

**MORAL TRAITS, CRIME KNOWLEDGE, AND WILLINGNESS
TO HELP VICTIMS AMONGST GENERATION Z IN
MALAYSIA**

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MORAL TRAITS, CRIME KNOWLEDGE, AND WILLINGNESS TO HELP VICTIMS AMONGST GENERATION Z IN MALAYSIA

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CVI	Content Validity Index
CVR	Content Validity Ratio
DoSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
FYP	Final Year Project
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
MCI	Moral Competency Index
NT	Neutralization Theory
RTH	Readiness to Help Assessment
SLT	Social Learning Theory
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

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MORAL TRAITS, CRIME KNOWLEDGE, AND WILLINGNESS TO HELP VICTIMS AMONGST GENERATION Z IN MALAYSIA

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between moral traits, crime perception, and willingness to assist crime victims among Generation Z in Malaysia. A quantitative cross-sectional approach was adopted, involving 235 Malaysian Gen Z respondents aged between 19 and 28 years who completed a self-administered online questionnaire disseminated through social media platforms. Differences in crime severity rankings across age and residency categories were analysed using Kruskal–Wallis and Mann–Whitney U tests, while Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were employed to assess the relationships among moral traits, crime perception, and willingness to help victims. The results revealed that perceptions of most crime types were largely consistent across groups, with statistically significant differences identified only for murder, incest, defamation, and robbery across age categories, and for receiving stolen property between urban and suburban respondents. A moderate positive association was observed between moral traits and willingness to assist crime victims. Furthermore, regression findings demonstrated that moral traits emerged as the primary predictor of helping behaviour, whereas crime perception did not show a significant predictive effect. These findings indicate that helping intentions among Gen Z are shaped more strongly by internal moral capacity than by evaluations of crime severity, underscoring the importance of fostering moral development and personal responsibility in crime prevention and victim support programmes

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This quantitative criminology undergraduate Final Year Project (FYP) aims to understand the moral traits, crime knowledge, and willingness to help crime victims among Generation Z (Gen Z, aged 18-28) in Malaysia as part of proactive crime prevention. This criminology FYP also aims to determine how Gen Z perceives the severity of crimes by ranking a myriad of crimes. Considering these two aims, this chapter outlines the background of the study, problem statement, research questions, research objectives, research hypotheses, operational definitions, and significance of the study.

1.1 Background

This section consists of three contexts surrounding the research. The first background is statistics on recent crime in Malaysia. The second background relates to the critical role of crime perception, and the third background relates to understanding morality.

1.1.1 Statistics on Recent Crime in Malaysia

Based on data published by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM, 2025), Malaysia's crime index overall experienced a 11.1% rise, reaching 58,255 cases in 2024. Specifically, violent crimes, which comprise of murder, rape, robbery, and causing injury; recorded an increase of 5.9% with 11,067 cases in 2024 compared to 10,453 cases in 2023. Property crimes, including house break-ins, theft, vehicle theft, and other thefts; recorded an increase of 12.4%, with 47,188 cases in 2024 compared to 41,991 cases in the previous year (DoSM, 2025).

Although recent statistics have shown a decline in juvenile cases, dropping from 1,764 to 1,573 (*Institut Penyelidikan Pembangunan Belia Malaysia*, 2025); emerging forms of crime remain concerning. In particular, online crime in Malaysia increased by 35.5% in 2023 with 34,532 cases, compared to 25,479 in 2022, and e-commerce crime alone accounted for about 33.2% of online crime cases (Bernama, 2024). The National Scam Awareness Survey 2024 also reported that young adults are increasingly vulnerable to online scams, with 73% of young working adults (aged 18-40) having encountered scam attempts, and 65% of youth survey respondents reported that they had been targeted by scams (Juremi, 2024; Bernama, 2024). These figures suggest that while traditional youth victimisation is declining, Gen Z is still vulnerable to crimes, particularly in the online sphere. The present researcher suggests that this trend may stem from high engagement with social media or other online platforms, which increases their exposure to scams, fraud, cyberbullying, and other forms of cybercrime.

