

**PSYCHOSOCIAL PROFILES OF MALE
JUVENILE DELINQUENTS**

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**PSYCHOSOCIAL PROFILES OF MALE
JUVENILE DELINQUENTS**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Authority problem
ATT	Attachment to Teacher
CBT	Cognitive-Behavioral Theory
CPA	Child Protection Act
CRC	Children Rights Coalition
CSC	Commitment to School Scale
CTC	Communities That Care
D	Delinquent
DAT	Differential Association Theory
DBS	Delinquent Belief Scale
DoSW	Department of Social Welfare
DPS	Delinquent Peers Scale
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
FD	Family discord
GTC	General Theory of Crime
GTP	Government Transformation Programme
HIT-Q	How I Think Questionnaire
HSES	Hare Self-Esteem Scale
IS	Integration School
IQ	Intelligent Quotient
JCA	Juvenile Court Act
MCP	Malaysian Penal Code
MJA	Malaysian Juvenile Act
MLR	Multiple Linear Regression
MMPI	Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory
MMPI-2	Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2
ND	Non-delinquent
NPFD	National Population and Family Development
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
PCMD	Psychosocial-Criminogenic Model of Delinquency
PCO	Police Corrective Order
PDM	Prison Department of Malaysia
PRAY-IG	Psychosocial Risk Assessment for Youth – Interview Guide
PSAB-J	Psychosocial Assessment Battery – for Juveniles
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
RMP	Royal Malaysia Police
RYDS	Rochester Youth Delinquent Study
SCS	Self- Control Scale
SCS-M	Self Control Scale – Malay version

SLR	Single Linear Regression
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
WGPA	Women and Girls Protection Act

PROFIL PSIKOSOSIAL JUVANA DELINKUEN LELAKI

ABSTRAK

Delinkuensi juvana merupakan tingkahlaku yang menyalahi undang-undang yang dilakukan oleh individu-individu yang berumur di bawah umur 18 tahun. Dalam latar tempatan, kajian yang menekankan faktor-faktor psikososial dan kriminogenik delinkuensi juvana adalah wajar berikutan analisis tren jenayah juvana bagi tempoh sepuluh tahun di Malaysia, populasi, penanda sosial dan permulaan penglibatan dalam jenayah, serta kepelbagaian jenayah juvana. Berikutan ini, kajian ini secara amnya bertujuan untuk membina profil psikososial dan kriminogenik juvana delinkuen lelaki Malaysia. Bagi mencapai matlamat ini, empat objektif spesifik telah dirangka. Kerangka teori kajian ini berdasarkan teori psikologi, sosiologi dan kriminologi. Penyelidikan berkaitan pembolehubah psikososial melibatkan pengukuran kawalan diri, keyakinan diri, pengherotan kognitif, konflik keluarga, masalah dengan pihak berkuasa, hubungan dengan guru, komitmen terhadap sekolah, kepercayaan delinkuen, dan rakan sebaya delinkuen. Kajian ini merupakan kajian perbandingan keratan rentas yang menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan jenis campuran, melalui fasa kuantitatif dan fasa kualitatif. Dalam fasa kuantitatif, *Psychosocial Assessment Battery – for Juveniles (PSAB-J)* yang ditadbir sendiri telah diedarkan kepada 101 juvana delinkuen dan 317 belia bukan delinkuen. Pengambilan sampel bagi kedua-dua kumpulan ini adalah melalui kaedah persampelan bertujuan dan kaedah persampelan mudah. PSAB-J telah mengumpulkan maklumat berkaitan latar belakang sosio-demografi dan sosio-moral, serta ciri-ciri psikososial responden. Analisis data dilakukan menerusi analisis

diskriptif dan inferensi. Dapatan diskriptif berjaya mengenalpasti pembolehubah psikososial yang lazim antara kumpulan delinkuen dan bukan delinkuen. Analisis korelasi menunjukkan beberapa hubungkait yang signifikan antara pembolehubah psikososial. Analisis regresi menunjukkan bahawa terdapat beberapa pembolehubah psikologikal mempunyai hubungan signifikan dan boleh meramal pembolehubah sosiologikal. Analisis min melalui ujian-t bebas menunjukkan bahawa delinkuen dan bukan delinkuen mempunyai perbezaan yang signifikan dalam beberapa pembolehubah psikososial. Dalam fasa kualitatif, temu bual separa berstruktur telah dijalankan dengan 18 juvana delinkuen lelaki. Satu panduan temu bual, *Psychosocial Risk Assessment for Youth – Interview Guide* (PRAY-IG) yang mengandungi siri soalan-soalan terbuka telah digunakan sebagai instrumen penyelidikan sepanjang sesi temu bual. Analisis tematik telah digunakan untuk menghasilkan tema utama dan sub-tema yang berkaitan. Enam tema telah diteroka (tingkahlaku delinkuen, sejarah delinkuen, latar belakang keluarga, hubung kait delinkuen dan ciri-ciri psikologikal) dan satu tema baru muncul. Perbincangan dapatan kajian dikaitkan dengan delinkuensi juvana, teori-teori yang mendasari penyelidikan ini dan konteks kriminologi. Adalah penting untuk ditekankan bahawa dapatan penyelidikan ini terbatas kepada kumpulan kajian atau belia lelaki yang mempunyai kriteria penyertaan dan penyingkiran yang serupa. Walau bagaimanapun, hasil dapatan ini adalah menyeluruh dalam meneroka isu delinkuensi juvana melalui aspek psikososial dan kriminologi delinkuen lelaki yang berguna bagi langkah pencegahan proaktif dalam delinkuensi.

