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Attachment to Peers and Delinquency

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment for the
Degree of Bachelor of Science in Forensic Science**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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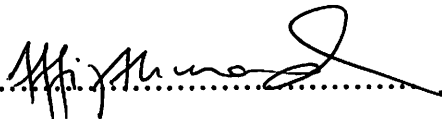
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ABSTRACT

The present research was designed to investigate the relationship between peer attachment and delinquency. The samples of this study are incarcerated youth from Henry Gurney School, Batu Gajah, Perak and Henry Gurney School, Ayer Keroh, Malacca and consisted of 32 female and 141 male juveniles that are randomly selected. A set of questionnaire was used to measure peer attachment and delinquency among these juveniles. The peer attachment questionnaire is a simplified version of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA: Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). It comprised 25 items divided into three main scales, i.e. trust, communication and alienation. The self-reported delinquency questionnaire comprised 29 items related on individual involvement in delinquent activities. The hypotheses were tested by using the Pearson product moment correlation and t-test analysis using the SPSS/PC and package for statistical analysis. The results indicated that there is no significant correlation between peer attachment and delinquency in juveniles. However, a significant negative correlation exists between subscale of peer attachment quality of communication and delinquency in male juveniles. In term of peer attachment quality, the present study found a correlation between subscale of peer attachment quality of trust and subscale of peer attachment quality of communication in juveniles. It is interesting to note that, male juveniles tend to show higher mean value of delinquency than female juveniles. Regarding involvement of juveniles in group, juveniles who reported involve in group showed higher mean value of delinquency compared to juveniles who did not involved in any group.

INTRODUCTION

Peer influence and peer pressure are considered crucial in the development of delinquent behavior. Previous researcher (e.g., Brownfield and Thompson, 1991) agree that an individual is more likely to show delinquent behavior when his or her peers engage in such activities. In Malaysia, juvenile delinquency has been increasing recently as evidenced by newspaper reported (Nasimah, 2005). The statistics from The Social Welfare Department Malaysia recorded that there were 15,499 juveniles' cases through the years 2001 until November 2003. These startling figures only begin to illustrate just how many youths are involved in illegal activities and how immense this problem in our society.

In accordance with recent findings regarding the increased number of juveniles' delinquency in Malaysia, this study is conducted to investigate the relationship between attachment to peers and juvenile delinquency. Moreover, there was no comprehensive study yet in Malaysian sample relating with this perspective.

According to Barlow (2003), attachment is referred to as a basic human behavioral system, which increases the infant's chances of survival and internalizes expectations of the environment. While those expectations may change with the course of development, these expectations tend to influence the individual affect, behavior, and perceptions throughout life. As adolescent, their attachment behavior shifts gradually from patterns of attachment behavior seen in earlier ages. Chaplin (1985) had defined adolescence as the developmental transition between childhood and adulthood that entails major physical,

cognitive, and psychosocial changes. The approximate ages of adolescent are 12 to 21 for girls and 12 to 22 for boys (Chaplin, 1985).

Marcus (1996) noted some point of characterization in adolescent relationships and friendships that influence peers on adolescent behaviors. According to Marcus, there are five major themes representing the characterization of adolescent friendship. First, in early adolescence, one to two chums are sought who are similar in sex, grade, and school, and long periods are spent interacting with such individuals (e.g., on the telephone or at school activities). Second, friendships in early adolescence are unstable, with girls showing the greater instability because of the greater intimacy and reciprocity demands placed on friendships. Third, adolescents learn to get along with a heterogeneous group of peers to age 15, after which they become more, discriminating. Fourth, adolescents conform to peer's value, as well as forms of dress, appearance, and behavior. These values may not be far from those held by parents, but there is greater conformity to peer values as they approach emancipation and in situations where parent/adolescent conflict is great. Lastly, adolescent friendship fulfills emotional needs such as striving for independence, sharing of common interests, feelings, and problems, helping in resolving conflicts, learning of social skills, and the reduction of loneliness and insecurity.

The term delinquency is defined as a pattern of "illegal behavior committed by a minor" and it implies that the adolescent places him or herself in opposition to those in positions of authority. Delinquent acts range from violent crimes against persons and property (assault, theft) to liquor law violations, and even status offenses based on the adolescent's age (purchasing liquor, running away from home, sexual activity) (Synder, 1997). According to Seigel (2004), deviant behavior is defined as any other action that

departs from social norms, apart from criminal behavior. Many deviant acts are not criminal even though they may be shocking or immoral, for example, watching sexually explicit films.

