

The Role of Peer Pressure, Parental Bonding, and Sensation Seeking in Predicting Risk-taking Attitude among Adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia

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Abstract

Various aspects which are associated with a risk-taking attitude among adolescents have been identified in previous studies. However, the strongest predictor for risk-taking attitude, particularly among adolescents in Selangor, remains elusive. It is essential to identify these factors as the risk-taking attitude which begins in adolescence can lead to a towering of various risky behaviours into adulthood. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of peer pressure, maternal and paternal bonding, and sensation seeking in predicting risk-taking attitudes among adolescents in Selangor. Participants (n = 426) consisting of 183 male adolescents (43 %) and 243 female adolescents (57 %) were recruited from 18 secondary schools in Selangor. Attitude towards risk questionnaire (ATTRQ), *Peer Pressure, Popularity, Conformity Scale, Parental Bonding Inventory (PBI) and Impulsive Sensation Seeking Inventory (ImpSS)* were used for data collection. Multiple regression analyses indicated all variables significantly predict adolescents' risk-taking attitude. Sensation seeking, peer pressure and paternal bonding were found to be the predictors that lead to adolescent engagement in risk-taking attitudes. Sensation seeking was found to be the strongest predictor. The result may guide relevant agencies and individuals to develop early intervention programs to shape adolescents' healthy psychological development.

Keywords: Peer Pressure, Parental Bonding, Sensation Seeking, Risk-taking Attitude, Adolescents.

Introduction

This paper examines the identified potential factors that predict risk-taking attitudes among adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia. Generally, attitudes are formed because of the influence

of the environment and inner thoughts. Adolescents will evaluate and alter their behaviour by rationalizing the experience and exploring their cognitions and beliefs (Jarvela, 2011). Bandura (1989) believed that the individual's expectations, beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, and intentions shape and give direction to the desired behaviour. This insertion means adolescents will be more motivated to take an interest when they believe their action produced the desired outcome. Risk-taking attitude can be defined as an individual's positive or negative evaluation of controlled behaviour with a perceived uncertain outcome (Lee & Tseng, 2015). Various factors contributing to a risk-taking attitude might drive them more towards risky situations. Specifically, in this research, three variables have been selected in relation to adolescents' risk-taking attitudes. These variables include peers, parental bonding, and sensation seeking (Ahmadi et al., 2013; Smorti & Guarnieri, 2014; Yu et al., 2016).

In Malaysia specifically, a study done by Hamid and Nawi (2013) found evidence of risk-taking behaviours among adolescents living in rural and urban areas of Selangor. A prevalence of 83.7% (rural) and 81.7% (urban) was reported. Also, the statistics reported by the Malaysia Department of Social Welfare (2021) on youth in conflict with the law indicated that males show a higher number of cases, with 1,194 cases, as compared to females, with 80 cases. These cases include drugs, traffic offences, crimes relating to humans, crimes relating to property, weapons or firearms, minor offences, gambling and others. In 2022, MOH's NHMS survey showed that one-third of Malaysian teens aged between 13 -17 years old engaged in sexual activity before age 14. Three-quarters of them are reported to be sexually active, and 88% of them don't even use condoms or any birth control. The presented statistics involving risky behaviour among youth are enough to sound an alarm as to why tackling the factors that might contribute to such behaviours is deemed essential.

Families and peers are known as the most influential components in the life of an adolescent. This assertion was evident in an array of research globally. Ajisukmo (2021) indicated that parents play an important role in developing adolescents' readiness towards responsibilities and decision-making skills in sexual risk behaviour through communication and supervision. The lack of parental supervision and communication with adolescent might force them to consult with their peers for answers. Other studies which examined the peer influence in adolescents' life have found that pressure felt from peers have driven adolescents towards a risk-taking attitude (Namuwonge et al., 2023; Anaïs Osmont et al., 2021; de Boer & Harakeh, 2017). Recent findings also indicate that adolescents strongly perceive and justify their same-age peer's behaviour and activities and would highly engage in risky activities (Siraj et al., 2021). Also, numerous psychological theories have highlighted this relationship between peer influence and the development of risk-taking attitudes. One of them narrated that "human expectation, beliefs, emotional bents and cognitive competencies are developed and modified by the social influence that conveys information and activate emotional reaction through modelling, instruction and social persuasion" (Bandura, 1986, p. 3). This statement means that adolescents' surrounding has shaped their risk-taking attitude.