It is important to acknowledge that some members of Gen Z are also involved in criminal activities, including petty theft, drug use, sexual offences, and online crimes. Reports revealed that 60,000 Malaysian teenagers aged 13 to 17 are currently using drugs (National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS), 2022), and about 106,000 have experimented with drugs at least once in their lifetime (CodeBlue, 2023). In addition, recent animal cruelty cases involving cats and dogs in some universities in Malaysia highlight growing concerns about criminal involvement among Gen Z. Examples include horrifying cases of mutilated cats found in Universiti Malaya campus and the use of firecrackers against stray dogs by the student union of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) (Lo, 2024; Xiang, 2025).

This involvement of Gen Z as both potential victims and offenders underscores the complexity of Gen Z's relationship with crime. It highlights the need to explore how their perceptions of crime and moral reasoning may shape their attitudes towards criminality, as well as their willingness to help crime victims. This is not just academically relevant but also contributes to creating more effective prevention strategies for building safer communities.

1.1.2 The Critical Role of Crime Perception

Given the involvement of Gen Z as both potential victims and offenders, it is essential to consider how they perceive crime. This perception is predominantly shaped through digital lenses since they are deeply intertwined with digital media and online interactions. According to Segelhorst (2022), Gen Z, also known as digital natives; spend considerably more time on their devices than engaging in traditional human interaction, averaging ten hours daily on phones, tablets, and computers. These extended online hours are largely devoted to social platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube; which serve as hubs for information, entertainment, and social connections (Elkatmis, 2024). Thus, their perceptions of crime are heavily influenced by the type of content, narratives, and online discussions compared to direct personal experience.

The way Gen Z forms their crime perception through digital platforms can create a clear gap between actual crime statistics and how dangerous they believe the world to be. Constant exposure to sensational or violent news online may induce the 'mean world syndrome', which increases individual levels of fear, anxiety, and pessimism;

marked by the perception that the world is 'meaner' than it really is (Kemp, 2022). For instance, research shows that low-quality crime information on social media significantly reduces people's sense of safety, even in a safe environment (Abdul Ghani, Abdul Wahab, Ghazali, & Mohd Azam, 2021). Such distorted perceptions can also influence attitudes and behaviours, such as reduced trust in communities, avoidance in public spaces, or stronger support for punitive crime policies.

1.1.3 Understanding Morality

Liu (2023) explained that moral standards are influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Internal factors include brain function and cognition, while external factors encompass family, peers, and culture. The opinion of the present researcher is that morality influences how individuals evaluate crime, since perceptions of what is 'wrong' or 'harmful' guide attitudes toward law, justice, and acceptable behaviour in society.

Among Gen Z, morality is not developed in isolation, although they sharply decline in offline interaction (Segelhorst, 2022). According to Segelhorst (2022), the morality of Gen Z is shaped by their immediate environment, such as family values, peer groups, and cultural expectations. A study conducted in Malaysia by Tongbin and Ma'arof (2024) found that both parental involvement and peer support play crucial roles in fostering moral identity and prosocial behaviour in youth. This highlights the significance of close relationships in influencing the ethical actions of youth.

Earlier, Yudkin (2021) noted that the importance people place on a specific moral value can also shift depending on the people present in a situation. Specifically, the type or nature of the relationship between the person committing the act (the actor) and the person affected (the victim) influences moral evaluation. For instance, moral judgements may differ depending on whether they are strangers, friends, or family (Ding, Fu, Li, & Yu, 2025).

Indeed, research shows that moral judgments vary according to these relationships and adapt rapidly to changing moral rules and settings (Ding, Fu, Li, & Yu, 2025; Kusev, Martin, van Schaik, & Teal, 2025). The above research findings indicate that Gen Z's moral reasoning is rooted in close relationships and is adaptable to different social contexts. However, there have been no recent studies on how moral traits influence the development of Gen Z's crime knowledge to assist crime victims.

1.2 Problem Statement

There is a lack of criminological research focusing on Gen Z in Malaysia, resulting in a limited understanding of how this group perceives crime, engages in prevention efforts, and demonstrates their willingness to help crime victims. The reason this is a problem is that in Malaysia, youth crime prevention has traditionally emphasised punitive or reactive strategies. This led to insufficient proactive measures that address the specific vulnerabilities and perspectives of young people. For example, in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, a group of activists and experts are urging a shift towards preventive strategies that engage the perspectives and needs of youth, particularly in addressing school bullying (Carvalho, 2025).