According to Vitaro, Brendgen and Tremblay (2000), many events and behaviors can cause the onset of delinquency such as broken families, media, peers and parent interaction. Developmental contextualism, formulated by Robert Lerner, looks at each of these factors and states that throughout one life, the individual will experience dynamic interactions between the organism and its characteristics, along with the various components including social and physical setting (Muss, 1996). How a person will behave depends on the ever-changing relationship the adolescent has with these contextual factors. Thus, as suggested by Rogers (1999), an adolescent might become involved with juvenile delinquency because of his/her relationship with any or all of these variables. However, the present study will focus more on peer's factor.

Warr (2002) noted that peers not only provide valuable emotional assistance, they are often vehicles for social status and afford opportunities for shared behavior, including involvement in delinquent activities. Many teens begin to spend less time with their families and more time with their peers (Barlow, 2003). Indeed, it has been found that families become a lesser source of daily interaction from age 9 to 15 and that relationships with friends become more rewarding in the latter part of this age range (Immele, 2000).

In fact, the finding that affiliation with deviant peers is associated with growth in delinquent behavior is one of the most robust findings in the literature on juvenile delinquency (Thornberry et al., 1997). Exposure to deviant peers has been linked to

increases in a wide range of delinquent behaviors including drug use (Dishion and Skaggs, 2000; Thornberry et al., 1997), covert antisocial behavior (Keenan, Loeber, Zhang, Stouthamer-Loeber and Van Kammen, 1995), violent offenses (Elliott and Menard, 1996), and early and high-risk sexual behavior (Dishion, 2000).

Study done by Haynie (2002) reported that, although girls place more emphasis on close friendships incorporation intimacy and closeness than do boys, there is some evidence that boys are more susceptible to peer's influence. Besides, Pleydon and Schner (2001) found that female may be more susceptible to deviant peer influences than male. Based on the previous scenario, in the present study, researcher would like to investigate the gender difference between peer attachment and delinquency.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An understanding of the relationship between peers and delinquency is at the heart of delinquency research (Haynie, 2001, 2002). One of the most consistent findings in the literature involves the association between friends' delinquent behavior and a juvenile's own delinquency (Haynie, 2001, 2002; Kreager, 2004). Adolescents who report that their friends are delinquent tend to report higher levels of delinquency than adolescents with fewer or no delinquent friends (Haynie, 2002). Previous researchers (Kreager, 2004; Immele, 2000; Brownfield et al., 1991) found that adolescent with higher levels of delinquency had lower levels of trust in and respect for their friends, and as attachment to peers decreased, delinquency increased (Immele, 2000; Brownfield et al., 1991).

Much of the developmental researches on peer influences on deviant behavior have focused on adolescent delinquency. Sociological studies have shown that deviant behavior is concentrated in certain adolescent groups. Gangs, cliques, and peer groups vary in their overall rates of deviance, but if one member of a group engages in problem behavior, a high probability exists that other members will do the same (Smith, Dodge, Dishion and McCord, 2005).

Adolescents are exposed to pro-delinquent definitions and modeling of delinquent behavior when they have delinquent peers. This exposure in turn increases adolescents' likelihood of delinquency involvement (Haynie, 2002). Therefore, delinquent peers and delinquent attitudes have greater significant direct effects on delinquency (Brownfield and Thompson, 2005). Rubington and Weinberg (2002) further point out that association with deviants helps the individual to maintain a deviant identity. Deviant identity is an interactive process that may involve a cycle of deviant behavior and punishment, which

may not deter further deviance but confirm the person in a deviant role (for example, due to resentment or defiance of authority) (Brownfield et al., 2005).

According to Barlow (2003), adolescence is a period marked by tremendous physical and social transitions. The onset of puberty and physical maturation coincide with teenagers moving from relatively homogeneous primary schools into larger, more heterogeneous middle and high schools. Within these new school contexts, opportunities for clique formation and the establishment of status hierarchies dramatically increase. In order to cope with the rapid changes in their lives, teenagers increasingly turn to peers for social support. As peers, they not only provide valuable emotional assistance but often as medium for social status and afford opportunities for shared behavior, including involvement in delinquent activities (Kreager, 2004).

Research into gender differences in how peer pressure is exercised and experienced had been extended to delinquency. Males are more likely to feel that their friends are pressuring them (Giordano, Cernkovich and Pugh, 1986), and early-maturing females are more susceptible to peers pressure from males and older peers than are on-time or late-maturing females (Ge, Xiaojia, Gonger and Elder, 1996). Haynie (2004) found that female who are physically developed overall (pubertal development) is most likely to encourage delinquent activities.

