Religious practices in delinquents

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ABSTRACT: Too few studies have assessed the relationship between an individual and religiousity, which captured depth understanding of misbehavior, delinquency. This article investigates the role of religion in behavior before partaking in delinquency and how it is able to influence the decisions made in life. Moreover, this study focuses on the individual’s religious practices from childhood, teen, and adult. Analysis is based on qualitative data set collected from 4 delinquents who are already convicted and still serving their sentences in the Henry Gurney School (juvenile school). This research uses focus group interviews and personal notes which are combined and arranged into N-vivo software. The research suggests that being close to parents benefit their religious practices and their childhood is more on religious practices compared to teen lives.

Keywords: religious; delinquents; practices; misbehavior

1 INTRODUCTION

Delinquency refers to unlawful acts which are committed by youth under 18 from all backgrounds and used as a common term to identify the scope of criminal behavior involving all types of status offenses (Felson, 2003; Warr, 2002) while delinquent is the youth committing the crime (Shoemaker, 2010). These acts are identified such as alcohol drinking 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 be occurring because of several factors and loads of research concerning on these delinquency acts, a few aspects can be viewed as factors especially those which directly involved in adolescent development such as family (Amato & Jacob, 2008) who has direct instruction on adolescent behaviors in the three main areas which are home life, a child’s community, surroundings or neighborhood, 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 (Debebarbieux, 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. School programs such as “The Good Behavior Game” and “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, potential of 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. 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, after school recreation programs, mentoring programs, and school organization programs. Other interventions which focus on the surroundings are Parent Management Training (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992) and Functional Family Therapy (Sexton and Alexander, 2000); both interventions focus on the family while peer interventions (Coe and Miller-Johnson, 2001).

Even though delinquency issues happened in each part of the world, still Malaysia is a unique country, which is multi-racial as it has 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 cultures structures to
form Malaysia’s uniqueness and diversity heritage (Ishak, 2009; Jamil & Abd Razak, 2010). Thus, religion is one of the important aspects in Malaysia as and can be said as the focal point is Malaysian context, therefore, studies related to religion bring an advantage to a country like Malaysia or other similar countries. Moreover, there aren’t any religions that promote misbehavior, so it is relevant to say that being religious helps an individual to be a righteous person.

By reflecting on the purposes, religion can be used as a tool to help prevent high-risk urban youths from delinquent behavior and give them a greater sense of empathy toward 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 felonious who are already arrested or behind bars. Researchers need to examine their history of lives, how do they got involved in crime and does religion plays a role in their decision.

2 RESEARCH FOCUS

Delinquency is definitely a common issue involving the youth and it is happening around the world and relatively a lot studies have specifically examined the affect of economy to these delinquencies misbehavior. Socio-economy statuses either in urban or rural areas have the influences on individuals to participate in crime (Fergusson, Swain-Campbell, Horwood, 2004, Wilkinson, & Pickett, 2009, Tesser, 1995). This can easily be understood as the world requires money to live and even be the setter to one’s status among the citizen. Some felonious plainly act in crime because they needed to, they steal because money is required. (Siegel, 2005: Horstkotter, Beghman, Corine, Krumeich & Guido, 2005) while some because they are jealous or to fulfill their needs. However, Machin & Meghir (2004) stress that not only insecure economy and low wages but also the environment of the neighborhood aids the act of delinquencies.

Tonnes of emergent data derived from a qualitative study indicates that the delinquents are acting accordingly to their environment, neighborhood; it just happened to them (Horstkotter et al. 2005). Earlier studies (Sampson, Jeffery & Thomas, 2002; Hoffman 2002) concludes that disorder and less facilities neighborhood is likely to be recognized as crime area due to insufficient facilities and less connection between the neighbor; disorganized area affect the social activities among the neighborhood. 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 neighborhood is the environmental factors like parents and peers (Caspi, Brent & Rebecca, 2005).

Some studies during early 20th, 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 on family (parenting, reinforcement or motivation) becoming predictors in a child’s conviction. These surveys show that if a family member is charged with a crime or arrested due to misbehavior, the potential of a younger member to commit crime later in their behavior development is high. In relation to Mc Ara & Mc Vie (2005) who emphasizes on the term called “usual suspect”, once a person is seen as a trouble maker, the label will stay along with them even though the suspect tries to be better. This results in no effort being made to change to be better.

Other studies show that peers also play vital roles in misbehavior particularly throughout their adolescence years as peers share most of their amount of time together compared to family (Rengnerus, 2002). On top of that, peer promotes various types of crime based on their age instances; addicting to illegal substances may happen in middle school and while bullying by not befriending with someone has happened in primary. There are types of delinquents, which requires them to be in group with the people they know such as vandalism and bullying; definitely involving peers (Wright, Nichols, Graber, Brooks-Gun, & Botvin, 2004). Nonetheless, Smith (2004) indicates a link between being a prey or victim regularly changing 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 misbehavior pattern and criminal acts. There is a wide agreement that school is part of delinquency and crime but with different aspects; for example, school climate, teachers’ perception, and school economic support. Some researches center 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 at the same aspect, they
both end up with slightly different results. Smith (2006) mentions that an attachment between students and teachers are related to lower the level of misbehavior whereas Siege (2005) indicates that usually people starts to label an individual after involve in crime such as “pervert”, “thief”, or even “rapist” even after the person was out from prison. The label starts to follow and makes it hard for the person to change into a better person and sometimes use it as an excuse to commit crime in future.

