


Malaysian Stereotypes on Adolescents Involved in Delinquency: Acquaintances vs Close Friends

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ABSTRACT

There are several stereotypes on adolescents involved in delinquency (e.g., dislike academic studies, lazy, aggressive, rebellious). Looking into this point, literature regarding the factors contributing to delinquent behaviours in adolescents involved in delinquency indicates that parental neglect, peer pressure, low trust in teachers, lack of self-esteem, attention-seeking and risk-taking might be possible stereotypes upon adolescents involved in delinquency. This study proposes that close friends and acquaintances of delinquent adolescents might have different perspectives in terms of stereotyping adolescents involved in delinquency. With that, this study examined the differences in stereotypes on adolescents involved in delinquency, considering the factors established by literature regarding delinquent behaviors. The study aims to investigate the perspectives on this topic between close friends to delinquent adolescents (versus acquaintances) in the Malaysian context. 160 participants (Malaysian close friends versus acquaintances) were recruited to complete an online survey. Independent sample t-test was conducted to analyse the collected data. Findings show that acquaintances to delinquent adolescents have significant higher stereotypes on the factors peer pressure and risk-taking in the Malaysian context. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings were discussed.

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Contribution/Originality: This article contributes to the understanding on common stereotypes of adolescent delinquency among the Malaysian community.

1. Introduction

Adolescents involved in delinquency has been an alarming issue as the number of juvenile cases increased year by year in Malaysia. Adolescents in delinquency refers to the patterns of behavior which is opposite of the social norms within the age and unlawful acts, such as smoking, drinking, truancy from school, physical attacks, and

vandalism (Abdullah et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2017). According to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021), the total number of juvenile offenders consists of 5,294 cases in 2018. However, repeated offenders had increased by 37.5% to 675 cases compared to the year 2017. Moreover, despite the occurrence of COVID-19 and lockdown in Malaysia, the percentage of juvenile offenders in 2020 has increased by 10.5% to 5,342 cases compared to the previous year (Abdullah et al., 2020). Therefore, the factors that are influencing adolescents to act in delinquent behavior is a huge concern in Malaysia.

Stereotypes are one of the most impactful influences on individuals, especially adolescents in their transition period. Adolescents involved in delinquency were always perceived with different labels and biases. They often placed certain labels such as, 'useless people', 'rubbish in society', and 'dark future' (Bernburg, 2019). These stigmas have created an increase of stress and impact on their life and may have highly created their first offense or repeated offense (Abrah, 2018). Close friends and acquaintances play a role in forming different stereotypes on adolescents. In the adolescence stage, friendship is crucial for adolescents in terms of scouting their way to form their own social circle. According to Yau and Reich's (2017), friendship was defined based on reciprocity as friendships are reciprocated and affectionate between peers when both individuals were found to share the same traits. Therefore, stereotypes on adolescents might differ and be biased upon acquaintances when compared to close friends.

With the evidence on adolescents involved in delinquency and juvenile delinquency from past research, most of the studies placed their focus on the factors leading adolescents into delinquent behaviors and how to prevent adolescents from getting into delinquency (Ruslan et al., 2020), however to our knowledge, there are no studies written regarding the stereotypes that applied on adolescents in delinquency that takes into account the differences between close friends and acquaintances. Therefore, the present study aims to examine Malaysians' stereotypes on adolescents involved in delinquency between acquaintances and close friends.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Terms & Operational Definition

2.1.1. Friends or Acquaintances to Adolescents Involved in Delinquency

According to Yau and Reich (2017), friends are theoretically defined as individuals who have reciprocated and affectionate between individuals when they were found to share the same traits (i.e., assumed similarity), whereas acquaintances are theoretically defined as people who you know but are not close to them (Haworth, 2020). In this study, friends to delinquent adolescents is operationally defined as those higher than the mean scores on level of secrecy, self-disclosure, and proximity; whereas those lower than the mean scores on level of secrecy, self-disclosure, and proximity will be categorized as acquaintances.

2.1.2. Parental Neglect

Parental neglect is conceptually defined as parents who did not provide the basic needs that a child needed (Dubowitz et al., 1993). In terms of neglect, the word has a range of severity where the continuum ranges from optimal care to extreme inadequate care (Dubowitz et al., 1993). Based on Straus et al. (2004) who had created the

Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale (MNBS), parental neglect comes in different neglect of needs, such as emotional needs, physical needs, supervision needs, and cognitive need.