In a study done by Ge and colleagues (Ge et al., 1996), they found that females conform to their peers more than do males, but there is greater social disapproval for female delinquency. Even in mixed-gender peer groups, females conform more to female, rather than male, expectations (Giordano et al., 1986). Other research (e.g., Simons, Wu,

Conger and Lorenz, 1994; Warr, 1996) indicates that males are more heavily influenced by same-sex peers, whereas females are more likely to be influenced by their male friends. Contrary, some studies suggest females are just as influenced by female peers as they are by male peers (Miller, 2001; Haynie, 2003). Therefore, from these previous study findings suggest that the behavioral context of the peer group is most important not the sex composition. Giordano et al. (1986) concluded that delinquent friendships are rewarding, as well as characterized by caring, trust, and intimacy.

Theories related to Attachment and Delinquency

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory has led to great strides in understanding the development of social behavior and psychopathology in infancy and early childhood, but the theory is only just beginning to be applied to adolescence (Allen, Marsh, McFarland, McElhaney, Land, Peck and Jodl, 2002). Attachment theory offers a framework for understanding future development and behavioral patterns of individuals (Immele, 2000) and may potentially shed valuable light on adolescent social development and deviant behavior (Allen et al, 2002).

According to John Bowlby who proposed this attachment theory (Bowlby, 1998), attachment is a form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world. Bowlby showed that children make an attachment to one particular person that endures through all situations, typically the mother.

Human, especially infants, form attachment relationships with their primary caregivers (Bolwby, 1969). These lasting bonds provide infants with comfort and reassurance when threatened, as well as a secure base from which to explore the world around them. Seeking to establish and maintain a certain degree of proximity to the caregiver is the behavioral hallmark of attachment. This proximity may range from close physical contact under some circumstances to interaction or communication across some distance under other circumstances (Immele, 2000).

Barlow (2003) reported that as adolescent attachment behavior departs from patterns of attachment behavior seen in earlier ages, adolescents often appear actively and purposefully to be moving away from attachment relationships with parents and other parental attachment figures. Adolescents frequently appear to treat attachment relations to parents more as restraints than as anchors to security, and a key task of adolescence is to develop a level of autonomy that no longer requires reliance on parents' support. Kobak and Cole (1994) noted that, at the onset of adolescence, the individual is beginning to make tremendous efforts to become less dependent on caregiver from primary attachment figures. In late adolescence, the possibility of becoming a primary attachment figure to offspring has emerged. More than a simple span of time between these two periods, adolescence is a time of profound attachment transformations in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral systems.

Parents and friends contribute differently to adolescent development (Barlow, 2003). Adolescents seek the approval and guidance of parents in forming standards of behavior, values, and educational or occupational goals. With friends they learn reality outside the family circle and experience a life that is uniquely their own. Adolescents are more likely

to be self-disclosing and open to friends than to parents. For many adolescents, interactions with peers occupy more time than interactions with family and the frequency of friend interactions increases throughout adolescence as time spent with parents' decreases. The friend relationships of adolescence require equality in give-and-take (a strong difference from the parent-child relationship), work toward development of a sense of connection to others, and have significance for future interpersonal relationships (Barlow, 2003).

Furthermore, peers who have the greatest influence on adolescents and those whose support is most important to adolescents are their close friends. Thus, it is clear that teens come to spend an increasing amount of time with their friends and that in the realm of friendships, close friends are most influential. Given the emergent importance of close friends in adolescence, it is plausible that these friends may serve as a buffer to the ill effects of an insecure attachment. Close friends may actually protect an insecure adolescent from delinquency (Immele, 2000).

Marcus (1996) noted that a measure of both adolescent attachments to peers and to parents has been developed by Armsden and Greenberg (1987). The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) that was developed by them intends to measure the quality of attachment to peers and parents in three factors called trust, communication and alienation. In case of peer attachment quality, trust is referring as stressed security in friendship, wanted a friend to be loyal, trustworthy and as a reliable source of emotional support. It is a degree of mutual understanding, respect and trust in for their friends. Communication is quality of interaction in adolescent friendship. It dealt with nature of communication between close friendships and perceived the level of understanding in their

communication. Alienation refers to feelings of anger, interpersonal isolation and conflictual elements such as fears of rejection, ridicule, embarrassment and lack of understanding. This attachment quality could be combined into a measured of security-insecurity (Marcus, 1996; Muris, Meesters, Melick and Zwambag, 2001).