According to Mohd Othman, Abdul Mutalib, Arshad, & Ahmad (2017), youths demonstrate awareness of major crimes, but their participation in prevention activities is minimal and often lacks a deeper understanding of criminal behaviours. This limitation may also stem from Malaysia's educational framework, which continues to favour grade-oriented learning over moral and civic development (Shaari & Nur Morat, 2024). Without a stronger emphasis on moral reasoning and social responsibility within education, young people may be less prepared to engage meaningfully in crime prevention initiatives. This indicates the need for more proactive and youth-centred approaches, such as peer-led education programmes, community-based awareness campaigns, and digital engagement initiatives; that empower young people as active partners in crime prevention.

1.3 Research Questions

This criminology FYP has two research questions that are explored quantitatively based on participants' answers.

1. How do Generation Z in Malaysia rank different types of crime?
2. What is the relationship between morality and willingness to help victims amongst Generation Z?

1.4 Objectives

This section emphasises the general objective of this research. Following that, the specific objectives of this research are outlined. There is one general objective and three specific objectives in this study. These objectives provide a clear direction for the research focus.

1.4.1 General Objectives

To examine the relationship between crime perceptions, morality, and victim assistance willingness among Malaysian Generation Z.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To determine the ranking of crime severity perception among Generation Z
2. To compare moral levels towards willingness to assist victims among Malaysian Generation Z.
3. To determine the relationship between crime perception, willingness to assist victims, and moral attitudes among Generation Z.
4. To determine the relationship between social learning, moral competency, and crime knowledge.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

It is stated here that sociodemographic factors include gender, age range, ethnicity, religion, education level, and residency. In this research, three hypotheses to be tested are:

1. H_{01} : There are no differences in how Generation Z ranks different types of crime based on sociodemographic factors.
 H_{a1} : There are differences in how Generation Z ranks different types of crime based on sociodemographic factors.

2. H₀₂: There are no relationships between moral traits and willingness to assist crime victims among Generation Z.

H_{a2}: There are relationships between moral traits and willingness to assist crime victims among Generation Z.

3. H₀₃: There are no relationships between crime perception, willingness to assist crime victims, and moral attitudes.

H_{a3}: There are relationships between crime perception, willingness to assist crime victims, and moral attitudes.

4. H₀₄: There are no relationships between social learning, moral competency and crime knowledge.

H_{a4}: There are relationships between social learning, moral competency and crime knowledge.

1.6 Operational Definitions

Several terms that are commonly mentioned in this research are defined in this section. The first term is Generation Z. Next is morality, followed by crime knowledge. Subsequently, the fourth and fifth terms are also explained, which are proactive crime prevention and victim assistance.

1.6.1 Generation Z

Generation Z, otherwise known as Gen Z; refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (Ita, 2025). Mathematically, this places Gen Z as individuals who are currently between 13 and 28 years old. They are the generation after millennials, and before

Gen Alpha (Eldridge, 2025). This generation was born and grew up in the digital era with a diversity of complex and sophisticated communication devices or gadgets such as iPads, PDA, smartphones, tablets, and other electronic devices (Abdullah, Ismail, & Albani, 2018). They are considered the first true digital natives, having grown up with the Internet, smartphones, and social media as integral parts of their daily lives (Eldridge, 2025).

With daily use of the digital world, it is the current researcher's opinion that Gen Z's vulnerability as a victim and perception towards crime might differ due to greater online engagement, increased exposure to diverse information sources, and heightened awareness of social issues. For the purposes of this study, Gen Z is operationally defined as individuals from this generation who are above 18 years old, as persons under the age of eighteen are legally considered children under the Child Act 2001. In line with ethical research practice, this study therefore excludes children and focuses only on adult members of Gen Z.

1.6.2 Morality

According to Hossain (2023), morals relate to human conduct, while morality encompasses the practical application of those morals. Hume (1977, cited in Marques, Cabral, Comfort, & Boggio, 2023) proposed that morality is shaped by emotions arising from personal experiences, which guide individuals in distinguishing virtuous from immoral actions. Liu et.al (2025) further explained that morality is generally recognised as a set of conduct that may be rooted in the behaviour of culture, religion, or philosophy; or can be derived from a universal standard that people strongly believe in. For example, most people would consider killing to be something immoral, while

helping others is viewed as moral (Liu et.al, 2025). In the context of the current study, morality refers to traits that influence individuals' understanding of crime, including its perceived severity and their willingness to assist crime victims.