Emotional needs are defined as the affection, social support, and companionship between parents and adolescents. Physical needs are defined as parents providing necessities (i.e., food, clothing, shelter, and medical care) to adolescents. Supervision needs are defined as parents providing limitations and controls on adolescents, educating adolescents about wrongdoings, and being aware of adolescents' physical position and social circle. Cognitive needs are defined as parents attending to provide help and guidance to adolescents' thought problems and attending activities with adolescents.

In this study, parental neglect is operationally defined with three subscales, which are the emotional needs subscale, cognitive needs subscale, and supervision needs subscale, and the combination of three subscales using the MNBS scale, as below:

- a) The total score of Emotional Needs from the MNBS scale. A higher score indicates the lack of parental affection, support, and companionship to delinquent adolescents.
- b) The total score of Cognitive Needs from the MNBS scale. A higher score indicates the lack of parental guidance to delinquent adolescents and attending activities with delinquent adolescents.
- c) The total score of Supervision Needs from the MNBS scale. A higher score indicates lack of parental control and educate wrongdoings on delinquent adolescents and paid less interest in delinquent adolescents' physical position and social circle.
- d) The total score from all three subscales in the MNBS scale. A higher score of MNBS indicates an overall stereotype of lack of parental care in general (emotions, cognitive and supervision) towards adolescents involved in delinquency.

2.1.3. Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is conceptually defined as the social influence given by their peers in a pressure context, and one needed to act, behave, think, and look in a certain way in order to feel accepted and valued by peers ([Gavin & Furman, 1989](#)). In our study, peer pressure is operationally defined as a higher score on the Perception of Peer Pressure Scale (PPPS) indicating an overall greater stereotype of peer pressure towards adolescents involved in delinquency.

2.1.4. Low Trust in Teachers

Low trust in teachers is also known as low student-teacher relationship trust where students' trust in their teachers indicates a "willingness to be vulnerable" based on the teacher's capacity to interact and behave with compassion, honesty, openness, reliability, and expertise ([Bankole, 2011](#)). In this study, low trust in teachers is operationally defined as a higher score on Student Trust in Faculty scale indicating an overall greater stereotype of low trust in teachers towards adolescents involved in delinquency.

2.1.5. Lack of Self-Esteem

Based on [Manning et al. \(2006\)](#), lack of self-esteem, also known as low self-esteem, is commonly exaggerated to the extent that low self-esteem is perceived as the cause of all evil. According to [Rosenberg \(1965\)](#), the conceptual definition of self-esteem refers to one's perception or subjective appraisal of their own worthiness, individuals' feeling of respecting themselves, as well as the level of one's hold positive or negative views about themselves. In terms of lack of self-esteem, based on the conceptual definition of general self-esteem, it is conceptually defined as one's negative perception or subjective appraisal of their own worthiness, feeling the lack of respect for themselves, as well as negative views of themselves. In this study, lack of self-esteem is operationally defined as A higher score on Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale indicating an overall greater stereotype of lack of self-esteem towards adolescents involved in delinquency.

2.1.6. Attention Seeking

Attention-seeking is conceptually defined as seeking attention when maltreatment arises or refers to when actions performed at a constant unacceptable behavior ([Mellor, 2005](#)). In this study, attention-seeking is operationally defined as a higher score on Sensation Seeker Attention Scale (SSAS) indicating an overall greater stereotype of attention-seeking towards adolescents involved in delinquency.

2.1.7. Risk-Taking

Conceptually, risk-taking is defined as taking actions that has an unclear consequence and the possible repercussions can be both good and bad ([Hertwig et al., 2019](#)). There are two types of risk-taking: reactive or reasoned risk-taking. Reactive risk-taking refers to adolescents performs risk-taking behaviors when poor response inhibition and high rewarding sensitivity ([Rosenbaum et al., 2018](#)). On the other hand, reasoned risk-taking refers to adolescents consciously deciding to engage in dangerous activities in order to reap the rewards they feel are linked with those activities ([Romer et al., 2017](#)). In this study, risk-taking is operationally defined as a higher score on the Revised- ARTI scale indicating an overall greater stereotype of risk-taking towards adolescents involved in delinquency.

