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**THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON PROBLEM
BEHAVIOUR AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN MALAYSIA**

Yap Ming Hui (a)*, Koh Doh Hian (b), Yap Chin Choo (c), Tan Soon Aun (d), Gan Su Wan (e)
*Corresponding author

(a) Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kampar, Perak, Malaysia, minghui.1228@hotmail.com

(b) Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kampar, Perak, Malaysia, justinova94@hotmail.com

(c) SUNWAY University, Selangor, Malaysia, gracey@sunway.edu.my

(d) Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kampar, Perak, Malaysia, tansa@utar.edu.my

(e) Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kampar, Perak, Malaysia, gansw@utar.edu.my

Abstract

Juvenile offences are on the rise over the recent years and have led to serious societal concern in Malaysia. Thus, this study was designed to investigate the relationship of both interpersonal and intrapersonal emotional intelligence relating to problem behaviours among adolescents in Malaysia. A quantitative research design method and cross-sectional research design was selected as our main data collection method to obtain data from different age groups and demography status of populations at same period. By using multistage cluster sampling method, 600 school-going adolescents from Penang, Perak and Johor were recruited and 496 sets of questionnaires were completed. The age of the participants ranged from 13 to 17 ($m = 15.07$, $SD = 1.08$). Profile of Emotional (PEC) scale and Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) were used as the instruments to assess the variables under study. The results showed that both intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional intelligence were negatively correlated with problem behaviours. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis revealed that intrapersonal emotional intelligence is the only significant predictor in explaining adolescents' problem behaviours. This research provides empirical support to the importance of intrapersonal emotional intelligence in discouraging adolescents from developing problem behaviours.

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Keywords: Adolescents, emotional intelligence, predictor, behavioural problem.



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1. Introduction

Adolescence is known as a physiological and emotional transition period between childhood and adulthood (Santrock, 2012). The adolescence stage is the most important phase in life as individuals experience changes in cognitive, physical, and sociological growth that include cognitive capacities, maturation, pubertal changes and social roles differentiation (National Research Council, 2002; Wheaton & Clarke, 2003). As these changes progress, some adolescents might experience difficulty in coping and adapting (Coleman, 2014). Faulty adaptation tends to shape questionable personalities and characteristics that have a negative yet lifelong impact as well as evoke behavioural problems in adolescents (Lahey et al., 2008).

Behavioural problem refers to behaviour that has been marked as a problem and unacceptable by either societal or legal norms and will usually trigger some kind of social control responses (Jessor, Donovan, & Costa, 1991). Problem behaviours are inclusive of drug abuse, alcohol use, bullying, cigarette smoking, violence, truancy, and any delinquent behaviour or other norm-violated acts (Bartlett, Holdtich-Davis, & Belyea, 2007). Juvenile delinquency has become one of the social problems that draw much attention in Malaysia in recent years. According to the statistics released by the Royal Malaysian Police Bukit Aman, a total of 7,816 juvenile crime cases were recorded in 2014. Out of these 7,816 cases, 1,632 of them involved schooling adolescents. This statistical analysis has shown that there is a 57% increment in schooling juvenile delinquency from year 2012 to 2014. Besides, the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (DSW) also reported that 5,584 adolescents were involved in different types of crime related to property, people, minor offence acts, infringement of supervision terms, drug use, gamble, weapon or fire arms, traffics, school problems and others in 2013. Statistics on juvenile crime cases that reported by Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF) in 2014 showed an increase of 24% in arrestment between 2013 and 2014 in which a total of 8015 arrests were made in 2014 compared to 6802 in 2013.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as the capacity to recognize and manage the emotions of self and others (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). Adolescents with lower EI will be more aggressive and get involved in social problems like drug abuse whereas adolescents with higher EI are able to rationale the effects of the event and are less likely to get involve in problem behaviour (Mayer et al., 2000). Several past studies pointed out adolescents who showed lower level of emotional intelligence may have higher level of aggression. The results of these studies indicated a negative and significant association between aggression traits and emotional intelligence (Asl, 2018; Liau, Liau, Teoh, & Liau, 2003; Masoumeh, Mansor, Yaacob, Talib, & Sara, 2014; Shahzad, Begum, & Khan, 2013). It is also believed that higher levels of emotional intelligence, which is observable via the ability to manage stress and intrapersonal development, tend to lower the risk of physical aggression (Johnston, 2003). Further, Liau et al. (2003) and Harris (2002) suggested that secondary school students who are more involved in delinquent acts might have a lower emotional intelligence and higher aggressiveness together with lower moral standards. Thus, higher levels of emotional intelligence are deemed as having a greater understanding for self and others' emotion and hence reduces conflicts with each other. Another study that aimed to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and delinquent behaviours in students was conducted in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. In this study, emotional intelligence was comprised of self-regulation, self-

