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Risk Behaviors among Indonesian and Chinese College Students

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Abstract.

College students are still in a period of building self-identity. In search of their identity, college students tend to spend more time with their peers than families. The influence of peers will increase their predisposition to get involved in risk behaviors, which can be divided into exploratory and health risk behavior (Skaar, 2009). Exploratory risk behaviors refer to behaviors which promote the increasing of positive health and educational outcomes, such as making friends and trying new sport. On the contrary, health risk behaviors refer to behaviors which increase the emergence of negative health and educational outcomes, such as using substance and skipping school. The aim of this study is to evaluate the differences in risk behaviors among Indonesian and Chinese college students. Subjects are both female and male college students from University of Surabaya (N=50) and Zhejiang University of Technology (N=50), aged 17-25 years. This is a quantitative study and data are collected using questionnaires. The results show that there is no difference either in exploratory risk behaviors ($z = -.311$, $sig. = .755$ ($> .05$)) or health risk behaviors ($z = -.380$, $sig. = .704$ ($> .05$)) between Indonesian and Chinese college students. The results will be discussed later.

Keywords: *exploratory risk behaviors, health risk behaviors, Indonesian and Chinese college students*

INTRODUCTION

As college students encompass adolescence to emerging adulthood, they are still in a process of identity development. According to Marcia (in Dumas, Ellis, & Wolfe, 2012), there are two underlying processes of identity development, self-exploration, in which individuals consider different identity-related options, such as: career paths, dating relationships, and family roles, and identity commitment, in which individuals commit to an overarching personal identity. In search of their identity, college students tend to spend more time with their peer groups than families, which make them more prone to get involved in risk behaviors. There are many researches concerning risk-taking behavior in

adolescence and emerging adulthood, but they were often focused on risk behaviors that have adverse consequences (health risk behaviors), such as: smoking, risky sexual behavior, drug use, risky driving, delinquency, alcohol consumption, and drinking and driving (Greene, Krcmar, Walters, Rubin, Jerold, & Hale, 2000; Schwartz, Forthun, Ravert, Zamboanga, Umana-Taylor, Filton, et al., 2010).

According to Skaar (2009), risk behaviors have a potential for both favorable and adverse consequences. Drinking alcohol, getting into physical fights with others, and having sex without any form of birth control are frequently accepted within peer groups, but often

adverse effects. Other risk behaviors can result in constructive outcomes because it is necessary over the course of social and academic development, but tend to be overlooked by teachers, parents, and other adults, such as: engaging in challenging academic tasks, unfamiliar extracurricular activities, and making new friends. So, Skaar emphasizes that it is necessary to define risk behaviors in a way that includes both types of behavior in order to provide a more complete conception and, in turn, to develop interventions that increase positive risks and decrease negative risks. Skaar distinguishes these different types of risk behaviors into exploratory and health risk behaviors. Exploratory risk behaviors refer to behaviors which promote the increased likelihood of positive health and educational outcomes, such as making friends and trying new sports. On the contrary, health risk behaviors refer to behaviors which increase the emergence of negative health and educational outcomes, such as using substance and skipping school.

Risk behaviors are often first initiated in adolescence (ages 10-18), however they may be even more prevalent and dangerous during emerging adulthood (ages 18-25). Arnett (in Schwartz et al., 2010) explained that many emerging adults live independently from parents, so they have more freedom to spend their time and money as they wish. Even for those emerging adults who still live with their parents, parental supervision and authority are not as strict as in adolescence and childhood. The prevalence of several types of risk behaviors that increase during emerging adulthood include unprotected sex, most types of substance use, and risky driving behaviors such as driving at high speeds or while intoxicated (Arnett; Bachman, Johnston, O'Malley, & Schulenberg, in Arnett, 2000). According to Arnett, emerging adults' risk behaviors can be understood as part of their identity explorations, that is, as one reflection of the desire to obtain a wide range of experiences before settling down into the roles and responsibilities of adult life. Emerging adults have more freedom to pursue novel and intense experiences than adolescents because they get looser parental monitoring and can pursue them more freely than adults because they are less constrained by roles. The responsibilities of marriage role and parenting role lead to lower participation of risk behavior as emerging adulthood is succeeded by young adulthood.

The aim of this research was to evaluate the differences in risk behaviors among Indonesian and Chinese college students. The researchers were also interested to know whether: (a) there were some differences in the level of exploratory and health risk behaviors between female and male college students in Indonesia and China and (b) there were some differences in the forms of exploratory and health risk behaviors between female and male college students in each country.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were female and male college students from University of Surabaya (N=50) and Zhejiang University of Technology (N=50) whose ages ranged from 17 to 25 years.

