

A Profile of Delinquents in an Approved School

Profil Pesalah Juvana di Sebuah Sekolah Tunas Bakti

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ABSTRAK

Peringkat remaja merupakan suatu tempoh yang sukar bagi orang muda. Semasa peralihan daripada peringkat seorang kanak-kanak menjadi seorang dewasa, remaja terpaksa mengatasi pelbagai cabaran hidup. Salah laku dalam kalangan remaja mungkin disebabkan tingkah laku yang kurang berkesan semasa menghadapi cabaran hidup harian. Walau bagaimanapun, bukan semua remaja daripada status ekonomi yang rendah atau hidup dalam suasana yang sering melanda jenayah terjebak dalam kejadian salah laku. Ciri-ciri remaja ini perlu dikenal pasti bagi membolehkan intervensi yang sesuai dirangka untuk mencegah salah laku juvana. Sampel yang terdiri daripada 63 orang pelajar di sebuah (Sekolah Tunas Bakti) dikaji dari segi jenis salah laku, dorongan mereka dan tingkah laku penyesuaian (coping) dalam kalangan mereka untuk memahami perbuatan salah laku. Salah laku mereka diklasifikasikan sebagai salah laku harta benda, salah laku terhadap orang, salah laku status, penyalahgunaan dadah dan minuman keras, dan salah laku awam. Dalam kalangan pesalah juvana ini, 63.6 peratus dirujuk berdasarkan salah laku harta benda dan 23.7 peratus pula bagi penyalahgunaan dadah. Hanya sembilan peratus bagi salah laku keganasan dan 3.6 peratus bagi salah laku status. Merokok merupakan salah laku yang paling kerap manakala hanya satu kes cuba membunuh dirujukkan. Dorongan mereka termasuk masalah kewangan dan ingin berseronok. Tingkah laku penyesuaian (coping) pula bercirikan usaha cuba mengelakkan daripada isu yang timbul seperti 'dengan berjenaka', 'banyak tidur', 'memujuk diri bahawa masalah yang dihadapi itu remeh sahaja' atau 'menjalani aktiviti yang lasak'. Mereka jarang berbincang dengan ibu bapa tentang masalah yang mereka hadapi itu.

Kata kunci: Salah laku juvana, Sekolah Tunas Bakti, jenayah, dorongan, tingkah laku penyesuaian

ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a difficult period of development. During their transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescents have to cope with various stressors. Deviant behaviour could be the result of ineffective coping with these stressors. However, not all adolescents from low socio-economic status and living under criminogenic conditions resort to deviant behaviour. Resilience among these adolescents is examined to help formulate preventive measures against delinquency. A sample consisting of 63 students in an Approved School is examined in terms of types of offences committed, their motive for doing so and the coping behaviours frequently employed by them in order to understand delinquency. Their deviant behaviour are classified under crimes against properties, crimes against persons, status offences, drug and liquor law violations and offences against the public order. Among the delinquent subjects, 63.6 percent are referred for property crimes while 23.7 percent are for drug charges. Only nine percent are for violent crimes and 3.6 percent for status offences. Rank order of their self-reported offences shows that smoking is the most frequent offence while only one of them reported attempted murder. Motivation for delinquency includes lack of finances and wanting to have fun. The coping behaviours frequently employed by delinquent subjects are those described as avoidance-focused such as 'joke and try to be funny', 'sleep a lot', 'tell myself that the problem is not important' and 'do strenuous physical activity'. However, talking to parents about their problems is the least common among them.

Keywords: Delinquency, approved school, crimes, motivation towards delinquency, coping behaviours

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has made vast investments in health, education and sports to nurture the energy, creativity and talents of its young people in order to contribute to nation building. While the majority of adolescents benefited from such

programs, there are still many who require special support and attention. The Malaysian media are awash with stories of abandoned babies, *mat rempit*, loafing (*lepak*) teenagers and *bohsia* girls. Launching the *Baby Hatch* is greeted with mixed reaction; that we might instead be encouraging premarital sex among our youths. We

should be more concerned with the root causes of social deviance, rather than just taking care of its symptoms or play the blame game.