1.6.3 Crime knowledge

Crime, in its legal sense, refers to *an act or omission prohibited by law and committed voluntarily, which is punishable through legal proceedings due to its impact on public order and societal safety* (Kamus Undang-Undang, 2019; Criminal Procedure Code [Act 593], 2017). Beyond its legal framing, crime is also understood as *harmful not only to individuals but also to the community, society, and the state, as it causes injury or damage to persons or property and constitutes a violation of the right to life guaranteed under Article 5(1) of the Federal Constitution* (Ali Mohamed & Ahmad, 2023). Meanwhile, knowledge is generally defined as familiarity, awareness, or understanding of facts and information acquired through learning or experience (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025; Merriam-Webster, 2025). It not only involves the possession of information, but also the ability to interpret and apply it meaningfully in different contexts. In the context of the current study, crime knowledge refers to individuals' awareness and perceptions of crime as a legal and social phenomenon, including their definitions, beliefs, and evaluations of its seriousness and prevalence.

1.6.4 Proactive crime prevention

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2025), crime prevention comprises strategies and measures aimed at reducing the risk of crime and its negative impacts on individuals and society. This also includes addressing fear of crime by targeting its underlying causes (UNODC, 2025). According to Haskins (2019),

proactive measures emphasise initiating change rather than merely reacting when it occurs. Instead of waiting for crime to occur, proactive crime prevention means recognising patterns, anticipating threats, and implementing strategies that discourage criminal behaviour before it happens (Monehin, 2024). In this study, proactive crime prevention is examined via Gen Z's judgments about crime severity, which reflects how individuals perceive and prioritise different forms of criminal activity.

1.6.5 Victim assistance

Victim assistance generally refers to the support provided to individuals affected by crime, which may address their physical, emotional, social, financial, and psychological needs (Sette, 2020; Office for Crime of Victims, 2025). Victim assistance commonly takes the form of programmes that are often funded or administered by the government to provide advocacy and support services, guide victims through the legal system, and help them cope with emotional distress (EBSCO, 2025). Such support can be delivered by professionals or volunteers and typically includes counselling, information provision, court support, and guidance through the criminal justice system (Sette, 2020; Office for Crime of Victims, 2025; FBI, 2025).

In this current study, victim assistance is operationalised as willingness to help victims of crime in hypothetical scenarios. It is assessed through self-reported intentions to offer support to the victim, report incidents or crime, or guide victims to resources. This construct is not examined as formal victim support services, but rather as individual willingness to assist.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study holds two main significances. Firstly, this study contributes to the body of research exploring the intersection of morality and crime perception among Malaysian Gen Z. While existing studies tend to focus on either moral attitude towards crime or crime-related knowledge separately, few have examined how these two elements jointly influence the way individuals assess the severity of criminal behaviours. This study narrows the gap in knowledge by focusing on criminology knowledge and moral mechanisms shaping willingness to help crime victims amongst Malaysian youth.

Secondly, this study provides theoretical support by testing the applicability of established criminological theories within the Malaysian context. Many criminological frameworks were developed primarily in Western settings (for example, SLT (Bandura, 1977) and NT (Sykes & Matza, 1957) were primarily developed in the United States of America). Consequently, the applicability of these theoretical frameworks may be limited in capturing cultural and contextual factors that influence moral reasoning and behavioural tendencies in Malaysia. By applying these theories within a Malaysian sample, this study offers insights into their usage for future criminological research in Malaysia.

1.8 Format of this FYP

This dissertation consists of six chapters. The first chapter is devoted to the introduction, which includes the study's background, problem statement, research questions, objectives, hypotheses, operational definitions, and significance of the study. The second chapter is a literature review chapter, followed by a methodology chapter. Then, subsequent chapters are: results, discussion, and conclusion.

