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Youth Empowerment: A Criminological Approach to Crime Awareness and Prevention at North Malaysia

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Abstract- The study raised awareness on cyber-crime, sexual offenses, and drug abuse among the youth at Polytechnic Tuanku Sultanah Bahiyah. The study also assessed how much knowledge and understanding this age group had on crime, prevention, and victimization. Globally, youth are the most perpetrators of crime, Malaysia included, yet this is the age group that mostly lacks knowledge and understanding of what is criminal or not. The study took a seminar approach to address 100 participants using lecturing, open discussions, teaching aids, and dramatization of concepts. The study used a survey method using questions constructed by the seminar presenters to assess how much knowledge the youth had on crime. The study gathered that 50% of male and 20% of female participants had general information about cyber-crime in the form of cyberbullying mainly from harassment of themselves and or peers on social media platforms. On drug abuse, 100% of the males and 90% of females knew about drug abuse generally, and 60% of the males and 50% of females knew about the long and short-term effects of drug abuse. On sexual offenses, 60% of males and 80% of females generally knew about sexual abuse crimes. Future studies are recommended to hold such crime awareness programs in other locations for this age group in Malaysia.

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I. Introduction

Crime concretization programs among the youth serve as critical measures to empower will be offenders and victims before an offense is committed (Coker et al., 2015). Raising awareness on crime and its prevention among the youth is an effective way to achieve crime reduction world over (Kemshall & Moulden, 2017). This age group are a prominent and significant feature in the development of any community (LaFree, 2018), and as such, in several ways contribute to both the sustenance and destruction of society's values and principles. Youths as, described by LaFree (2018) hold the future; they are tomorrow's owners and leaders because in most parts of the world, they outnumber the aged and the middle-aged in terms of population. Besides numerical advantage, youth have energies, orientation, inventiveness, and character that can shape the security of a nation (Felker- Kantor, 2018). Through their innovativeness, imaginative, as well as physical strength, nations across the globe consider the youth to be an exigent part of the society whose moral fiber has to be molded and empowered by various stakeholders in life so that they become responsible adult citizens (Wainwright, 2018). The above assertion appreciates the pivotal role played by the youth in society but also acknowledges that, these youngsters to some extent mostly determine the degree of disorderliness and instability.

Most youths find themselves victims or perpetrators of crimes unknowingly (Chapin & Brayack, 2016), at times, become on lookers in a criminal act simply because they are not alert to wrong acts, and do not know what to do in that situation. Youths, especially emerging adults (19-24 years), are considered novices in significant aspects of life (Arnett, 2016). They are at a stage where they are struggling with graduating from teenage life where they are protected by parents into being independent young adults. It is vital that these youngsters be educated on crime and crime prevention (Tripathi, 2017) as new forms of it are cropping up, most of which this age group will be most vulnerable to like internet scams (Larrañaga, 2016). The downstream approach to crime is costly to both the victim, perpetrator, and the law enforcement agencies; crime must be prevented, controlled, or be reduced before it happens (Sadgrove, 2016).

It is crucial to impart knowledge about crime to the Malaysian youths, especially regarding cybercrime as most of them are clueless about the vast types of offenses, and dangers concealed on the internet as most of them blindly engage fashionably in social media and internet activities (Hasan, 2015). Crimes like cyber-bullying are rampant in Malaysian youth, especially in school institutions; there is a crucial need for various stakeholders to step in and educate the victims and victimizers on the criminological aspect of it (Simon, 2017). The youth in Malaysia have fallen vulnerable to the world of crime (Abdullah, 2015). Common offenses by this age group include internet fraud, cyber bullying, as well as other non-internet crimes like dating violence, and this age group commits robberies too. A worrying factor being that some of these youths are not even aware that their conduct could be a criminal offense

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(Cooter & Ulen 2016). Lack of knowledge and understanding on what is criminal or not and non-comprehension of the law, has landed some of them in conflict with the law (Hamby, 2018) as well as having some youths fall victim unknowingly. There are 'normalised' crimes by this age group, like dating violence (Espelage, 2018).

