School Violence and Juvenile Delinquency in Malaysia: A Comparative Analysis between Western Perspectives and Islamic Perspectives

Zainab Mahirah Ismail*1 & Nik Suryani Nik Abdul Rahman2

Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, Jalan Gombak, 53100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Abstract

Current study aims at discovering the possible preventative methods in reducing school violence and juvenile delinquency among children in Malaysia from the Islamic perspective. The research is mainly a library based research obtained through the collection and compilation of written sources. Modern psychologists focused more on the behavioral, biological, social, family, and cognitive as the preventative methods of school violence and juvenile delinquency without paying much attention to the human spirituality and the role of religion and faith as the predictor of adolescents’ behaviour. Based on the analysis, it is suggested that religion and faith plays important role in prevention of aggressive behaviour amongst adolescents.

Keywords: Mental health; children; adolescents; juvenile delinquency; school violence.

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1 Masters Student, Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia. E-mail: zmahirah@yahoo.com
2 Associate Professor, Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia. E-mail: nsuryani@iium.edu.my

Introduction

Background

In Malaysia, the National Health and Morbidity Study (NHMS) shows an increase in mental health related problem since 10 years ago from 13.0% (NHMS 1996) to 20.3% (NHMS 2006) among children and adolescents. Mental health among children and adolescents is a crucial for investigation as it may contribute to other problems like violence in school and juvenile delinquency. There are wide research done pertaining to mental health but most of the resources are derived from the Western perspectives. The Malaysia population is currently more than 28 million with 60% of them are Muslims and 32.2% are children from the age of 0 to 14 years old. Study conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health Epidemiological Catchment Area (NIMH- ECA) identified four major adult health disorders that commonly started in adolescent namely (1) Anxiety; (2) Major depression; (3) Drug dependence and abuse; and (4) alcohol dependence and abuse (Callicutt, 1997). Thus, it is important to look into the mental health of children as it will cause distress and impact on other aspects of life as well as difficulties to those involved with the child such as parents, teachers, and peers (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002).

For years, researches in psychology pays little attention towards positive emotion (Abdel- Khalek, 2006) but there are some studies showing a positive correlation between spirituality and mental health (Jansen et al, 2010; Abdel- Khalek & Lester, 2007; Abdel- Khalek, 2006 &2009; Mela et al 2008; Merril et al, 2009). A research conducted in Pakistan indicated that psychiatric patients who relied heavily on their faith are less depressed than those who subscribed on other types of treatments (Chaudhry, 2008). Carl Jung and Gordon Allport stated that religion can be a protector from stress and as a method of gaining social acceptance through conformity or as a mean of growth and fulfilment (Priester, Khalili, & Luvathingal, 2009). In a research conducted by Kearns, Girvan, & McAleese (1998), the Spiritual Dimensions Scale among male juveniles in correctional centres indicated that those who scored low on development of spiritual health are more likely to participate in criminal activity.

Definition of Mental Health

According to the World Health Organizations (WHO), a person who is mentally healthy are able to establish a harmonious relationship with other people, participate as well as contributing constructively to changes in his social and physical environment (Pilgrim, 2005). The Malaysia’s National Mental Health Policy defines mental health as:

“...the capacity of the individual, the group and the environment to interact with one another to promote subjective well- being, and optimal functioning, the use of cognitive, affective and relational abilities, towards the achievement of individual and collective goals consistent with justice”. (Deva, 2004, p. 170)

In Islam, a mentally healthy person is characterized by a balance in personality and having a strong self- identity (Najati, 2000/ 2006). Al- Ghazali believes that man, created by God, consists of dual components which are the body and the soul. It is the soul, which is the essence of man, where the body depends on it (Quasem, 1976).
Definition of Religiosity & Spirituality

Thorson (1998) as cited in Abdel-Khalek (2009) stated several factors needed to be taken into consideration in defining religion namely; religious group versus individual activities, religious affiliation, frequency of religious attendance or daily worship, the degree of religious involvement, as well as intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. According to Wong et al (2006), religiosity is defined as:

“...one’s relationship with a particular faith tradition or doctrine about a divine other or supernatural power while spirituality is defined as the intrinsic human capacity for self transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self including the sacred and which motivates the search for connectedness, meaning purpose, and contribution ”. (p. 163)

Social Learning and Cognition

Most parents are concerned with what their children are watching on the television. In Malaysia for example, movies and television shows are given grades according to the suitability of ages to watch the show as follows. If the show is suitable for general viewing, it will be graded as ‘U’. Movies or shows with excessive sex, violence scenes will be graded as 18 PG, 18 PL or 18 SX accordingly. The number 18 stands for 18 years of age suitable to view the show. The concern was raised because parents are worried that their children will imitate and follow the acts shown on the television.