awareness, self-motivation, maturity, social skills, empathy, and spiritual awareness whereas delinquent behaviour was categorised into several components including crime involvement, drugs use, vandalism, sexual behaviour, dishonesty, and other misconducts (Chong, Lee, Roslan, & Baba, 2015). It was reported that there is a significant negative correlation between the overall emotional intelligence and delinquent behaviours. Adolescents who have higher emotional intelligence were reported to have lower tendencies in delinquency involvements. Their results also found self-motivation, spirituality and self-awareness have significant negative relationship with delinquent behaviours. The study further identified that self-awareness is significantly predictive of delinquent behaviours. In other words, low self-awareness on personal emotion tends to prevent a person to make links between feelings and thoughts (Goleman, 1998). The role of gender differences in problem behaviours among adolescents has also been examined in a couple of past studies. A study in China compared the manifestation of problem behaviours found that boys were observed to have higher externalizing problems reported by both their parents and teachers; and, girls have higher somatic problems reported by their teachers (Yang, Li, Zhang, Tein, & Liu, 2008). The study summed up that boys are inclined to externalize while girls to internalize problems. Another gender study on problem behaviours reported by Kemi et al. (2015) focusing on aggressiveness and truancy in problem behaviours and age reported that male students displayed higher aggressive behaviour and truancy than females despite both gender and age were not the direct cause. Kemi et al. (2015) also noted that aggression and truancy were not influenced by the experience of child abuse. Crime involvement among Malaysian adolescents is on the rising trend, based on the official statistics. We are concerned about the reasons behind the rise. Nevertheless, if juvenile delinquencies are not taken seriously, it is likely to expand speedily under the influence of peer pressure and recognition, as shown in a study examining how young people started to smoke via peer influence and yearning for social belongings (Frohlich, Potvin, Chabot, & Corin, 2002). This phenomenon may be applicable to all types of problem behaviour.

The present study aimed to examine the relationship of emotional intelligence (intrapersonal and interpersonal) and problem behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia. Besides, gender difference in problem behaviour was also examined. Furthermore, this study aimed to identify the predictor of problem behaviour. The expected findings are believed to provide essential information for practical implication as well as to contribute in filling the knowledge gaps in the area of interest as well as to discover new information adding to school-based resources to address delinquent behaviours committed by schooling teenagers. The findings are also beneficial to parents to understand the factors affecting adolescents' problem behaviour during puberty. Hence, effective solutions can be garnered to assist adolescents to avoid or to overcome problem behaviours.

2. Problem Statement

From the statistical result, it was assumed that numbers of crime are on the rise across the years (MCPF, 2014), especially among the adolescents. The factors that caused problem behaviours occurred in adolescent group were concerning. Besides that, most of the study population targeted in adult group people (Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2003; Limor, 2012) but less studied in adolescent group people (Chong, Lee, Roslan, & Baba, 2015). Most of studies resources about the factors (interpersonal emotional

intelligence and intrapersonal emotional intelligence) and problem behaviour among adolescent are from western countries (Brackett et al., 2003; Limor, 2012; Mehrvand & Asl, 2013) but lack of study in Malaysia. There is also lack of the studies to investigate the combination of two independent variables that chose in understanding adolescent's problem behaviour.

3. Research Questions

Based on the problem that stated, several research questions were developed and aimed in this study.

- 3.1.** Is there any significant relationship between emotional intelligence (interpersonal emotional intelligence and intrapersonal emotional intelligence) and problem behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia?
- 3.2.** Is there any gender difference on problem behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia?
- 3.3.** What are the unique predictors of problem behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia?

4. Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this research is to examine the effect of emotional intelligence and interpersonal relationship on problem behaviours among adolescents in Malaysia. Several proposed objectives were aimed:

- 4.1.** to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence (interpersonal emotional intelligence and intrapersonal emotional intelligence), interpersonal relationship and problem behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia.
- 4.2.** to determine the gender difference on problem behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia.
- 4.3.** to identify the unique predictors of problem behaviours among adolescents in Malaysia.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Participants and Procedure

A multi-stage cluster sampling method was conducted to recruit the adolescent participants studying in 12 public secondary schools. Johor, Perak, and Penang were shortlisted through a random selection among the states within Malaysia. It was estimated a total of 12 clusters with a cluster represented 40 students in a class. The list of public schools from the selected states were obtained from Ministry of Education Malaysia and assigned with a number. Random number generator was then used to select the schools. Followed, two schools and each school two classes were chosen in each of the selected state. The two classes in each school were consisted of Form 4 and Form 2 students. Subsequently, the actual sample was consisted of 235 males and 261 females, making up a total of 496 school-going adolescents aged between 13 and 17 years (Mean = 15.16; Standard Deviation = 1.065). Among the respondents, majority of them are Malays (57.5%), followed by Chinese (27.4%), Indians (12.5%) and other minority ethnic groups (2.6%) inclusive of Iban, Kadazan, and Siam. Data collection was done through survey method. Prior to data collection exercises, approval letters were obtained from Ministry of Education (MOE), Department of State Education (DSE) and the participating schools as well as parental

consent. The questionnaire took approximately 15 to 20 minutes for respondents to complete. The data collection was solely conducted by the researchers on the study.

