

## Juveniles and Their Parents: Narratives of Male & Female Adolescents in Rehabilitation Centres

*Haja Mydin Abdul Kuthoos, Noraida Endut, Nor Hafizah Selamat,  
Intan Hashimah Mohd Hashim and Azman Azwan Azmawati*

C02, Centre for Research on Women and Gender (KANITA),  
Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** A number of studies, internationally, have established a relationship between family structures and environment with juvenile delinquency (Harper and McLanahan, 1998; Larson, Swyers and Larson, 1995; Anderson, 2002). Not many studies have been conducted in Malaysia to link juvenile delinquency with the context of juveniles' families, especially of their parents or people assuming the role of their parents. This paper is an early attempt at understanding the experiences of juveniles with their parents in order to explore the relationship between their experiences and their involvement in crime or juvenile behaviour. For this purpose, a qualitative research approach was adopted by conducting in-depth interviews with seven (7) male juvenile offenders from a rehabilitation centre in Penang and five (5) female juvenile offenders from a rehabilitation centre in Kedah, Malaysia. The interviews provide an insight into the male and female juveniles' personal feelings about their experiences and relationships with their parents or persons whom they identify as people have parental guardianship over them. The study finds that adolescents who are involved in delinquencies expressed much unhappiness with their parents due to reasons such as their parents having divorced, not receiving love from their parents, feeling uncared by their parents and families, having strained relationships with their family and experiencing violence from their parents and/ or family. The narratives of the juveniles are hoped to be able to inform us about specific areas to explore further in understanding the criming and delinquent behaviour of juveniles.

**Key words:** Juvenile experience • Governance • Parents • Rehabilitation centre • Malaysia

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### INTRODUCTION

The issue of ethics and moral crisis of youth in Malaysia are increasingly alarming. Statistics show an increase of 111 percent in the last year for the number of criminal cases involving juvenile offenders. Statistics released by the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) in 2013 showed a total of 7, 816 cases were recorded compared to 3, 700 cases in 2012, involving an increase of 4, 116 cases, including sexual crimes such as rape and sodomy [1]. Most of the past international studies have established a relationship between family structures and environment with juvenile delinquency [2, 3, 4] and the relationships adolescents have with their family [5]. A strong family institution is a very important foundation for the children's nurturing process. Not many studies have been

conducted in Malaysia to link juvenile delinquency with the context of juveniles' families, especially of their parents or people assuming the role of their parents. This paper is an early attempt at understanding the experiences of juvenile with their parents in order to explore the relationship between their experiences and their involvement in crime or juvenile behaviour.

**Literature Review:** International studies found that there is a link between family structure and delinquency by the adolescents [6]. Family structures and juvenile crimes have been investigated in different countries. In India Sharma [7] have found that most of the juvenile detainees have recorded troubled and disturbed relationships with their family members. Their family's environments are too difficult and the family's influence on the early stages of

juvenile's life was very painful; e.g. parental ill mannerism, violence, alcohol abuse, wrong upbringing and poor living conditions are among the main factors that encourage the adolescent's criminal behaviour. Children will choose the "wrong" way to satisfy their needs if they do not have the opportunity and space to satisfy their needs through the proper channels.

In Malaysia the findings of a study conducted by Siti Noor Fazarina *et al.* [8] about the relationship between family bonds with behavioural problems among young offenders, indicate that the higher the parents bond is in a family, the lower adolescent's behaviour problems are in the family.

Studies done by Laird *et al.* [9] in the United States of America reported that there was a link between low parental monitoring and lack of knowledge about their children's activities with their children's behavioural problems. Barber [10] evaluated the correlation between the family and adolescent's problems in the US. He found that parental supervision and poor parental control can lead to adolescent problem behaviour of the adolescents. In a further study Barber, Olson and Shagle [11] investigated parental behavioural control and the adolescents' associated behavioural outcome. Their results show that a significant relationship between insufficient parental behavioural control and adolescent externalizing behaviours exists. Studies conducted by Larson, Swyers and Larson [3] in the United States of America found that adolescents from divorced families are up to six times more possible to be delinquent than children from intact families in the United States of America. In addition to that it is found that children from the United States that do not live with their biological fathers were almost three times more likely to commit a crime [2]. According to Henry, Tolan and Gorman-Smith [12] children and adolescents become more likely delinquent when a high level of marital discord, considerable conflict, inadequate supervision and violence is witnessed in the families. Furthermore anderson [4] found that adolescents from a single-parent family are significantly higher risk to involve in delinquency.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to investigate the intricate qualitative aspects of the juvenile's experiences with their parents and to explore the relationship between these experiences and their involvement in crime or juvenile behaviour, an in-depth interview was used as methodology. In-depth

