

QUALITY OF LIFE AND MENTAL WELL-BEING AS PREVENTIVE FACTORS TOWARDS THE OCCURRENCE OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AMONG MALAYSIAN ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

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Received: 12 February 2020

Revised: 15 March 2021

Accepted: 16 March 2021

Published: 18 April 2022

Citation:

Fitriana, M., Wood, M., Ling, W. S. and Siau C. S. (2022). Quality of life and mental well-being as preventive factors towards the occurrence of juvenile delinquency among Malaysian adolescents. *Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Studies* 22(1): 174-184.

Juvenile delinquency is a complex problem that affects the individual's social community and eventually the society as a whole. Despite the common knowledge and understanding of risk factors, the identified number of juvenile delinquency cases in Malaysia are at high influx with interventions to decrease its occurrence indicating the possible predicting preventive factors that have yet been investigated. Therefore, this paper aimed to compare the occurrence of juvenile delinquency in adolescents, in Kuala Lumpur, within the range of low and high quality of life as well as poor and good mental well-being. A causal-comparative design was used to identify the predicting preventive factors for juvenile delinquency among adolescents through the administration of Family Quality of Life Scale (FQOL), Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), and Self-Reported Delinquency to 224 respondents using a purposive sampling technique. Independent Samples t-test revealed the significant differences between the low and high group of quality of life, poor and good mental well-being, and gender differences. The regression model showed mental well-being as a significant predictor to prevent the occurrence of juvenile delinquency among adolescents. Implications of these findings contributed to the development of modules and interventions of preventing strategies for the delinquent behaviors.

Keywords: Low and high quality of life; poor and good mental well-being; delinquent behavior

1. INTRODUCTION

Witnessing news reports of adult crime is nothing out of the ordinary but when the report mentions that the crimes were committed by a minor, it becomes a controversial subject. It is due to the prevailing

assumptions that assess maturity and judgement for children and adolescents to know the moral standards of right and wrong is subject to age-appropriateness. Malaysia has been plagued by the plight of juvenile delinquency. However, insufficient effort has been put in to produce concrete results in overcoming this issue. With the hope of achieving a fully developed and modernized society, the continuous involvement of adolescents in delinquent behaviors will undoubtedly threaten the progress of society as well as jeopardize the well-being of communities and families (Jessor, 1998; Fitriana and Ramli, 2019). The effects of delinquent acts have affected the nation's economic progress by increasing government financial issues and social cost (DeLisi, 2005).

Juvenile delinquency refers to a young person below the statutory age of majority – usually less than 19 years old who habitually commits criminal acts or offences and participates in illegal behaviors (Jessor, 1992; Siegel and Welsh, 2005). However, the precise definition may vary according to the jurisdiction. A similar description of juveniles is mentioned under Section 82 of the Penal Code (2006), but with a specification of a minimum age of 10 years old. A delinquent, on the other hand, refers to an individual who has committed a criminal offence that comprises of a wider range of behaviors that are conditional to the law of the government below the age of nineteen (Shakti, 2014). Therefore, according to Malaysian laws, a juvenile delinquent specifies a young person who has been issued a court order for committing a criminal offence and although legal definitions and crime statistics may have their shortcomings and can be misunderstood, they do somehow provide indications of delinquency faced by the society.

According to Zaky (2017), adolescence is a crucial transitional stage in one's life that requires proper guidance, empathy, and parental care as it eminently shapes the person's characters. Almost all adolescents are guilty of committing at least one or more status offences (Farrington, 1987) which range from running away from home to high-end criminal activity. Siegel et al. (2003) defined criminal offences as illegal behaviors that include an expansive range of acts from harmless offences such as thievery to activities that cause harm to others regardless of age. With the increase in prevalence for juvenile delinquency among youths, prevention methods described by Hawkins (1994) involve understanding and identifying the contributing factors (risk factors) and protective factors of delinquency. Werner (2000) explained that environmental or individual vulnerability increases and individual's detriment to negative developmental outcomes. The scope of contributing factors includes individual characteristics, peers, family, school, and community that each influences the adolescent's behaviors.