5.2. Measures

The Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, Lamping, & Ploubidis, 2010) was used to measure problem behaviours. The scale consists of 25 items with five subscales that assess emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer relationship problems, and pro-social behaviours. The subscales can be used either combined or independently. The pro-social behaviour subscale was not relevant to the study and therefore excluded. Respondents were required to respond on the items based on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not true) to 2 (certainly true). Higher total scores represent higher tendency of problem behaviour. This scale showed a reliability value of 0.78 in this study. The Profile of Emotional Competence (PEC; Brasseur, Grégoire, Bourdu, & Mikolajczak, 2013) is a self-report questionnaire that examines how people handle emotional information by measuring both intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional intelligence (EI). Intrapersonal and interpersonal EI are the sub-concepts of emotional competence that encompass the idea of identification, expression, comprehension, regulation, and utilization of one's own and others' emotions. The scale consists of 50 items with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally not describe you) to 5 (strongly describe you). Higher scores in PEC test mean higher competency in emotional ability. The internal consistency for the interpersonal emotional intelligence (0.70) and the intrapersonal emotional intelligence (0.65) showed acceptable reliability in the study.

5.3. Data Analysis

IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0 was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, Pearson's correlation test, independent samples *t*-test and multiple regressions were used in the study. Pearson's correlation test was used to determine the relationship of problem behaviour and emotional intelligence (intrapersonal and interpersonal). Independent samples *t*-test was used to compare the inclinations to problem behaviour between male and female respondents. Finally, multiple regression analysis was utilized to identify which components in emotional intelligence (intrapersonal or interpersonal) are uniquely predictive of problem behaviour in adolescents.

6. Findings

6.1. Correlation between interpersonal emotional intelligence, intrapersonal emotional intelligence and problem behaviours

Table 01. Bivariate correlations among SDQ, Intro-PEC and Inter-PEC(N=496)

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---------|--------|---|
| 1. Problem Behaviour | 1 | | |
| 2. Intrapersonal Emotional Intelligence | -.41*** | 1 | |
| 3. Interpersonal Emotional Intelligence | -.17*** | .47*** | 1 |

The two facets of emotional competence are intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional intelligence, and they are referred to how an individual identifies, expresses, understands, regulates and uses his emotions or those of others (Brasseur et al., 2013). Pearson’s correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationship of emotional intelligence and problem behaviour. The result showed that intrapersonal emotional intelligence [$r(496) = -.41, p = .001$] and interpersonal emotional intelligence [$r(496) = -.17, p = .001$] were negatively correlated to problem behaviour (See Table 1). It hinted that the higher the emotional intelligence, the lower the risk of problem behaviours. The results showed that there is a significant negative relationship between interpersonal emotional intelligence and problem behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia. In other words, the study result indicated that the higher the interpersonal emotional intelligence, the lower the problem behaviours are being reported. Such finding is consistent with Liau et al. (2003)’s as their study concluded that adolescents who showed greater emotional exchange with peers tend to have less problem behaviour. In addition, a couple of previous studies also supported that adolescents who have difficulty in social communication with their friends or others and hard to express themselves to other people may lead to delinquent behaviours (Chong et al., 2015; Erasmus, 2007). The results of the study also reported to obtain a significant and negative relationship between intrapersonal emotional intelligence and problem behaviour, lending a support to the study conducted by Shahzad, Begum, and Khan (2013) noting that intrapersonal emotional does affect problem behaviour. This finding indicated that the lack of maturity of personal emotions may drive them prone to problem behaviour. Aside from this, intrapersonal emotional intelligence is a part of the inner self in a person. If individuals have greater control of their inner self, the tendency in developing problem behaviour is lower as individuals can control their emotions well (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Eggum, 2010). If a person has a mature intrapersonal emotional intelligence, the person is able to regulate his emotion appropriately.

6.2. Gender differences on problem behaviour

Independent samples *t*-test was used to compare gender differences in problem behaviour. The result revealed a higher mean score in females ($M = 14.08$ $SD = 5.74$) as compared to males ($M = 13.92$, $SD = 5.88$); $t(496) = -.285, p = 0.055$; nevertheless, gender differences in problem behaviour were not significant (See Table 2).