It is true that juvenile delinquency is a major concern world wide and not just confined to Malaysia. It is a major contributor to the social ills in any society (Chiam 1993; 1994). This is a real waste of human resources because juvenile delinquents form a big portion of our youths who should be groomed to be our future leaders. Instead, they are incarcerated and their potentials left to waste. Hurrelmann (1990), in his overview of research on problem behaviour among adolescents, concluded that problem behaviours are signals of stress resulting from developmental tasks during adolescence. Stressful situations lead to problem behaviour if the adolescents are unable to cope with the stress. These stressors include unfulfilled expectations of parents, scholastic demands, school failure, difficulties encountered with peer-group acceptance and lack of finances.

OBJECTIVES

This study is intended to draw out a profile of the delinquents in an approved school with the hope of understanding why they behaved the way they did (Thompson 1991). Consequently, we wish to help build up our youth's resilience and keep them away from crime.

Our specific objectives are as follows:

1. Draw out the demographic factors of juvenile delinquents
2. Identify the types of crimes committed and their frequency of offence
3. Determine the relationships between the types of crimes
4. Uncover their motives for delinquency
5. Describe the coping behaviours that they frequently employ

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

A survey method was employed to collect quantitative data from the samples, which comprised delinquent subjects detained for various offences.

SAMPLES

The delinquent subjects comprised 63 male Malay students in Sekolah Tunas Bakti (L) Jerantut. Their ages ranged from 16 to 18 years and they are from the East Coast states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang. Table 1 shows the percentages of students according to the State of their residence.

TABLE 1. Percentage of Delinquent Subjects According to States

State	Frequency	%
Kelantan	23	36.51
Terengganu	12	19.05
Pahang	28	44.44
Total	63	100.0

The subjects had been referred by the Juvenile Court and would be detained in the approved school for not more than three years as stated in the Juvenile Court Act, 1947. From their particulars, the delinquent subjects are found to come from low socio-economic status families. Their fathers were mainly labourers; farmers, drivers and security guards while the working mothers were fruit sellers, restaurant helpers, rubber tappers and hawkers. Both parents had very little formal education as shown in Table 2. Among their mothers, 60.3 percent had only primary education followed by 14.3 percent with no formal education at all. Likewise, the majority of their fathers had only primary education; 49.2 percent

TABLE 2. Level of Formal Education among Parents

Level of Education	Mother		Father	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
No Formal Education	9	14.3	6	9.5
Primary School	38	60.3	31	49.2
Lower Secondary (PMR)	5	7.9	4	6.3
Ordinary Level (SPM)	5	7.9	13	20.6
Advance Level (STPM)	3	4.8	3	4.8
No response	3	4.8	6	9.5
Total	63	100.0	63	100.0

had primary education and 9.5 percent with no formal education.

Of the 63 delinquent subjects, 55 gave their juvenile court referral while eight of them did not respond. Table 3 displays their juvenile court referral as classified by the Penal Code by the Legal Research Board (1998) and the number of cases for each of them.

TABLE 3. Juvenile Court Referral and Number of Cases

Offence	Frequency	%
<i>Crimes against Property</i>	35	55.6
Burglary	18	28.6
Motorcycle Theft	15	23.8
Theft > RM50	1	1.6
Car Theft	1	1.6
<i>Drug charges</i>	13	20.7
Selling Drugs	10	15.9
Taking Drugs	3	4.8
<i>Crimes against persons</i>	5	8.0
Assault	2	3.2
Robbery	1	1.6
Sexual Offences	2	3.2
<i>Status Offences</i>	2	3.2
Defy Parents	1	1.6
Run Away from Home	1	1.6
No Response	8	12.7
Total	63	100.0

INSTRUMENTATION

A questionnaire was constructed with the following sections. Section A on the demographic data of subjects, Section B on their frequency of offending for various offences, Section C on their motives for committing the offence and Section D on the coping behaviours adopt by the subjects when confronted with a problem situation.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection consisted of administrating the questionnaire to 63 delinquent subjects from the East Coast states in the approved school. To ensure that their reading level did not impede the students' ability to complete the questionnaire reliably, the instructions as well as the items and their responses were read out slowly and clearly for all of them. They were required to indicate their choice of responses according to a Likert Scale in the spaces provided. The whole session lasted more than an hour.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis made use of descriptive statistics, ranking and correlation matrices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR

Burglary, which involved the unlawful entry into a premise with the intention of stealing, was the most common offence among their reasons for referral. Eighteen of the delinquent subjects or 28.6 percent cited burglary as the reason for their referral by the Juvenile Court. Motorcycle theft was the reason for referral for 15 or 23.8 percent of them. Ten of the subjects or 15.9 percent cited 'selling drugs' as the reason. Three of the delinquent subjects or 4.8 percent were referred to the juvenile court for taking drugs. There were two cases each for assault and sexual offences and they account for 3.2 percent each. Only one person or 1.6 percent was referred for theft of articles valued more than RM50, car theft, robbery, defying parents and running away from home.

Results show that a total of 55.6 percent of the samples were charged for property crimes, which included theft of articles valued more than RM50, motorcycle theft, car theft and burglary. This was followed by 20.7 percent for drug offences that included both Taking Drugs And Selling Drugs. Status offences, such as defying parents and running away from home are acts that are considered offences only when committed by a juvenile, were the lowest. There was one case each for these two offences and they constituted 3.2 percent. Status offences were seldom used as juvenile court referral.

Analysis of their self-reported deviant behaviour in Table 4 reveals a wide range of frequently committed offences among the delinquent subjects. The self-reported deviant behaviour when rank ordered according to its frequency among delinquent subjects, shows that the more serious the offence, the lower the frequency of the offence.

Smoking is most common among delinquent subjects with 79.4 percent reported having smoked many times. It is a major disciplinary problem in schools and is ranked at the top. Smoking is one of the outlets from frustrations or as escapism. Although not permitted in schools, smoking is still acceptable in society. This contradiction often confuses the school children. Some of these youngsters smoked out of rebellion, just to go against the establishment. Increasingly society is against smoking because of health reasons and health authorities try to educate the public against smoking through various campaigns. Authorities also fear that smoking will graduate to drug use.

Traffic offences are ranked second and fourth on the list of offences committed by the delinquent subjects. According to a police officer during a school seminar on juvenile delinquency, driving without a valid license and driving vehicles that are not insured are the common traffic offences committed by adolescents. Among the delinquent subjects, 73 percent reported driving without

a license many times. Most youths yearn for the speed and mobility offered by the motor vehicles. Those who drive without the necessary documents are either below the required age limit, lack the economic means to acquire the documents or simply do not see the need for such papers.

Truancy, often the prologue to delinquency, is ranked third. This offence causes much embarrassment to school heads that are required to bail out school children picked up by police patrols during school hours.

In the rank order, petty thefts (5th, 6th and 7th) follow the traffic offences. The thefts could be due to lack of finances or they could be acts of defiance or just for the fun of it, as in vandalism, that is at the eighth placing. Liquor offences (8th and 11th) are more frequent than drug offences (17th and 18th). Defying parents and running away from home follow suit (19th and 20th). Theft of vehicles is less frequent than petty thefts because it

is more difficult to carry out (21st and 22nd). Robbery ranks 23rd in position. It is a more daring act compared to Burglary (11th) or housebreaking because it involves a direct confrontation with the victim, with or without weapons. Arson (24th) or fire setting is vindictive in nature while car theft (25th) requires more elaborate planning and involves greater risk. Attempted murder, while the most serious offence, is reported by only one subject and is therefore at the bottom of the list of offences.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OFFENCES

The relationships among the offences for all the five categories were examined to understand deviant behaviour among adolescents. Relationships involving the category on substance use have the highest correlations. This is as explained by Elliot et al. (1985) that most crimes are link to drug abuse.