Abdul (2017) acknowledges the importance of engaging in crime reduction programs among the youth of Malaysia through awareness campaigns in efforts to compliment the Government in its Government Transformation Program (GTP). A worrisome concern is that crime is not really reducing in Malaysia, especially on violent related crimes, rather its fluctuating. There is need to widen approaches to addressing the issues of crime which are not decreasing but fluctuating (Tim, 2017), with 21 809 reported violent crimes in 2015, 22 326 in 2016 and 21 366 in 2017, and also (Crime statistics, Malaysia, 2018). There is a substantial number of Malaysian youths who continuously continue to commit crimes as noted by the rate of recidivism of Malaysian youth which, was as at 7.6% in 2016 and slightly increased to 7.8% in 2017 (Press reader, Malaysia, 2018).

II. Crime Awareness Programs

Criminologists such as Gottfredson & Hirschi (1990), Gottfredson (2017), and Cohn (1998) all simply concur that crime awareness programs are an essential part of crime reduction exercises in all communities, for all age groups. Crime prevention strategies come in diverse forms; they include community policing, urban and physical design; and neighborhood watch (Crawford & Evans, 2017). However, crime awareness and concretization programs to the community are very crucial aspects of crime control (Crawford & Evans, 2017). Such programs enhances the livelihoods of people by creating safer communities that are conscious of crime and its devastating effects (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010). An alert society can support each other on the prevention and even apprehension of offenders Gottfredson (2017). Siegel (2015) acknowledges that empowerment through knowledge on crime reduces the victimisation cost to the aggrieved and the community at large. Furthermore, Siegel (2015) advocates for crime awareness programs to empower communities as they produce the appreciation of crime and its consequences and alerting the community on new crime trends.

III. Structural Functionalism Theory

The theory views society as a single but interconnected social organ where each element in the system performs a significant function (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 2009). The theory views people as a system that is complex, but each of its parts thrives on making a positive contribution towards solidarity and stability. The characteristic of the structural functionalism theory is the recognition of equilibrium in the interdependent components of the social system (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 2009). This theory appears to be the right framework to adopt for the study. The theory is appropriate for the study because it theory views the human society as a system, which consists of interdependent and interrelated parts that work in unison to make a whole, and the elements work harmoniously for the benefit of the entire social system. The harmoniously working of the whole system enables to facilitate the actualization of the system's needs, and this enables the system to remain intact. In this study, the provision of empowerment programs through a crime awareness campaign, and concretization program worked harmoniously to aid in the efficient functioning of the society.

More so, the crime awareness program constituted various stakeholders in the correctional field who all came together in partnership with educational officers in Malaysia to raise awareness on crime and prevention to the youth. On the aspect of achieving equilibrium in society by the structural functionalism theory, criminality and other social vices are responsible for the disequilibrium occurring in the system within the context of this study hence; the engagement in awareness program facilitates as one of the means to reach equilibrium. The structural functionalism theory is shown in the table below:

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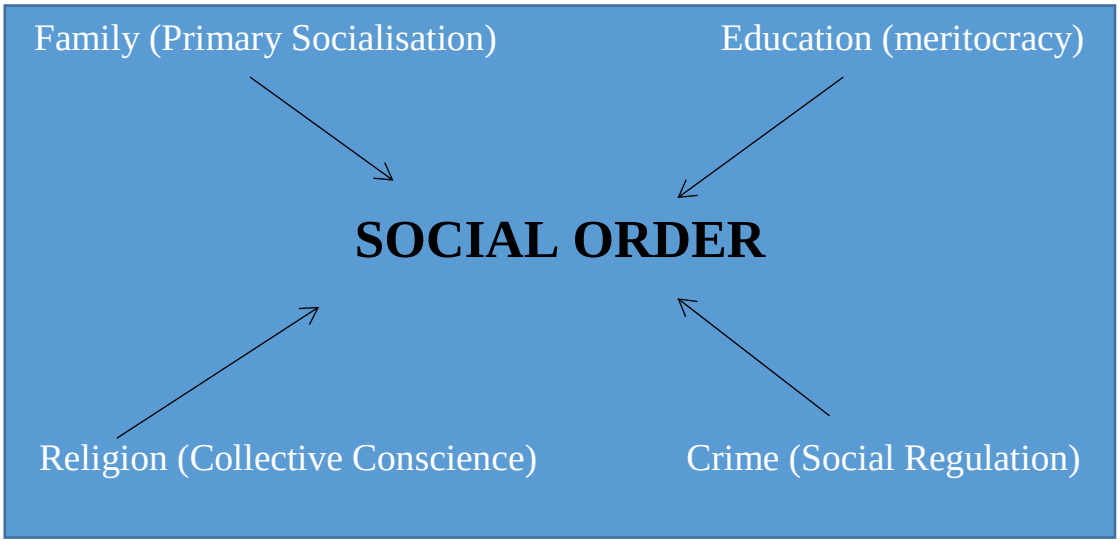