2.2. Close Friends or Acquaintances

It is common in nature when individuals entitled others with the word "friends" are in a friendship and they presume their relationship to be reciprocal ([Almaatouq et al., 2016](#)). Reciprocate friends in their relationship goes bidirectional and people in closer reciprocated friendships does emotionally support each other ([Almaatouq et al., 2016](#)). This is because the level of proximity and level of disclosure higher when friendships are dyadic. Past research has mentioned that self-disclosure are one of the significant benefits in reciprocal friendship which creates a sense of emotional support ([Teff, 2017](#)). Besides, the assumed similarity is generally defined as the correspondence between how individuals describe themselves and their judgment of others based on their own personality characteristics ([Thielmann et al., 2020](#)). This states that people in closer relationships tend to assume similarities between themselves, and their friends based on their agreement ([Lee et al., 2009](#)). Hence, social categorization theory categorizes individuals close to delinquent adolescents as in-group due to shared similarities, providing an in-depth understanding of their behaviors.

On the other hand, acquaintances are commonly defined as individuals that you know but do not know well (Haworth, 2020). Based on social categorization theory, acquaintances which was categorized as out-group may have a general stereotype of adolescents in delinquency due to lower familiarity between perceivers and others (Kenny & West, 2010). Kenny and West's (2010) research also highlighted that perceivers verify their perceptions of others by using themselves as a reference point due to low friendship reciprocity levels where they rely on stereotypes to understand their behaviors. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate the differences between acquaintances and friends when it involves stereotypes of adolescents involved in delinquency.

2.3. Six Factor Stereotypes of Adolescents Involved in Delinquency

2.3.1. Parental Neglect

Parental care plays an important role during the transition period of adolescents. Literature have established that adolescents who lack of parental care are more likely to be involved in delinquency behaviors. A meta-analysis conducted by Hovee et al. (2009) found that negative aspects including neglect, hostility and rejection or a combination of all three had found significant links to delinquency. As Malaysia is an achievement-oriented nation with a moderate masculinity level (Ting & Ying, 2013), parents tend to over work and only provide materialistic needs to the children (Johnston, 2013) which induces adolescents with higher freedom of act, hence resulting in delinquency. Therefore, parental neglect plays an important role in the development of delinquent adolescents.

2.3.2. Peer Pressure

Adolescents see peers as a very important aspect in their transition period (Brown & Larson, 2009), especially in a high collectivistic country like Malaysia that emphasizes group identity within their social norm (Kawamura, 2012). Hence, peer groups became a source for adolescents to seek self-identity as research indicated that adolescents seeking identity often follow their friends' behavior to find their own identity (Levey et al., 2019). Adolescents wanted to fit into the social norm by changing their attitudes and behavior to immerse into the group norm (Simons-Morton & Farhat, 2010). Similarly, delinquent adolescents often engage in delinquent behaviours to fit into their social circle and be accepted within the group. Hence, it is important to note that there might be possibilities that peer pressure will be a stereotype to adolescents involved in delinquency in the Malaysian context.

2.3.3. Low trust in Teachers

Teachers are individuals with authority whom students are frequently in contact at school (Petrik, 2019), especially in Malaysia (Menna & Ruck, 2004). Therefore, the teacher-student relationship may contribute to stereotyping teenagers in the school compound (Nouwen & Clycq, 2016). Adolescents who are closer to school teachers tend to receive positive influences (Tanveer et al., 2012), leading to a high level of trust and positive impressions. Conversely, delinquent adolescents often face negative consequences due to implicit bias from their teachers, such as negative academic attitudes during class (Tormey, 2021). Hence, the level of trust in the teacher-student

relationship within delinquent adolescents might be reduced. This can be supported by a few study findings which explain that perceived teacher behavior is associated with students' educational experience, expectations, and openness to teachers, eventually having adjustment difficulties in school and causes low levels of trust between adolescents involved in delinquency and any school teachers (Agir, 2019; Dong et al., 2021; Özdemir & Özdemir, 2020).

2.3.4. Lack of Self-esteem

Low self-esteem can be an alarming stereotype for adolescents. Adolescents are commonly associated with academic grades to gain their self-esteem (Aryana, 2010). Adolescents, in general, with good grades tend to have a high self-esteem as they get positive reinforcements from their parents, teachers in school or even in their peer circle to gain their basic psychological needs at adolescence stage such as autonomy, relatedness and competence needs (Aryana, 2010; Zhao et al., 2021). On the other hand, adolescents with lower grades tend to have a lower level of self-esteem because of their perceived low competence in academics (Echeburúa, 2013). Hence, they would often engage in delinquent acts to boost their self-esteem, especially among delinquent adolescents (Kassim, 2006), as they perceived delinquent acts as “cool” behaviors – pseudo matures which increases their self-esteem out of academic context (Simons et al., 2018). Therefore, they are more prone to be involved in delinquent acts to replace their low self-esteem level with delinquent acts that shows competence in themselves.