interviews have been used in social research to collect the rich data and whole view of the research subject. Respondents for this study's purposes were selected from juvenile rehabilitation centre in Penang, Malaysia for male respondents and Kedah, Malaysia for female respondents. Interviews were conducted with seven for male and five for female, which means 12 respondents in total. The number of male respondents is higher than the number of female respondents because in Malaysia the number of male juvenile population is higher than the number of female juveniles. Researchers had to request approval from Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development before the data collection process started. This is because the rehabilitation centres in Malaysia are under the supervision of that particular ministry. After getting approval from the ministry, the researcher also ask for permission from the administrators of the rehabilitation centre for conducting interviews. Administrators of both centres choose their own seven and five juvenile offenders to be interviewed by researchers. The researchers inform the respondents about purpose and background of the study. The researchers have given consent forms and research information to all respondents.

Although the respondents were selected by the administrator of the rehabilitation centre, the researchers made sure that the respondents actually stated that they will answer the interview voluntarily. If they are not willing then they can choose to withdraw. Every respondent needs to sign a consent form as a proof of agreement to take part in the research. All respondents can keep the research information form for their future references. All respondents also have been informed that they can stop giving response whenever they feel uncomfortable with the interview session. The interviews were conducted by the researchers in a closed room by using a voice recorder. Voice recording is also done after obtaining the consent of the respondent. This interview includes demographic information of the respondents, family background, experience and history of involvement in the crime. Each interview session takes about one to one and half hours.

## RESULTS

**Respondent Profile:** Overall, male respondents are aged between 14 and 19 years old at the time of interview was done. Six of the respondents interviewed are ethnic Malay and Muslims, while another one is India and Hindu. Majority of respondent's education level are not

graduated high school and dropped out halfway from the formal education system. From the seven respondents, only one of them have graduated high school with SPM which is Ali with result of 1A 1B 2C 1D 1E 1G. While Syah stopped schooling after PMR and Siva stopped schooling after standard 6 because no more interest in studying. Man didn't finish Form 3, Abu continue study at Giat Mara after finished PMR before he was sentenced to the rehabilitation centre, while Din was study at Form 1 before enter the rehabilitation centre and Boy was study until Form 3. All of them are not able to following the formal education system because they were sentenced at the rehabilitation centre. However, they are allowed to take skills classes that are offered at the centre. From seven of the respondents, six were involved in sexual crime (3 rapes cases: Ali, Syah, Man and sodomy 3: Abu, Din, Boy) and one (Siva) is involved in housebreaking crime.

From five female respondents, four of them were 17 years old and one was 16 years old. Four of the interviewed respondents are Malay ethnic and one was India ethnic. All of them are Muslims. For the education level, four of them which is Nurul, Siti, Liza and Priya were still studying when they get detention and they still continued their schooling after get sentenced to the rehabilitation centre. Only Lina have stopped schooling at Form 4 because no more interest to study and she started to work as salesgirl at a mall. They all arrested on allegations of uncontrolled children. Lina, Nurul and Siti were involved in cases of running away from home and Liza was involved in drug case. While Priya was involved in running away from home and also arrested because stabbed her mother with scissors (but her mother was not injured).

**Family Profile:** Majority of the respondents are from the broken, poor families and have many siblings. For example, Ali has eight siblings and he is the sixth child in the family. His parents are still married and his father works as a bus driver. Abu's parents were also still married and his father works as a farmer. Abu has 4 siblings. Syah is the fourth child from eight siblings and his father is a fisherman. Syah's father is the third husband for his mother. Man is the youngest from ten siblings; his parents had divorced 11 years ago and his father remarried and not concerned about Man and his family. Din is the youngest from 4 siblings and his parents are still together but his father who works at a hotel has married a second wife. Boy is the only child and his parents are divorced. His mother is married for the third time. Both of Siva's parents had passed away and he is

the youngest from his five siblings. His mother had passed away recently because of cancer disease and his father passed away when Siva was 6 years old. His late father has worked as a bulldozer driver. Now, Siva is supported by one of his sisters who work at a jelly factory. Most of the respondent's mothers are housewives, except of Boy's, Din's and Siva's mother. Boy's mother works as a factory operator, Din's mother works at restaurant and Siva's late mother worked as rubber tapper.

