

The Involvement of Teenagers in Social Problems at Low Cost Housing Areas

A.M. Azmi, O. Nik Hairi, M. Jamiah, C.K. Arena, I. Fauziah and P. Kartigavani
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, School of Psychology and Human Development,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract: This study aims to determine the level of youth involvement in social problems in low-cost housing areas. In addition, this study aims to determine the relationship between parental behavior, cognition and perception of internal factors and individual characteristics of the environment with the involvement of youth in social problems. Quantitative research methods were used in data collection and analysis process. Data were collected through the questionnaire form that contains a Parental Behaviour Inventory (PBI), cognitive and internal perception of youth, the environment factors and Delinquency Scale for at-risk teenagers who live in low-cost housing areas in Kuala Lumpur. The study found that the main problem are teenagers hanging out in shopping, spending time in video game shops or cafes, hitting partners, fighting, hurting people, bullying, vandalizing public property, involved in illegal racing and watching pornographic movies. The Pearson correlation analysis results were found positive and significant relationship between cognition and internal perception to the involvement of young people in social problems ($r = 0.556$; $p < 0.01$); behavioral factors of parents and youth involvement in social problems ($r = 0.426$; $p < 0.01$) and relationship of environmental characteristics to youth involvement in social problems ($r = 0.300$, $p < 0.01$).

Key words: Teens, social problems, low cost housing, public property, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Social problems encompass variety of negative behaviors that blatantly violate the ethics, values, norms and laws in society (Rubington and Weinberg, 2002), such as drug abuse (Fauziah *et al.*, 2012), vandalism, running away from home and free sex among teens (Sanchez *et al.*, 2010). Studies in Santiago highlighted that 70% of teens involved in sex problems at the average age of 13 years old (Sanchez *et al.*, 2010). This free sex acts contributed significantly in the increment of other more chronic problems concerning teenagers such as schooldropouts, sexually transmitted diseases and unmarried pregnancy (Sanchez *et al.*, 2010). In lieu, there are also other social problem, even though it does not violate state law but created an adverse effect on adolescent mental health such as smoking habit (Lawrence *et al.*, 2010). Not only this negative behavior is incompatible with culture of a society, it also has weakened the strength of the social system and further threatening the livelihood of the society itself. Other researchers also argued that youth involvement in social problems are due to the level of psychosexual development during the youth phase and the change in locus of control in the parenting relationship (Hurlock, 1990). Teenagers is a long

and challenging transitional period from childhood to adulthood (Papalia *et al.*, 2001; Rice, 1997). This period usually relates with the phenomenon of storm and stress which is full of physical, intellectual and social chaos that advently provoke the teenagers to challenge and rebel against the authority of adults (Santrock, 2008).

Based on the early studies, there are many factors influencing youth involvement in social problems and these include individual and environmental factors (Rozumah *et al.*, 2005); parenting style and peers factors (Barnes and Farrell, 1992; Phares and Compass, 1992; Wilson, 1987; Gegas and Schwalbe, 1986; Bandura and Walter, 1959; Lukman *et al.*, 2011); socio-economic level or family income (Mannes *et al.*, 2005); gender; quality of the environmental factors and parents busy with careers (Larson, 2002). Bandura and Walter (1959) argued that delinquent and aggressive youths were the result of families whose parents resort to excessive physical punishment in disciplining the children. Ezhar Tamam stated that social problems, such as loitering or hang out until late at night and smoking are a common social problem among youths from low income families. High rate of cigarette consumption among adolescents should immediately be prevented to avoid the risk of adolescent mental health (Lawrence *et al.*, 2010). Parental