Measures

Adolescent Exploratory and Risk Behavior Rating Scale (AERRS; Skaar, 2009)

The Indonesian and Chinese version of the AERRS Part I contained 43 Likert-type items was used to measure participation in exploratory and health risk behaviors. First, the initial version was translated into Indonesian by two Indonesian researchers. Next, the initial version was also translated into Chinese by two Chinese researchers. In the participation section of the AERRS, college students were asked to rate how often they participate in each behavior on a scale of 1 (never) to 4 (often). The total scores for the exploratory risk behaviors and health risk behaviors are sums of the rating scale item scores with higher scores indicating greater participation in the behavior. Items that attempt to identify dishonesty without explicitly asking the respondent to report a level of honesty were also included in the AERRS. Paired item sets were randomly placed throughout the instrument. Each pair asks students to respond to the same behavior, but different words and phrases were used for each item in the pair. Therefore, if the student reads each item carefully, the response to each of the items should be the same and if the student does not read carefully, responses are likely to differ. All AERRSs were inspected for an acceptable endorsement of the validity items and invalid response sets, such as random responding and selection of the same response choice throughout the rating scale. Instruments were considered invalid and removed from the analysis if two or the three pairs of validity items showed dissimilar responses.

Procedure

Indonesian researchers distributed the AERRS to the college students from University of Surabaya, Indonesia, whereas Chinese researchers distributed to the college students from Zhejiang University of Technology, China.

RESULT

Differences between Indonesian and Chinese College Students in Exploratory and Health Risk Behaviors

The result showed that there was no significant difference either in the level of exploratory ($z = -.311$, *asympt. sig.* = .755 ($> .05$)) or health risk behaviors ($z = -.380$, *asympt. sig.* = .704 ($> .05$)) between Indonesian and Chinese college students. More detail results showed that: (1) there was no significant difference in the level of exploratory risk behaviors between Chinese (mean rank = 28.88) and Indonesian (mean rank = 22.12) female college students ($z = -1.645$, *asympt. sig.* = .100 ($> .05$));



(2) there was no significant difference in the level of exploratory risk behaviors between Chinese (mean rank= 22.98) and Indonesian (mean rank= 28.02) male college students ($z = -1.231$, asymp. sig. = .218 ($> .05$)); (3) there was no significant difference in the level of health risk behaviors between Chinese (mean rank= 27.10) and Indonesian (mean rank= 23.90) female college students ($z = .778$, asymp. sig. = .437 ($> .05$)); (4) there was no significant difference in the level of health risk behaviors between Chinese (mean rank= 22.60) and Indonesian (mean rank= 28.40) male college students ($z = -1.410$, asymp. sig. = .159 ($> .05$)).

Differences between Indonesian Female and Male College Students in Exploratory and Health Risk Behaviors

The result showed that there was no significant difference in the level of exploratory risk behaviors between Indonesian female (mean rank= 22.46) and male (mean rank= 28.54) college students ($z = -1.483$, asymp. sig. = .138 ($> .05$)). Though there was no significant difference in the level, yet there might be some differences in the forms of exploratory risk behaviors. Using item analysis, the researchers found out that majority of Indonesian female college students sometimes and often did exploratory risk behaviors, such as: telling the truth even if it means they would be disciplined (96%), making new friends (80%), standing up to their friends when they asked them to do something they disagreed with (80%), trying sports/games they had never tried before (72%), and spending more than two hours a day watching television or playing video games (72%). Item analysis in Indonesian male college students found that majority of them sometimes and often did exploratory risk behaviors, such as: standing up to their friends when they asked them to do something they disagreed with (92%), spending more than two hours a day watching television or playing video games (88%), making new friends (84%), trying sports/games they had never tried before (76%), standing up to people who were bullying other students (76%), telling the truth even if it means they would be disciplined (76%), and raising their hands to ask or answer questions in class (76%).

The result showed that there was significant difference in the level of health risk behaviors between Indonesian female (mean rank= 21.42) and male (mean rank= 29.58) college students ($z = -1.987$, asymp. sig. = .047 ($< .05$)). Using item analysis, it was known that only a small amount of Indonesian female college students who stated that they sometimes and often did health risk behaviors, such as: staying out past midnight on weeknights (28%), skipping school without telling their family (28%), cheating on their school work/tests (24%), driving more than 10 mph over the speed limit (24%), and driving over the posted speed limit (20%). Quite differently, more than half Indonesian male college students stated that they sometimes and often drove more than 10 mph over the speed limit (68%), nearly half

of them driving over the posted speed limit (44%), staying out past midnight on weeknights (40%), and cheating on their school work/tests (36%).