According to the social and cognition theory proposed by Albert Bandura, behaviour is learnt indirectly through observational learning without apparent reinforcement or practice. It incorporates the role of social cognition in acquiring desirable and undesirable behaviour. This theory relates how children think of themselves and other people to which resulted in the formation of mental representations of themselves, their relationships, and their social world (Mash & Wolfe, 2010).

This theory explained that children and adults imitate behaviours by modelling other people, particularly in aggressive behaviours. Bandura conducted an experiment by using a Bobo doll in 1961 to study behaviour related to aggression. He discovered that children who are exposed to aggressive models are more likely to act in aggressive physical manner than those who are not exposed to aggressive methods. In relation to school violence and juvenile delinquency among children, they are more likely to learn violence through observation of media, parents, and community. Hence, this paper aims at discovering the possible intervention in reducing school violence and juvenile delinquency with the following guiding questions:

1. What are the causes of violence and juvenile problems among children?
2. How does Islam view mental health development among children?
3. What are the possible preventative methods in reducing mental health related problems according to Islam?
Methods

The research is a library based research obtained through the collection and compilation of written sources by Muslim scholars and Western scholars on school violence and juvenile delinquency using the search keywords like school violence, adolescence, mental health in Malaysia, violence prevention from Islamic perspective, juvenile delinquency, spirituality and mental health, religiosity and mental health, spiritual psychology.

Findings

*Figure One: Reviewed Studies on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study One</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Mother- Son Relationships of Juvenile Felon.</td>
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<td>Study Two</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Drug Use and Violent Crime Among Adolescents.</td>
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<td>Study Four</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Implementation of a School- Based Prevention Program: Effects of Counsellor and School Characteristics.</td>
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<td>Study Five</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>The Importance of the Community Context in the Epidemiology of Early Adolescent Substance Use and Delinquency in a Rural Sample.</td>
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<td>Study Six</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Online ‘Predators’ and their ‘Victims’: Myths, Realities, and Implications for Prevention and Treatment.</td>
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<td>Study Seven</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Boys and Violence: A Gender- Informed Analysis.</td>
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<td>Study Eight</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>The Effectiveness of Functional Family Therapy for Youth with Behavioral Problems in a Community Practice Setting.</td>
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<td>Study Ten</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Reducing Violence and Prejudice in a Jamaican All Age School Using Attachment and Mentalization Theory.</td>
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<td>Study Eleven</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>The Predictive Validity of the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth in Secondary Educational Setting</td>
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**Figure Two: Meta Analysis on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency**

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Based on the analysis conducted, there are only a few numbers of researches conducted on the school violence and juvenile delinquency prevention as most of the researches focused more on the methods of reducing the problems particularly from the Islamic perspectives. On the other hand, modern psychologists focused more on the behavioral, biological, social, family, and cognitive as the preventative methods of reducing school violence and juvenile delinquency without paying much attention to the human spirituality. They also did not take into consideration the role of religion and faith as the predictor of adolescent’s behavior.

Lab (2004) defined crime prevention as any action designed to reduce the actual level of crime and/or the perceived fear which involve the police, the courts and correctional setting, the design of physical environment, schools and education programme at any level, job training and placement, parental training and others. Haynie et al (2009) examined the consequences of exposure to violence on adolescents as it compromise them by affecting their behavior and psychological wellbeing. Among the types of exposure are street, peer, school violence, and exposure to family and friend suicide. In a research conducted by Sullivan and Wilson (1995), they found that among the contributing factors towards juvenile delinquency are psychological, family, sociological, and community.
Family, Genetic and Peer Factor

Relationship between family members are important as in the earliest study performed by Bourdin, et al (1985), it is discovered that mother-son relationships in families with juvenile offenders were less warm and tended to evidence less positive communication and more negative communication than non offenders. It is implied that strong bond and good communication between a mother and her children could reduce the occurrence of violent behaviour. Sexton and Turner (2010) suggested Functional Family Therapy (FFT) which had been used since 1969 as prevention and intervention programme in reducing youth behavioural problem. 35% of the juvenile offenders showed significant reduction in felony, a 30% in violent crime, and a marginally significant reduction rate of 21% in misdemeanour recidivism as compared to those in the controlled group. In a study conducted by Dishion et al (2009) on 998 respondents related to peer dynamics and early adolescent problem behaviour, school marginalization, and low academic performance suggested the importance of careful consideration of peer clustering into gangs in reducing levels of violence.

