

The Relationship Between Parental Attachment Toward Delinquent Behavior among Young Offenders

Siti Noor Fazariah Bt Suis @ Mohd Rusdy

Razima Hanim Othman

Azahar Che Latif

Norhamidah Jarimal @ Safri

This study examined the relationship between parental attachment and delinquent behavior and the differences between age ranged and delinquency types among young offenders in Sabah. A total of 92 young offenders aged 16-21 years old were selected by using purposive sampling method from rehabilitation institutions in Sabah. The revised version of Inventory of Parents and Peers Attachments (Revised-IPPA-R) and the Junger Delinquency Scale were used in this study. The correlation findings shows that there is a weak negative and significant relationship between parental attachment and delinquent behavior ($r=-.337$, $k<0.05$). Specifically, the higher the parental attachment, the lower the delinquent behavior. Discussion on the implications for young offenders, families and communities were discussed. Some suggestions on future research were also provided.

Keywords : Parental attachment, Delinquent behavior, Young offenders

SAPJ Code : 2070, 4080, 5090

Introduction

Concerns on the rising of delinquency cases due to the development of delinquent behavior among youth should become the priority among all the related parties nowadays. As statistical data indicates that in virtually all parts of the world, with the exception of the United States, rates of youth crime rose in the 1990s. In western Europe, one of the few regions for which data are available, arrests of juvenile delinquents and under –age offenders increased by an average of around 50 per cent between the mid-1980s and the late 1990s. The countries in transition have also witnessed a dramatic rise in delinquency rates, since 1995, juvenile crime levels in many countries in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States have increased by more than 30 per cent. Many of the criminal offences are related to drug abuse and excessive alcohol use (World Youth Report, 2003).

In Malaysia, youth involved in delinquent behavior through committing in various types of delinquency cases, and they will be officially defined as offenders. Generally juvenile delinquency involves some form of offending acts by youth. The delinquent acts of a juvenile can be divided into two categories; first, acts or omissions which are prohibited and punishable by law under the respective legal systems and second, acts which are known as status offences (Hussin, 2007). From the legal point of view there are various definitions of juveniles depending on their group and age. According to the Prison Act 1995, a juvenile or a young offender is defined as "prisoner who is under the age of 21 years". The Prison Department of Malaysia detains juveniles aged between 14 and 21 years in prison as young prisoners or in Henry Gurney School (approved school) as students. The Child Act 2001 defines a child as "a person under the age of 18 years and below" and the age of criminal responsibility at the age of ten. The Child Protection Act 1991 defines a child as "a age of 18 years and below". The Children and Young Persons Employment Act 1996 defines a child as a person aged between 10 and 14 years old, and a young person as one aged between 14 and 16 years. From the legal point of view the definition for juveniles can be concluded as a

group of adolescents under the age of 21 years and who have criminal responsibility at the age of 10 years (Kassim, 2016).

The rise in social deviance among adolescents can be viewed from various aspects. Throughout 1995, 4012 adolescents (remanded in prison and Henry Gurney School) were involved in crimes where 95.2% were male adolescents. The phenomenon is rather alarming and should not be viewed lightly as there are more male detainees in rehabilitation centres and under remand. Although there is an increase in the number of male adolescents involved in criminal misconducts, statistics show that the involvement of female juveniles in crime increased 161.5% from 325 cases in 1974 to 850 cases in 1995. The statistics of The Prison Department of Malaysia show that of the 2964 juveniles who are serving prison sentences: 1231 (41.6%) are Malays; 110 (3.7%) Chinese; 314 (10.67%) Indians; 197 (6.6%) other races including the Bumiputera in Sabah and Sarawak, and 1112 (37.5%) foreign juveniles. The increase in criminal misconduct among adolescents is influenced by several factors particularly involving those directly involved with adolescent development such as parents, the school, the family, social institutions, the community and the government (Kassim, 2016). This paper focuses on adolescents aged between 16 and 21 years old and they will be referred as young offenders.

