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# Social Support and Psychological Well-being among Delinquents in Rehabilitation Centers in Malaysia

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**Abstract**
This paper demonstrate the relationship between social support and psychological well-being of 240 delinquents in six rehabilitation centers in Klang Valley and Melaka. 113 males and 127 females delinquents aged between 10-18 years old were involved in this study. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988) and Affect Balance Scale (Bradburn, 1969) were used to assess respondents social support and psychological well- being. Findings showed that majority of the respondents exhibit high level of perceive social support and moderate level of psychological well-being. Further analysis showed that social support were found to have a significant correlation with psychological well-being
Key words: Social Support, Psychological Well-Being, Delinquents, Rehabilitation Center

**Introduction**

Malaysia is a developing country with establish position in the economic, social and political sectors. But sadly this development also gave rise to a number of social problems including juvenile delinquency. In Malaysia the act of crime or violation of law by minors are on the rise and the number increases dramatically. In 2012 the cases of delinquency increases from 3,399 to 8704 cases in 2013, that is an increase of 5,305 cases (Malaysia Ministry of Home Affairs –MOHA, 2014). According to the media report, the adolescents' involvement in crimes is getting bolder each time. Their involvement was not only in petty crimes, but also includes rape, gangsterism, robberies, and even recruiting new members to commit crimes (BERNAMA, 2014).

The adolescent stage is a crucial period in one's life time. Improper handling and adjustment and the continues process of stressful events in their life may be harmful to their immature cognitions and consequently may lead to physical dysfunctioning. Adolescents with

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adjustment disorder tend to be involved in negative peers influence and juvenile delinquency. Similarly in Malaysia, an uprising issues on *samseng jalanan* or road thugs, violent gangs, and drug-fuelled sex parties clearly showed the influence of peers and people with similar interests. Statistics obtained from the Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF) indicated that in 2008, juvenile crime represented only 2% of the overall crime rate. In recent years, statistics indicated 3,629 students aged between 13 and 18 were arrested for robbery, rape, murder and theft, ie. 388 more than in 2007. Earlier, according to Wood (2005) over 35 per cent of young people aged 10 to 15 had experience at least one personal crime in the previous 12 months. Predictably, moral decay in current youth generation is due to the fact that the new generation has higher tendencies of exploratory behavior. They are more open and bold in engaging activities, as compared to the past society.

Yet, explanations on crime among adolescents are varied and diverse. Types of parenting, parent-adolescent communication, family functioning, peer influence, child maltreatment profiles, level of religiosity, social problem solving, and emotional competence were predicted at one time as the key factors that influence various criminal acts among these teenage juvenile delinquents (Lai Kwok & Shek, 2010; McGarvey, Keller, Brown, DeLonga, Miller, Runge & Koopman, 2010; Hazen, Connelly, Roesch, Hough & Landsverk, 2008; Hun-Soo & Hyun-Sil, 2005). Nevertheless, recent studies also tend to focus on the individual positivism that can effect their psychological well-being, thus may assist them to plan their future as soon as they are discharge out from the rehabilitation centers.

According to Diener (1997), psychological well-being refers to how people evaluate their lives, either good or bad based on their cognition or affective elements. Evaluation constructed on cognition are usually information based on appraisal of one's life, i.e. when a person gives conscious evaluative judgments about one's satisfaction with life as a whole. Meanwhile, the affective evaluation is more of a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings such as frequency with which people experience pleasant or unpleasant mood in reaction to their lives. Deci & Ryan (2008) on the other hand conceptualized psychological well-being as a combination of positive affective states such as happiness and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social aspects. Huppert (2009) perceived positive well-being as about lives going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively." i.e. people with high positive well-being report feeling happy, capable, well-supported, satisfied with life and etc.

Earlier notion on adolescent psychological well-being as defined by Ryff (1989) viewed adolescent psychological well-being as adolescents' sense of whether their life have purpose, either realizing their given potentials, the qualities of their ties to others, or to feel in charge of their own lives. Ryff proposed that it consists of the requirements of an individual to be psychologically well. This is simply contradictory to the conception of subjective well-being, which refers to feeling well. More to the point, psychological well-being is equivalent to the characteristics of healthy personality as proclaimed by Erikson (1982). Erikson has indirectly

relating the desirable outcomes of identity formation with one's good judgement and capacity of doing well; somehow these indicate the characteristics of being psychologically well (Vleioras & Bosma, 2004). The idea of well-being's satisfaction among delinquents is initially focused on how they perceived their previous life before they were admitted into the rehabilitation centre. Conversely, researchers chose to hub on the altered feelings of these adolescents about themselves as subsequent to a major phase in life; being caught for delinquency acts. Thus, the conceptual definition of psychological well-being applied in this research is a combination of delinquents' feelings and other aspects of psychological functioning.