control or supervision of the childrens' daily activities have been found to have significant influenced on the frequency of children attributed to the social problems (Al-Hadi, 1993; Sanchez *et al.*, 2010). However, the study also found that home environment too contributed to the teen involvement in social problems and their academic performances; communication style and perceptions towards environment (Booth and Edwards, 1976). Mitchel (1971) had been found that the density of houses and residential areas have a clear impact on the relationship between parents and children. The more densely populated residential area, the more difficult for the parents to monitor their children which would eventually increase the number of teenagers involvement in social problems.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research employed quantitative analysis by distributing questionnaires to 85 young people involved in social problems in the areas of low cost housing at PPR Kerinci, PPR Sri Pantai and Flat Seri Selangor, Kuala Lumpur. The snowball sampling method was used to indentify the group of teenagers involved in social problems and used them as respondents. This questionnaire is divided into 5 parts. Part A consists of the respondent and family background, such as age, gender, level of educational attainment, number of siblings, parental education level, parents' occupations and incomes. Part B contains the characteristics of the behavior of parents or guardians. This study consists of 9 questions and developed based on the Parental Behaviour Inventory (PBI) by Renson *et al.* (1968). Part C contains the characteristics of adolescent cognition and perception. The questionnaire was developed by Othman and Norazmah which consists of nine items. Part D consists of the environmental features formed by Othman and Norazmah and Fatimah which consists of five items related to the environment of peers and six items related to the home environment. Part E consists of questions about the frequency of youth involved in social problems questionnaire developed based on delinquency scale by Junger and Trembley (1999). Researchers using a 4-stage scale of measurement that is 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree and 4 = Strongly agree to the B-D and Part E using three level scale of measurement that is 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally (<5 times) and 3 = Regular time (>5 times). Frequency and percentage analysis methods used to examine the background of the respondents and the frequency of youth involved in social problems. Mean analysis was used for analysis of

the items in Part B-D, while the correlation test is used to identify the parents behavioral factors, cognition and internal perceptions of individuals and the environment against the involvement of youth in social problems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the respondents: The number of respondents in this research were 85 people whereby 82.4% were male and the remaining 17.6% were female. Most respondents were in the 15-17 years age group (44.7%), followed by 18-21 years of age (31.8%) and 23.5% were aged 22-25 years. In the aspect of education, the majority of the respondent were a certificate of education Malaysia (SPM) holder which is represented by 57.6%, followed by the certificate of lower secondary assessment (30.6%), respectively. While 3.5% attended Standard Six Test Assessment (UPSR), Malaysia Higher School Certificate (STPM), diploma and first degree. The study discovered that 75.3% of respondents lived with parents, 14.1% stayed with their single mother. Only 2.4% lived with their single father meanwhile 3.5% lived with guardians. The majority of the respondents' parents and guardian were only holding a minimal academic qualification; SPM and PMR compared to higher qualification such as diplomas and degrees. In terms of occupations of the family, majority of the parents worked in the private sector, followed by the government sector, factory workers and laborers, small traders. Nevertheless, many of the parents found out to be jobless. As for the earnings, a total of 29.4% of respondents' family earned <RM1000.00 a month, 51.8% earned between RM1000.00-2000.00 and 18.8% earned >RM2000.00 income a month.

Frequency of youth involvement in social problems: Table 1 illustrated the type of social problems and the frequency of such act committed by the teens. The results of the study showed that the most significant problems are loitering in shopping complexes, spending time in the cyber cafe and video games shops, hitting partner, fighting, injured others, bullying, vandalizing public property, illegal racing and watching pornographic movies. These findings aligned with Ezhar Tamam finding which stated that most of the young people involved in loafing or loitering activities at certain locations.

Parents behavior characteristics factors: Factors concerning parental characteristics behavior refers to as any act or conduct that would seriously affect parental behavior towards their children (Bandura, 1986). Parental behavior includes physical behavior, verbal as well as

Table 1: Type of social problems and frequency (n = 85)

Items	Never (%)	Occasionally (%)	Regular time (%)
Loitering in shopping complexes	11.8	27.1	61.2
Spent time in video game shops/cafes	11.8	31.8	56.5
Hit friends	28.2	29.4	42.4
Fighting	8.2	50.6	41.2
Injured others	37.6	24.7	37.6
Bullying	25.9	36.5	37.6
Damage the public property	38.8	34.1	27.1
Involved in illegal racing	58.8	16.5	24.7
Watch a porn movie	32.9	47.1	20.0
Joining the illegal group/gangster	65.9	15.3	18.8
Consuming alcohol	65.9	18.8	15.3
Stealing	52.9	34.1	12.9
Drug addiction	77.6	10.6	11.8
Sexual harassment/obscene gesture	60.0	30.6	9.4
Fights with parents (physical)	78.8	12.9	8.2
Extortion	80.0	11.8	8.2
Gambling	72.9	21.2	5.9
Arrested on suspicion of involvement in crime	81.2	12.9	5.9
Unlawful sexual intercourse	77.6	16.5	5.9
Run away from home	82.4	11.8	5.9
Involved in prostitution	90.6	8.2	1.2