TABLE 4. Frequency of Offences (%) by Delinquent Subjects

Offences	Frequency of Offence				Mean	Rank
	Never	Once only	Several times	Many times		
<i>Crimes against Property</i>						
Theft of articles valued less than RM10	15.9	6.3	28.6	49.2	3.11	5
Theft of articles valued between RM10 - RM50	12.7	9.5	34.9	42.9	3.08	6
Theft of articles valued more than RM50	22.2	7.9	15.9	54.0	3.02	7
Bicycle theft	41.3	15.9	28.6	14.3	2.16	21
Motorcycle theft	41.3	22.2	22.2	14.3	2.09	22
Car theft	73.0	9.5	14.3	3.2	1.48	25
Burglary	20.6	20.6	22.2	36.5	2.75	11
Vandalism	25.4	4.8	34.9	34.9	2.79	8
Arson	55.6	15.9	22.2	6.3	1.79	24
<i>Crimes against Persons</i>						
Robbery	54.0	9.5	15.9	20.6	2.03	23
Attempted murder	88.9	4.8	4.8	1.6	1.19	26
Assault	25.4	15.9	34.9	23.8	2.57	15
<i>Status Offences</i>						
Smoking	7.9	1.6	11.1	79.4	3.62	1
Truancy	9.5	4.8	27.0	58.7	3.35	3
Defying parents	28.6	12.7	41.3	17.5	2.48	19
Defying other adults	19.0	11.1	44.4	25.4	2.76	10
Running away from home	30.2	17.5	30.2	22.2	2.44	20
<i>Drug and liquor law violations</i>						
Selling drugs	41.3	6.3	11.1	41.3	2.52	17
Taking drugs	44.4	4.8	7.9	42.9	2.49	18
Buying liquor	22.2	15.9	22.2	39.7	2.79	8
Taking liquor	28.6	7.9	23.8	39.7	2.75	11
<i>Offences against the Public Order</i>						
Possession of dangerous weapons	23.8	11.1	31.7	33.3	2.75	11
Driving without license	11.1	0.0	15.9	73.0	3.51	2
Other traffic offences	19.0	4.8	14.3	61.9	3.19	4
Gambling	30.2	14.3	22.2	33.3	2.59	14
Sexual offences	36.5	7.9	20.6	34.9	2.54	16

(N=63). Percentage in *bold* is the highest for the offence.

RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE OFFENCES UNDER DRUG AND LIQUOR LAW VIOLATIONS AND CRIMES AGAINST PROPERTY

From a total of 36 correlations obtained as shown in Table 5, 33 or 91.7 percent of the correlations were moderate while three or 8.3 percent were low. The relationship between property crimes and drug offences suggests that those who were involved with theft and burglary were also involved in substance abuse. The relationship might be due to the necessity or need for money to purchase drugs and alcohol. Since they were adolescents without earning power, they might be forced to steal to get money to support their substance use. Delinquent subjects under the influence of drugs and alcohol were also more likely to commit other property crimes including vandalism and even arson. Two of the low correlations involved theft of articles valued less than RM10, an act that can be described as mischievous among adolescents, rather than a significant source of income.

RELATIONSHIP AMONG OFFENCES UNDER DRUG AND LIQUOR LAW VIOLATIONS, AND STATUS OFFENCES

From a total of 20 correlations obtained as shown in Table 6, 16 or 80.0 percent of the correlations were moderate while only four or 20.0 percent were low. Moderate correlations were for status offences such as smoking, truancy, defying other adults, and running away from home.

Smoking had often been associated with substance abuse. In fact, some considered smoking itself as substance abuse. Truancy, often the result of association with delinquent peers, leads to experimentation with drugs and liquor. This in turn, provoked the ire of well-meaning neighbours and the teachers in schools. They retaliated with defying other adults. They ran away from home when their family could no longer support their substance abuse, which is a financial burden. The subjects

however, would never admit to defying parents because it is tantamount to being *anak derhaka* (prodigal child), which is sinful. This accounted for the low correlations with defying parents.