The analyses of the statistical data on the increasing number of delinquency cases in Malaysia, is proving this problem has worsened, unless, some appropriate action are taken. As response to that, studies need to be done, specifically in investigating the causal factors on the development of delinquent behavior among youth. Referring to Bowlby (1994) and Hirschi (1969) as referred in Hoeve, Jan, Stams, Van Der Put, Dubas, Van Der Laan and Gerris (2012), poor attachment to parents is considered to be one of the causes of delinquency. Delinquency will be low in families with strong affective ties, because juveniles who are strongly attached to their parents are more likely to care about the normative expectations of their parents, which protects against delinquent impulses. The quality of attachment functions as an indirect parental control: conventional behavior of the child is achieved as a by-product of strong child-parent attachments (Hirschi, 1969) as referred in Hoeve et al.,(2012). Delinquent behavior is not only an alarming issue in Malaysia alone. But, it occurred across the globe. In Korea, Kim and Kim (2005), studied that the nature and extent of delinquent behavior among adolescents is becoming a social issue in South Korea. Again, according to Kim and Kim (2008) as referred in Nasir, Ahmad, Khairudin and Wan Shahrzad (2011), Even though, the incidence of delinquency among Korean adolescents is relatively and not high compared to that of adolescents in Western countries, delinquent behavior among Korean adolescents has become increasingly more violent and remains a serious social problem facing Korean society.

Literature review on the relationship between parental attachment toward delinquent behavior

According to Wright & Wright (1994) in Ngale (2009), the family is the foundation of human society. Children who are rejected by their parents, who grow up in homes with considerable conflict, or who are inadequately supervised are at the greatest risk of becoming delinquent. Adolescence is a time of expanding vulnerabilities and opportunities that accompany the widening social and geographic exposure to life beyond school or family. The findings showed the importance of having positive attachment among parents and their children. Back in 2004, Parker & Benson (2004) stated that, their present study was designed to examine parental support and monitoring as they relate to self-esteem and behavior problems during adolescence. It was hypothesized that parental support and monitoring, as perceived by the adolescents, would be associated with higher self-esteem and less risky behavior and the findings showed, both high parental support and parenting were related to greater self-esteem and lower risk behaviors. These studies are in line with

each other, on their conclusions which said that, delinquent behavior is related to the attachment with parent.

Again in Sharma (2012), stated that most of the delinquents reported troubled and disturbed relationship with their family members. Their family environment has never been smoother. Sharma (2012) was also stated that family's influences in the early years of life of delinquents are intense. Parental ill mannerism, violence, alcohol abuse, maladaptive upbringing and poor living conditions are important determinant of criminal behavior. Children having fewer possibilities to legally satisfy their needs often select inappropriate ways to satisfy their needs. Both studies by Wright & Wright (1994) in Ngale (2009) and Sharma (2012), are indicating the relationship between parental attachment toward delinquent behavior among the juvenile respondents in their research setting. These studies might be having different delinquency context with Malaysian's juvenile offenders, as been investigated in this research, but, the parental attachment can be the causal factors on delinquent behavior among juveniles around the globe.

Apart from analysing the statistic report which showed the alarming number of cases among juvenile offenders in Malaysia previously, some research findings in 1990s as shown by Barber (1992) has linked poor parental supervision to adolescent problem behaviour, whilst Frick (1993) has reported the association of low parental supervision and lack of knowledge of the adolescent's activities with adolescent behaviour problems. These studies were done in 1990s and surprisingly, attachment toward parents has been proved as having relationship on juvenile's delinquent behavior back in those years till now, as referred in Sharma (2012). It can be concluded that, substantial research is needed in investigating the relationship of parental attachment on the behavior of juvenile offenders, in responding on the dearth of previous research.

Methodology

Setting

This study was a quantitative study and carried out in rehabilitation institutions in Kota Kinabalu and Keningau Sabah. These institutions were monitored and supervised by The Prison Department of Malaysia.

Respondents

The respondents consisted of 92 young offenders aged from 16-21 years old whom were selected by purposive sampling. The approval from the rehabilitation institutions were obtained through official procedure. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in the institutions. Instructions in completing the questionnaire form and the confidentiality of the study were explained to the respondents. Questionnaires were promptly collected upon the completion of the process.

Instruments

The revised version of Junger Delinquency Scale as referred in Baharom (2006) was used to measure delinquent behavior among the respondents. This scale measured the frequency of delinquent behavior done by the respondents before being sentenced to undergo rehabilitation programs in the rehabilitation institution by the authorities. The Junger Delinquency Scale consists of four types of delinquent behavior which categorized into physical delinquency, antisocial delinquency, sexual delinquency and verbal delinquency.

This inventory is a five-point Likert Scale ranging from almost never, sometimes, seldom, often and always. Higher score indicates higher frequency of delinquent behavior showed by the respondents. The Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was .92.

The Inventory of Parents and Peers Attachments (Revised-IPPA-R) as referred in Che Latiff, Rathakrishnan, Safri @ Jarimal and Suis @ Mohd Rusdy (2015) was administered to measure parental attachment among juvenile offenders. The Cronbach's alpha for the instrument was .89.