IV. Objective

The main goal of this study was to raise awareness on crime and prevention measures among Malaysian youths. The study also aimed to assess how much knowledge and understanding this age group has about the aspect of crime, prevention, and victimization.

V. Methodology

The study took a seminar approach to meet the main objective of raising awareness of crime to the youth. A full class of 100 senior students from Polytechnic Tuanku Sultanah Bihayah, Sungai Petani, Kedah were all engaged in a full- day seminar on crime awareness, prevention, and victimization. The senior students were participants because they constitute of members who all fall in the targeted age group (19-24 years). Several teaching methods, which included lecturing, open discussions, examples, and dramatization of concepts, employed. Each discipline was slotted a time allocation for presentation and discussion. The presenters constituted expects from different organizations within the correctional sciences field who were all students and lecturers from Universiti Utara Malaysia. Officers from Agensi Anti Dadah Kebangsaan addressed the issue of drug abuse while officers from the Royal Malaysian Police Department addressed the issue of cybercrime and sexual offenses.

The study also used a survey method to assess how much knowledge the youth had on crime. The questions used in the study were the standardized questions used by the Royal Malaysian Police Department, and Agensi Anti Dadah Kebangsaan for clients' knowledge assessment.

All the 100 students completed the simple questions about their knowledge on the subject at hand: drug abuse, sexual offenses, and cybercrime. The results were analysed descriptively.

The study managed to deliver the awareness program on crime to the youth at Polytechnic Tuanku Sultanah Bihayah. Cyber-crime was discussed in its numerous forms, which include mail bomb, piracy, harassment, web defacement, forgery, frauds, and phishing. Sexual offenses were also raised awareness on with a special emphasis on empowering both males and females on forms of sexual abuse, which appear acceptable in some communities, Yet, they are an infringement to one's rights. These offenses included intimate sexual assault and sexual harassment statements. Drug abuse was also raised awareness on, also the long and short term and the long-term effects of drug abuse.

The second objective for the study was to assess how much knowledge and understanding the youth have about the aspect of crime, prevention, and victimization. On cybercrime, 15% of males and 5% reported to having the knowledge or come across cybercrime with the purpose of malicious damage through electronic hacking that causes tremendous monetary loss. The 15% heard and witnessed this type of crime on television programs, not that they had experienced it themselves personally. 50% of male and 20% of female participants had highlighted to know of cyber-crime in the form of cyberbullying mainly from harassment of themselves, and or peers on social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, and Face book. Table 1 below has the descriptive statistics on the knowledge the youth have on cyber- crime:

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Offense	Gender	Category	Mean	Std Dev	Percentage
Cyber-crime	F	Hacking	0.05	1.42	5%
	M		1.5	2.76	15%
	F	Bullying	0.2	1.54	20%
	M		0.5	3.78	50 %

On the topic of drug abuse, 100% of the participants had general knowledge about drug abuse. They had learned it through various means including school, parents, media, and religious organizations. It was not a new phenomenon for all of them. However, on the short term effects of drug abuse, 97% of the males and 90% of females knew about the short term effects, which include being high, blurred vision, and lack of concentration. On the long-term effects of drugs, 60% of the males knew about the long term effects of drug abuse while 50% of females knew about it. Table 2 below has the descriptive statistics on the knowledge the youth have on drug abuse:

Offense	Gender	Category	Mean	Std Dev	Percentage
Drug abuse	F	Long effects	0.5	4.87	50%
	M	Long effects	0.6	5.1	60%
	F	Short effects	0.9	5.87	90%
	M	Short effects	1	0	100%

