

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

RISK TAKING BEHAVIOUR AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENTS IN JOHOR BAHRU AND ITS ASSOCIATED FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction : Social problems among adolescents are on the increasing trend. Their involvement in different kinds of high risk behaviours could lead them into juvenile delinquency. Early adolescence is the stage where they are easily influenced. However, this is the period where they should be captured for health prevention enhancement.

Objectives : A cross-sectional study was carried out to identify factors associated with risk taking behaviours involving form one adolescents in selected secondary schools in Johor Bharu.

Methods : Using self administered questionnaires, a total of 280 respondents were recruited via multi-stage sampling.

Results : The prevalence of risk taking behaviour among respondents was 66.8%. Going to video games and karaoke centres was the most popular risk taking behaviour (46.8%) to be followed by truancy (30.7%). Among all the factors studied, being male (AOR=4.5, 95% CI 2.39-8.4), Malay (AOR=7.5, 95% CI 3.30-17.19), and having negative perception towards teachers (AOR 0.3, 95% CI 0.16-0.65) were risk factors for such behaviour among respondents. However, coming from an intact family (AOR=0.1, 95% CI 0.02-0.47) was found to be protective against risk taking behaviour.

Conclusion : Intact family structure and having positive perception towards teachers were found to be protective against risk taking behaviours among adolescents.

Keywords : Adolescents, risk-taking behaviour, social problems, family interaction

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are often said to be a group with enthusiasm, full of fun, ideas and hopes. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescents are those aged between 10 to 19 years of age¹. They are categorized according to their growth stages: Early adolescent (10 years to 14 years old); Middle adolescent (15 years to 17 years old) and Late adolescent (18 years to 19 years old). The United Nations (UN) defined adolescents as a stage in life where an individual reaches sexual maturation and as a transition period between childhood and adulthood². This is the period where important changes in terms of physical, biological, emotional and attitude will make the teenager the person he or she is. These changes can be fun and interesting or it can also be the most difficult stage in their life. All these changes or turmoil that the adolescents went through could expose them to some risk taking activities and negative influences that could lead to juvenile and social crimes, some of which are gangsterism, illegal racings, smoking and drug abuse.

Risk-taking behaviour is defined as behaviour or activities that lead to mortality, morbidity and social problems among adolescents. Adolescents, being naïve and inexperienced, get themselves into activities that may destroy them without thinking of the future consequences. They will usually bring this problem into adulthood. These problems are usually interrelated³.

The 4th Malaysia Population and Family Survey (2004), conducted by the National Population and Family Planning Board (NPFPPB), found that 13.5 percent adolescents in Peninsular Malaysia, 12 percent in Sabah and 11.3 percent in Sarawak goes out late at night without their parent's consent. Besides that 18.5 percent male teenagers and 0.9 percent female teenagers smokes. This survey also found 1.4 percent of teenagers were involved in gangsterism and 1.3 percent admitted to taking drugs⁴.

Johor Bahru, as a growing city, is definitely not free from social problems involving adolescents. Based on the statistic reported by Polis DiRaja Malaysia, from January to June 2006, the total juvenile arrested in Johore were 338 cases where 151 (10.29%) cases were students. As compared to year 2005, within the same time span, the number of juvenile arrested

in Johore was 125 and 67 cases (5.24%) and these involved students^{5,6}.

The objective of this study was to determine the prevalence of risk-taking behaviours among lower secondary school adolescents and its associated factors. Factors studied were grouped into socio-demographic characteristics, school factors, academic performance, parents' educational level, and family interaction. In this study, a teenager is considered as having had risk taking behaviour if he or she does at least one of the following: smoking, involved in fighting or bullying friends, stealing, destroy public facilities, attended video game or karaoke centre and truancy.

METHODOLOGY

This is a cross sectional study which was carried out from June to August 2007 in Johor Bahru. It involved 280 form one students from three schools which were preselected randomly after considering some exclusion criteria such as boarding schools, private schools, school for the disabled or religious school. Two form one classes were randomly selected from each of these three schools and all students in these classes were purposely chosen as respondents. They were given self-administered questionnaire. The questions were developed by researcher according literature and were validated among form one students from a school not involved in the selections of respondents. RTB included smoking, involvement in physical fight or bullying friends, stealing, destroying public facilities, attended video game or karaoke centres and truancy. This study was approved by the research and ethics committee, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia as well as the Ministry of Education. All data were processed and analysed using SPSS software, version 13.

RESULTS

Risk-taking behaviour

In this study, as many as 187 respondents claimed to have at least committed at least one of the identified risk taking behaviours. Hence, making the prevalence of risk taking behaviour among them as 66.8%.