Among the common prevailing factors for juvenile delinquency are personal or individual characteristics (Cheung and Cheung, 2008), family functions, (Hadi, 1990), (McGarvey et al., 2010) home environment, and peer influence that has been associated with delinquent behaviors (Fitriana and Ramli, 2019). Other research showed a link between parenting and childhood defiance (Simons et al., 2001; Tung and Lee, 2013; Pederson and Fite, 2014). Farrington (2002) however, added that low socioeconomic status could play a role as a contributing factor that influences the development of antisocial behaviors in children and adolescents. Psychological factors (Sullivan and Wilson, 1995) and child maltreatment (Hazen et al., 2008) have also indicated minor correlations in the causal factors of delinquent behaviors. Besides, Hechlinger (1992) also recognized a connection between the home and community environment with the crime, violence, and drug use among adolescents. Identifying the risk factors and its correlations with other related factors is fundamental to address and subsequently develop intervention and preventive measures curbing the problem of adolescent delinquency.

Quality of life (QoL) is one prevailing factor that influences individuals' behaviors and its consequences are cohesively related to a significant concept of health care. However, research in this area is restricted despite its flourishing reputation, due to the lack of conceptual precision on what QoL defines (Eiser, 1997; Fayers and Machin, 2000). This dissonance is due to interpretation of QoL as a collection of physical functioning and psychosocial variables (Smith et al., 1998) emphasizing life satisfaction and happiness as the key components (Fayers and Machin, 2000). Meanwhile, well-being is presumed as the most natural aspect of the subjective quality of life. According to Cella and Tulsky (1993), the quality-of-life rests on the evaluation of an individual's life satisfaction, the meaning of life and quality of happiness (Ventegodt et al., 2003) in which the true state of well-being is displayed through one's attitudes and actions. Ventegodt et al. (2003) stated that satisfaction is a mental state where needs, desires and life expectations are met, and where life becomes meaningful, thus associating the function of life with its positive outcomes.

In Malaysia, research indicated profound findings on QoL highlighting such eminent factors as improved life outlook among Malaysia adults from 2000 to 2010 (Abdullah et al., 2017) However, this Malaysia Quality of Life Index (MQLI) was reported to have little evidence on the Malaysian adolescents' components of QoL in physical and psychological well-being. When reported on life satisfaction in the school system, the older adolescents in Malaysia expressed lower satisfaction to compare to the younger adolescents who perceived better satisfaction in the school system, regulation, and setting (Lewis et al., 2011) as well as in their

environment (Chiong et al., 2016). It was also reported that Malaysian adolescents' age, family background, and gender were identified to have an impact on their overall perceived quality (Park, 2005; Chiong et al., 2016). Such an increase of QoL among adolescents was perceived due to social support by maintaining good relationships with the significant figures such as parents, sibling, and friends thus lead to a happier life (Jessor, 1992; Cobb, 1976; Pitman and Scharfe, 2010).

The adolescents' mental well-being (MWB), on the other hand, has been prominent and holistic to focus more on social, emotional, and spiritual well-being comprising mental health which becomes detrimental when such well-beings are imbalance (Yahaya et al., 2012). Lack of family relationship and family cohesion decreased in well-beings and QoL among adolescents (Barber, 1996), thus leading to the occurrence of delinquent behaviors (Hadi, 1990). Families with low socioeconomic status, financial instability, and with less discipline and control on the adolescents at home, have been associated with delinquency (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Kumpfer, 1999). Nonetheless, crime rates among males in Malaysia were much higher than females. Hussin (2005) reported in 2004 that the number of males who were arrested was 4884 while the female was only 152. Gender is often presumed and progressed as one of the strongest predictors for involvement in criminal activity (Messerschmidt, 1993) by which gender differences are of considerable importance when it comes to the development and engagement in delinquent behaviors.