TABLE 6. Correlation Matrix: Status Offences with Drug and Liquor Law Violations

Drug & Liquor Law Violations	Status Offences				
	Smoking	Truancy	Defying Parents	Defying Other Adults	Running Away From Home
Selling Drugs	.32	.49	.22	.34	.48
Taking Drugs	.38	.47	.24	.42	.43
Buying Liquor	.42	.54	.26	.46	.59
Taking Liquor	.42	.51	.27	.40	.53

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG OFFENCES UNDER DRUG AND LIQUOR LAW VIOLATIONS, AND OFFENCES AGAINST THE PUBLIC ORDER

Results in Table 7 show that 15 out of a total of 20 correlations, or 75.0 percent were moderate correlations while 5 or 25 percent low correlations. Relationships between substance use and offences such as weapon carrying, gambling and sexual offences were moderate. Weapon carrying for extortion purposes can be monetary sources to pay for their substance use. The act of Gambling may be another attempt to secure more money for buying drugs and liquor. When their cravings for drugs and liquor are strong enough, some may even exchange sexual favours for money. Correlations between substance use and traffic offences were lower.

TABLE 5. Correlation Matrix: Crimes against Property with Drug and Liquor Law Violations

Drug and Liquor Law Violations	Crimes Against Property								
	Theft of Articles Valued Less Than RM10	Theft of Articles Valued Between RM10 to RM50	Theft of Articles Valued More Than RM50	Bicycle Theft	Motorcycle Theft	Car Theft	Burglary	Vandalism	Arson
Selling Drugs	.28	.52	.57	.35	.50	.40	.50	.37	.42
Taking Drugs	.28	.47	.54	.27	.43	.39	.41	.40	.34
Buying Liquor	.36	.63	.66	.44	.52	.32	.54	.42	.40
Taking Liquor	.34	.60	.65	.52	.49	.31	.58	.43	.46

TABLE 7. Correlation Matrix: Crimes against Property with Offences against the Public Order

Offences Against Public Order	Crimes against Property								
	Theft of Articles Valued Less Than RM10	Theft of Articles Valued Between RM10 to RM50	Theft of Articles Valued More Than RM50	Bicycle Theft	Motorcycle Theft	Car Theft	Burglary	Vandalism	Arson
Possession of Dangerous Weapons	.38	.52	.48	.30	.40	.20	.39	.39	.29
Driving without License	.26	.31	.33	.19	.27	.21	.21	.35	.22
Other Traffic offences	.27	.31	.33	.24	.21	.19	.23	.32	.20
Gambling	.42	.52	.52	.37	.37	.32	.36	.45	.29
Sexual Offences	.11	.45	.47	.21	.38	.29	.32	.46	.43

MOTIVATION FOR DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR

Analysis of the motives for deviant behaviour in Table 8 shows that 55.6 percent of delinquent subjects chose lack of finances as indicated by the statement *I had no money*, as their motive for their offences. It was chosen by the largest number of the subjects. This seems logical as both smoking and drug abuse, common offences among them, requires money. *I just wanted to have fun* was checked by 54.0 percent of the subjects and is the second highest number of respondents. These two data suggest that, apart from lack of finances, youngsters' deviant behaviour was the result of boredom. Deviant behaviour, which can get the adrenalin flowing was perceived as a form of play.

TABLE 8. Motives Delinquent Subjects Gave for Committing Offence

Motives for Offence	Percentage
I had no money	55.6
I just wanted to have fun	54.0
I lost my head	52.4
I was forced	49.2
Friends asked me to go along	47.6
I followed friends	46.0
Others always say I am bad	46.0
I was pressurized	46.0
I was bored at that time	44.4
I have reached a dead end	44.4

(N = 63)

In order to explain why these students are bored in school, their participation in school activities were examined. Table 9 shows that these adolescents had limited involvement in extra-curricular activities in schools with 65.1 percent not being involved in any

form of extra-curricular activities. Thus, these students lacked beneficial activities to develop and hold their interests. The extra-curricular activities in schools may lack variety or those available did not appeal to them. Elliot & Voss (1974) noted that delinquency in school often lead to dropouts.