Findings

Table 1: Demographic profile of young offenders

| Variables | | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--|----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 61 | 66.3 |
| | Female | 31 | 33.7 |
| Age (Years Old) | 16 | 2 | 2.2 |
| | 17 | 11 | 12.0 |
| | 18 | 14 | 15.2 |
| | 19 | 33 | 35.9 |
| | 20 | 19 | 20.7 |
| | 21 | 12 | 13.0 |
| | <i>Missing data</i> | 1 | 1.1 |
| Number of siblings (People) | 1 | 4 | 4.3 |
| | 2 | 8 | 8.7 |
| | 3 | 10 | 10.9 |
| | 4 | 7 | 7.6 |
| | 5 | 15 | 16.3 |
| | 6 | 19 | 20.7 |
| | 7 | 10 | 10.9 |
| | 8 | 8 | 8.7 |
| | 9 | 4 | 4.3 |
| | 10 | 1 | 1.1 |
| | 11 | 4 | 4.3 |
| | 12 | 1 | 1.1 |
| | <i>Missing data</i> | 1 | 1.1 |
| | Academic Achievement | End of primary 6 | 19 |
| End of secondary 3 | | 41 | 44.6 |
| End of secondary 5 | | 21 | 22.8 |
| Not attending school/Not finish school | | 8 | 8.7 |
| <i>Missing data</i> | | 3 | 3.3 |
| Guardian | Biological Parents | 45 | 48.9 |
| | Biological mother | 12 | 13.0 |
| | Biological father | 2 | 2.2 |
| | Biological mother and stepfather | 5 | 5.4 |
| | Biological father and stepmother | | |
| | Grandmother and grandfather | 1 | 1.1 |
| | Foster parents | | |
| | Others | 2 | 2.2 |

| | | | |
|--|---------------------|----|------|
| | <i>Missing data</i> | 3 | 3.3 |
| | | 16 | 17.4 |
| | | 6 | 6.5 |

Table 2: Correlations between parental attachments toward delinquent behavior among young offenders.

| Independent Variable | Dependent Variable | Sig. |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------|
| Parental attachment | Delinquent behavior | -.337 |

Note 1: Delinquent behavior, 2: Parental attachment
 * $r < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 2 shows the correlations result between parental attachment toward delinquent behavior among young offenders. The findings shows there is a weak negative and significant relationship between parental attachment toward delinquent behavior, ($r = -.337$, $k < 0.05$). Specifically, the higher the parental attachment, the lower the delinquent behavior.

Discussion

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the young offenders. There were almost an equal numbers of male (66.3%) and female (33.7%). About 65.3% of the young offenders ranged from 16-19 years old. Meanwhile, 33.7% of the young offenders were in their early twenties, which ranged from 21-22 years old. Number of siblings of the young offenders was grouped into three main categories and detail of that group as shown in Table 1. The first group was having only one sibling and 4.3% of the respondents were at this. Then, the second group was categorized as having more than one sibling, ranged from two to nine siblings and 88.1% of the respondents were at this. The third group was categorized as having more than nine siblings, which is 10-12 siblings, and 6.5% of the young offenders were at this. The data also shows the highest percentage for number of siblings was having seven siblings (20.7%). There were 88.1% just managed to finish school and 8.7% did not attend/finish school. Specifically, respondents were managed to finish primary six (20.7%), finish secondary three (44.6%) and finish secondary five (22.8%). Most of the young offenders were living with their own biological parents (48.9%) as their guardian and only 6.5% were living with their stepmother or stepfather as the guardian, which was 5.4% (biological mother and stepfather) and 1.1% (biological father and stepmother). Only 2.2% were living with grandmother and grandfather as guardian. Meanwhile, 3.3% were living and been guarded by foster parents and 17.4% were living and guarded by other family members.

Meanwhile, Table 2 shows the findings on the correlations result between parental attachments toward delinquent behavior among young offenders. Based on the findings in Table 2, parental attachment has a weak negative and significant relationship toward delinquent behaviour among young offenders. This shows that, young offenders who are highly attached to their parent are less likely to behave delinquently. Parents who are more attached to their children are more concern on their children daily activities and with whom they spend most of their time. Findings also shows that, the more the children being attached with their parents, the lesser they will be involved in delinquency and vice versa.