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by type of risk-taking behaviour. Going to video game or karaoke centre (48.6%) was the major risk-taking behaviour among the

adolescents, followed by truancy (30.7%), stealing (21.4%), involved in fighting/bullying

friends (21.1%), smoking (20%) and destroying public facilities (13.6%).

Table 1 Distribution of respondents by types of risk taking behaviour

Risk-taking behaviour	Yes		No	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Going to video game/karaoke centre	131	46.8	149	53.2
Truancy	89	31.8	191	68.2
Stealing	60	21.4	220	78.6
Involved in fighting/bullying	59	21.1	221	78.9
Smoking	56	20.0	224	80.0
Destroy public facilities	38	13.6	242	86.4

Respondents socio-demographic characteristics

There were a larger proportion of male (51.4%) adolescents compared to female. Majority were Malays (81.4%) and 56.5% were from family with monthly income less than RM 2000. They were mostly (85%) from nuclear family structure whose parents were mostly (91.1%) still married. With regards to education achievement, 21.4% had five As for their year six examination (UPSR) with majority (56.6%) scored between two to four As. Majority of their parents obtained their highest education up to secondary school (76.1% for mothers and 70.7% for fathers). A greater number of fathers (29.3%) compared to mothers had tertiary education. Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents by risk-taking behaviour and socio-demographic

factors. Risk-taking behaviour was significantly higher among boys, Malays and those from single parental family. There was no significant relationship between family income or family structure and risk-taking behaviour.

Education achievement and school factors

This study found that students' achievement in UPSR (Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah) and parents' educational level were unrelated to risk taking behaviours among adolescents.

Table 3 shows the distributions of respondents by risk category and school factors (whether they like going to school and their perception towards their teachers). Risk taking behaviours were significantly lower among students who like to attend school and have positive perception towards teachers.

Table 2 Distribution of respondents by socio-demographic factors

Socio-demographic factors	Risk behaviour		χ^2	p value	POR	95% CI
	Yes (%)	No (%)				
	(n = 187)	(n = 93)				
Gender						
Male	112 (77.8)	32 (22.2)	16.148	<0.001*	1.41	1.184-1.680
Female	75 (55.1)	61 (44.9)				
Ethnicity						
Malay	165 (72.4)	63 (27.6)	17.249	<0.001*	1.711	1.233-2.373
Non Malay	22 (42.3)	30 (57.7)				
Parents' marital status						
Married	164 (64.3)	91 (35.7)	7.868	0.005*	0.699	0.603-0.810
Single family	23 (92.0)	2 (8.0)				
Family structure						
Nuclear	161 (67.6)	77 (32.4)	0.531	0.466	1.093	0.849-1.407
Extended	26 (61.9)	16 (38.1)				
Monthly income						
Less than RM1000	32 (71.1)	13 (28.9)	0.927	0.336	1.127	0.895-1.419
RM1000- 2000	78 (69.0)	35 (31.0)	0.913	0.339	1.094	0.910-1.314
More than RM2000	77 (63.1)	45 (36.9)			1 (ref. value)	

* Significant at p< 0.05

Table 3 Distribution of respondents by school factors

School factors	Risk behaviour		χ^2	p value	POR	95% CI
	Yes (%)	No (%)				
	(n = 187)	(n = 93)				
Going to school						
Happy	122 (61.0)	78 (39.0)	10.563	0.001*	0.751	0.644-0.875
Unhappy	65 (81.3)	15 (18.7)				
Perception towards teachers						
Positive	87 (57.2)	65 (42.8)	13.667	<0.001*	0.733	0.621-0.864
Negative	100 (78.1)	28 (21.9)				

* Significant at p< 0.05

Risk-taking behaviour and family interaction

The following table (Table 4) shows the distribution of respondents by risk category and family interaction. Risk-taking behaviours were significantly lower among parents who have

good interaction with their children by spending more time together and praising as a form of appreciation. Risk-taking behaviours were significantly higher among adolescents in which their parents always ignore their needs.

Table 4 Distribution of respondent by family interaction

Family interaction	Risk behaviour		χ^2	p value	POR	95% CI
	Yes (%) (n =187)	No (%) (n = 93)				
Parents spend time together						
Good	98 (58.7)	69 (41.3)	12.249	<0.001*	0.745	0.635-0.874
Poor	89 (78.8)	24 (21.2)				
Parents ignore children needs						
Always	31 (81.6)	7 (18.4)	4.338	0.037*	1.266	1.059-1.512
Negative	156 (64.5)	86 (35.5)				
Praising from parents						
Good	126 (62.1)	77 (37.9)	7.404	0.007*	0.783	0.670-0.917
Poor	61 (79.2)	16 (20.8)				

* Significant at p< 0.05

In multivariate analysis, logistic regression was done to identify the predictors of risk-taking behaviour. Being male and Malay were predictors of risk taking behaviour.