Table 02. Gender differences on problem behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia

| | Gender | | | | Mean Difference | t | p |
|--------------------------|---------------|------|-----------------|------|-----------------|-------|------|
| | Male (n= 235) | | Female (n= 261) | | | | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| Problem behaviour | 13.93 | 5.88 | 14.08 | 5.74 | -.890 | -.285 | .055 |

Notes. *M*= Mean; *SD*= Standard Deviation

This study churned a negative result that means there are no gender differences on problem behaviour. This finding echoes a past study claiming that gender did not influence the problem behaviour namely aggression and truancy among the adolescents (Kemi et al., 2015). Such finding can be explained by which both genders tend to share the similar experiences and conditions such as educational

opportunity and social environment. Nevertheless, the manifestation of problem behaviour is found dissimilar between genders. Male adolescents were more likely to externalize their problems through the expression of overt misconducts whereas female adolescents were more likely to internalize their problems via non-suicidal self-injury (Van Camp, Desmet, & Verhaeghe, 2011; Muehlenkamp & Brausch, 2012; Whitlock, Powers, & Eckenrode, 2006). Similar findings are supported by previous studies whereby female adolescents have higher tendency to engage in problem behaviour, for instance self-injury (Van Camp et al., 2011; Muehlenkamp & Brausch, 2012; Whitlock et al., 2006; Yang, Li, Zhang, Tein, & Liu, 2008).

6.3. Predictors of adolescent’s problem behaviour

The predictive model was performed by using multiple regression analysis. The result revealed that the combination of intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional intelligence at 17.3% of variance in predicting adolescent’s problem behaviour. In comparing the Beta value of both predictors, intrapersonal emotional intelligence ($\beta = -.44, p = .001$) is shown to be the only predictor as compared to interpersonal emotional intelligence ($\beta = .05, p > .05$). This finding proved that the result of correlational analyses in which adolescents who have high intrapersonal emotional intelligence tend to have less problem behaviour (See Table 3). This study identified that intrapersonal emotional intelligence is the only predictor to influence problem behaviour among the respondents. A past study that obtained the similar finding has suggested a negative relationship between appropriate emotional regulation and externalizing problem behaviours (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Eggum, 2010). It is speculated that adolescents who have a poor self-emotion control are inclined to externalize problem behaviour (Eisenberg et al., 2010; Martel et al., 2007). In other words, lacking of skills in emotion regulation and control may be prone to misconducts.

Table 03. Linear multiple regression analyses in predicting problem behaviour from intrapersonal EI and interpersonal EI (N=496)

| Criterion variable | Predictor variable | F | R ² | df | β | t | p |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------|----------------|---------|---------|-------|------|
| Model | | 34.23 | .17 | (3,492) | | | |
| Problem Behaviour | Sex (0=Male) | | | | .02 | .48 | .628 |
| | Intrapersonal EI | | | | -.44*** | -9.44 | .000 |
| | Interpersonal EI | | | | .05 | 1.07 | .284 |

Notes. Intrapersonal EI = Intrapersonal Emotional Intelligence; Interpersonal EI = Interpersonal Emotional Intelligence; *** $p < .001$

7. Conclusion

Some measures are suggested to assist adolescents in self-regulating their emotions, such as motivational talks, workshops, and campaigns. These interventional measures can be organized by inviting effective speakers to share insights on coping with adverse surroundings and negative influence from other parties, particularly their peers. Via proper intervention, adolescents can gain a better awareness of their emotional reactions and behavioural indications during high-pressure situations and

hence manage their emotional turbulence rather than be overcome by it. Empathy training should also be included in the intervention in order to cultivate the ability to think and to feel for others to enhance an effective interpersonal relationship. Besides that, organizing campaigns such as “staying calm under pressure” can benefit adolescents; for example, relaxation techniques can help to calm their mind and generate positive thinking. Additionally, schools can organize workshops emphasizing the importance of self-confidence, problem-solving, and resilience for students. These learned abilities in emotion management can be seen as a form of self-improvement that promotes maturity. The number of juvenile offenders in Malaysia has been rising over the years. This situation hints at low emotional competence experienced by youth at-risk. Thus, this study was carried out to identify the impact of emotional intelligence contributing to problem behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia. The findings revealed that both intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional intelligence were negatively connected to problem behaviours whereas intrapersonal emotional intelligence was the only predictor that influenced adolescents’ problem behaviour whereby females displayed a near-significant tendency towards problem behaviour than males. The findings of the study emphasized the need to focus on the emotional development of adolescence as a preventive measure. Efforts should be focused on teaching adolescents how to manage their emotions and how to express these emotions effectively. The findings also serve as a foundation for future studies to provide more thorough investigation into the impact of emotional intelligence on problem behaviour as well as to provide a better explanation to the public to address the issues of juvenile offenders in Malaysia.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared that there is no conflict of interest among the parties of concerned

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in this study.

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