Delinquency: Does religion play a vital role in misbehaviour?

Maisarah A. Malik, Abd Razak Zakaria, Mohd Faisal Mohamed & Rahimi Saad
Department of Educational Foundations and Humanities, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ABSTRACT: Too few studies have assessed the relationship between an individual and religiosity which captured depth understanding of misbehaviour; delinquency. This article examines the role of religion in shaping behaviour before partaking in delinquency and how it is able to influence decisions made in life. Moreover, this study focuses on an individual’s religious practices from childhood, teen and adult. Analysis is based on qualitative data set collected from 3 criminals who were recruited from one of the Cure and Care Rehabilitation Centre in Malaysia. This research uses semi-structured interviews, observation and recording and will be analysed through triangulation and Nvivo computer software. The research suggests that religion plays a crucial role in life as a path for an individual to avoid making mistakes.

Keywords: delinquency; misbehaviour; vital role; religion

1 INTRODUCTION

Virtually, working to prevent delinquency and to rehabilitate delinquents is challenging. It requires a wide range of understanding of reasons behind these delinquency acts. Delinquency refers to illegal acts which are committed by youth under 18 from all backgrounds and used as a common term to identify the scope of criminal behaviour involves all types of status offences (Felson, 2003; Warr, 2002) while delinquent is the youth committing the crime (Shoemaker, 2010). These acts are identified such as drinking alcohol and cigarette smoking, drug use, risky driving, early sexual activity also known as youth substances (U.S Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, Adolescent Health, 1991; Ferguson & Meehan, 2011), running away from home, truancy (Aras, Gunay, Ozan & Orcin, 2007), robbery, assault, rape and homicide (U.S Department of Justice, 1998).

Delinquency appears to happen because of a few factors and collectively loads of studies taken concerning on these delinquency acts, a few aspects can be viewed as factors especially those which are directly involved in adolescent development such as family (Amato & Jacob, 2008) who has direct influences on adolescent behaviours in three main areas which are home life, a child’s community or neighbourhood and parents. Adding in school effectiveness (Smith & McVie, 2003; McAra, 2004) on certain dimension such as teachers attachment, student against student, student against teacher, teacher against teacher or teacher against student (Fuchs, 2009), commitment to school, school violence (Debarbieux, 2006) and peer pressure (Smith, 2004).

By highlighting factors of delinquency, professionals have learnt a great deal about which risk and protective factors are relevant for screening and intervention. The promising intervention begins with school (Herrenkohl, Hawkins, Chung, Hill & Battin-Pearson, 2001) recommend a few such as conflict resolution and violence prevention curriculums, bullying prevention, afterschool recreation programmes, mentoring programmes and school organization programmes. Other interventions which focus on the surrounding are Parent Management Training (Patterson, Reid & Dishion, 1992), Functional Family Therapy (Sexton and Alexander, 2000); both interventions focus on the family while peer interventions (Coie and Miller-Johnson, 2001) and school programmes such as ‘The Good Behavior Game’, ‘The Fast Track Program’ (Herrenkohl et al., 2001) and ‘Communities That Care’ by Hawkins and Catalano, 1992 are created for adolescents’ surrounding. As the child grows older and becomes integrated into society, new risk factors related to peer influences, the school and the community begin to play a larger role. Although focusing on risk factors is important, examining protective factors that reduce the risk of delinquency is as important for identifying interventions that are likely to work.

Even though delinquency issues happened in each part of the world, Malaysia is a unique country which is multi-racial such as the Malays (53.3%), who are Muslims and form the majority in the country; while the other two main racial
groups are the Chinese (26.0%), who generally follow Buddhism and Confucianism while the Indians (7.7%), who mostly follow Hinduism. Clearly, these races blended their cultural structures to form Malaysia’s unique and diverse heritage (Ishak, 2009; Jamil & Abd Razak, 2010). Thus, this research focal point is in the Malaysian context and as the races result to different religions, in our present study; we explored on reasons these delinquents partake in crime and how much religion plays a role in one’s life to avoid misbehaviour.

By reflecting on the purposes, religion can be used as a tool to help prevent high-risk urban youths from delinquent behaviour and give them a greater sense of empathy towards others (Johnson, Corbett & Harris; 2001). Thus, additional investigation on religion factors are needed to better understand factors behind delinquency acts. However, this research is mainly focused on a few selected felons who are already arrested or behind bars. Researchers need to examine their histories, how they got involved in crime and does religion plays a role in their decision.

2 RESEARCH FOCUS

On 3rd April 2014, there was a case involving a 15-year-old girl who was resting in front of her grandmother’s house and was reportedly assaulted sexually by her grandmother’s neighbour who directly claimed he did it for fun. Thus, it triggered madness in the court house, turning to the question why such behaviour existed? This particular case portrays how delinquencies are daringly expanding among Malaysian citizens (BeritaHarian online, 2014). Early November 2013, official police statistics disputed the struggle to minimize the crime index from 2012 to 2013. It is stated the violent crimes committed in 2013 is equal to 74.9% of such incidents in 2012, which means a relatively unchanged situation. This issue however was one of the severe national debates in Parliament (Malaysiakini, 2013). The current proclamation made during Anti-Drug Campaign in Pahang, in which The Police Head Chief, Datuk Sharifuddin Ab Ghanir urged the community to report any delinquencies acts that happened around them so that appropriate actions can be taken to diminish the amount of cases in the state.