Parents are immediate caretakers in the adolescent's socialization process and are seen as essential in predicting the adolescent's behavior. Adolescents can feel the care of their parents when they have a close relationship between parents and adolescents, as well as providing them with a source of support (Muhammad et al., 2017). Grounded in the

challenges with the issue concerning family functioning (e.g., family breakdown or dysfunction), the adverse effect on adolescent's well-being is anticipated. Maepa and Ntshalintshali (2020) showed that the absence of a healthy balance between families, regardless of the presence of the mother or father, will potentially lead to a negative influence toward adolescents, which includes the development of risk-taking attitudes. Azmawati et al (2015) suggested that the development process has affected families in various ways. The most evident effect is the changing roles of a large extended family, a nuclear family unit. As a result, time spent with adolescents is restricted, leading to the lack of monitoring of their activities, which leads to more risky and dangerous activities (Dou et al., 2021). Recent studies even identified that efforts made by parents to reduce the opportunities for adolescents to engage in risky behaviour could indirectly influence the development of their adolescent sensation seeking (Kapetanovic et al., 2023).

The adolescent's negative and positive experiences with their families and friends may determine the sensation seeking of an adolescent (Çelik & Calik, 2023). Psychologically, even though past studies have found that there was a connection between the social aspects (family and peer) and risk-taking attitude, we cannot undermine the role of personal aspects, especially personality. Breakwell (2014) suggested that risk-taking behaviour is the by-product of sensation seeking and acts as a strong predictor of risky behaviour, especially regarding criminality and social violation. Adolescents with a high level of sensation seeking tend to be involved in risk-taking (LaSpada et al., 2022); Te Brinke et al., 2022; Breivik et al., 2020; Britto et al., 2019). They will expose themselves to more stimulating sensations when they perceive their capabilities more. Past studies have consistently identified sensation seeking as contributing to adolescent risk-taking, and it is believed that adolescents who experience the pleasure of risky behaviour will be involved more in risky behaviour (Siraj et al., 2021; Ismail et al., 2015; Smorti, 2014). Thus, this personal aspect, particularly sensation seeking, would potentially lead to risk-taking attitude.

Therefore, these three variables are identified as the most common and unavoidable in adolescents' lives. In Malaysia, despite the fact that studies have been done on at-risk adolescents, little is known of the contributing factors leading to risk-taking attitudes among the general population of adolescents. Which factors (respondent's background profile, sensation seeking, peer pressure and parental bonding) would predict the risk-taking attitude in adolescents? Thus, this research seeks to examine this issue.

Method

Research Design

This research employed a correlational research design. The correlational research design is a non-experimental study that describes and measures the degree of association between two or more variables or sets of scores through a correlational statistic (Creswell, 2014). This study examines the relationship between peer pressure, parental bonding, self-efficacy, sensation seeking and risk-taking attitudes among adolescents.

Participant

A total of 426 participants between the ages of 13 and 17 years old from 18 secondary schools in Selangor participated in the study. Participants comprised 183 (43%) male and 243 (57%) female adolescents. The participants were recruited based on multi-stage cluster sampling through random selection technique.

Measures

One set of questionnaires comprising four measures was administered to all participants, which consisted of the following measurements for risk-taking, sensation seeking, peer pressure and parental bonding:

The risk-taking attitude was measured by an instrument adapted from 20 *Attitude Towards Risk Questionnaire* items. Psychological and physical risks scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (like me) to 5 (not like me). The instrument shows a high internal reliability alpha coefficient of 0.84. The subscale of psychological risk obtains an alpha coefficient of 0.79 and the physical subscale of 0.85 (Franken et al., 1992).

Sensation seeking was the *Impulsive sensation seeking (ImpSS) Questionnaire*. This instrument is used to measure the general sensation seeking tendency. The scale was scored using dichotomous scoring, which is 1 (yes) and 0 (no). The impulsive sensation seeking scale is reliable, with the items for impulsivity showing alpha Cronbach 0.68 and the sensation-seeking items showing alpha Cronbach 0.92 (Ismail et al., 2015).

Meanwhile, *The Peer pressure, popularity, and Conformity Scale* was adopted, and the peer pressure scale was used to measure the peer pressure variable. The peer pressure consisted of 11 items and was scored using the 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The internal consistency for the scale of peer pressure and the conformity scale are $\alpha = 0.83$ and $\alpha = 0.78$ (Iwamoto & Smiler, 2013).

Finally, *the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI)* was used to measure the parental behaviours and attitudes as perceived by the child. The instrument consists of 25 items that measure care dimension and overprotective dimension with a 4-point Likert scale from 0 (very unlike) to 3 (very like). The parent bonding inventory reported good internal consistency with a split-half reliability coefficient of 0.888 for the care dimension and 0.74 for the overprotective dimension (Parker et al., 1979).