While facing the conflicts in developmental tasks, adolescents are still immature to stand alone and they must seek for support from their ecological surroundings. Cobb (1976) defines social support as a thought upon others that one is being loved, esteemed and valued, and it has become mutual obligations. The domain of belonging has to be fulfilled and good attachments with significant people such as parents, siblings, peers, and teachers help adolescents to lead a happy life. Social support enhances the quality of life and provides a buffer against adverse life events (Pitman & Scharfe, 2010).

According to Wills & Filer (2001), those with positive social support seems to perceive family and friends as important factors that can provide quality assistance and hinder from future stressors, ie. they can count on their family and friends to provide quality assistance during times of trouble. The opinion and reality that one is cared for, with accessible support from significant others, means that they have a supportive social network. These supportive resources can be emotional (e.g., nurturance), tangible (e.g., financial assistance), informational (e.g., advice), or companionship (e.g., sense of belonging) and intangible (e.g., personal advice).

Somehow there are few arguments on which and which sides are more significant in determining the sense of good life among adolescents. Nevertheless, no matter how severe are the attachments to both sides, attachment figures do significantly contribute towards adjustment outcomes (Gullone & Robinson, 2005). Previous research has proved that engaging with peer bullying and emotional abuse, are highly associated with poor perceptions in social support (Pepin & Banyard, 2006). Nevertheless, having friends and other individuals, including family members to turn to in times of need or crisis, can give one a broader focus and positive self-image.

The objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between social support and psychological well-being among juvenile delinquent in Malaysia. Not many are aware of the existing ties between the two variables, social support and psychological well-being, in explaining delinquent behaviour. The purposes of this article are two folds, namely a) to determine the level of perceived social support and the level of psychological well-being among the delinquents, and b) to examine the correlation between the perceived social support and their psychological well-being.

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## Methodology

This study is quantitative in nature and a correlational study design was employed. Multistage random sampling technique was utilized for the selection at the state and institutional level. Based on the simple random technique using the fish bowl method, six rehabilitation centers (institutions) were selected as the location of study . A total of 240 delinquents from the rehabilitation centres in Peninsular Malaysia, specifically from Taman Seri Puteri Cheras, Sekolah Tunas Bakti Sungai Besi, Asrama Bahagia Kg. Pandan, Asrama Sentosa Sentul, Asrama Akhlak Bukit Baru, Melaka and Sekolah Tunas Bakti Sg. Lereh Melaka were finally selected as respondents. Only respondents who were born in Peninsular Malaysia and have stayed in the centers for over six months were eligible to be involved in this study.

Face to face interview using a set of structured questionnaires was utilized for data collection. Face to face was utilized in this study because most of the respondents were illiterate or do not know how to read or write well. The questionnaires used was translated into four languages, i.e. Malay, English, Chinese and Indian language. Therefore, enumerators from different races were employed to assist in the interview sessions. Enumerators were trained prior to the data collection phase.

To measure respondents' perceived social support and psychological well-being status, two establish scale were used, ie. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support [MSPSS] (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988) and Affect Balance Scale (Bradburn, 1969 - revised). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988) consist of 10 items, with 7 provided Likert scales, which are '1= very strongly disagree', '2= strongly disagree', '3= mildly disagree', '4= neutral', '5= mildly agree', '6= strongly agree' and '7= very strongly agree'. MSPSS focuses on three main subscales; family, friends, significant other. Meanwhile, Affect Balance Scale is a revised short term assessment to access two dimensional model of psychological well-being, i.e. positive and negative affect. Respondents are required to answer either 'yes' or 'no' in accordance to all 10 statements which best defined their feelings for the past months. The summing score for these two aspects serves as the more potent indicator of well-being. Statistical Package of the Social Science to Windows (SPSS for Windows 18.0) has been used to analyze the collected data. A descriptive and inferential statistical analysis were carried out on the data collected, parallel to the study objective.

## Results

Findings showed that the mean age of respondents involved in this study is 15.9 (s.d= 1.4), with more than half (53.8% - 129) of them are between 14 to 16 years old, followed by 33.0% (79) above 16 years old and 13.3% (32) were below 14 years old. Findings also showed that female respondents are higher (52.9% - 127) than male ( 47.1%-113).

Analysis were also carried out on respondents level of perceived social support and psychological well-being. As shown in table 1, none of the respondents have low perceived social support. 145 (60.4% - 145) delinquents reported receiving high level of social support from their family, friends and significant others, followed by 39.6% (95) with moderate level of social support. The perceived high level of social support reflected that the adolescents realized that they still have families and friends that they can rely on. A research carried out by Kingon & O'Sullivan (2001) has proved that family is a protective factor. Contradictory, utmost level of perceived social support is still insufficient for them to refrain themselves from engaging in offences.