2.3.5. Attention Seeking

Attention-seeking behavior was always the significant stereotype on adolescents who are involved in delinquency. They were commonly stereotyped as adolescents who were involved in purposeful violence exposures (i.e., hitting or smashing, fighting, gangsterism) in the Malaysia context as they tend to impress others and increase their feeling of superiority (Fitriana & Ramli, 2018). Research by Eaton et al. (2009) indicated that delinquency behavior is significantly linked to less parental attention to their children. Hence, it is interesting to find out whether attention-seeking might be possible stereotypes on adolescents involved in delinquency in the Malaysian context.

2.3.6. Risk-Taking

Risk-taking behaviors are also known as behaviors that seek sensations. Delinquent adolescents are commonly stereotyped as sensation seekers as they tend to seek high-risk experiences (Siraj et al., 2021; Defoe, 2021). Their age group is more inclined to suggest dangerous behaviour, perceiving that risk-taking is normalized among adolescents (Ciranka & den Bos, 2021). Therefore, the difference in perception of risk might contribute to how people stereotype adolescents involved in risk-taking. In Malaysia, adolescents have a normalised risk-taking perception due to high tolerance of ambiguity in their culture (Tymula et al., 2012), Hence, delinquent adolescents do not find it dangerous but exciting (Hansen & Breivik, 2001). But, in general, adolescents might have higher risk-taking perception as it stems from their upbringing with a strong moral code, which discourages risky activities, thereby enhancing their overall risk tolerance (Reniers et al., 2016). Therefore, the perception of risk might play a role in stereotyping adolescents who are involved in delinquency in Malaysia.

2.4. Social Categorization Theory

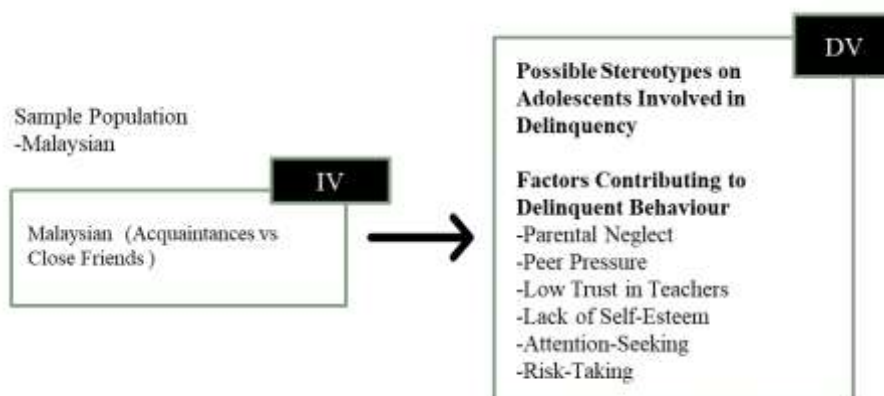
Social categorization theory explains that individuals categorize others based on the social information received, and it happens automatically (Krueger, 2001; Stoler & Freeman, 2016). In Malaysia, where collectivism is prevalent, adolescents involved in delinquency are often stereotyped based on different perspectives of others. People who are close to delinquent adolescents categorize themselves as in-group because they are cognitively similar with delinquent adolescents and vice versa (Haslam et al., 1996). The degree of friendship reciprocity and level of assumed similarity (Yau & Reich, 2017) differentiates the categorization when forming the basis of their stereotypes on adolescents involved in delinquency. Past research indicates that high levels of friendship reciprocity do not correlate with adolescent friends' prejudices and stereotypes (Ritchey & Fishbein, 2001). It also explains that adolescents perceive their friends to have similar attitudes, which inferred to lesser bias. Hence, the categorization of friendship suggested different levels of bias in stereotyping delinquent adolescents.