PSYCHOSOCIAL PROFILES OF MALE JUVENILE DELINQUENTS

ABSTRACT

Juvenile delinquency is illegitimate behaviours that are against the law committed by individuals under the age of 18 years old. In the local setting, research addressing the psychosocial and criminogenic factors of juvenile delinquents is warranted following a ten-year trend analysis of juvenile crimes in Malaysia, population, social marker and onset of criminal involvement, as well as versatility of juvenile crimes. Related to these, this research aimed to construct psychosocial and criminogenic profiles of Malaysian male juvenile delinquents. In order to achieve this, four specific objectives were formulated. The theoretical framework of this research is rooted in psychological, sociological, and criminological theories. Investigation of psychosocial variables involved measurements of self-control, self-esteem, cognitive distortion, familial discord, authority problem, attachment to teacher, commitment to school, delinquent belief and delinquent peers. This was a comparative cross-sectional study which was mixed-method in design, using quantitative and qualitative phases. In the quantitative phase, self-administered Psychosocial Assessment Battery – for Juveniles (PSAB-J) was distributed to 101 juvenile delinquents and 317 non-delinquent youths. Sampling recruitment for both groups were through purposive and convenience sampling, respectively. PSAB-J collected information on socio-demographic, socio-moral background and psychosocial characteristics of respondents. Data analyses were performed through descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The descriptive findings successfully identified prevalent psychosocial variables among the delinquents and non-

delinquents. The correlation analyses highlighted several significant associations among the psychosocial variables. The regression analyses revealed that several psychological variables have significant relationships and are predictive of sociological variables. Mean analyses through independent t-test indicated that delinquents and non-delinquents differ significantly in certain psychosocial variables. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 male juvenile delinquents. An interview guide, Psychosocial Risk Assessment for Youth – Interview Guide (PRAY-IG) containing series of open-ended questions was used as a research instrument throughout the interview session. Thematic analysis was used to extract related main themes and sub-themes. Six themes were explored (delinquent behaviour, delinquent history, familial background, school background, delinquent association and psychological characteristics) and one new theme emerged. Discussion of results was linked to juvenile delinquency, theories that underpin the present research and context of criminology. The present findings are limited to the study sample or male youths with similar inclusion and exclusion criteria. However, the findings are extensive in exploring the juvenile delinquency issue through psychosocial and criminological aspects of male delinquents which would be useful for proactive preventive measure in delinquency.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines eight sections in providing a general understanding of this research: study background, research interest in this area, justification for the study, definition of terms, research questions, research objectives, and significance of the study. The phenomenon of juvenile delinquency in the local setting was addressed to emphasize the need to investigate this issue. Following this, the significance of this study was described to address particular groups, personnel or agents who would benefit from this study.

1.2 STUDY BACKGROUND

In this section, three issues are brought forward as background for the need to conduct this research on Malaysian male juvenile delinquents. The first is on the prevalence of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia. The second is on children's vulnerability towards involvement in criminal actions. The third is on the apparent failure of institutionalized strategies to curb juvenile delinquency.

1.2.1 Prevalence of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia

As reported by the President of Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation, Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye in *The Star* (2014), statistics from the police reports compiled a total 7816 crime cases perpetrated by juveniles throughout 2013 as compared to 3700 cases in 2012. A total of 1632 cases in 2013 were committed by students and 6184 cases by non-students. Both groups showed a rise by 57% and 133% from the previous year

respectively. These cases include serious crimes such as rape, snatching, gang robbery with or without weapon as well as other violent crimes.

However, the number of unreported crimes is likely more than the reported cases. Generally, it is estimated around 15% to 25% of crimes go unreported (Gold, 1966) and the estimate is higher for children in conflict with the law. There are many reasons why delinquency is unreported including fear of tarnishing a school's image, victim's fear of retribution, and lack of trust in the current juvenile justice system (Finkelhor, 1999). When the child is not apprehended for wrong doing, it is likely that the delinquent act is repeated and as such may distort the official statistics regarding juvenile delinquency. The unreported cases depict a worrisome rate of children's involvement in criminal activities which needs to be better understood in order to address the underlying reasons for their involvement.

1.2.2 High incidence of male youth involvement in crime

Crime, in general, is a male phenomenon; given the high occurrence of male involvement as perpetrator or victim. Violent studies among youth in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom revealed the higher involvement tendency of male youth compared to females (Carter, McGee, Taylor, & Williams, 2007; Owens, Daly, & Slee, 2005; Sutherland & Shepherd, 2002). These differences between male and female delinquency is a well-established fact (Chesney-Lind, 1997) suggesting at least a 5:1 (male to female) ratio in offending.