Differences between Chinese Female and Male College Students in Exploratory and Health Risk Behaviors

The result showed that there was no significant difference in the level of exploratory risk behaviors between Chinese female (mean rank= 28.68) and male (mean rank= 22.32) college students ($z = -1.549$, asymp. sig. = .121 ($> .05$)). Item analysis showed that majority of Chinese female college students sometimes and often spending more than two hours a day watching television or playing video games (92%), telling the truth even if it meant they would be disciplined (88%), making new friends (88%), trying sports/games they had never tried before (84%), standing up to people who were bullying other students (80%), and standing up to their friends when they asked them to do something they disagreed with (80%). Similarly, majority of Chinese male college students sometimes and often did exploratory risk behaviors, such as: spending more than two hours a day watching television or playing video games (88%), telling the truth even if it meant they would be disciplined (80%), standing up to their friends when they asked them to do something they disagreed with (80%), and trying sports/games they had never tried before (72%).

Finally, it was found that there was no significant difference in the level of health risk behaviors between Chinese female (mean rank= 25.94) and male (mean rank= 25.06) college students ($z = .214$, asymp. sig. = .831 ($> .05$)). Item analysis showed that about half Chinese female college students sometimes and often did health risk behaviors, such as: drinking beer, wine, or liquor (56%) and drinking alcohol (44%). Similarly, nearly half of Chinese male college students sometimes and often drinking beer, wine, or liquor (36%) and drinking alcohol (36%).

DISCUSSION

There was no significant difference in the level of exploratory and health risk behaviors between Indonesian and Chinese college students might be explained by the universality of adolescence and emerging adulthood characteristic. According to Arnett and Erikson (in Schwartz et al., 2010), developing a sense of personal identity has been recognized as the primary psychosocial task of adolescence and emerging adulthood. The development of a personal identity, meaning an overarching set of culturally-accepted, self-relevant values, beliefs, and future goals (Waterman, in Dumas et al., 2012).

Dumas et al. (2012) found that: (1) teens who were more committed to their personal identities engaged in less risk behavior (substance use and general deviancy) than their less-identity-committed peers, with teens high in both identity commitment and exploration experiencing the lowest amount of risk behavior; (2)

from their peer groups. According to Marcia, high-identity-exploration teens tend to be more autonomous and feel more personally responsible for their behavior than teens who have engaged in minimal identity exploration. College students are more likely than working emerging adults to engage in identity exploration, but less likely to have consolidated a sense of identity (Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, & Pollock, in Schwartz et al., 2010). While Bronfenbrenner (Santrock, 2003) says that the development of the individual is very oriented to the environment in which individuals live. Micro system is an environment that includes family, peers and school. Use of leisure time among adolescents is generally spent with his peer group, because a group of peers can provide feedback on the behavior of adolescents, and information about the world outside the family. Therefore, relationship with peers is a huge part in the lives of most teenagers, and can affect the behavior of teenagers.

The result showed that there was significant difference in the level of health risk behaviors between Indonesian female and male college students. Indonesian male college students showed higher level of health risk behaviors than the female. This result was similar with the result of Schwartz et al. (2010) that gender differences emerged in 7 of the 13 health risk behaviors examined (binge drinking, marijuana use, inhalant use, prescription drug misuse, anal sex, casual sex, and intoxicated driving), with men more likely than women to engage in all of these behaviors.

The result found 'telling the truth even if it means they would be disciplined' is always the top item students choose sometimes and often, either in Indonesia or in China. In Indonesia, it might be related with the religious restriction, whereas in China, it might be related with traditional culture in China. From ancient times, honesty and fair-minded are always the moral being praised. Even now, it is seen as a traditional virtue

of China. As for the reason why female choose this item more than male, might because female are more sensitive, and if they don't tell the truth, they will get hearts condemn.

The result found that 'spending more than two hours a day watching television or playing video games' is the item most Chinese students choose sometimes and often. But most females spent two hours watching television and most males spent two hours playing video games. There is a phenomena in China, 'homeboy'. 'Homeboy' means a group of youth who don't like going out; they stay at home every day and like playing games on BBS, like IT, and don't have much contact with other people. Now in China, there is a huge group of 'homeboy' and also 'home girl'. Besides, playing games and watching soap opera has been an atmosphere in college students in one dormitory will watch video or play games together, will talk about this with friends.

Both 80% percent female and male choose sometimes and often for 'standing up to their friends when they asked them to do something they disagreed with'. This reflect female and male nowadays have the same level of self-awareness.

About half of the China students sometimes and often did health risk behaviors, such as: drinking beer, wine, or liquor and drinking alcohol. This also might have a relation with traditional wine culture in China. When the whole family gathered on the festival, people will toast each other and urge others to drink to express the good blessing and cheer the atmosphere. Wine is also seen as a thing that can make people forget sadness. So in the college, when have party or something sad, some student will choose to drink.

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