The last chapter of this study concludes with recommendations for its improvement. The study's limitations are also discussed in this chapter. Lastly, references and appendices are attached at the end of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is divided into four. The first section is a review of past studies on crime perception and moral behaviour. The second is the factors shaping willingness to help crime victims. Third is the gaps in the literature. The last section is the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

2.1 Past studies on crime perception and moral behaviour

Perceptions of crime are commonly assessed through judgments of seriousness, harmfulness, and wrongfulness. Adriaenssen et al. (2020) conceptualised crime seriousness as comprising wrongfulness, harm severity, and the incidence of both crime and its harms. For example, violent offences are ranked highest, while corporate fraud and drug trafficking are perceived as less serious despite their potential for large-scale harm (Adriaenssen, et al., 2020). Simpson, Galvin, Loughran, and Cohen (2023) then demonstrated these insights in the context of white-collar crime, showing that perceptions of seriousness translate into support for harsher or more lenient policy responses.

More recent studies confirm the emphasis on harm, with Kluin, Ansems, and Brands (2024) and Treshenkov, Turjeman, and Dagan (2024); showing that harmful consequences consistently outweigh intent and wrongfulness in shaping evaluations, while van de Weetering, Weinrath, and Kohm (2024) revealed that the framing of a crime scenario alters perceived seriousness. These studies suggest that crime perceptions are influenced by harm, wrongfulness, incidence, framing, and crime type. However, reliance on Western samples raises questions about whether Malaysian

Gen Z interprets wrongfulness and harmfulness in similar ways, justifying a localised investigation.

Socio-demographic factors also play a significant role in shaping perceptions of crime. Earlier, Xun (2022) showed that cultural context shapes how young people judge offences, with Chinese and British youth differing in their views on minor crimes. Building on this, Calmeiro, Sousa, and Cruz (2023) found that Portuguese residents judged wrongfulness and harmfulness differently depending on age and gender, while Cinoglu and Odabasi (2023) reported that fear of crime in Turkiye varied by socioeconomic status. Steer & Simpson (2024) observed comparable demographic differences in New Zealand, reinforcing the role of background characteristics in shaping perceptions of crime. Although these findings consistently demonstrate the influence of socio-demographic factors, the studies remain culturally specific and may not apply to Malaysian Gen Z, highlighting the need for localised research.

Beyond demographics, media exposure strongly influences public fear and perceptions of crime. Fatuma (2024) argued that Tanzanian media exaggerated violent crime, thereby intensifying its seriousness, while Gramlich & Eddy (2024) showed that US local news heightened public concern about crime. Ringim (2024) found similar effects among Nigerian students, suggesting that youth are particularly vulnerable to media framing of crime. However, Zhang (2023) and Cuenca and Perez (2025) revealed contradictions: moderate social media use amplified fear, but intensive use sometimes reduced insecurity. These inconsistencies suggest that media effects are complex and context-dependent, underscoring the need to examine how Malaysian Gen Z, as digital natives, construct moral evaluations influenced by media exposure.

Sattler, van Veen, Hasselhorn, Mehlkop, and Sauer (2022) argued that internalised moral rules and emotions such as shame and guilt act as filters shaping how individuals perceive crime, especially in criminogenic settings. Barton-Crosby (2022) extended this by showing that anticipated guilt and shame function as deterrents through projecting emotional consequences of offending. These findings suggest morality operates as a psychological barrier, yet they are largely tested in Western contexts. Studies in Korea (Kwak & Lee, 2023) and Ukraine (Bateman, Markovska, Serdiuk, & Bogdanov, 2024) provide cross-cultural evidence, but focus narrowly on theft, robbery, or corruption, leaving broader youth contexts underexplored. This indicates that while moral emotions consistently reduce acceptance of crime, their scope and applicability across different populations remain uneven.

The protective role of morality is further reinforced when combined with cognitive and value-based processes. Timmer, Antonaccio, Botchkovar and Hughes (2023) found that thoughtful decision-making reduced offending among adolescents with stronger moral beliefs, while Borg and Hermann (2022) earlier showed that personal values, such as respect for authority and social responsibility, similarly shaped attitudes toward crime. Together, these findings suggest that morality operates not only through emotions but also through deliberate reasoning and value orientations. However, adolescence may not fully represent Gen Z, who face distinct pressures such as higher education demands, financial independence, and social expectations around relationships and civic participation. This raises questions about whether moral regulation functions similarly across age stages and cultural settings, underscoring the need to examine Malaysian Gen Z.