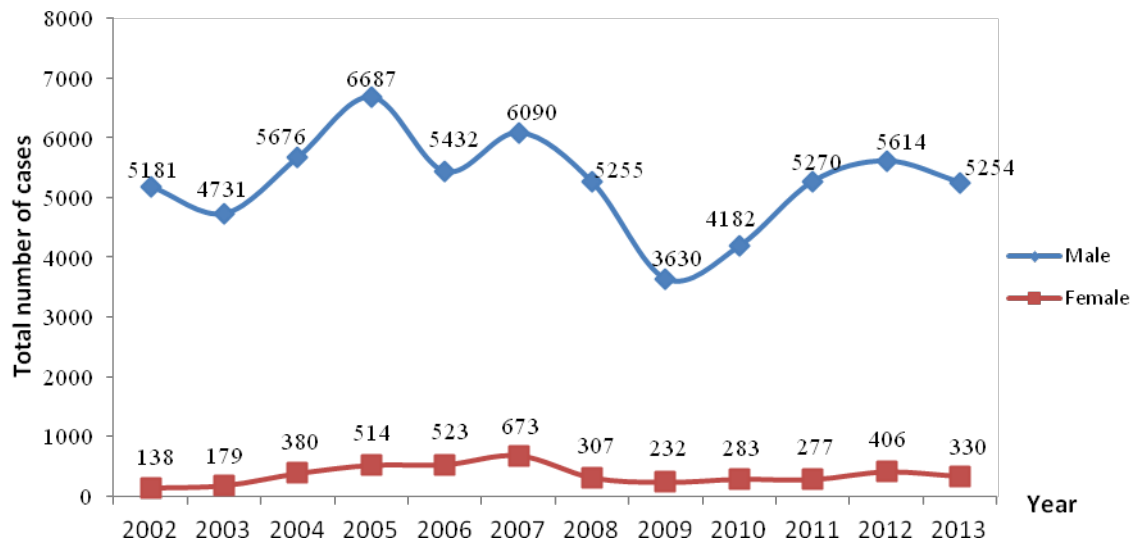


Figure 1.1 Statistics of reported youth crime by gender between 2000 and 2013.

[Adapted from: Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (DoSW), 2014]

It is clear from Figure 1.1 that the number of official arrests for male youth is more conspicuous than female youth. Around 90% of total official arrest in juvenile cases every year revealed males as the predominant contributor of youth crime (refer to Table 1.1). Although young female involvement in delinquency occurs, overall, male youth are much more likely to be institutionalized as females are often perceived as unwitting accessory to a crime or as a victim. Being male is associated with risk-taking and aggressive behaviours which may be influenced by gender norms within societies [World Health Organization (WHO), 2010], therefore it is a common stereotype of perceiving males as pro-criminals.

Based on the above trend analysis, there is a large gender gap in crime rates among youth - urging more attention on the male population in the study of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia. In fact, the majority of crime studies and criminological theories tend to be centered on the male population following this discrepancy in

participation rates in crime. Thus, recruitment of male youth population in this study is rationalised based on the high number of male youth participation in crime in official reports, subsequently allowing for their accessibility and availability for this research purpose. In addition, there is a limited number of Malaysian researches on male juvenile delinquency in which the findings were rather descriptive in terms of socio-demographic background details. As such, there is an important need to expand the knowledge through in-depth research in order to advance the understanding of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia.

1.2.3 Adolescents' vulnerability towards involvement in criminal actions

Based on the available literature and DoSW statistics (2014), it appears that a large number of adolescents and youths indulge in delinquent behaviors as they find these activities intriguing. At this period of life, adolescents and youths are experiencing an intermediate state of transition into adulthood where delinquent motivated activities and behaviors appear appealing to them (Houghton & Carroll, 2002). Due to this concern, some scholars argued that age distribution acts as a conspicuous feature to youths' involvement in crime (see, Shoemaker, 1996; Farrington, 1997). However, findings on the suggestive criminogenic age for adolescents are inconsistent due to different source of data used (see, Farrington, 1995; Graham & Bowling, 1995; Rutter, Giller & Hagell, 1998; Wolfgang, Figlio & Sellin, 1972).

It is also important not to lose sight of the fact that peak age of offending varies with respect to different types of offences. Even so, findings suggested that involvement in delinquency at the earlier age predicts later criminality in adulthood (Ou & Reynolds, 2010). When children and youths do not receive any official warrant or

punishment for their misbehaviors, this is when involvement in delinquency is sustained. These individuals are recognized as ‘at risk’ since they place themselves in a dangerous future (McWhirter *et al.*, 2007) and risk involvement with more serious crime in later adulthood (Farrington, 2005; Piquero & Buka, 2002; Paternoster, Brame, & Farrington, 2001).

There is much more to look into beyond chronological age, as a predisposing factor in adolescents’ involvement in delinquency. Despite an individual’s age, why some adolescents engage in delinquency and why others do not reveal a need to conduct more research exploring this matter. This further suggests delinquency is a complex phenomenon with psychological, sociological and behavioural outcomes which require more exploration in multiple risk factors within individuals and their social surroundings. While there are many researches on delinquency in Western settings, little empirical finding was found for local reference.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to perpetuate empirical and in-depth studies in order to advance the understanding of the underlying cause and risk factors in delinquency. Findings in this research would be informative to serve as a guide on how to hinder delinquency as a means of proactive delinquency intervention strategy. At the same time, sharing of these analysed profiles would be beneficial especially for designing suitable rehabilitation programmes according to an individual’s need to ensure the effectiveness of the intervention strategy.