Table 2: Behavior characteristics of parents (n = 85)

Items	Mean	Level
Mother/father did not invite me when they make any decision	2.68	Moderate
My mother/father beat me when I make mistake	2.52	Moderate
My mother/father always busy with work	2.34	Moderate
Mother/father hardly ever at home	2.20	Moderate
Mother/father have always argued	2.15	Moderate
Mother/father always go home late at night	2.14	Moderate
My father always used physical violence when arguing with mother	1.98	Low
Overall mean	2.20	Moderate

anti-social behavior. From the results of mean analysis as shown in Table 2 indicated that overall characteristics on the factor affecting parental behaviors influence adolescent involvement in social issues are mainly at a moderate level (mean value 2.20).

The item for parents' behavior in which the exclusion their teenager in the decision making process appeared to give dominant influence on adolescent involvement in social problems. As a matter of fact, the more negative parental support and communication with adolescents, the greater the tendency for the teenagers to engage in undesirable activities (Haddock and Sparokowski, 1982). Rarely present at home and returned late at night from work also led to youth involvement in social problems, such as loitering in shopping complexes and spent time in a video game shops or internet cafes. Arief and Wardah study found that busy parents would have less attachment with their children. Similarly, parents' behavior who often hit the teenage children whenever they made a mistake may trigger teenagers to be more aggressive. Bandura and Walter (1959) study found that the children who are often physically abused by parents would also

Table 3: Mean score of cognition and perception of individuals (n = 85)

Items	Mean	Level
I often feel angry if my desire is not fulfilled	2.82	Moderate
I am not satisfied with my life now	2.82	Moderate
I do not like if shackled by anyone	2.76	Moderate
I often experience emotional distress	2.52	Moderate
I do not like to follow rules	2.51	Moderate
I always want attention on something that I do	2.47	Moderate
I am not faithful in fulfilling the commandments	2.27	Moderate
I always want to try to do something new	1.87	Low
I want to be successful in my life	1.52	Low
Overall mean	2.40	Moderate

Table 4: Social problems based on environmental factors (n = 85)

Items	Mean	Level
I was happy if I can spend most of the time with friends	3.14	High
I always spend time with friends at the mall or recreation	3.12	High
Friends often ask me to do the activities that are not healthy	2.84	Moderate
I feel bored if staying at home	2.76	Moderate
My friend always challenged me to do something that is prohibited	2.69	Moderate
The safety control in my residential areas are not strict	2.69	Moderate
My house is small and crowded	2.54	Moderate
I will be criticized/marginalized if not spend time with them	2.53	Moderate
I am not satisfied with the facilities at home	2.53	Moderate
I do not like to engage with the surrounding communities	2.52	Moderate
I do not have good relationship with my neighbors	2.51	Moderate
Overall mean	2.72	Moderate

behave aggressively. Pearson correlation analysis results showed that there are positive and significant relationship between parental behavioral and the involvement of teenagers in the social problems ($r = 0.426$; $p < 0.01$). This study is consistent with Compas and Phares whereby it has been proven that the behavior of parents contributed to teen social problems as they have failed to show exemplary behavior in front of the children.

Cognition and perception factors that cause young people involved in social problems: Cognition and perception factor refers to the attitudes, thoughts and views of an individual against himself which influence behavior. Based on Table 3, the overall mean analysis of individual cognition and perception factor towards youth involvement in social issues are at a moderate level (mean value 2.40).