Table 1: Perceived Social Support Level (N=240)

| Levels | Perceived Social Support | |
|---|---|---|
| | n | % |
| Low | 0 | 0 |
| Moderate | 95 | 39.6 |
| High | 145 | 60.4 |

Further analysis were carried out to analyze who are the respondents source of support. As shown in Table 2, majority of the respondents (65% -156) admitted that friends or peers were their main source of support. Mostly their friends are from the same rehabilitation center, but there are a few from outside the centre. Meanwhile about 21.3% (51) respondents said that their main source of support are from significant others, for example the counselors, teachers, cleaner, care taker, gardener, cook etc. Only 13.7% (33) of them perceived family such as parent/s, uncles, aunties, grandparents and siblings as their main source of support. As a matter of fact, majority of them have minimal contact with their initial families.

Table 2: Source of Social Support (N=240)

| Source of support | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Family | 33 | 13.7 |
| Friends | 156 | 65.0 |
| Significant others | 51 | 21.3 |

Meanwhile, quite similar result were observed for level of psychological well-being, as shown in table 3. More than half (55.4% - 133) of the respondents were found to demonstrate moderate psychological well-being level, followed by 33.8% (81) with high psychological well-being. This findings clearly showed that the respondents viewed psychological well-being not as a pursuit of pleasure, but instead as a sense of good life and fulfilling one's own potential instead, because it is an important predictors of one's trust and confidence. In addition, psychological well-being is about fulfilling own potential because it is an important predictor of one's trust and confidence (Dhar, Sen & Basu, 2010). A study conducted by Elias, Mahyuddin, Abdullah, Roslan, Noordin & Fauzee (2007) proved that

adolescents with positive psychological profile are less likely to get involved in behavior problems. Findings also showed only a small portion (10.8% - 26) of the respondents with low psychological well-being level, where interviewed found that the respondents admitted feeling useless after breaking the law. Majority of them mildly feel good about themselves. It seems acceptable, yet it indicates that these adolescents do not receive any *'call'* to repent in any way.

Table 3: Psychological Well-being Level (N=240)

| Levels | Psychological Well-being Level | |
|---|---|---|
| | n | % |
| Low | 26 | 10.8 |
| Moderate | 133 | 55.4 |
| High | 81 | 33.8 |

Pearson correlation analysis carried out on the relationship between perceived social support and psychological well-being showed that there is a significant positive relationship between social support and psychological wellbeing (r= .181, $p \leq 0.01$) [see table 4]. It is an unquestionable fact that people tend to be happier if they feel acceptance. Studies carried out by Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia & Scabini (2006) found similar finding on the existent correlation between social support and psychological well-being. They claimed that with adequate support from family, friends and significant others can enhance positive affect of psychological well-being among adolescents.

Table 4: Relationship between perceived social support and Psychological well-being

| | Psychological Well-being (r) |
|---|---|
| Social support | 0.181** |

Note: **$P \leq 0.01$

**Conclusion**

Based on the results of the study there are several conclusions that can be drawn. Findings showed that on average respondents have moderate level of psychological well-being but high perceived social support. Social support was also found to be statistically positively correlated with the juvenile delinquents psychological well-being. This study clearly proved that with adequate social support and positive attachment and love with families, friends and significant individuals, can assist in the development of a positive psychological well-being among the delinquents, where they become more confident and will have a better attitude towards life and a promising future. However, we need to be extra cautious in the interpretation because the respondents admitted that most of their social support came from friends/peers. And, according to past literature, peers can also thrust adolescents towards negative behavior (Poulin, Dishion & Haas, 1999).

In conclusion, this study clearly showed that there is a positive significant correlation between respondents' social support and psychological well-being. The result also indicate that social support may influence adolescents psychological well-being. The positive significant correlation between the variables showed a clear evidence that even though living in the rehabilitation center, but knowing there are people that they can rely on in times of needs, will nurture their psychological well-being. The conducive and supporting rehabilitation environment are very important to ensure positive recuperating process. Having 'the best' rehabilitation and correctional programs is not enough, but more importantly, the key element in solving juvenile delinquency is for them to feel loved, protected and have a sense of belonging.

Every one must be aware and alert to the increasing number of juvenile delinquency cases, as this will affect the sustenance of the future generation whom will replace the current generation and lead the country in the future. In most cases this social deviance behaviors begin early (school age) - initially in the form of violating the school rules, truancy, smoking and vandalism. If no action or measures taken to curb and overcome (help) the adolescents, this will lead to a more serious criminal misconduct such as bullying, injury to others, rape, theft and even murder. A stable and supportive home life is essential to prevent delinquency from occurring. There must be a program or strategy to inculcate awareness and educate parents, caregivers and the community on the issue. With proper support and adequate care adolescents positive well-being can be enhance and develop.

More inviting organizations are required for Malaysian adolescents in order to deal with youth-related issues. As such, there is the existence of Malaysia International Youth Program (MIYP), initiated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, where youths and adolescent can voiced out their opinions on current issues, including the rising rate of crime. On the other hand, different aspects of developmental changes and potential human health risks should be exposed to the youths. With this exposure, it may help adolescents to be prepared in order to face future challenges, obstacle, and barriers, thus prepared for a more positive well-being.

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