1.2.4 The ineffectiveness of institutionalized strategies to curb juvenile delinquency

The juvenile justice system in Malaysia is separate from the adult justice system with the goal to attend juvenile's individual needs through rehabilitation and protecting them from exposure and destructive punishments in adult criminal courts. Unlike the legislation for adult offenders, the main goals of the juvenile justice system are to 1) protect public safety and 2) act in the best interest of the youth. While attempting to protect public safety, the goal may have not met what is best for the the youth.

This is because, despite various ways of punishing youth misbehaviours, upon return to society, these youths return to delinquent ways of behaviour. In addition, despite being aware of the potential punishment for juvenile delinquency, some youths still misbehave against cultural and national norms. For example, Spice, Viljoen, Latzman, Scalora & Ullman (2013) followed 193 juveniles who had sexually offended previously; over a time period averaging 7.24 years and found that 27 youths (14%) committed a nonsexual violent offence and 39 youths (20%) committed a nonsexual nonviolent offence (e.g., vandalism). In another study, Chui & Chan (2012) followed 92 male juvenile probationers (aged 14–20 years) for six months. It was found that 30% of the juveniles reoffended within the 6-month follow-up period.

The above examples and others indicate that despite institutionalized rehabilitation, incidents of juvenile delinquency are still prolific. Through this phenomenon, it can be suggested that the current preventive measures are counterproductive which partially reflects the ineffective function of institutional placement as installing

punishment. The logic to instill lessons for the delinquents through incapacitation as a consequence of crime seems to fail to achieve the desired outcome. This is reflected through the appalling number of official arrests among the local youth every year (see Figure 1.1). In addition, about 35.46% of relapse cases of substance abuse among youth were documented by The National Anti-Drug Agency (Drug Handbook 2013).

Generally, rehabilitative programmes in youth reform schools and correctional institutions in Malaysia focus on vocational training, religious programmes, counseling session, academic as well as co-curriculum programmes. However, Yahaya and Geok (2004) found that the vocational, religious and counseling programmes are less effective as they are reactive measures in the rehabilitation of problematic youths. Implementation of these programmes may appear successful due to the controlled environment within the institution that requires delinquents to abide orders and exhibit desired behaviour. The effectiveness of academic and co-curriculum programmes could be explained through the long-term benefit gained by delinquents particularly in preparation for employment after finishing probation.

Upon re-entering society, the success of institutionalized rehabilitation is less clear due to recidivism, which is partly motivated by societal rejection of these youths. Previous studies (for example Bernberg, Krohn & Rivera, 2006; Schwalbe, Ibrahim, Brewer, MacKenzie, & Gearing, 2013) have evidenced that youth who have been stigmatized due to their delinquency and subsequent incarceration or sentencings are often the recipient of exclusionary social forces that create barriers to pro-social and normative activities and which in turn promotes re-offending. Through this finding, it

can be inferred that the effort in combating delinquency should not be focusing on behaviour rectification solely but attempted through various aspects.

Approaches that are counterproductive in reducing delinquency involve multiple agents for example parents, youngsters, school, and community as well as target multiple behaviours. While many view juvenile delinquency as a social problem, the family institution is always the first organization to be blamed. A broken family background is identified to provide inadequate environment for adolescent growth with the absence of the other parent as a role model. About 27,355 total number of divorce cases among Muslims were reported in 2011 (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia). In these cases, children are the real victims who are still in need of parental support and supervision, which are vital in deterring psychosocial problems in the long run (Xioming, Stanton & Feigelman, 2000).

Delinquency is associated with poor school performance, truancy, and leaving school at a young age. In receiving formal education, the number of male adolescent enrolment in school appears to be reducing at higher education levels compared to female adolescents (Ministry of Higher Education, 2004). About 50.8% enrolment of male students at lower secondary level showed a reduction to 33.6% percent at matriculation and form six levels. High participation in delinquent behaviours among young adults can be explained through low educational commitment since it was well-documented to be positively associated (Herrenkohl et al., 2000).

Based on the background information above, the purpose of this research is to shed light on two areas. The first is the psychosocial variables that make a person to be

delinquent. The second is the nature and extent of delinquent behavior from the psychosocial and criminological perspectives. In the Malaysian context, answers to both areas are lacking.

1.3 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

For the purpose of this thesis, three research justifications are explained. The first reflects upon a ten-year trend analysis of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia. The second justification ruminates the population and psychosocial-based markers as well as the onset of criminal involvement. The third is the versatility of juvenile crime.

1.3.1 A ten-year trend analysis of juvenile crimes in Malaysia

The most recent statistic of 2013 (Berita Harian, 2014) revealed an increase of 57% of school-going youths' involvement in crime than the previous year. This is shown in Figure 1.1 below. In the same year, the report revealed an increase of 47% delinquents aged between 12 and 17 years old. Engagement in grievous crimes among individuals within this age range demonstrated a marked increase from 368 cases in 2012 to 542 cases in 2013 (Ibid). Statistical figures released by Department of Social Welfare (DoSW) Malaysia per year further provide clarity of juvenile delinquency trend in Malaysia.