Majority of the female respondents are also from broken and poor families. For example, Lina is an adopted child and only children in that family. Her adopted mother is a single mother and works with her friend selling cakes. Her adopted father has passed away when Lina was at standard 3. Nurul's parents have divorced when Nurul still small. Her mother is Indonesian citizen, has gone back to her country after divorced. Nurul's father has married second time with her step mother. Nurul is the 1<sup>st</sup> child from 4 of her siblings and she has one step sister. And her step mother works as shirt saleswomen. Siti's parent has divorced when she was at kinder garden and her mother married for second time with a military man. Siti was a 2<sup>nd</sup> child from 3 children and she has a step brother from the same mother. Her real father did not remarried after get divorced. Siti has stay with her father from kindergarten until she was at standard 5. Her father works as a mechanic and her mother did not work and plays a role as housewife. Liza is a youngest from her 6 siblings and her parents are still together. Liza's mother was a housewife and her father works as labourers. Priya is a youngest child and she has a brother. Priya's mother works as housewife and her father is an insurance agent.

**Experiences with Family:** Most of the male respondents are from broken family as mentioned in the respondent's family profile. They mentioned that they will always shared their problem with their friends and not with their own family and school administrations. Boy, Syah and Man mentioned that they are not close with their family. Man said that he event does not recognise his siblings and does not know the sequence of his siblings. He only gets to know his siblings after his father showed him the family's picture album. Man's siblings and Boy's father never bothered about them after their parents get divorced. Syah mentions that he rarely meets his father because he always comes back home late night at 3 or 4 o'clock or even at early morning at 5 o'clock when his father has already gone out for work. He also mentions that his father will never scolded him regarding his

relationship with girls but his father will get angry if Syah takes any drugs. Din mentions that he always feels disturbed because of his family. He feels such a way when his parents get in conflicts because of his father's second marriage. Even though Ali was involved in crime he did not left behind his academic. The reason could be his family bonding is better if compared to other respondents' family bonding was mentioned by Ali that, "My parents always bring our family to have a picnic at kampong on the hill."

Meanwhile, Siva said that his family bonding was not good, his father always scolded and beaten their whole family, especially his mother. He mentioned that,

*He broke my head (as he showed the wound), he pulled my shirt like this then he threw me. It has happened when he beaten my mother, then all of us children got in and begged our father to stop beating our mother, then he just hold all of us and threw us away. Because of that, my head broke down here.*

He said his father always acts violently when he gets drunk and beats all of them at late night. Sometimes when his mother cannot see her children got beaten, she will fight with her husband. Siva's mother is the one who supported their family after his father had passed away. Siva said that his family does not know about his crime activity and he is a stubborn child who does not like to get scold by his family or anyone. After his mother passed away, he felt like he had lost his one and only supporter in his life.

Most of the female respondents from this study were also from the broken family. As mentioned in the respondent's family profile, Nurul said that she does not know where her mother is. Nurul added that she is not close with her step mother and her father because they are busy. The issues getting worst when Nurul's step mother treat her and her little brother badly and like to beat them badly until they fight back with their stepmother. That situation made her stepmother expelled Nurul and her brother from their house and report to the police that they had run away from the home. Now Nurul's step mother does not want them back to her house. Lina mentions that she loves her adopted mother so much and feels the love from her mother, but she does not like her mother's act which is brought back her boyfriend back home every day. Lina said that she reprove her mother act whenever she have chances to do so but in the result she have scolded back by her mother. When she get stressed by her mother action then Lina said that she choose to go

and stay at her friend's home because she does not feel comfortable at her mother's house. Siti says that:

*I don't feel happy to stay with my parent's house. I feel stress because my step father always beat and have a fight with my mother. He has an affair with other women and my mother found it out.*

Siti mentioned that, her mother and biological father have conflict because her real father goes back to his original religion which is Buddha and keep Siti's elder brother with his Buddhist family. Because she feels stressed and unhappy she always runs away from her home and finally she have a sex with her boyfriend when she stays at her lover's house. Liza mentions that:

*After I get back from school I will sleep until evening, then I will go out and return home at 7 o'clock at morning. And no one will ask me where do I go or with who I go out. Sometimes my mom will ask me where am I going and I will answer that I go to my friend's house. I do not communicate much with my parents and my brother. I only talk with my sister.*

Liza said that she feels unsatisfied with her parents. It is because she feels that her parents has deprived of her freedom by sending her to the rehabilitation centre.