2.2 Factors shaping willingness to help crime victims

This section examines factors identified in the literature as shaping willingness to help crime victims. Intervention decisions are influenced by a combination of moral evaluations, perceptions of victim responsibility, justice-restorative beliefs, individual moral identity, and relational closeness to victims (Urschler, Fischer, & Kessler, 2020; Jordan & Kouchaki, 2021; Li & Hu, 2023; Walker, Kelty, & Wong, 2024). These studies suggest that helping behaviour is not a simple reflex but develops from how bystanders interpret the victim's situation, influenced by their own values, identities, and social connections.

Moral evaluations have consistently been shown to shape willingness to assist crime victims. Urschler, Fischer, and Kessler (2020) demonstrated that perceptions of severity and victim responsibility decisively influence intervention, with blame attribution reducing willingness to help even among morally inclined individuals. This tendency to rationalise inaction has been observed across diverse contexts, including bullying (Nuha, Rahman, & Muslihati, 2025), racism (Lyons, Makinen, Arogundade, & Zacheus, 2025), and intimate partner violence (Vázquez-González & Ferrer-Pérez, 2025). These findings highlight a persistent conflict: bystanders may acknowledge harm but choose to disengage when responsibility is ambiguously assigned, revealing the vulnerability or moral motivation in real-life situations.

In contrast, Jordan and Kouchaki (2021) found that victims are often viewed as morally superior to others, a perception known as the 'Virtuous Victim' effect, which fosters justice-restorative responses. This perception influences intervention, as observers who see victims as morally superior are more likely to support them or punish perpetrators on their behalf. Building on this, Rawlings, Cook, Hasenour, Maloney, and

Smith-Lovin (2025) argued that under the justice restoration framework, people elevate victims' moral standing as a way of repairing the imbalance created by wrongdoing. Such moral elevation strengthens prosocial intentions toward crime victims, particularly when harms are perceived as intentional, where punishment and assistance are seen as necessary to restore justice.

Moral identity has also emerged as a consistent driver of prosocial behaviour. Li and Hu (2023) demonstrated that moral identity and sensitivity mediate the relationship between social support and helping behaviour. Velusamy, Ma'arof, and Hamsan (2024) extended this to Malaysian youth, showing that moral traits embedded in self-concept significantly predict prosocial engagement. Wang et al. (2025) further confirmed that both internalisation and symbolisation dimensions of moral identity are linked to helping behaviour across contexts. These findings reinforce that moral identity consistently drives willingness to help victims, though variations in its expression among Malaysian Gen Z remain underexplored.

Relationship closeness has been widely examined as a situational determinant of intervention. Kuskoff and Parsell (2023) and Walker, Kelty and Wong (2024) found that bystanders are more likely to intervene when victims are friends or family, reflecting reciprocal norms and heightened responsibility. Yet Mennicke, Brienzo, and Cacace (2025) cautioned that closeness does not consistently moderate intervention, as situational barriers may outweigh relational proximity. Earlier, Weitzman, Cowan, and Walsh (2019) observed that perceived risk and the type of violence shape intervention even among those closely connected to victims, although Mainwaring, Gabbert, and Scott (2022) noted that familiarity with perpetrators can reduce support for victims.

These findings complicate assumptions about relational closeness, suggesting that proximity interacts with contextual constraints rather than guaranteeing intervention.

These indicate that the presence of a close relationship is not a sufficient catalyst for intervention if personal barriers are perceived to be high. Based on the above research, willingness to help crime victims is likely shaped by a dynamic interplay of moral evaluations, perceptions of victim responsibility, situational feasibility, and relational closeness, emphasising the diverse dimensions of helping behaviour. How these factors relate to Gen Z in Malaysia is currently unknown.

2.3 Gaps in Knowledge

This section explains the gaps in knowledge in the literature review. Two gaps in knowledge were identified. First is the limited studies combining crime perception and morality among Generation Z in Malaysia. Second is the disconnect between moral beliefs and actual intervention. Addressing these gaps are crucial for developing culturally and generationally tailored crime prevention and moral education strategies.