The current research aimed to identify the difference in the occurrences of juvenile delinquency among adolescents in Kuala Lumpur. The study focused on the comparison of adolescents with low and high family quality of life, good and poor mental well-being, and the frequency of the occurrence of juvenile delinquency across genders. The study also aimed at comparing the predicting factors for preventing juvenile delinquency among Malaysian adolescents. Therefore, it hypothesized that (i) Juvenile delinquency would be higher in families with low quality of life as compared to families with high quality of life, (ii) Juvenile delinquency would be higher in adolescents with poor mental well-being as compared to adolescents with good mental well-being, (iii) The occurrence of juvenile delinquency would be higher among male adolescents as compared to female adolescents, and (iv) There would be a significant comparison of predictors, for preventing juvenile delinquency.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative method. To measure the three variables, a Likert scale was used to assess the respondent's quality of life, mental well-being and a self-rated delinquent activities scale to measure the respondents' prevalence of juvenile delinquency. Therefore, this study utilized a causal-comparative design to explore the related causes and comparisons of juvenile delinquency from the adolescent's quality of life and mental well-being.

The study was conducted in Malaysia within Kuala Lumpur, a metropolitan area which has a multi-ethnic population with a sample size of 224 participants. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique in a few schools and centers in Kuala Lumpur. A non-probability sampling was adopted to gain respondents from Malaysian adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old regardless of gender, race, and religion to participate in the study. Three different scales were employed and distributed to the identified adolescents, who committed delinquent behaviors and fulfill the research's inclusion criteria.

For sampling, permission was first obtained from teachers to distribute questionnaires in schools and education centers. Verbal consent was then obtained from participants who filled in online questionnaires with required criteria, while physical questionnaires required the informed consent to be signed before participation. A total of 224 questionnaires were successfully collected (124 physical questionnaires, and 100 online questionnaires) from respondents who completed the questionnaires in about 15 to 20 minutes.

The instruments used for the questionnaire were Family Quality of Life Scale (FQOL) (Hoffman et al., 2006) which consists of 25 items but only 22 items were used to measure the family quality of life (QoL), Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) (Tennant et al., 2007) which consists of 14 items to measure individual's mental well-being, and the Self-Reported Delinquency— Rochester Youth Development Study (Thornberry et al., 2003) which has 36 items but only 32 items were utilized to indicate the frequency of adolescent involvement in juvenile delinquent activities. The data collected was then compiled and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

3. RESULTS

Table 1 showed the mean scores for juvenile delinquency ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 3.902$) indicating that the respondents had low involvement in juvenile delinquent activities. The mean score for quality of life ($M = 82.27$, $SD = 15.327$) indicated that the respondents mostly experience a fairly good quality of life while the mean score for mental well-being ($M = 47.11$, $SD = 13.506$) shows that the overall respondents' mental well-being was slightly above average. The range of variable scores based on lowest and highest score indicated by respondents; QoL = (46 - 110) = 64, MWB = (16 - 70) = 54, and JD = (0 - 17) = 17.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Scores on Juvenile Delinquency, Quality of Life and Mental Well-Being

Variables	Mean (M)	S.D.
Juvenile delinquency	4.81	3.902
Quality of Life	82.27	15.327
Mental Well-being	47.11	13.506

Note: N=224; S.D. =Standard deviation

Table 2: Reliability Tests of All Measures

Scale	Items	Reliability coefficient alpha (α)
Quality of Life	22	.938
Mental Well-being	14	.952
Juvenile delinquency	32	.794

Table 2 showed high reliability for all the scales which measures the quality of life (QoL), mental well-being (MWB) and juvenile delinquency. The Cronbach's alpha for the QoL scale and MWB is .938 and .952 respectively which indicates a high level of reliability and very good internal consistency. On the other hand, the Cronbach's alpha for juvenile delinquency is .794 which indicates acceptable internal consistency and average reliability according to the descriptions of reliability by Kline (2005). Therefore, all the scales were evaluated to have adequate to very good internal consistency reliabilities in the study.