In response, there are plenty studies on the rationale of delinquency and often cases, most researchers chose problems which are crucial and vital to be revised especially when it can be used to resolve the problem of our Malaysian future pioneers. Delinquency is virtually a common issue executed by youth in every corner of the world and relatively a handful of studies have specifically examined that economy in each country affects these delinquent misbehaviour. Socioeconomic statuses either in urban or rural areas have influence on individuals to participate in crime (Fergusson, Swain-Campbell, Horwood, 2004, Wilkinson, Pickett, 2009 & Tesser, 1995). This can easily be understood as the world will keep on circling so as lives, in order to survive in lives, economy plays a major role in one's life. Affirmative studies show that these delinquents are rational and well aware of their decisions in executing crimes along with a variety of motives or to fulfill personal needs like greed in having extra cash or jealousy to have what others can. Furthermore, some felons plainly act in crime because they needed to; they steal because money is required. (Siegel, 2005; Horstkotter, Beghman, Corine, Krumreich & Guido, 2005). However, Machin & Meghir (2004) stress that not only insecure economy and low wages but also the environment of the neighbourhood aids the act of delinquencies.

The abundance of emergent data derived from a qualitative study indicates that the delinquents are acting according to their environment and neighbourhood; it just happened to them (Horstkotter et al. 2005). Earlier studies (Sampson, Jeffery & Thomas, 2002; Hoffman 2002) concludes that underprivileged locales and disorder neighbourhoods are likely to be recognized as crime areas due to insufficient facilities and less connections between the neighbour; disorganized areas affect the social activities among the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, continued study also showed that disorganized areas not only affecting the economy but also the social aspect called ‘Collective efficacy’; (Sampson, 2006) residents who concern and engage in each other lives. Destroying collective efficacy will make a huge turn to delinquency. Another related factor with the neighbourhood is the environmental factors like parents and peers (Caspi, Brent & Rebeca, 2005).

Continuing the idea of Caspi et al., some studies during early 20th century, suggest environmental interferences such as parenting and peer factors do shape an individual to become a delinquent (Garnier & Stein, 2002 & Maxwell, 2002). In some longitudinal studies (Farrington 2002, Loeb 2008, Farrington, Coid & Murray 2009) highlight that family (parenting, reinforcement or motivation) becomes a predictor in a child’s conviction. These surveys indicate that having convicted or arrested family members mostly influence the younger members to commit crime later in their behavioural development. In relation to McAra & McVie (2005) who emphasize on the term called ‘usual suspect’, once a person is stamped as a menace or trouble maker, the label will stay along with them even though the suspect intended to be better. Thus, such treatment tailors them to stay as felons.
On the other hand, other studies show that friends also play vital roles in one's misbehaviour particularly throughout their adolescent years as peers share more amount of time with them compared to family (Regnerus, 2002). On top of that, peer promotes types of crime according to their age from primary to middle, for instance; addiction to illegal substances may happened in middle school and not primary. Also types of delinquency which requires them to be in group such vandalism and bullying (Wright, Nichols, Graber, Brooks-Gun & Botvin (2004). Nonetheless, Smith (2004) indicates a link between being a prey or victim regularly change them to be the offender, part of it because they spent too much time with their friends in school.

Apart from family and school, Smith (2006) mentioned that school affects the later development of misbehaviour pattern and criminal demeanour. There is a broad consensus that school is part of delinquency and crime but with different aspects; for example school climate, teachers’ perception and school economic support. Some researches centre the school climate which permits delinquency and range of crimes; such as truancy, bullying, drugs and vandalism (Carra, 2009; Jenkin, 1997 & Karworski, 2008). While other researches investigate on the community within the school such as peers and teachers (Smith, 2006 & Siege, 2005). Even though both are looking on the same aspect, they end up with slightly different results. Smith (2006) mentioned that an attachment between students and teachers are related to lower the level of misbehaviour whereas Siege (2005) indicates that the community tends to label the students; once an individual is viewed as bad, it is more likely the person is seen as a deviant and gradually proposed him to a career as criminal.

For these reasons, the meaning of delinquency have been discussed in almost all factors such as economy status, neighbourhood, environmental aspects; family and peers, a few criteria of school; the climate, the relationship between teachers and the economic status. However, what remains to be explored is a study in relation to religion and focuses Malaysia’s delinquency issues. Despite an increasing interest in studies and cases on delinquencies in Malaysia, it is surprising to know that only little research on the matter have been done especially in the perspective of religion; Islam. Very few studies have focused on the impact of religion and delinquency acts among Malaysian descriptively and conceptually.