In summary of all the literatures regarding the variables, there is a clear pattern that can be seen that close friends and acquaintances have different biases in stereotyping delinquent adolescents based on factors contributing to delinquent behaviors. Close friends may have less bias due to proximity and self-disclosure, while acquaintances may have more due to low self-disclosure and individual values. Therefore, we aim to investigate the possible stereotypes on adolescents involved in delinquency based on the factors contributing to delinquent behaviors between close friends and acquaintances.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 is based on social categorization theory, which explains that the categorization of others can be identified based on the degree of friendship reciprocity. When the degree of friendship reciprocity is high, it categorizes as in-group as they have a higher assumed similarity level to delinquent adolescents. Thus, in-group might be less biased, when compared with the out-group (i.e., acquaintances). Based on current literature (e.g., Abdullah et al., 2015), the six main stereotypes on adolescents involved in delinquency based are: parental neglect, peer influence, low trust in teachers, lack of self-esteem, attention-seeking, and risk-taking.

Figure 1: The conceptual framework of the study



The research question of this study is: Are there differences in stereotypes on adolescents involved in delinquency from the perspective of Malaysian adults who are either acquaintances or close friends to the delinquent adolescents? Following this research question, there are six hypotheses, as below:

H1: There is a significant difference between the stereotypes of individuals who are acquaintances versus friends to delinquent adolescents on parental neglect in Malaysia.

H2: There is a significant difference between the stereotypes of individuals who are acquaintances versus friends to delinquent adolescents on peer pressure in Malaysia.

H3: There is a significant difference between the stereotypes of individuals who are acquaintances versus friends to delinquent adolescents on low trust in teachers in Malaysia.

H4: There is a significant difference between the stereotypes of individuals who are acquaintances versus friends to delinquent adolescents on lack of self-esteem in Malaysia.

H5: There is a significant difference between the stereotypes of individuals who are acquaintances versus friends to delinquent adolescents on attention-seeking in Malaysia.

H6: There is a significant difference between the stereotypes of individuals who are acquaintances versus friends to delinquent adolescents on risk-taking in Malaysia.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study applied the cross-sectional research design using quantitative online survey methodology. One category as independent variable (i.e., Malaysians: acquaintance vs close friends with delinquent adolescents) and the six dependent variables (i.e., factors contributing to delinquent behaviors) are parental neglect, peer pressure, low trust in teachers, lack of self-esteem, attention-seeking, and risk-taking were examined in this study. The research paradigm applied in this study is positivism.

3.2. Sample

Participants were recruited through convenience and purposive sampling ([Andrade, 2020](#)) among Malaysians. The inclusion criteria of this study are Malaysian adults (18 years old and above) who come across any adolescents involved in delinquency. Google Forms is used to recruit participants for this study and the survey is promoted through various online platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook for voluntary participation. Recruitment posters and recruitment scripts are distributed to recruit participants.

G*Power 3.1 a priori analysis was used to determine the sample size of this study. By applying an 80% power and an alpha of 0.05, 128 participants are needed to get a medium effect with a particle eta squared of 0.5. With consideration of participants who might drop out from the study, 10% of the attrition rate is added to our sample size

needed. Therefore, the recruitment goal for this study is to collect at least 141 participants.

In this study, a total of 188 Malaysian adults were collected as participants. Out of 188 participants, 28 participants were excluded as outliers in the study, resulting in 160 participants as the sample of the study. Out of the 160 sample, 57 participants are male (35.6%), 97 participants are female (60.6%), and 6 participants prefer not to say their gender (3.8%). Among the 160 participants, 38 participants have previous delinquent experience (23.8%), and 122 participants have no previous experience (76.3%). As for occupation, 139 participants (86.9%) are university students, and 21 participants (13.1%) are working.

3.3. Measures

A total of seven measures are used in this study, they are (1) parental neglect measure, (2) peer pressure measure, (3) low trust in teachers measure, (4) lack of self-esteem, (5) attention-seeking measure, (6) risk-taking measure, and (8) close friends or acquaintances to delinquent adolescent's measure. All measures were adapted and operationalized into the study by changing the first-person nouns (i.e., "I", "me", "they") into a third-person nouns (i.e., "Delinquent adolescents", "Parents", "Teachers"). To measure parental neglect, the Multidimensional Neglection Behavior Scale (MNBS) (Straus et al., 2008) is adapted into this study. This 12-item measure uses 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), measuring three subscales which are (1) emotional needs, (2) cognitive needs, and (3) supervision needs. In our study, MNBS has Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.78, 0.74, and 0.71 for the respective subscales.

Next, Perception of Peer Pressure Scale (PPPS) (Manzoni et al., 2011) is adapted into the study to measure peer pressure as the possible stereotype. This 10-item measure uses 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In the current study, PPPS has Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.86.