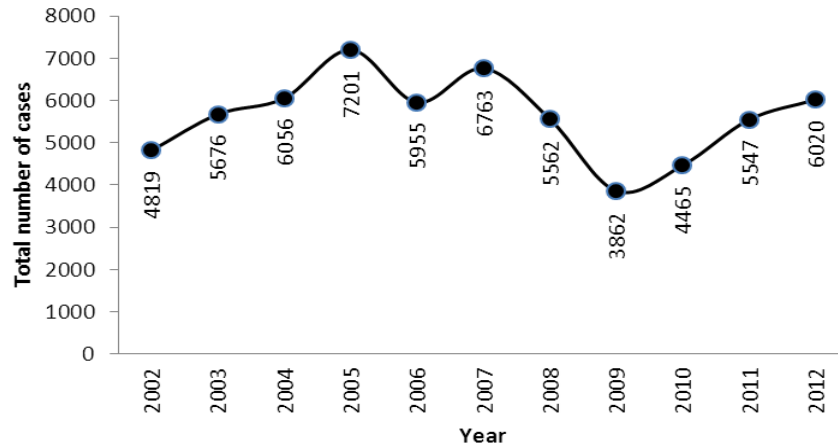


Figure 2.2 Statistics of reported crime by youth between 2000 and 2012

(Adapted from: DoSW, 2013)

Figure 1.2 above demonstrated inconsistencies in the trend of juvenile crimes throughout the years. Incidents of juvenile crimes were the highest in the year 2005 with 7,201 cases, followed by the year 2007 with 6,763 cases. The year 2009 reported the lowest number cases of juvenile crimes with 3,862 cases. Even though the number of reported cases decreased in 2009, a gradual increase was evident in subsequent years.

However, it is important to note that these statistical figures relied on the official number of cases and arrests. Some acts of juvenile delinquency are not reported or after reporting are retracted and this further explains the inconsistencies in the statistical reports of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia. Additionally, the statistical figure only represents one case per individual (Farrington, Synder & Finnegan, 1988) despite multiple crimes committed at one time. In fact, a large number of undetected delinquent behaviours are unrecorded in these sources (Gold, 1966) due to ignorance and unwillingness to report by parents and schools (Letchumanan, 2010).

Based on the statistics disclosed above, it is more than enough to indicate that the prevalence of delinquency among adolescents in Malaysia is alarming. Although the seriousness of delinquency among adolescents is recognized, the criminology-based research of delinquent behaviors and its predisposing factors have been largely ignored. Most local studies focused on the legal trend and changes related to judiciary practices regarding acts of juvenile delinquency with an overlay discussion on the sociological causal factors (e.g, Azizah, 2002). As a consequence, scholars, law enforcement agencies, and the public have little understanding about the nature of delinquency in this country; and what is known appears to not have any significant effect in reducing youth's involvement in criminal activities. As such, offences committed by adolescents and youths require more focused attention.

1.3.2 Population, psychosocial markers and onset of criminal involvement

Crimes committed by adolescents and youths are of the researcher's particular concern since this group is the predominant population in Malaysia. According to the National Population and Family Development (NPFDP, 2010) an approximate 45% of the total population was presented by individuals within the age range of 10-24 years in both 2001 and 2010. At this stage of life, adolescents and youths are a stage of experimentation, risk and opportunity (Schwartz et al., 2010) which further explains why criminal offending peaks during this period. It is worrisome since early offending in adolescents leads to an increased likelihood of adult criminal behavior (Haynie, 2001).

From the statistics (DoSW, 2013), children as young as ten years old already contribute to the figures. The age group of between 18-21 years consistently appears

to be the predominant perpetrators (Ibid). In addition, juvenile perpetrators seem to replicate the gender dominance of males as adult crime perpetrators compared to females (Baker, 2006). Therefore, this research should be carried out immediately as crime fighting and prevention are important elements in Malaysia's Government Transformation Programme (GTP, 2010) and Vision 2020.

Findings from international longitudinal studies suggest that social condition and personal characteristics of adolescents are linked to delinquency. The Rochester Youth Development Study (Thornberry et al., 1998) found that family, school, peers, gang membership, structural position as well as involvement with guns are predisposing factors towards delinquency. In the longitudinal Pittsburgh Youth Study, Loeber et al. (1998) identified individual, family and socioeconomic risk factors influencing progressive development of disruptive and delinquent behaviors. However, how these findings can be adapted to the Malaysian context remains unknown.

In an attempt to understand delinquency, scholars have utilized several ways in approaching the issue. Sociologists emphasize the association between home, family, neighbourhood, peers and other variables that form adolescents' social environment; and delinquent behaviors (e.g., Regnerus, 2002). Meanwhile psychologists have focused on forces within an individual, such as intelligent quotient (IQ), personality, self-restraint and negative emotionality (e.g., Steiner, Gauffman & Duxbury, 1999; Huckaby et al., 1998) to explain the theoretical underpinnings of juvenile delinquency. However, the researcher hypothesized that juvenile delinquency is more

than just social deviance or psychological problems, but as a resulting behavior of various factors that intertwine with each other.