Findings on previous study indicated that adolescent who classified themselves as securely attached would display higher scores on the IPPA scales measuring trust and communication, and lower scores on the IPPA scales of alienation compared to adolescent who classified themselves as insecurely (i.e. avoidant and ambivalently) attached (Muris et al., 2001). Moreover, greater level of trust and communication (security) in peers, and poorer level of alienation (insecurity) will decrease delinquency involvement of peer (Immele, 2000).

Social Control Theory & Social Learning Theory

Essentially, the two portraits of adolescent friendship are the products of two theories of delinquency that are social control theory (non-intimate) and social learning theory (intimate delinquent peer relationships) (Pleydon et al., 2001; Haynie, 2001).

Social control theory, also called social bond theory, is a sociological theory. It is articulated by Travis Hirschi in his 1969 book, *Causes of Delinquency* (Siegel, 2004). Social control theorists propose that individuals are delinquent because controls are absent or defective (Shoemaker, 1996). According to Hirschi (1969), these controls are either intra-individual (e.g., impulse control) or interpersonal (e.g., attachment, commitment, and involvement with regard to family, school, peers, and religion). Hirschi (1969) suggests that there is a negative relationship between attachment/commitment and delinquency.

Social control theory also sees delinquent friendships as conflicted, troubled, unstable, and marked by feelings of less trust and lower security. Poor social skills, weak familial relations, and overall low attachment to social institutions do not allow for healthful friendships between delinquents (Hirschi, 1969).

In contrast with social control theory, social learning theorists propose that delinquent friendships are close, intimate, and essentially similar to those of non-delinquents. According to social learning theory, an individual cannot be influenced by someone or something unless there is some vested interest or attachment (Sutherland and Cressey, 1978). Thus, the stronger the attachment, the stronger the potential influence. If delinquents are encouraged, taught, or pressured to be delinquent by other delinquents, there must be some level of attachment.

One of the most prominent social learning theories is Edwin H. Sutherland's differential association theory. According to Sutherland et al. (1978), peer association is a key component of differential association theory. The theory proposes that association with deviant peers increases exposure to definitions (e.g., values, attitudes, and beliefs) favorable to violation of norms, whereas association with conventional peers increases exposure to definitions unfavorable to violation of norms. When definitions favorable to violation of norms exceed those unfavorable to violation of norms, deviant behavior is likely to occur. In this way, association with deviant peers should increase the likelihood of involvement in delinquency (Sutherland et al., 1978).

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The aims of this study are:

1. To examine the relationship between attachment to peers and delinquency.

The present study tries to prove Brownfield et al. (1991) finding that as attachment to peers decreased, delinquency increased. Moreover, adolescent with higher levels of delinquency had lower levels of trust in and respect for their friends.

2. To examine the gender difference in subscales of peer attachment quality.

Females score higher of peer attachment measure and on the subcomponent scales of trust and communication. As reported in Marcus (1996) study, males typically have poorer quality friendships in adolescence.

3. To investigate gender difference in path of peers influence.

Recent study found that female may be more susceptible to deviant peer influences than male (Pleydon et al., 2001).

4. To investigate the association between individuals' delinquency and peer's delinquency.

Findings from Haynie's study (2001) indicate that friend's delinquency is associated with an adolescent's own delinquency involvement.

In order to clarify the present study objectives, researcher would like to analyze and examine several hypotheses. The hypotheses that will be tested are as following:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant correlation between peer attachment and delinquency in female juveniles.

Hypothesis 1.1: There is a significant correlation between subscale of peer attachment quality of trust and delinquency in female juveniles.

Hypothesis 1.2: There is a significant correlation between subscale of peer attachment quality of communication and delinquency in female juveniles.

Hypothesis 1.3: There is a significant correlation between subscale of peer attachment quality of alienation and delinquency in female juveniles.

Hypothesis 1.4: There is a significant correlation between each of the subscales of peer attachment quality (trust, communication, alienation) in female juveniles.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant correlation between peer attachment and delinquency in male juveniles.

Hypothesis 2.1: There is a significant correlation between subscale of peer attachment quality of trust and delinquency in male juveniles.

Hypothesis 2.2: There is a significant correlation between subscale of peer attachment quality of communication and delinquency in male juveniles.