As the findings have specifically shows, the higher the parental attachment, the lower the delinquent behavior. Therefore, negative attachment, regardless in any form

which is occurred between youth and their parent need to be avoided. These weak relationships can manifest themselves in many ways. They may not have intimate communication with each other, in that youths do not talk over their future plans with parents, and they do not share their thoughts and feelings with their parents. Parents may not typically explain rules or help children to understand things by answering their questions. When there are weak parent-child relationships, parents often feel that they cannot “get through” to their children and that the children are not a part of the family, for they stay in their own rooms or outside of the house much of the time (Trojanowicz & Morash, 1992).

Studies by Abdul Jalal (2005) stated that, youth misbehaviors are more likely to develop in a family that has experienced risk factors such as poor family management practices, family conflict, and family history of problems behaviors. As stated earlier, delinquency will be continuously increasing in Malaysia, unless some appropriate action is taken. Parents should be having vast knowledge on the importance of being in positive and strong attachment between themselves and their children, and this will decrease the alarming number of delinquency cases and ensuring that, all people are in their own well-being, regardless their life condition. Not only that, parents nowadays should be educated on the ideal parenting styles which suits their children and again, this will strengthen positive attachment between them.

Referring to Gao, Yu & Ting (2013), besides the interaction among family members, family is one of the conventional institutions to provide social control. As deviant peer association serves as an instigator of delinquency, family may be a barrier to the negative influence of deviant peers. In other words, family may play a role of moderator between deviant peer affiliation and delinquent behavior. Thus, in Malaysia itself, it is vital to look into the attachment among family members. As we can build another dimensions in understanding the nature of young offenders in Malaysia based on findings in Table 1, in which stated that, young offenders in Sabah behaved delinquently although majority of them were raised by their own biological parents (48.9%) and able to complete secondary school (44.6%). The new dimension as i mentioned earlier, probably on the influence of peers as the peoples whose having attachment in their social life and how that attachment build relationship toward their showing behavior. From the perspective of a researcher, either by hook or by crook, i urged more studies on peers attachment toward delinquent behavior, not only focusing among young offenders, but also encompassing the whole categories of children and adolescents for their nature and nurture factor, youth empowerment and adult inmates or prisoners for their criminality history or even in ideal families, in which maybe having positive attachment with their children. We have to accept that our social life is dynamic and the world is influencing each other and we might think that juvenile offenders in Malaysia might be having different needs compared to the juvenile offenders in the other part of the world, but, as the world becomes more connected through technological advancements, issues facing the family in one country might be similar to what is happening in other parts of the world. Families everywhere share similar concerns and needs regarding adolescent delinquency (Abdul Jalal, 2005).

In addition, parents with incarcerated background history will impact their reared children. According to Armsden & Greenberg (1987), as referred in Carter (2009), history of parental incarceration and parent-child relationship quality are familial characteristics that can impact child behavior. When a parent is incarcerated, they are absent from their child's life and are unable to support them emotionally and financially in the same way that a non-incarcerated parent could. This is clearly a serious risk factor for diminishing parent-child relationship quality. Important aspects of any parent-child relationship include open and honest communication, feelings of mutual trust, supervision, and parental emotional support. Therefore, it is hoped that, this findings will be useful in empowering young offenders and building new positive perspective into their life. As we know that delinquency

cases rose each year and according to Carter (2009), well, it means that we need to think outside of the box in dealing with these groups of people. According to this findings, i am sharing with people out there, the thoughts that young offenders nowadays should be intervened thoroughly and being empowered holistically, despite had gone through certain years of rehabilitation program in institutions, they still need hands from other parties. Therefore, the helping hand might be social workers in communities or social worker in research setting and their professional helping activities include examining on the possibilities of what will happen to themselves, their family and their children in their future, the possible enforcement in policy and the community's role onwards. As we know, they had the history of incarcerating and it has had affecting their behavior toward their own children, as well as the attachment between these two groups of people might jeopardize, as they spent their time only on their own.

The future research may be on the gender differences and the involvement in delinquency types. The involvement in delinquency among genders is important as there is no empirical confirmation that, only certain gender will behave delinquently. As shown in this studies, both female and male youth are involved in various types of delinquencies. Another aspect in which need to be studied is on the high risk factors of involvement in delinquency among youth in Sabah. The findings then, can be revised in intervening children and adolescents with delinquent behavior problems or the nature of their social system in which influencing the development of that behavioral problem. Aside focusing on direct rehabilitation toward the young offenders, we may need to highlight on how to build new perspective of positive life into them, as i said earlier. It can be done through networking with related government and non-governmental bodies in Sabah. As we have many possible sources in linking young offenders to fulfil their needs, then, the risen statistic of delinquency might be decrease. Table 1 also shows plenty of data on the demographic profile of young offenders in Sabah, such as, academic achievement, age of the perpetrators and the guardian of them before being sentenced to undergo rehabilitation program. As this study is limited to examining the parental attachment toward delinquent behavior and only did descriptive analysis on the demographic profile, again, research onwards maybe has the ability to examine in depth. Part of the abilities i mean, is in terms of getting wide consideration on the permission of data collection process in related institutions.