Priya have more conflicts with her family because she said that her parents and her big brother have convert to Islam from Hindu religion and they had forced her to convert to Islam, which she does not like it. She added that she is so close with her father since she was small but now her father have changed after became a drug addicts. He started to beat Priya badly and also beat his wife even she have suffered enough trough breast cancer. Priya said she become stressful because all this conflicts and violence and whenever she feels angry she will beat her mother badly and one day she has stabbed her mother with scissors but luckily she did not injured.

## DISCUSSION

The study finds that most of the male juveniles are not able to continuing their formal schooling activities after get sentenced in the rehabilitation centre and many of them have stop schooling in half way. While the majority of the female juveniles are able to attend the normal school even while they get sentenced. Majority of the respondent's families are from poor or middle income and broken families. Even the adolescents from complete

family also are involved in crime. They experiencing violence from their parents and there is no or less care and love from their parents. The broken families make the adolescents feels unhappy and stressed. Many of the respondents have a strained relationship with their family. The parents do not know about their children's daily activities. When the adolescents faced this entire problem by their self, they just do not know how to deal with it and choose the wrong way to deal with it. The most of the female respondents choose run away from home as a solutions for their problem but it is finally bring more harm to them. For the majority of the respondents they choose to hang out with their friends to make them feels happy. However because of they have chosen a bad friend so they get influenced to be involved in crime. The broken families show a high chance of their children to be involved in crime because there are more conflicts in the family. These findings are supported by previous studies. Alfrey [6] prove that there is a link between family structure and adolescent's delinquency. Sharma [7] have found that most of the juvenile detainees have recorded troubled and disturbed relationships with their family members. Their family's environments are too difficult and the family's influence on the early stages of juvenile's life was very painful; e.g. parental ill mannerism, violence, alcohol abuse, wrong upbringing and poor living conditions are among the main factors that encourage the adolescent's criminal behaviour. Children will choose the "wrong" way to satisfy their needs if they do not have the opportunity and space to satisfy their needs through the proper channels. Research by Siti Noor Fazarina *et al.* [8] about the relationship between family bonds with behavioural problems among young offenders, indicate that the higher the parents bond is in a family, the lower adolescent's behaviour problems are in the family.

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America found that adolescents from divorced families are up to six times more possible to be delinquent than children from intact families in the United States of America. In addition to that it is found that children from the United States that do not live with their biological fathers were almost three times more likely to commit a crime [2]. According to Henry, Tolan and Gorman-Smith [12] children and adolescents become more likely delinquent when a high level of marital discord, considerable conflict, inadequate supervision and violence is witnessed in the families. Furthermore anderson [4] found that adolescents from a single-parent family are significantly higher risk to involve in delinquency.

## **CONCLUSION**

On the basis of this study, we can conclude that adolescents who are involved in delinquencies expressed much unhappiness with their parents due to reasons such as their parents having divorced, not receiving love from their parents, feeling uncared by their parents and families, having strained relationships with their family and experiencing violence from their parents and/ or family. The finding shows that there is a link between adolescent's delinquency and family bond. There for it is important to us to strengthen the family institutions and build a strong family bond among the member of the institutions. Then we can prevent adolescent's delinquency from keep spreading. Married couples must be educated on the science of parenting and empowerment of related laws must be made so that domestic violence can be eliminated and the future of their children can be secured. For the future research, are suggested to investigating the effect of socioeconomic of the family towards adolescent's delinquency. And also can be study on the factor's that encourage adolescents to drop out from formal education system. It is important to do the future on suggested area because majority of the respondents are from low income families and not interested in continuing their study. There for the suggested future study can help to identify the factors that can be improved to the bright future of adolescents and great governance of the nation.

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