Procedure

The research was conducted in Selangor, Malaysia. Letters of approval from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Selangor State Education Department were obtained. An ethics approval was granted by the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (JKEUPM). All participants were informed of the research goals and were convinced of the confidentiality and anonymity of their identities and responses. After consent was obtained, a questionnaire was administered during the regular school period. The data collection process took approximately 45 minutes. The data were analyzed using *Statistical Package for Social Science 20* (SPSS 20). Hierarchical multiple regression analysis for risk-taking attitude was used to analyze the data.

Result**Discussion**

The study was conducted among 183 boys (43 %) and 243 girls (51.9 %) studying in secondary schools in Selangor, Malaysia. This study aimed to determine the unique predictors of risk-taking attitudes among adolescents. The multiple regression analysis demonstrated the strong role of sensation seeking in predicting adolescent's risk-taking attitudes. The result obtained is consistent with most of the research in relation to risk-taking attitudes. The

current findings supported the previous relationship between sensation seeking and risk-taking attitudes (LaSpada et al., 2022; te Brinke et al., 2022; Breivik et al., 2020). Smorti and Guarnieri (2014) suggested that adolescents with high sensation seeking will look for environments that offer stimuli that can satisfy their excitement needs. The need to satisfy the pleasure of stimuli outweighed the negative consequences of the action that they might be facing. Zhang et al (2016) believed that although adolescents could realize the adverse outcomes of risk-taking attitudes, they expected more positive feelings or benefits from the behaviour based on their life experiences.

Other findings of the present study revealed that peer pressure is a significant predictor of risk-taking attitudes among adolescents. This finding is consistent with the findings from past studies (Negeri, 2014; Loke et al., 2016). Considering the adolescent's perception of risk-taking, they might perceive it as a rewarding form of behaviour when it is acceptable to their social norms. Their interest in being a part of or staying in the social group of their interest could motivate them more to engage in such behaviours (Nováková & Vávrová, 2015). Adolescents observe their peers who are actively engaged in risky behaviour could also lead to their engagement. This argument is supported by the fact that Malaysian adolescents mostly spend their time at school surrounded by peers (Syairah Aimi & Abdul Rahman, 2021). In addition, adolescents often observe and model risky activities of their peers based on the interest to conform despite the consequences (Kretsch & Harden, 2013).

Another low but significant predictor of risk-taking attitude was paternal bonding. Adolescents perceived to have a paternal bond were more likely to be involved in risk-taking attitudes. The findings found in the study are consistent with past studies conducted that the care shown by the father could decrease the likelihood of their sons engaging in risk-taking attitudes (Phuong et al., 2013). In another study, it was found that female adolescents who had poor father-daughter bonding tended to engage in risky sexual behaviour compared to those who had good father-daughter bonding (Dumas et al., 2012). This connotation can be explained from the perspective of the father's role in Malaysia, where they are seen as someone who is looked up to and respected in the family. The bond between father and adolescent allows adolescents to seek the father when facing various developmental challenges, reducing their likeliness to turn to their peers. A father is more authoritative, emphasizing more on disciplining adolescents with more driven strategies to protect adolescents from dangerous risk-taking attitudes (Sidze et al., 2015). In this study, however, maternal bonding shows no significant role in predicting adolescent's risk-taking attitude, although the variable was significant on a bivariate level. Despite adolescents perceiving having a good maternal bonding, there are the possibilities of adolescents acting on obedience to avoid penalties from their mothers. Sasson and Mesch (2014) indicated that restrictive supervision might motivate adolescents to find various means to bypass the restrictive supervision by their parents.

The outcome of this current study could provide essential information to other researchers who are interested in studying risk-taking attitudes, especially among adolescents. The lack of predictive behaviours in understanding adolescents' risk-taking attitudes might open an opportunity to other possible factors which may lead to adolescent risk-taking attitudes. With sensation seeking found to be the strongest among other predictors studied the findings could give further insight to the professionals in providing intervention or support for the adolescent to develop healthier well-being. In relevance to adolescents' high usage

and exposure to social media, future studies should consider the effect of social media on adolescents' decision to engage in risk-taking attitudes. As the study focuses on the adolescents who studied in Selangor, the findings could only be limited to the adolescents studied in the secondary school in Selangor rather than generalized to Malaysian adolescents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the risk-taking attitude was influenced not only by environmental factors but also by personal factors. The influence of peers on adolescents could shape and elevate adolescents' sensation seeking levels, thus contributing to adolescents' risk-taking attitudes. The value that they observed from their peers and wanting to comply with the social norms led adolescents to model them and be involved in such behaviours. Therefore, in line with what was believed by Bandura, an adolescent's attitude developed through modelling and imitating the attitude they were exposed to. By identifying the predicting factors, the dangerous adolescent's risk-taking attitude can be prevented and avoided.

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