However, parents' marital status and adolescents' positive perception towards teachers were protective predictors of risk taking behaviour among adolescents (Table 5).

Table 5 Predictors of risk-taking behaviour among adolescents

Variables	Regression coefficient (B)	Standard error	Wald	Adjusted Odds Ratio	95% Confidence interval	p value
Gender						
Male	1.500	0.321	21.872	4.48	2.39-8.40	< 0.001*
Ethnicity						
Malay	2.020	0.421	23.006	7.54	3.30-17.20	< 0.001*
Parents' marital status						
Married	-2.291	0.793	8.356	0.10	0.02-0.48	0.004*
Perception towards teachers						
Positive	-1.144	0.361	10.039	0.32	0.16-0.65	0.002*
Constant	2.013	0.944	4.542	7.48		0.033

* Significant at p< 0.05

DISCUSSION

This study found that the prevalence of risk-taking behaviour is high, which was 66.8%. This was most probably due to the definition of risk taking behaviour used, if a teenager does at least one of the risk behaviour listed, they would be considered as positive. However, each activity chosen as risk taking behaviour in this study were also commonly found in other studies of similar nature.

A study by Hidayah et al (2003) in three rural development scheme which involves form 1 students indicated that the prevalence of risk-taking behaviour could be divided into 3 categories that is low risk, high risk and no risk. 51.5% students were categorized as low risk whereas 10.7% as high risk. The report also mentioned school truancy (34.4%) as the major risk behaviour. Bullying (14.4%), stealing (12.9%) and smoking (12.0%) are also reported as the common agenda among respondents⁷. In this study almost similar behaviours were noted whereby the most was visit to video and karaoke centres (46.8%), followed by absent from school (30.7%), stealing (21.4%), fighting and bullying (21.1%), smoking (20%) and destroying public properties (13.6%).

This study found a high percentage on activities such as trips to arcade centres and karaoke which is 46.8%. Research on video games among American teens by Hope et al (2007) found that prevalence of 36% and involves students who played video games at home with other family members where the total time spent on the activity was recorded⁸. The percentages between the study done by Hope and this study in Johore Bharu are not comparable because in this study the percentages of prevalence of risk taking behaviour were obtained from respondents' confession whilst Hope based on the total time spent on the risk taking behaviours.

In this research, the family income factor did not show a significant relationship with the students' involvement in risky behaviour. According to Shahidan et al in Kedah (2002), a student who smokes has a higher allowance than a non-smoker⁹. However this research did not ask about daily expenditure of the students in school. However having an intact family appeared to be a protective factor for adolescents against risk taking behaviour. This imply that presence of both parents could be hindrance for adolescents to do anti-social

behaviour compared to if only mother or father was available in a limited time.

According to Naing et al(2001) in a study in Kelantan, the probability to be a smoker is high amongst students with low academic achievements¹⁰. This study however found that there was no significant relationship between UPSR achievements and risk-taking behaviour. The same goes with the parent's educational level. This study could not show the relation with risky practices.

It was found that students who say that they like going to school, it was not easy for them to be involved with risky behaviour practices. Positive proclamation towards teachers can also shun students from getting involved in risky behaviour practices. Positive perception was important to instil the love of school hence decrease the risk of immoral activities involvement.

There were a few weaknesses in this study. Amongst others, the benchmark of risky behaviour practices findings was based on student's confession. The study also chose students from normal daily schools as respondents; therefore the information was not collected from school drop-outs.

CONCLUSION

The finding showed that the risk taking behaviour was higher, indicating that adolescents were very susceptibles. All the behaviours listed were at least carried out by certain percentages of the respondents.

However it could not be denied that intact family support is a very important factor and shown to be protective against risk taking behaviour. Hence role of family is very crucial. A good perception towards school especially teachers is another significant protective factor that could prevent our adolescents from getting involved in risk taking behaviours. School is a place where teenagers spend a lot of their time, should be 'friendly' and safe in all aspects to create a student with human capital traits. This includes the school's environment, facilities and teachers who are caring towards the students, not only in academic matters but also non-academic.

Hence school, teachers, parents should work hand in hand to ensure that our adolescents grow up in a healthy environment.

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