For these reasons, the meaning of delinquency has been discussed in almost all factors such as economy status, neighborhood, and 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 focus Malaysia’s delinquency issues. Despite an increasing interest studies and cases on delinquencies in Malaysia, it is surprising to know that only a few 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’ lives’ 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 behavior during their childhood, teenager, and adult eras.

5 METHODOLOGY

Research is a process consisting of 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 misbehavior. 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 and b) Teenager, (ii) In which phase, the religious practices are well taught to these delinquents.

This chapter is conducted in a school which is controlled under The Prison Department of Malaysia and using qualitative approaches as the main method. Both interview and personal notes are used in collecting the data. Group Interview consisting of four participants for about two hours are listened to thoroughly by three researchers assisted by an expert of the matter. The expert is used to ensure the trustworthiness in collecting data as no visual recording is allowed. While personal notes consisting of a few questions related to the study are distributed to each delinquent and they are asked to write down the answers. Researchers seriously take ethics as an important matter, thus, all personal notes are confidential and participants are reminded not to put any initial or nicknames on their paper. The interviews are transcribed and personal notes are typed out and later arrange in the Nvivo 9 software to accommodate and to combine the data and also to see the patterns through the systems. The strategy taken to increase data trustworthiness and also ethical issue faced by the researcher.

6 FINDINGS

Producing a perfect child has been a dream to all married couples and sometimes to those who are not married too. We are living based on several main essential aspects such as financial, physically healthy condition, mental stability, and even religiosity. Religion is seen as a guideline to ensure an individual to stay righteous so that there would not be any negative influence or incidents to happen.

This study indicates parent as the main agent and in theory at the beginning of childhood especially in educating religious practices. All participants agreed that parents are the main roles that always applying religious advices in their lives; however, three of them specifically mentioned “mom” who influenced them the most.
“My mom. She always reminds me to follow my dad to the mosque and evensending me personally to class teaching me to read Al-Quran (Muslim bible)”

“I think my mom. She always asks me to join her each time she wants to pray. I remembered she called me and teach me wudhu.”

“Both of my parents always teach me about religious practices but my dad was not always around, he is a lorry driver. So, my mom will be the one who always send me to religious class and even teach me how to recite Al-Quran.”

Referring to the above, all participants agreed that their childhood is more observed and reminded compared to the teenagers and adults. Nevertheless, half of the participants indicate that their childhood was more on obeying and practicing the practices. Additionally, being a child at that time requires them to follow instructions and caning was part of the parents teaching methods.

“It think my childhood is strict because my mom will cane me if I did not perform my prayer (shalat)”

“My parents are strict but I know it is for my own good. Once, I lied to them, I went to play bicycle than attending my religious class (reciting Al-Quran), my sister told my dad and my dad cane my legs. It hurts a lot but since that day, I never miss my class.”

Besides that, participants also mentioned that in their teenager years there was more freedom than childhood due to their proximity and distances with their parents. All of them stressed how their teen lives are far different from their childhood. All of them agreed that religious practices start to lose it grips.

“I feel more freedom during my teen life compared to childhood. None of my friends ever advice me to pray or anything.”

“Teen. When I was a child, I have to always report myself; what am I doing, where am I going but when I started to work, I don’t have to do them anymore. Sometimes when I called my mom or visit them, she did advice me not to forget shalat but when I am on my own, I don’t do it”

“Erm my parents passed away when I was 10, then I lived with my grandfather. My grandfather is not strict like my dad. So my teen life is more freedom and no one really care about my religious practices.”

“Teen. I quit school when I was 14. I started to work at a cyber cafe in the city. My parents are in the village. Erm my friend never remind me to pray and I did not to.”

7 DISCUSSION

In growing up, there are several phases of life; childhood, teen, and adulthood. These three phases definitely influence and trigger an individual maturity in making choices either independent or dependent decision. On top of that, religion is also an element of knowledge, which needs to be instilled in individuals and these three phases of lives do differ the degree of applying religious practices. Most childhoods are dominated by the parents or adults and the degree of knowledge imparted to them is depending on the people surrounding them, which are mostly adults, parents, teachers, or the community. However, there are individuals who received great religious attention from the parents but being blocked by other factors such as friends. The control starts to lose when they enter the second phase where friends, entertainment and other influences are setting into their lives. As a result, parents slowly start to lose the grip over their child and be more understanding or supportive. The roles of planting religious practices turns to facilitating either they implement them or not. Undeniably, childhood religious practices are more secure compared to teen phase and usually, teen is the stage where people judge the success of parents in raising the children.

In comparing both stages; childhood and teen lives, most participants feel that they started to change when they entered their teen lives. They believed that being far from the parents allows them to act freely as if there are fewer eyes watching their movement. In addition, there are no loud voices instructing them to “shalat” or recite Al-Quran. Moreover, as the parents get older, their strictness and firmness gets older too. This results to no punishments being taken if they did not perform any religious practices, which is different from their childhood lives.

This study can offer a lot but some limitation drawn by the gate keeper limits the depth to be discovered by the researcher. Some limitation such as no visual recording and time provided to affect the process. These two elements are worth fighting for in future research in furthering to understand the delinquency in the aspect of religion because religion is one of the basic needs in human lives; thus, it is relevant to study the matter. Apart from that, there are issues such as time consuming and practices. As this study involves certain organization with high security, the researcher does not pass a few gate keepers and it takes a lot of time to settle for permission to access the school as well as the participants. As this involves interviewing participants who are already convicted and are still serving their punishments, it will be a bit high
affective to filter for both parties researcher and participants. Hence, it is valuable if researcher manages to do a few rounds of pilot study or meeting just to enhance trust and even practices skills to interview them well. Therefore, future research will be conducted related to the variables but more in depth.

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