1.8
Drugs	98.5	1.5

The overall analysis does not revealed much about who are those university/college students at-risk in terms of their ethnicity, gender, and the type of environment they were brought-up. As there was too small proportion

involved in drugs and glue sniffing, comparative analysis of involvement in risk activities by ethnicity, gender and place of brought-up was confined to the top-seven negative activities. Table 3 reveals the proportion of the respondents involved and not involved in risk activities by ethnicity.

TABLE 3: Proportion of respondents involved in risk activities by ethnicity

Negative behavior		Percentage (%)			X ² (sig. level)
		Malay (n=353)	Chinese (n=236)	Indian (n=69)	
Pornography	Not involved	79.3	71.2	87.0	0.009
	Involved	20.7	28.8	13.0	
Alcohol	Not involved	98.0	49.6	78.3	0.000
	Involved	2.0	50.4	21.7	
Gambling	Not involved	94.2	54.7	84.1	0.000
	Involved	5.8	45.3	15.9	
Vandalism	Not involved	84.2	88.1	94.2	0.059
	Involved	15.8	11.9	5.8	
Theft	Not involved	88.2	88.6	94.2	0.338
	Involved	11.8	11.4	5.8	
Adultery	Not involved	96.8	92.8	94.2	0.080
	Involved	3.2	7.2	5.8	
Gangsterism	Not involved	94.8	95.3	97.1	0.717
	Involved	5.2	4.7	2.9	

As shown in Table 3, vandalism, theft, adultery and gangsterism is not confined to a particular ethnic group as no significant difference in the proportions observed. Hence, vandalism, theft, adultery and gangsterism, although not widespread, is common among youth in university/colleges across different ethnics. On the contrary, watching pornographic materials is the most common problem among the respondents across all three ethnic groups. All three ethnic groups recorded the highest percentage of involvement in watching pornography. Easy accessibility, lack of social competence and the need for information about sex explain the result. A significant difference was observed between the three ethnic groups in their involvement in watching pornography,

alcohol drinking, and gambling. A significantly higher proportion of the Chinese samples were involved in the three activities, suggesting more Chinese youth are at risk in terms of pornography watching and alcohol drinking.

Table 4 summarizes the results of a comparative analysis across gender. The comparative analysis in involvement in negative behaviors across gender revealed a significant difference between male and female youths in almost all the negative behaviors studies. A significantly greater proportion of males were more involved in negative behaviors compared to that of females, implying that male youths are more at risk. A score of reasons could explain for the differences and it is difficult to figure out specific factors for the observed differences. In addition, when ascribing gender differences in negative behavior, it is important to acknowledge the extensive biological differences and the physiological differences between male and female. Nonetheless the implication of the findings is obvious. Youth development programs should ensure that the male youth should be the focus target participants.

TABLE 4: Proportion of respondents involved in risk activities by gender

Negative behavior		Percentage		X ² (sig. level)
		Male (n=211)	Female (n=446)	
Pornography	Not involved	49.0	90.5	0.000
	Involved	51.0	9.5	
Alcohol	Not involved	67.5	83.5	0.000
	Involved	32.5	16.5	
Gambling	Not involved	62.7	86.4	0.000
	Involved	37.3	13.6	
Vandalism	Not involved	73.8	92.8	0.000
	Involved	26.2	7.2	
Theft	Not involved	78.6	93.9	0.003
	Involved	21.4	6.1	
Adultery	Not involved	91.4	96.8	0.080
	Involved	8.6	3.2	
Gangsterism	Not involved	87.6	98.9	0.000
	Involved	12.4	1.1	

A variation in the patterns of involvement in risk activities is also observed across place of brought-up. As shown in Table 5, gambling, drinking alcohol and adultery are more pronounce among the respondents raised in urban area. A significantly higher proportion of urban youth was involved in alcohol and adultery.

As shown Table 5, three in every ten urban respondents were involved in alcohol drinking, compared to two in every ten sub-urban and one in every ten rural respondents. These proportions are considered high. Availability of alcohol and easily obtainable probably explained why more of the urban respondents were involved in alcohol drinking. Poor regulatory reinforcement could also contribute to the negative situation. More work needs to be done to ensure that youth, the urban youth particularly, do not see alcohol drinking as a standard of living in a metropolitan city.

TABLE 5: Proportion of respondents involved in risk activities by place of brought-up

Negative behavior		Percentage (%)			X ² (sig. level)
		Urban (n=290)	Suburban (n=189)	Rural (n=172)	
Pornography	Not involved	79.3	75.3	75.6	0.449
	Involved	20.7	24.7	24.4	
Alcohol	Not involved	71.0	81.0	87.8	0.000
	Involved	29.0	19.0	12.2	
Gambling	Not involved	75.2	81.0	82.6	0.119
	Involved	24.8	19.0	17.4	
Vandalism	Not involved	87.2	88.4	83.7	0.391
	Involved	12.8	11.6	16.3	
Theft	Not involved	91.0	86.8	87.8	0.305
	Involved	9.0	13.2	12.2	
Adultery	Not involved	92.1	96.3	98.8	0.003
	Involved	7.9	3.7	1.2	
Gangsterism	Not involved	95.5	95.8	94.2	0.745
	Involved	4.5	4.2	5.8	

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

Despite some methodological weaknesses in the study, this study has provided insights into who among the university/college students are at risk. The findings most likely underestimate the proportion of university/college youth involved in risk activities. As the respondents were asked to self-disclose their involvement in negative behaviour, the responses obtained could be social desirable response. Another weakness is the study has not included other important negative/risk behaviours such as smoking. A focus on university/college students provides only a partial picture of the youth at risk. At the time of this writing, the study is in the process of keying data from secondary school children and school leavers/drop out.

As a conclusion, although only a small percentage of university/college youth are involved in negative activities it should be of great concern to all because these negative behaviours are addictive and eventually could lead to dire consequences. While there is a differential proportion in involvement in the highlighted problems (eg: more widespread in the urban, among the male), these are generic social problems among the youth. Dialogue among all the quarters responsible on youth development across ethnic groups must be intensified to find innovative way to curb the problem getting out of hand. Given the patterns of findings of the present study and considering the emerging challenges faced by the youth, there is a greater need to focus on positive youth development approach, in addition to deficit-based youth development approach. Positive youth development approach emphasizes on providing services and opportunities to support all young people in developing a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging, and empowerment. Youth needs to be well grounded in developmental assets- the cognitive and social competencies. This is crucial for youth to experience youth stage positively and to be able to cope in a fast-changing environment, and eventually to grow up being successful adults.

While the present study underscore the role of place of brought-up variable in identifying youth at risk, more studies involving more historical and background variables need to be conducted in order to get a better understanding of the profile of youth at risk.

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