As a conclusion, this study had discussed the demographic profile of young offenders in Sabah, in which showing the gender, age range, academic qualification and guardian of them in their daily living. Secondly, findings on the relationship between parental attachment and delinquent behavior shows that parental attachment has a weak negative and significant relationship toward delinquent behavior among young offenders. Finally, few suggestions have been discussed, including widening the scale of networking with both governmental and non-governmental bodies, consideration on flexible rules and regulations for research, especially on the process of data collection and some of gaps in research in which need further studies. Last but not least, this studies has its own limitation, but, aiming high in empowering young offenders, as well as ensuring the holistic wellbeing of people in community and decreasing the risen statistic on delinquency cases.

References

- Abdul Jalal, F. H. (2005). Family functioning and adolescent delinquency in Malaysia. (Phd. Thesis). Iowa State University. Retrieved from:<http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2741&context=rtd>

- Baharom, B. (2006). Persekitaran keluarga dan kesannya terhadap tingkah laku devian remaja di Daerah Pontian, Johor (Tesis sarjana). Fakulti Pendidikan: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
- Carter, K. E. (2009). The relationship between delinquent behaviour, adolescent parent relationships, and intergenerational cycles of crime. College of William & Mary Undergraduate Honors Theses. Paper 335. Retrieved from:<http://publish.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1344&context=honorsthees>
- Che Latiff, A., Rathakrishnan, B., Safri @ Jarimal & Suis @ Mohd Rusdy (2015). Hubungan antara perapatan ibu bapa, rakan sebaya dan Self-esteem dengan penglibatan remaja pelbagai etnik (Kadazan, Dusun, Bajau dan Murut) ke atas penyalahgunaan gam dan syabu di Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan dan Tawau. Unpublished RAGS research grant: Universiti Malaysia Sabah.
- Gao, Y., Yu, Y., Ting. K. N. (2013). A study on the moderating effect of family functioning on the relationship between deviant peer affiliation and delinquency among Chinese adolescents. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 3, 178-185.
- Henggeler, W. S. (1989). *Delinquency in adolescence*. SAGE Publications, Inc. Newbury Park, California.
- Hussin, N. (2007). Juvenile delinquency in Malaysia: Legal framework and prospects for reforms. Revised version of conference paper presented at The 4th World Congress on Family Law and Children's Right, Cape Town, South Africa, 20-23 March 2005.
- Hoeve, M., Dubas, S. J., Eichelsheim, I., V., Van Der Laan, H., P., Smeenk, W., & Gerris, M., R., J. (2009). The relationship between parenting and delinquency: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 37, 749-775
- Ngale, F. I. (2009). Family structure and juvenile delinquency: Correctional centre Betamba, centre province of Cameroon. *Internet Journal of Criminology*. Retrieved from: http://www.internetjournalofcriminology.com/ngale_family_structure_and_juenedelinquency.pdf
- Kim, H., S., & Kim, H. S. (2005). Gender differences in delinquent behavior among Korean Adolescents. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 35, 325-345.
- Kassim, A., W. (2016). Juveniles on remand: trends and practices in Malaysia. Retrieved from: http://www.unafei.or.jp/english/pdf/RS_No68/No68_17PA_Kassim.pdf
- Parker, S., J., & Benson, J., M. (2004). Parent-adolescent relations and adolescent functioning: Self-esteem, substance abuse, and delinquency. *ADOLESCENCE*, 39, 155.
- Sharma, A. (2012). Correlates of juvenile delinquency: The role of family environment and self-esteem. *Advances in Asian Social Science (AASS)*, Vol. 4, No. 1.
- Nasir, R., Ahmad, Z., Z., Khairudin, R., & Wan Sharazad, W. S. (2011). Family functioning, self esteem, self-concept and cognitive distortion among juvenile delinquents. *The Social Sciences* 6(2): 155-163.

Trojanowicz, R. C., & Morash, M. (1978). *Juvenile delinquency; Concepts and control*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

World Youth Report (2003). *Juvenile delinquency*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/ch07.pdf>