Table 3: Demographic Profile of the Respondents (Age and Sex)

Variables	N	%	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max
Age (years)						
13-14	39	17.4	16.31	1.57	13	18
15-16	60	26.8				
17-18	125	55.8				
Sex						
Male	125	55.8				
Female	99	44.2				

Note: S.D. =Standard deviation, Min=Minimum, Max=Maximum

The respondents of this study were adolescents aged between 13 and 18 years old with a mean age of 16.31 and standard deviation of 1.57. The largest proportion was from respondents in the 17-18 years old age group that made up 55.8%, while the smallest portion was made up of 17.4% of respondents in the 13-14 years old age group. Many of the respondents were males taking up 55.8% of the sample population while females only comprised 44.2% as shown in Table 3.

Furthermore, in Table 4 and Table 5, the mean score, standard deviations, and t-value of juvenile delinquency scores were shown for the low and high quality of life, as well as for poor and good mental health based on a cutoff point, determined based on the median value of each variable. Independent Samples t-test was conducted to compare the scores between low and high quality of life as well as between poor and good quality of life. For QoL, the difference in the mean score of low group ($M = 6.16$, $SD = 3.73$) and high group ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 3.69$) indicated a significant difference in the total score of quality of life [$t(222) = 5.02$, $p < .001$]. Similarly, for MWB, the difference in the mean score of low group ($M = 6.14$, $SD = 3.89$) and high group ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 3.44$) also indicated a significant difference in the total score of mental well-being [$t(222) = 5.44$, $p < .001$]. This implied that both low groups for the variables (QoL and MWB) would demonstrate higher levels of juvenile delinquency.

Table 4: Means, Standard Deviations and T-Value on Juvenile Delinquency Scores for Low Quality of Life and High Quality of Life

Groups	N	Means	S.D.	df	t	p
Low - QoL	103	6.16	3.73	222	5.020***	.000
High - QoL	121	3.66	3.69			

Note: ***p < 0.001 QoL=Quality of Life

Table 5: Means, Standard Deviations and T-Value on Juvenile Delinquency Scores for Low Mental Well-Being and High Mental Well-Being

Groups	N	Means	S.D.	df	t	p
Low - MWB	112	6.14	3.89	222	5.44***	.000
High - MWB	112	3.47	3.44			

Note: ***p < 0.001 MWB=Mental Well-being

Independent Samples t-test was conducted to compare the scores of each variable for males and females as displayed in Table 6. For quality of life, the mean score between males ($M = 81.02$, $SD = 15.87$) and females ($M = 83.85$, $SD = 14.54$) are not significantly difference [$t(222) = -1.386$, $p = .167$]. On the other hand for mental well-being, significant differences were found [$t(222) = 3.262$, $p < .01$] between males and females where males ($M = 49.67$, $SD = 13.65$) have higher mean than females ($M = 43.87$, $SD = 12.67$). This indicated that males have better mental well-being compared to females. Lastly for juvenile delinquency, no significant difference [$t(222) = 1.278$, $p = .203$] where found between males ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 3.89$) and females ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 3.90$). To conclude, only mental well-being showed a significant difference in the total score among male and female respondents while there is no significant difference for males and females for quality of life and juvenile delinquency.

Table 6: Means, Standard Deviations and T-Value of Male and Female on Juvenile Delinquency, Quality of Life and Mental Well-Being

Scales	Subjects	N	Mean	S.D.	df	t	p
QoL	Male	125	81.02	15.87	222	-1.386	.167
	Female	99	83.85	14.54			
MWB	Male	125	49.67	13.65	222	3.262**	.001
	Female	99	43.87	12.67			
JD	Male	125	5.10	3.89	222	1.278	.203
	Female	99	4.43	3.90			

Note: **p < 0.01; S.D.=standard deviation; QoL=Quality of Life; MWB=Mental Well-being; JD=Juvenile delinquency