TABLE 9. Sports Involvement

Points	N	%
0	14	22.2
1	7	11.1
2	4	6.3
4	10	15.9
5	4	6.3
6	2	3.2
7	2	3.2
8	8	12.7
10	4	6.3
12	3	4.8
16	1	1.6
18	1	1.6
20	1	1.6
22	1	1.6
24	1	1.6

Table 10 indicates that 49.2 percent were not given any sort of responsible posts while in schools. These students were not given a role to play in their schooling process. Activities organised and supervised by the teachers in schools are better means to guide them through adolescence compared to those carried out by their peer-groups. This is because such programmes have proper agendas and supposedly insulate adolescents from deviant behaviour as they acquire skills or develop their innate abilities.

TABLE 10. Responsible Posts Held

Points	N	%
0	31	49.2
10	21	33.3
20	7	11.1
30	4	6.3

COPING BEHAVIOUR OF DELINQUENTS

Youths need to cope adaptively with the daily hassles (Kohn 1996). The coping behaviours employed by the delinquent subjects need to be measured (Patterson & Mc Cubbin 1987). The two most frequently used coping behaviours reported by the delinquent subjects as shown in Table 11 are 'joke and try to be funny', and 'do strenuous physical activity'. The coping behaviour 'joke and try to be funny' was always used by 47.6 percent of them while 40.3 percent always used the coping behaviour 'do strenuous physical activity'. Both of these coping behaviours had been identified as avoidance-focused mode of coping. Problem-focused coping behaviours like 'organise my life and what I have to do' was always used by a lesser percentage, that is, 38 percent of them. Instead of actively finding solutions to their problems, as in problem-focused coping, delinquent subjects were more likely to cope by disengaging themselves mentally and physically from problem situations.

Results also show that they were least likely to cope by seeking out parental support. The coping behaviour 'talk to parents about what bothers me' was never used by 41.3 percent of them. Several factors could have led

to such state of affairs. The parents were financially poor and had low purchasing power. Consequently, they were not able to cater to their children's material needs such as branded items. The parents themselves had very little education. They were unable to help their children with their schoolwork. In many cases, parents were not available to listen to their children's problems because they were not at home. Such low parental support is especially true for large families, stepfamilies and single parent or working mothers. Communication that is vital in the family is lacking together with parental attention in such homes. When parents fail to talk and listen to their children, these adolescents will turn to their peers for comfort and attention in times of trouble.

CONCLUSION

During their transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescents have to undergo developmental tasks such as developing an identity, gaining independence from the family and fitting into a peer-group (Pombeni et al. 1990). They cope differently with stressors in the form of daily hassles. Some respond well while others react in ways that may be self-defeating. Effective youths approach their lives in a purposeful way, anticipating challenges, considering alternative solutions and seeking relevant information to cope with the demands. Adolescents who are apt at problem solving go through this difficult period undaunted while others adopt inappropriate mechanisms to manage stress related to their developmental changes. Delinquency may be an outcome of ineffective coping during adolescence (Chan 2002).

TABLE 11. Coping Behaviour of Delinquent Subjects

Coping Behaviours	Frequency					Mean	Rank
	Never	Rarely	Some Times	Often	Always		
<i>Problem-focused Coping</i>							
Organize my life and what I have to do	12.7	20.6	19.0	9.5	38.1	3.40	3
Try to make my own decision	17.7	22.6	14.5	6.5	38.7	3.26	6
Talk to parents about it	41.3	25.4	23.8	4.8	4.8	2.06	12
Pray to God	1.6	27.4	37.1	9.7	24.2	3.27	5
<i>Emotion-focused Coping</i>							
Get angry and yell at people	39.7	20.6	33.3	3.2	3.2	2.10	11
Talk to friends about how I feel	14.3	14.3	28.6	9.5	33.3	3.33	4
Complain to friends and family	17.5	23.8	34.9	14.3	9.5	2.75	9
Cry alone	32.8	23.0	31.1	1.6	11.5	2.36	10
<i>Avoidance-focused Coping</i>							
Joke and try to be funny	4.8	15.9	22.2	9.5	47.6	3.79	1
Sleep a lot	14.3	38.1	19.0	12.7	15.9	2.78	8
Tell myself that the problem is not important	17.5	22.2	38.1	6.3	15.9	2.81	7
Do strenuous physical activity	11.3	8.1	21.0	19.4	40.3	3.69	2

(N = 63) Percentage in *bold* is the highest for the item.

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