2.3.1 Limited studies on crime perception and morality

The current researcher identified an apparent gap in previous studies regarding crime perception and morality among Malaysian Gen Z. Although several Malaysian studies have examined youth crime perceptions and moral attitudes (Hanapi, Yaacob, Daud, & Mansor, 2023; Tongbin & Ma'rof, 2024), these researches did not distinguish Gen Z as a separate cohort, often treating young people as a uniform group. Moreover, existing studies did not focus on the generational and underlying factors that may shape crime-related attitudes, including digital exposure, global influences, and

individualistic values (Yeo, 2023). The present study on Malaysian Gen Z is important to provide an understanding of why generational factors may result in differing perceptions of crime, morality, and bystander behaviour.

2.3.2 The Disconnect Between Moral Beliefs And Actual Intervention

Previous research identified key external barriers to intervention, such as perceived risk and relationship closeness (Walker, Kelty, & Wong, 2024; Mennicke, Brienzo, & Cacace, 2025), yet the external barriers reflect correlations without unpacking why people fail to act on moral intent. Recently, Bateman, Markovska, Serdiuk, & Bogdanov (2024) observed that moral beliefs often deter deviant behaviour, but these beliefs do not always translate into action. Sjogren, Thornberg, Kim, Hong, & Kloo (2024) linked this gap to moral disengagement, where individuals justify inaction by deactivating self-regulation, but its role in bystander intervention among young people remains unclear. This points to an intention–behaviour gap, where people acknowledge responsibility but stay passive. The application of Neutralization Theory (NT, Sykes & Matza, 1957) to Malaysian Gen Z, is examined herein to identify why individuals rationalise inaction despite recognising moral responsibility.

2.4 Theoretical framework and relevant theories

This section describes the theoretical framework that surrounds this research and elaborates on two relevant theories (Figure 2.1 is referred). The first theory involved is Social Learning Theory (SLT) by Bandura (1977). Secondly, is Neutralisation Theory (NT) by Sykes and Matza (1957). It is mentioned here that this framework may change as raw data is interpreted.

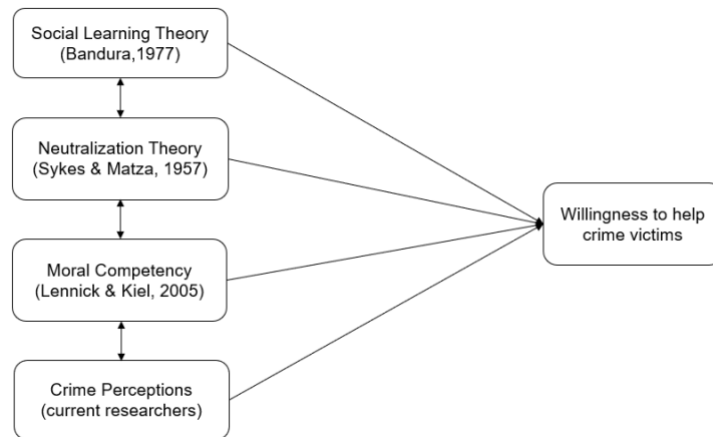


Figure 2.1: Theoretical framework of study

2.4.1 Social Learning Theory

SLT (Bandura, 1977) posits that individuals acquire behaviours, attitudes, and moral values by observing and imitating role models within their environment. The people being observed are called models, and the process of learning is called modelling (Manik, Sembiring, Padang, & Manurung, 2022). This theory emphasises that learning occurs in a social context, where individuals observe, internalise, and reproduce behaviours; that are either rewarded or perceived positively (Afumbom, 2022; Bandura, 1977). Through continuous exposure to social models, individuals develop moral reasoning patterns that guide their perceptions of right and wrong and influence their responses in situations involving crime and victimisation.

In the context of Malaysian Gen Z, family members, peers, digital influencers, and media representations; could be the models in this observational learning process. Family and peers often serve as live models, directly demonstrating behaviours and moral attitudes in everyday interactions (van Meegen, Van der Graff, Carlo, Meeus, & Branje, 2024; Wan, et al., 2022; Tongbin & Ma'arof, 2024). Recent findings show that parental involvement and peer support significantly predict prosocial behaviour among Malaysian youth, reinforcing the importance of live and verbal models (Tongbin &

Ma'rof, The Influence of Parental Involvement, Peer, 2024). Hanapi, Yaacob, Daud and Mansor (2023) found that peer pressure and parental bonding are significant predictors of risk-taking attitudes amongst adolescents in Selangor, highlighting the impact of close social models in shaping behavioural tendencies. Symbolic modelling has likewise proven effective, as Jamal and Astuti (2020) demonstrated that video-based modelling reduced bullying behaviour among Indonesian students.