Hence, this study positively gives new data or variables which can help to minimize delinquency issues in future. Regnerus (2003) reveals that helpful influence of religion in youth help them to promote positive prosocial outcomes. Most of the studies focus on delinquents’ outside factors and less on the spiritual insight. This research will focus on the delinquents’ life experiences as well as religion in their lives, their family, friends and school practices. The main focus is to understand how an individual decides to be a delinquent and how much religion plays a role in their behaviour during their childhood, teenage and adult eras.

3 RESEARCH PURPOSES

This research aims to understand the criminal way of living during childhood before participating in delinquency and the reason such negative steps taken by these delinquents in the very beginning, factors behind such decisions to partake in delinquency and does religion plays a role in their decision.

4 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research are:

1. To investigate the factors of transition from righteous individual to be a delinquent.
2. To know how Islam is taught throughout their lives; childhood, teen and adult.
3. To see whether a good foundation of religion can sustain within an individual from childhood until adult.
4. To see the persistent of practicing Islam way of lives in their social lives.
5. To examine the affect of practicing Islam in tailoring them before, while and after they commit delinquency.

5 METHODOLOGY

Research is a process consisting a few systematic steps to understand various aspects of the world (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Merriam, 1998). This particular research is to comprehend how the religion affects an individual’s decision in misbehaviour. The whole process is specified to remark these research questions: (i) How religion practices are taught in their lives in each era of lives: a) Childhood b) Teenager and c) Adult, (ii) To what extent the foundation of religion can sustain from childhood to teenagers and adult, (iii) To what degree is religion practices applied in their social lives and (iv) To what extent religion plays a role in tailoring their lives before and after partaking in delinquency.

This chapter will elaborate and justify reasons of using qualitative approach as the main method.
Besides that, there will be thorough explanations on these elements; chosen case study and research design which include the researcher's roles, selected location, the respondents, research procedure as well as the process of collecting the data.

Subsequently, there is the explanation of the data analysis where the narrative analysis is chosen along with the Nvivo 9 software to analyse the data, the strategy taken to increase data trustworthiness and also ethical issues faced by the researcher. At the end of this chapter, the researcher will point out some experiences which may influence the process of analysing the data as real face to face interviews with criminals is not an easy task to do.

6 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research is seen as an organized and analytical process which builds up s researcher's understanding on certain issues incorporated with the world (Creswell, 2003). This methodical process includes these three frameworks; i) philosophical inference or hunch regarding a matter, ii) the research's procedures of inquiring into the matter and iii) precise procedure of methods which include collecting data, analysing and writing (Creswell, 2003, 1994). These three elements will determine the success of this research considering the suitable choice of research designs to cater to the research problem. Research design allows plans in ideas to be carried out in the literature as well as to be easily read by the audiences and also to be recognized to support the research process.

This research is based on qualitative design as its main purpose is to understand the reasons behind why these delinquents chose to partake in misbehaviour activities, how religion affects their lives from being a child until an adult and does the foundation of religion taught play a role in delinquent's misbehavior. These desires require adequate understanding of the delinquents, compassionate to the whole process and responses from researcher and participants.

Through this research, researcher is directly involved as most of the process of inquiring information require researcher's full involvement. Thus, qualitative research is chosen because the methodologies used are relevant and able to fulfil the research question problems.

7 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is a research that requires a natural setting of social world and captures the richness of the situation (Yin, 2011). This particular research attempts to unravel, broaden or deepen the motives and understanding of how things came to be the way they are (Yin, 2011; Drew, 2009). Thus, to comprehend the situation, researcher needs to build a solid understanding of the phenomenal journey before making it as a matter to be studied. Furthermore, as the world is occupied with diverse individuals, each is subject to different perspectives which offer wide interesting topics to be selected (Haberman; 1996, Yin, 2011; Creswell; 2009). This variety of individualization results in enormous result in life which design the world. By comprehending the uniqueness of each life, researcher needs to investigate experienced respondents who spent an amount of time on the situation and it is called as ‘emic’ perspectives (Yin, 2011; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002).

As qualitative research takes a rapid and deep learning curve into an issue which may contribute new emergent concepts which explain human social behaviour (Yin, 2011). This act of not to test the existing theories but to build or develop empirical theory indicates that qualitative research is also an inductive research (Yin, 2011; Maxwell, 2005; Creswell, 2003). Besides that, this research involves uncovering insights which requires time, thought and creativity. Based on the elements, researcher needs to acquire skills of checking and valuing the interconnection from each component carried out in the research; the research questions, theoretical and conceptual framework also are the methodologies used to achieve the research objectives. All of these highlight the importance of interaction, flexibility and fluidity (Maxwell, 2005).

Throughout this research, the issues raised involve a review on how a person changes from being righteous to a delinquent and the influence of religion in tailoring the decision making. These issues portray the necessity for research to directly probe and grasp the reasons of changing one’s behaviour. In this context, detailed description, narrative and inductive are part of shaping a concrete explanation for the issues (Yin, 2011 & 1994). In order to accomplish; observation and interviews are the most apt approaches for the research. All of the characters mentioned are a few components that exist in qualitative research which clearly assists to achieve the research’s objectives.

REFERENCES


Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.