The findings of the study (Table 3) showed that the internal factors influencing respondents' involvement in social problems are: often angry when their needs can not be satisfied, not satisfied with what they have in life and often experience emotional distress. These acts put immense pressure on them and further drive them to involve in negative activities and undesirable activities. Zainal and Mohd Sharani stated that youths are driven

into anti-social behavior because of depression, anxiety and lack of psychological factors. Youth involvement in social problems are also the result of poor religious fundamentals exposure and teaching, low understanding with regards to value and lack of spiritual practices, such as prayer. Arieff and Wardah explained the stability of religion started relatively at a later age between 23 and 24 years old. Pearson correlation analysis results revealed that the individual internal cognition and perception is a key factor affecting the involvements of the teenagers at the low-cost housing areas in social problems ($r = 0.556$; $p < 0.01$).

Environmental factors that causes teen involved in social problems: Environmental factors refer to the size of the home, environment and facilities in the home, relationships with neighbours and peers factor. The overall mean analysis of the characteristics of environmental factors and influence on youth involvement in social problems are at a moderate level (mean = 2.72).

Environmental factors in this study is divided into two aspects namely peer group and home environment. The findings in Table 4 showed the influence of environmental factors on teenagers social problems. Satisfaction in spending more times with friends and having fun when with peers proven to be a significant factor. In this case, Jha and Kelleher (2006) explained that the nature of youth is their tendency in seeking pleasure. Teenagers are also found to be easily imitated and influenced by their peers. Despite that, small houses also has led teenagers to spend more time outdoors with friends and colleagues in the wider areas. This phenomenon will further weaken the influence of parents, complicate the surveillance and facilitate participation in activities that are unhealthy. Fatimah mentioned that the state of congestion at home might ultimately interfere in the individual's personal space induced uncomfortable mood, lack of facilities and encourage loitering. This is consistent with the findings of Pearson correlation analysis which showed positive and significant relationship between characteristics of the environmental factors and youth involvement in social problems ($r = 0.300$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, this is also consistent with studies by Mustaeva (2010) who found a significant relationship between financial and economic crisis on family well-being.

CONCLUSION

The findings showed that the reason teenagers involved in loitering is because of the poor supervision

from parents. This may further encourage participation of other negative symptoms. Parents should spend more time with their children, provide adequate attention, set priorities in juggling with their activities as well as setting a specific time for family. Parents are advised not to neglect their children in their pursue of career development. Parents should also take the effort to know whom their children befriends with, progress to identify the problems faced by their children and have the willingness to take the time to solve the problem. All of these extra efforts could prevent the teens from finding another resources or supports. Parents should also enhance children's appreciation towards religion, values, motivation and show exemplify behavior which will provide a guideline to the children.

The school on the other hand could also contribute by actively provide surveillance and more sensitive to the changes in the attitude among the students apart from imposing heavier penalties on students who found to engage in juvenile delinquencies. This can be materialized by adding more activities based on academic and non-academic and making the learning process more interesting and encouraging students to come to school. Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) should also play their role to combat social problems among teenagers. More frequent meetings between parents, guardians and teachers should be held, especially for students with learning disabilities. With this, parents will be able to monitor the behavior of their children at school. The teenagers on the contrary should strive to build self-awareness and remove the negative attitude, aware of the mistakes and should be committed to become a good and responsible person. They must be careful in mixing and choosing friends as the wrong choice in making friends would adversely impact their lives. They must also spend their time with meaningful activities either in school or residential areas.

The residents associations at the housing areas should also actively portray a caring attitude towards the problem occurred and take effective measures to deal with it. Among the proactive measures that could be taken by the residents association are planning the activities that involve the cooperation of the youth, dynamically cooperate with the National Drug Agency to implement drug prevention campaigns and seek the assistance of the police and authorities to conduct surveillance at the residential areas. Such activities can provide a space for teenagers to mingle with the local community and educate them in a peaceful and safe environment. Overall participation of the teenagers from the low-cost housing areas in social problems has been found to be at a all time low. There are three factors that influence youth from

low-cost housing areas involved in social problems and they includes parents, cognition and the internal perception of the individual and the environment. Results has shown that the main factors influence youth involvement in social problems is because of an internal cognition and perception of the individual. These findings are intended to assist the parties related to curb and eliminate social problems among youth and adolescents for the sake of nation building.

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