Hypothesis 2.3: There is a significant correlation between subscale of peer attachment quality of alienation and delinquency in male juveniles.

Hypothesis 2.4: There is a significant correlation between each of the subscales of peer attachment quality (trust, communication, alienation) in male juveniles.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant difference between peer attachment and gender.

Hypothesis 3.1: There is a significant difference between subscale of peer attachment quality of trust and gender.

Hypothesis 3.2: There is a significant difference between subscale of peer attachment quality of communication and gender.

Hypothesis 2.4: There is a significant difference between subscale of peer attachment quality of alienation and gender.

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant difference between gender and delinquency.

Hypothesis 5: There is a significant difference between group of ages and delinquency.

Hypothesis 6: There is a significant difference between gender and numbers of times enter Youth Rehabilitation Centre.

Hypothesis 7: There is a significant difference between numbers of times enters Youth Rehabilitation Centre and delinquency.

Hypothesis 8: There is a significant difference between gender and involvement in group.

Hypothesis 9: There is a significant difference between involvement in group and delinquency.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

In this study, the population of interest is adolescent of Youth Rehabilitation Centre (YRC) in Henry Gurney School, Batu Gajah, Perak and Henry Gurney School, Ayer Keroh, Malacca. There were 32 female and 141 male juveniles participated in this research. They were randomly selected by the YRC officer. Participants were asked to complete a set of questionnaire given. Researcher was always available to ensure independent and confidential, and to provide assistance when necessary.

Research Technique

A set of questionnaire which consists of four parts (Part A, B, C and D) was devised to measure the peer attachment and self-reported delinquency. A copy of the set of questionnaire is shown in Appendix I.

PART A: General Information

Part A of this questionnaire is to obtain background information of the subjects. The questionnaire covers the gender, age, race, family income, status of the juvenile before entering the YRC, juvenile educational background, number of times enter the YRC, involvement in group, friends' age, friends' educational background, number of friends, and friends' gender. This information will serve as a record to the researcher and help in evaluation and interpretation of the result later. Moreover, the aim of this research is to distinguish between two samples, male and female juveniles.

PART B: Peer Attachment Questionnaire

Part B is a peer attachment questionnaire comprising of 25 items. The items in the peer attachment questionnaire are sources of attachment quality cited from Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA: Armsden et al., 1987). The scales contain items that are related to three domains of attachment quality that is trust, communication and alienation. The summary of the subscales and number of items for each subscale is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Subscale and Items in Peer Attachment Questionnaire

Subscale	Items
Trust	5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21
Communication	1, 2, 3, 7, 16, 17, 24, 25
Alienation	4, 9, 10, 11, 18, 22, 23

Trust: This section comprised ten items. The items were used to reflect the degree of mutual understanding, respect and trust in for their friends. The items of this subscale are located at number 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20 and 21. An illustrative example of this item is:

Eg: "My friends respect my feelings."

Communication: Eight items were used to assess the extent of spoken communication. It measures the degree of communication among juveniles and his/her friends. The items for this subscale are located at number 1, 2, 3, 7, 16, 17, 24 and 25. An example of communication item is:

Eg: "I tell my friends about my problems and troubles."

Alienation: Alienation items measure the feelings of anger and interpersonal isolation. There are consists of seven items and located at number 4, 9, 10, 11, 18, 22 and 23. Example of alienation item is:

Eg: "My friends didn't know me angry of them."

Items have to be rated on 5-point Likert scales with 1 = *almost never true*, 2 = *not very often true*, 3 = *sometimes true*, 4 = *often true*, and 5 = *almost always true*. Peer scales scores are computed by summing across relevant items. Higher scores on this scale indicated greater peer attachment.

PART C: Self-Reported Delinquency Questionnaire

Part C is a self-reported delinquency questionnaire measuring delinquent activities that the participant had involved and done before entering the YRC. The questionnaire was adopted from research done by Affizal (2005). The items in self-reported delinquency questionnaire are refer to delinquent activities that normally done by the juveniles. The scales contain 29 items dealing with various types of delinquent activities such as smoking, sexual assault, drug offences, murder, thief, road-trafficking, vandalism and other violent offences. The questionnaire used a structured items format with Likert type 4-point scales. The four response categories and the scoring method consisted of the following: 1=*never*, 2=*very rare*, 3=*sometimes* and 4=*frequently*. The delinquent scores are obtained by summing across of the items. The highest score indicates the highest possibility of involving in delinquent activities, while the lowest score indicates and opposite effect.