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the independent variables significantly predict the occurrence of juvenile delinquent behaviors to which both mental well-being ($\beta = -.380$, $p < .001$) and gender ($\beta = -.155$, $p < .05$) were identified to be the significant predictors of juvenile delinquency. However, quality of life did not significantly predict juvenile delinquency as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Multiple Regression on Juvenile Delinquency Scores for Quality of Life, Mental Well-being, and Gender

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized Coefficient		
	B	Stand. Error	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	13.216	1.276		10.354	.000
Quality of Life	-.033	.020	-.129	-1.675	.095
Mental Well-being	-.110	.023	-.380	-4.841***	.000
Gender	-1.214	.497	-.155	-2.443*	.015

Note: $R = 0.471$; $R^2 = 0.222$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.211$; $F = 20.891$; $p < 0.001$, *p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001

4. DISCUSSIONS

Three out of the four hypotheses were accepted. The third hypothesis failed to be accepted as findings indicated that there was no significant difference in the occurrence of juvenile delinquency of male adolescents as compared to female adolescents. This contradicts to past studies that indicated higher rates of male involvement in juvenile delinquent activities and antisocial behaviors compared to their female counterparts (Hussin, 2005; Junger-Tas et al., 2004; Messerschmidt, 1993). However, some studies, have found that the number of females being involved in juvenile delinquent behaviors has increased over the years (Siegel et al., 2003; Cheung and Cheung, 2008). This could be due to peer pressure especially in urbanized areas (O'Donnell et al., 2011), and lower self-esteem (Junger-Tas et al., 2004) among girls found to be due to high demand in peer relationship (Dishion et al., 1995). Gender was found to be a significant predictor of juvenile delinquency, however, no significant differences were found in both genders for juvenile delinquency. Gender is often presumed and progressed as one of the strongest predictors for involvement in criminal activity (Messerschmidt, 1993; Van Voorhis et al., 1988).

Mental well-being was identified to be the strongest contributor to the occurrence of juvenile delinquency, thus leading to be the best predictor variable to prevent juvenile delinquency among adolescents. Delinquency and mental health issues commonly co-occur (Underwood and Washington, 2016) especially

following an individual's personal history and experiences of abuse, violence, neglect, and sexual victimization which would lead to adolescent's involvement in substance abuse (Siegel et al., 2003) or it may stem from low self-esteem, dissatisfaction towards life and having doubts in one's abilities (Baldwin et al., 1993). Furthermore, findings from Akhter (2015) indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between biological and physical differences with the satisfaction of life among adolescents.

5. CONCLUSION

This study served as primary information for parents and schoolteachers to be adolescents' resourceful guide to enable them promoting mental awareness and readiness to the youths as well as encouraging them to seek counselling or therapy to help cope with problems. Besides, it is imperative to parents and family members to be more vigilant in understanding the needs of their children and outsource external help to ensure the family quality of life is at a good level. In a society, people can start by being mindful of adolescent's involvement in antisocial behaviors and juvenile delinquent activities to provide them with early intervention. The current research implied family and society integrity to develop a Multisystemic Intervention Model, adopted from Walsh (2007), in preventing the occurrence of juvenile delinquency. Such a model would be the focus of further research to be used in analyzing the effectiveness of preventive measures using a qualitative approach.

Despite its limitation in data collection, which might involve social desirability bias, thus reflecting the responses of the respondents in their favorable feelings, as well as the time-consuming factor resulting in the number of males higher than female, this research provides support for further investigation of how the family quality of life and individual mental well-being are the preventive predictors for the prevalence of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia, and serves as the guidelines for the community to understand these two important preventive measures reducing the rate of delinquent behaviors among the young people. Future research investigation might also be specifically conducted on hormonal factors affecting the occurrence of the behaviors from the biological perspective among male and female participants. Researchers from other disciplines in education, economics, politics or media and communication might also continue the investigation on delinquent behaviors among the youths from their focus and viewpoints. Study on gender as the moderating factor would also be useful to investigate the effect of different quality of life and mental wellbeing among delinquent adolescents.

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