In this study, the researcher took a more holistic approach in addressing the issue of local delinquency through an in-depth investigation of psychosocial and criminogenic factors. Frosh (2014) argued the term psychosocial imposed an ambiguous definition of what it really constituted of. To address this, Frosh (2014) asserted that the study of psychosocial “*seeks to investigate the ways in which psychic and social processes demand to be understood as always implicated in each other, as mutually constitutive, co-produced, or abstracted levels of a single dialectical process*” (p. 161).

The discussion of psychosocial markers in this study weighted more towards the psychological aspect as there are local studies that focus solely only on sociological aspects of delinquency, for example Azizah (2002). In other words, the researcher attempted to explore psychosocial markers through an investigation of the relationship between delinquents’ psychological factors and their social interactions. Explanation of this relationship is more concerned with the inner world of the delinquents in different area of social functioning involving parents, teachers, school institution, and peer relation. In order to meet this purpose, the psychological factors were set as the independent variables in establishing its relationship with sociological factors.

It is crucial to understand the underlying reasons behind juvenile involvement in delinquency so that effective prevention programmes can be implemented.

Therefore, the present study seeks to fill in the gap by investigating a list of psychosocial variables including cognitive distortion, self-control, self-esteem, family discord, authority problem, commitment to school, attachment to teachers, delinquent beliefs, and delinquent peers. While delinquents were recognized to experience psychosocial and educational problems (Brown, Borduin, & Henggeler, 2001), this study takes an in-depth approach in order to gain better understanding of psychosocial profiles of delinquents in Malaysia. Unlike past studies carried out on juvenile delinquents solely, this study compares delinquents and public data in order to establish a more reality-based understanding of why some Malaysian adolescents choose to involve in delinquency.

1.3.3 Versatility of juvenile crimes

According to the statistics compiled by the DoSW (2013), the types of crimes ranged from property related, interpersonal violence, minor offences, substance abuse, gambling, weapon possession and carrying, and traffic. This shows that crimes among youth in Malaysia are versatile involving overt and covert antisocial behaviours.

In a study on Australian juvenile delinquents in crime specialization and versatility, researchers found that young property offenders tend to stick to this type of offence throughout their careers compared to other young offenders (Carcach & Leverett, 1999). Researchers further added that irrespective of their specialization in crime, these young offenders displayed a more stable pattern of offending. Carcach and Leverett (1999) contended that obtaining knowledge in regards to juvenile offending shed light on number of dimensions underlying delinquent behaviour. While criminal

specialization showed single underlying process drives offending, multiple processes indicate versatile offending behaviour.

Instead of focusing on the type of offence, crime versatility among delinquents includes age-related factors. By this, offending in a certain age range has been found to predict offending in later life. For example, 73% of delinquents in a Cambridge study (Farrington, 1992; 1989) who committed unlawful acts between the ages of 10 to 16 were found to reconvict between ages 14 and 17 compared to non-delinquents (16%). In another study, 45% of delinquents showed relapses of delinquent behaviours between ages 25 and 32, compared to only 8% of those who were not delinquents (see Krohn et al., 2001; Statting & Magnusson, 1991). This is because the number of prior correctional commitments is strongly predictive of readmission rates (Krisberg & Howell, 1998).

From the view of life-course perspective, the earlier an individual is exposed to delinquency, the less likely is the person to desist from delinquent pathways (Loeber, Farrington & Petechuck 2003; Moffitt et al., 2002). Based on this notion, an early age of onset is a marker to high potentiality of later offending in adulthood. While developmental studies documented the development of offending behaviour among adolescents in corresponding to age, information on individual's motivations to involve and reinforce delinquency is lacking. Despite the many efforts to reduce the numbers juvenile crimes, juvenile delinquency in Malaysia seems to be a persistent phenomenon as these efforts were not based on localized empirical findings on the nature and versatility of Malaysian juvenile delinquents.

1.4 MALAYSIAN JUVENILE ACT 2001 (ACT 611)

In order to address the problem of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia, it is necessary to outline the relevant Malaysian law. The law provides definitions of terms ranging from who is defined as a juvenile, what acts are deemed delinquent, post-incident action, and avenues to curtail further involvement in crime. Such information herein is relevant as it guides the research methodology, scope of research and most importantly, both the quantitative and qualitative enquiries posed to the research respondents.

The Child Act 2001 is the latest revised version of the Juvenile Court Act 1947. The enforcement of this act is subject to the approval of certain amendments to the Malaysian Penal Code (MPC, Act 574) and accommodates those aspects that cannot be included in the Child Act 2001. This act was gazetted on 1st March 2001 as a result of the merging of three obsolete Acts: Juvenile Court Act (JCA) 1947, Child Protection Act (CPA) 1991, and Women and Girls Protection Act (WGPA) 1973. Though JCA and CPA were consolidated completely, there were some parts of the WGPA that were incorporated into the CPC in terms of supervision and legislature control. Within this section, only the important sections of the Child Act 2001 are highlighted.