Educational applications of SLT (Bandura, 1977) further illustrate its breadth. Li, Hong, and Craig (2023) and Liu, Pang, and Lam (2024), showed that SLT principles shape learning and social behaviour in classroom contexts. Khozin, Tobroni, and Rozza (2024) found that students' character development is enhanced when teachers embody positive traits, aligning with SLT's (Bandura, 1977) four processes: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Complementary evidence from Indonesia revealed that classrooms applying SLT (Bandura, 1977) principles produced higher gains in social attitudes compared to conventional settings (Muhammad Feri, Maemonah, & Naila Husna, 2022). Ahn, Hu, and Vega (2019) earlier found that learners engage more deeply with role models perceived as warm and competent, suggesting that the quality of the model, not just the presence of modelling, determines effectiveness. These findings illustrate how SLT (Bandura, 1977) not only explains behavioural acquisition but also offers valuable insights for interventions in school settings.

Aggression and criminal behaviour can also be explained using SLT (Bandura, 1977) by showing how violence is learned through observation and imitation. Bandura's (1961) classic Bobo Doll experiments demonstrated that children exposed to

aggressive adult models were more likely to imitate violent behaviours. However, Galanaki & Malafantis (2022) argued that SLT (Bandura, 1977) risks oversimplifying behavioural development by privileging external reinforcement over deeper psychological mechanisms, particularly in aggression modelling. They (Galanaki & Malafantis, 2022) contend that children's aggressive responses cannot be fully explained by imitation alone, since unconscious motives and emotional dynamics also influence how behaviours are internalised. Nonetheless, Siregar and Karmiyati (2024) provided some evidence that imitation remains a powerful driver of delinquent behaviour, showing how adolescents replicate violent acts observed in their social environment, leading to physical attacks, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility.

Earlier, Cosme's (2021) review evidenced that media portrayals of violence desensitise children to others' pain and increase aggressive conduct. More recent studies extend these critiques to modern contexts: Bastan and Dulek (2023) highlighted how violent role models in the home environment reinforce aggression, Borrego-Ruiz and Borrego (2025) found that violent video games reward players for aggression, and Khadka (2024) argued that repeated exposure to violent media normalises violence. These findings underscore SLT's (Bandura, 1977) relevance in both traditional and digital environments, particularly for Malaysian Gen Z, whose socialisation is increasingly shaped by peers, family, and online influencers. However, how this theory applies within the Malaysian context, specifically in shaping Gen Z's crime knowledge and influencing their willingness to help crime victims, remains underexplored.

2.4.2 Neutralization Theory

NT (Sykes & Matza, 1957) explains that individuals use certain strategies to protect themselves from feeling guilty or from being judged by others after they commit a wrongdoing. These neutralization techniques allow them to justify their actions, reducing the impact of their behaviour and lessening their feelings of guilt (Connolly, Borrión, & Arief, 2025). Sykes & Matza (1957) originally outlined five techniques of neutralization, which are: (1) denials of responsibility, (2) denials of injury, (3) denials of victim, (4) efforts to condemn accusers, and (5) appeal to higher loyalties (Frazier, Schreck, & Rogers, 2024). The first technique of neutralization is denial of responsibility, where offenders claim that their actions were unintentional or driven by external forces beyond their control (Tatch, 2021; Callahan, 2024). For example, as noted earlier by Wojciechowski (2020), one was forced into drunk driving because there was no alternative transport available.

The second technique is denial of injury, in which offenders rationalise their actions by minimising the perceived harm caused to victims. Callahan (2024) explained that offenders justify their behaviour by believing no one was “really” hurt, since losses could be recovered or absorbed, or because the injuries inflicted were not permanently debilitating. More recently, Haider and Musah (2025) highlighted similar rationalisations in the context of economic retribution, showing how fraudsters justify their crimes by claiming that financial losses can be compensated or that their offences are victimless. The third technique, denials of victims, focuses on explaining the harm caused by a criminal act because the person who was victimised deserved it (Wojciechowski, 2020). In addition, Callahan (2024) noted that offenders may also disregard the rights of victims who are unknown, absent, or abstract, since their lack of presence makes it easier for the offender to silence their conscience.