On the topic of sexual abuse, 100% of the youths had come across the word sexual offenses both formally and informally through teachings at school, parents, peers, and the media. All the participants understood broad general offenses categorized as sexual offenses including rape and indecent assault. However, on sexual assault, 30% of the females and 60% of males did not know that when their intimate partners force them to touch them in a manner that they do not want, it is a sexual offense. Generally, the before program, 60% of male students and 80% of female students knew about sexual offenses. Table 3 below has the descriptive statistics on the knowledge the youth have on sexual abuse:

Offense	Gender	Category	Mean	Std Dev	Percentage
Sexual abuse	F	Sexual assault	0.3	1.87	30%
	M		0.6	2.32	60%
	F	Sexual offenses	0.8	1.27	80%
	M		0.6	2.81	60%

VI. Discussion

The study gathered that female youths are more knowledgeable than males regarding sexual offenses and sexual abuse. Females during this section of the program, participated significantly more than male participants; they exhibited more general knowledge on the topic than their male counterparts did. Females have more on sexual abuse issues than males (Drummond, 2018). Furthermore, many organizations which deal with such offenses give attention on the girl child and neglect the boy child as there is no balance in empowering, raising awareness, and alerting the two (Flood, 2015). This situation leaves the boy child far behind on issues regarding sexual offenses. The community at large is more sensitive and alert to females as victims of sexual offenses compared to males (Voogt & Klettke, 2017) as most societies have not yet accepted the boy child as a victim of sexual abuse from females which leaves those brave enough to report tainted violations by females to be weak, cowards and liars (Flood, 2015).

The subject of cyber-crime, especially cyber-crime which involves money scams is unfamiliar to many ordinary people in the community especially individuals with less traffic of money in their bank accounts (Biren & Joshi, 2017) as it is a crime which targets those individuals with huge amounts cash flow in their bank accounts. Cybercrime is not usually a random act, especially cases which involves fraud, phishing swindles, bank card clowning and forgery (Nishanka, 2016) instead, this type of cyber-crime is a systematic crime in which, the victims are carefully studied and followed before they are attacked. Cybercrimes are usually organised crimes, they involve networks, and syndicates in mostly international conniving (Ngo & Jaishankar 2017).

Similarly, the study indicated that only 15% of the youths had knowledge on cybercrime, which involves money swindles. The few that reported having come across this type of crime, had witnessed it on the news; none of them had experienced to be victims of it

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directly. The findings also showed that more males knew about drug abuse and its effects than females. This could be because most drug users in Malaysia are males (Chie, 2015). In most communities around the world, very few females are involved in the act of drug abuse; mostly women come in as ponies in the trafficking of drugs, in international drug trafficking crimes (Carvalho & Soares, 2016). Most drug gangs also have few females as they are feared to sell out when they are caught (Stephenson, 2015).

VII. Implications of the Current Study and Recommendations for the Future

The study recommends the increased incorporation of more male youths on sexual abuse and sexual offenses programs so that they can be on the same page with females. There is a need for a balanced approach by all stakeholders' governmental, non-governmental, civil organizations, religious sectors, and the community to enhance awareness of sexual abuse and sexual offenses to males (Mitchell, 2017). The balances approach; will also help to reduce the prevalence of sexual offenses, as the most sexual offenders reported world over to date are males (Levenson & Socia, 2016). The study also recommends for continual awareness programs on cyber-crime. Cyber-crime is ever revolving to counter and be ahead of new advancement in techniques and technology (Brown, 2015) therefore the experience and information imparted on the youths in the Digital Youth Program could be found with little relevance shortly, as new tricks are always merging to counter the law and beat technology in this type of crime. The study also recommends future awareness campaigns on drug abuse to put more focus on the long-term effects of drug abuse.

Most of the youths, both males and, females did not know about the long term the effects of drugs. It is the tendency of this age group not to envisage or be concerned about the impact of their decisions in the long- run (Maraire & Chethiyar, 2019). Most of them leave for the here and now and how effects of drug abuse which depend on the type of drug taken like brain damage being a long-term effect of cocaine and reduced mental sharpness being the long- term effects of marijuana (Barnett et al., 2017). The study also recommends for future studies to award adequate time or narrow down on the types of crimes to be raised awareness. The study gathered that a one-day seminar was not adequate to fully discuss and exhaust the topics under discussion mainly sexual offenses, drug abuse and, cyber-crime because of the broadness and diversity.

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