1.4.1 Definition of ‘a child’

According to the Child Act 2001, a child is defined as an individual (a) under the age of 18 and (b) if related to criminal proceedings, it is predicated to a child who has attained the age of criminal responsibility that is ten years old as prescribed in section 82 of the Act 574. Herein, children are not classified into ‘children’ or

'young adult' as in the JCA. When the Child Act 2001 is used to mean 'children', it is to cite 'children under the age of fourteen years'. In the case of 'young adult', this act refers them as 'children aged fourteen and above'. In the case of women, WGPA 1973 had covered women until 21 years old. However, with the establishment of Child Act 2001, women in the ages between 18 – 21 years old are protected under Act 574.

1.4.2 Delinquent acts

Delinquent acts by juveniles can be categorized into two. The first refers to the acts or omissions which are prohibited and punishable by law under the respective legal systems. The second refers to acts which are known as status offences. Status offences refer to any act that is prohibited to children but not to an adult such as drinking and driving.

Based on the Penal Code, Act 574, for a child to be held accountable for crime, the establishment of an individual's culpability rests on three premises. First, the commission of act is unlawful. Second, the conduct of the act is not against an individual's free will. Third, the unlawful act is committed by an adult and sane person who can distinguish between right and wrong.

In the case of juvenile delinquency, the main subject that is always being questioned is the child's mental capacity to understand the nature and consequence of his or her behaviour. The argument is that the degree of understanding differs among individuals according to age. When the child's mental capacity is established, punishment is imposed accordingly.

1.4.3 Age of crime responsibility for juvenile delinquents

The Malaysian Penal Code stipulates 10 to be the minimal age of attainment of criminal responsibility. However, children between age 10 and 12 who have shown insufficient maturity may not be held accountable for criminality. Ongoing debates among policy makers put forward the suggestion to raise the minimal age to 12 for criminal prosecution as outlined by United Nation Children's Fund [Children Rights Coalition (CRC), 2012].

As the age of children involved in crime appear to be getting lower, scholars argued against the reliability of physiological age in reference to an individual's culpability. Since culpability refers to the extent to which a person can be considered blameworthy or deserving of punishment for a given behaviour, Cauffman and Steinberg (2000) contended moral decision as the evaluation of culpability since this attribute is incorporated in adolescent's decision making. Following this, Cauffman and Steinberg (2000) found that the psychosocial components (responsibility, perspective and temperance) make up the salient features on adolescents' capabilities of making mature judgment particularly in their offending decision. Findings further depicted psychosocial maturity as stronger factors compared to age in antisocial decision making (Ibid).

Rather than suggesting reform of the current policy on age of crime responsibility among children, this study attempted to emphasize the importance of psychosocial needs among adolescents in becoming resilient individuals. Additionally, meeting this basic need is also crucial as part of curbing delinquency among adolescents and youths.

1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

This section describes the definitions of several terms used in this study. The definitions cover the conceptual as well as operational definitions for variables, particularly cognitive distortion, self-control, self-esteem, and delinquent beliefs. Varied sources were referred, namely from the psychological, sociological, and criminological theories; and past studies.

1.5.1 Adolescent and youth

Different definitional terms of adolescent and youth can be obtained through developmental theories such as psychological, psychosocial and cognitive developmental theories. The definition of adolescent and youth also varies across literatures depending how these terms are operationalised based on the data used. Despite these differences, most of the definitions utilized chronological age distribution as a means to differentiate between these two terms. However, this age limit is constantly shifting based on statistical purposes and in different regions (United Nations, 2011).

a) Conceptual definition

In psychosocial development, individuals within a certain age group are recognized as experiencing certain stage of psychophysiological development: infancy (0-1 year old), toddlerhood (1-3 years), early childhood (3-5 years), middle childhood (6-12 years), and adolescence (13-18 years), young adult (18 to 40 years), and adulthood (40 to 65 years). According to Erikson (1950), each category is a successive stage that requires individual to master different psychosocial competencies upon completion of each stage. Adolescence is the most critical stage where an individual

seeks self-identity in relation to peers whereby youth seeks stable relationship and intimacy with others. Meanwhile, Piaget (1932) suggested four successive stages in cognitive development for certain age groups: sensorimotor (0-2 years), preoperational (2-7 years), concrete operational (7-11 years), and formal operations (11 years and above). Herein, adolescents and youth fall in the last stage where abstract thinking and hypothetical reasoning apply (Piaget, 1932).

For statistical convenience, the United Nations defined the age 10-19 years as adolescent and 15-24 years as youth, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child defines 'children' as persons up to the age of 18 (United Nations, 2011). The term 'young people' functions as a catch-all for adolescents and youth between 10-24 years of age.