Islam stresses on the importance of marriage and a wholesome family life, maintaining close ties of mutual help with neighbours as the sense of community helps as a great preservative of mental health (Jameelah, 1986). Even when choosing a person as a husband or wife, Islam puts on the importance of looking at our future partner’s family background.

Environmental, Community and School Influences

It is noted by Chilenski and Greenberg (2009) on the importance of creating and testing new intervention strategies that target community factors in the pursuit of juvenile delinquency prevention. Dawkins (1997) based on data collected from 312 youthful offenders outlined three importance factors in predicting criminal activity which are (1) Criminal history; (2) Racial identity; and (3) Substance abuse particularly alcohol and marijuana. The number of registered counsellors and practitioners in Malaysia is still limited but Lochman et al (2009) stated the importance of screening and training of practitioners for training of evidence-based programmes related to optimal intervention implementation. Trainings conducted for counsellors from 32 schools proved that those who were cynical about organizational change had poorer quality of engagement with children and parents if they worked in school with environments that allowed staff limited autonomy and with greater managerial control.

Wolak et al (2010) proposed to provide younger adolescents with awareness and avoidance skills while educating older youths about the pitfalls of social relationships with adults and their criminal nature. Practioners are recommended to pay more attention into this matter as they are likely to encounter related issues in different context. Effective school and community programmes may be helpful in counteracting damaging socialization experiences and support boys’ healthier emotional and psychological development (Feder et al., 2010). This is due to traditional view that boys are associated with masculine socialization experiences and violence. Batastini et al (2011) study over the period of 2 years on 112 adjudicated sex offenders found that those who met criteria for
registration in the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act (2006) did not reoffend at a significantly higher rate than those who did not meet registration criteria.

**Personality and Psychometric Assessments**

In a research conducted by Cheung and Cheung (2008), bivariate statistical analysis shows that low self control is correlated with delinquency in the Chinese setting. It was also found that low self control to be linked to a range of negative social condition. They suggested that the combination of self-control and social factors in predicting delinquency that might be different across cultures. Twemlow et al (2011) proposed the use of mentalization and power issues approaches grounded in attachment theory to (1) Improving academic performance; (2) decrease victimization; and (3) Increase helpfulness. Structured Assessment of Violence in Youth (SAVRY) can also be used in educational setting for identification as well as directing intervention effort (McGowan et al, 2011).

Unfortunately, all of these studies had their limitations as most of the researchers were conducted using self-reports, cross-sectional surveys which have a limited number of respondents and focusing only to a certain group of people in the community.

**Discussion**

In recent years, several studies have explored the relationship between religiosity and mental health. Unfortunately, there are a limited number of studies done from the Islamic perspective which is more applicable to the Malaysian context as more than 60% of its population are Muslims.

As is evident from this review, several methods can be taken into consideration as a prevention of school violence and juvenile delinquency. From the family factor, it is important to enhance the relationship between the children and their parents. As the number of registered counsellors and practitioners related to this field in Malaysia is relatively low, it is essential to develop awareness on the importance of this issue as trained counsellors could increase the effectiveness of prevention programmes in school and community. In the Holy Qur’an in Surah An-Nahl, Chapter 16 verse 97, Allah (S.W.T) stated that:

“...those who perform good deeds, both men and women in faith, indeed We shall grant them a good life and We will reward them with for whatever they have strived for”.

It is also further noted in Surah Ar- Ra’ad, Chapter 13 verse 28 that:

“(Indeed) Those who have faith and their heart will find calmness by remembering The Almighty. Remember, only by remembering Allah that your heart will find its peacefulness”.

The above verses from the Holy Qur’an stated the importance of faith to The Almighty and having strong sense of spiritual dimension as a way of preventing oneself in conducting bad deeds. It is incumbent particularly for Muslim psychologist, counsellors and educators in this field to develop, test, and deliver evidence-supported intervention focused on juvenile violence.
Conclusion

In short, it cannot be denied that religion and faith play an important role in prevention of aggressive behaviour amongst adolescents. However, there is a need for future research in this area particularly in the categorization of methods in prevention of violence and juvenile delinquency from the Islamic perspectives. It is hoped that professionals who are already delivering or are designing prevention programmes will see this as useful and as addition to their intervention.

References