Similarly, different countries adapt different age limits to define adolescents and youth. For example, the African Youth Charter defines youth as those between 15 and 35 years of age (African Union, 2006). The National Youth Policy in South Africa establish age range between 14 and 35 years to be referred as youth (National Youth Commission, 1997), the Kenyan National Youth Policy uses 15-30 as a marker (Ministry of Home Affairs, Heritage and Sports, 2002), and in Nigeria youth are defined as those between 18 and 35 (The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development, 2001). This inconsistency in age limit suggests that there is no agreed universal age to segregate between adolescent and youth.

b) Operational definition

For the purpose of this research, the term ‘youth’ is adapted based on the current age of the sample recruited while conducting this study (18 to 21 years). The term delinquent and non-delinquent are used synonymously with youth especially in the analyses of data and discussion throughout this thesis. Recruitment and selection of sample for both groups are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.5.2 Juvenile delinquency

As the focus of this current research is on juvenile delinquents, it is first necessary to define ‘juvenile delinquency’. In this section, the term is conceptually defined. This is followed by a brief explanation on its operational definition.

a) Conceptual definition

In general, juvenile delinquency is a term applicable to juvenile involvement in committing illegal behaviours (Siegel & Welsh, 2011). The illegal behaviours are recognized as such by law. Khurshid and Rehman (2006) describes juvenile delinquency as the involvement of youths up to 18 years of age whose behaviour does not comply with the norms of society or activities that are against the law. In other words, the definition provided by Khurshid and Rehman (2006) depicts the infringement of legal and social laws.

An important precursor is the age of the perpetrator as it differs from country to country and crime to crime. From the Malaysian legal perspective, age 10 is the minimal age for an individual to be held responsible for committing a crime. Based

on this guideline, several definitions were proposed in the Malaysian legislations to identify juvenile or young offender. For example:

- i. Prison Act 1995 asserts juvenile or young offender as “*prisoner who is under the age of 21 years*”. The Prison Department of Malaysia (PDM) detains juvenile aged 14 to 17 years in Henry Gurney School (approved school) as students and those who are aged between 18 to 21 years in prison as young prisoners.
- ii. The Child Act 2001 defines a child as “*a person under the age of 18 years and below*” and the age of criminal responsibility as age 10.
- iii. The Child Protection Act 1991 defines a child as “*a person under the age of 18 years and below*”.
- iv. The Children and Young Person Employment Act 996 refers a child as a person aged between 10 and 14 years, and a young person between the age ranges of 14 and 16 years.

b) Operational definition

In this study, ‘juvenile delinquency’ involves individuals within the age 18 to 21 years who are serving probation following involvement in crime activities. The types of crime were not specified due to the explorative nature of the present study and the wide range of offences committed by youths in general (refer to section 1.3.3 above), therefore the study population represents the general involvement of adolescents and youths in illegal behaviours as per the Child Act 2001 and Penal Code Act 574.

Access to younger juveniles was restricted due to more strict protection issues, institutional placement, and lengths of sentencing that were too short for the purpose of this current research.

1.5.3 Cognitive distortion

A common marker of juvenile delinquency is the prevalence of cognitive distortion. Primarily from the psychological approach (Barriga, Gibbs, Potter, & Liao, 2001; Copes, 2003), juvenile delinquents have been identified as having distortions in thinking that justify their involvement in crime. This is further discussed in chapter two. In this section, only the term is defined.

a) Conceptual definition

Cognitive distortion is known as self-serving or self-debasing (Barriga et al., 2001). In this study, only self serving cognitive distortion was used to explain “*inaccurate or biased ways of attending to or conferring meaning upon experiences*” (Barriga et al., 2001, p. 1). Specifically, self-serving cognitive distortions are associated with externalizing behaviors such as aggression and delinquency (Barriga et al., 2000). Through this definition, biases in the information processing are the main characterization of cognitive distortion which determines an individual’s behavioural responses. Several authors (Gibbs, 1991; Gibbs, Potter, & Goldstein, 1995) further introduced a four-category typological model which underlies the self-serving cognitive distortion conceptualization: self-centered, blaming others, minimizing/mislabeled, and assuming the worst.

According to Gibbs (1991), 'self-centered cognitive distortion' refers to an individual's attitude of putting forward his/her opinions and expectations first to the extent that the needs or opinions of others are neglected. 'Blaming others' explains an individual's cognitive schema of misattributing the blame for his/her behaviours to other people or sources (Gibbs & Potter 1992). 'Minimizing' refers to distortions where antisocial behaviour is seen as acceptable or a means to attain certain goals. 'Mislabeling' reflects an individual's tendency to belittle and dehumanizing ways of referring to others. Finally, 'assuming the worst' refers to individuals who attribute hostile intentions to others, considers the worst-case scenario as inevitable or sees his/her own behavior as beyond improvement (Ibid).

Each category is distinguished into primary and secondary cognitive distortion. Primary distortions are self-centered attitudes and beliefs (egocentric bias). The secondary cognitive distortion refers to pretransgression or posttransgression rationalizations that serve to protect an individual's self-image by neutralizing conscience, empathy and guilt following antisocial conduct. The secondary cognitive distortion consists of blaming others, minimizing/mislabeling, and assuming the worst.

b) Operational definition

In this study, the definition of self-serving cognitive distortion was used to describe general cognitive distortion. Individuals with cognitive distortions are said to experience deficiencies in interpreting social event that results in antisocial behaviours. Therefore, interventions programme such as EQUIP focusing on cognitive-behavioural therapy (Gibbs et al., 1995); emphasizes on improving