Following that, the Student Trust in Faculty Scale (Forsyth et al., 2011) was also selected to adapt into this study to measure low trust in teachers as the possible stereotype. This 7-item measure uses 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In our study, this measure has Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.77.

Besides that, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is adapted into the study to measure the lack of self-esteem factor as the possible stereotype. This 5-item measure uses 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In our study, this measure has Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.70.

Subsequently, The Sensation Seeker Attention Scale (SSAS) (Britton, 2008) is adapted into this study. This 12-item measure uses 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), measuring the attention-seeking factor as the possible stereotype on adolescent involved in delinquency. In our study, SSAS has Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.74.

The Revised-Adolescent Risk-Taking Instrument (ARTI) (Busen & Kouzekanani, 2000) was selected to adapt into this study as well. This 8-item measure uses 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), measuring the risk-taking

factor as the possible stereotype on adolescents involved in delinquency. In our study, Revised-ARTI has Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.74.

Moreover, in order to measure the level of self-disclosure and level of proximity, the items in the Close Friend or Acquaintance to Adolescents Involved in Delinquency Questionnaire are fully operationalized in our study. This 6-item measure uses 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In our study, this measure has Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.70.

3.4. Procedure

Pilot study ($n = 20$) was conducted to check the reliability and clarity of the measures. Then, data collection was conducted from 14 March 2022 to 30 April 2022. Participants were required to first read the Participant Information Sheet and fill in the Informed Consent Form in the online survey. Next, participants filled up all sections that consists of Multidimensional Neglect Behavior Scale, Perception of Peer Pressure Scale, Student Trust in Faculty Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Sensation Seeker Attention Scale, Revised Adolescents Risk-Taking Instruments, and Friends or Acquaintance to Adolescent Involved in Delinquency Scale. After completing all the instruments, participants were required to fill in their demographic information, which consist of, (1) Gender, (2) Age (As of year 2022), (3) Occupation, and (4) Previous experience in delinquency. Finally, participants were debriefed about the nature of this study and provided with a service sheet before submitting their response.

4. Result

4.1. Independent Sample t-test Analyses: Close Friends vs Acquaintances

The categorization of close friends and acquaintances is based on mean score of close friend vs acquaintance scale, which is 3.64. Hence, a means scores higher than 3.64 will be categorized as close friends, where as a mean score lower than 3.64 will be categorized as acquaintances. Prior analyses, outliers and normality were check. Independent sample t-tests were then conducted to compare the total scores of parental neglects, peer pressure, low trust in teachers, lack of self-esteem, attention-seeking, and risk-taking between close friends and acquaintances. Based on [Figure 2](#), the results showed that there was a significant difference in total peer pressure scores between close friends ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 0.71$) and acquaintances ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 0.98$); $t(106.2) = 3.48$, $p = 0.001$. Other than peer pressure, based on [Figure 3](#), there was also a significant difference in total risk-taking scores between close friends ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.63$) and acquaintances ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 0.79$); $t(114.3) = 2.15$, $p = 0.034$. Hence, Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 6, which stated that there is a significant difference between the stereotypes of individuals who are acquaintances versus close friends to delinquent adolescents and peer pressure and risk-taking were supported.

On the other hand, results from comparing the total scores of parental neglects using independent sample t-test show that there was no significant difference in total parental neglect scores between close friends ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.89$) and acquaintances ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.03$); $t(158) = 0.38$, $p = 0.707$. When comparing the total scores of low trusts in teachers using independent sample t-test, it was found that there was no significant difference between close friends ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.85$) and acquaintances ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.99$); $t(120.93) = 0.26$, $p = 0.798$. Another independent sample t-test was also

conducted to compare the total lack of self-esteem scores between close friends and acquaintances. Results showed that there was no significant difference between close friends ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 0.82$) and acquaintances ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 0.91$); $t(158) = 0.54$, $p = 0.588$. Besides that, there was also no significant difference in total attention-seeking scores between close friends ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.75$) and acquaintances ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.82$); $t(158) = 0.55$, $p = 0.582$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 3, Hypothesis 4, and Hypothesis 5, stated that there is a significant difference between the stereotypes of individuals who are acquaintances versus close friends to delinquent adolescents and parental neglect, low trust in teachers, lack of self-esteem, and attention-seeking were not supported.

Figure 2: Independent Sample t-test comparing acquaintances and close friends with stereotype as peer pressure ($n = 160$).

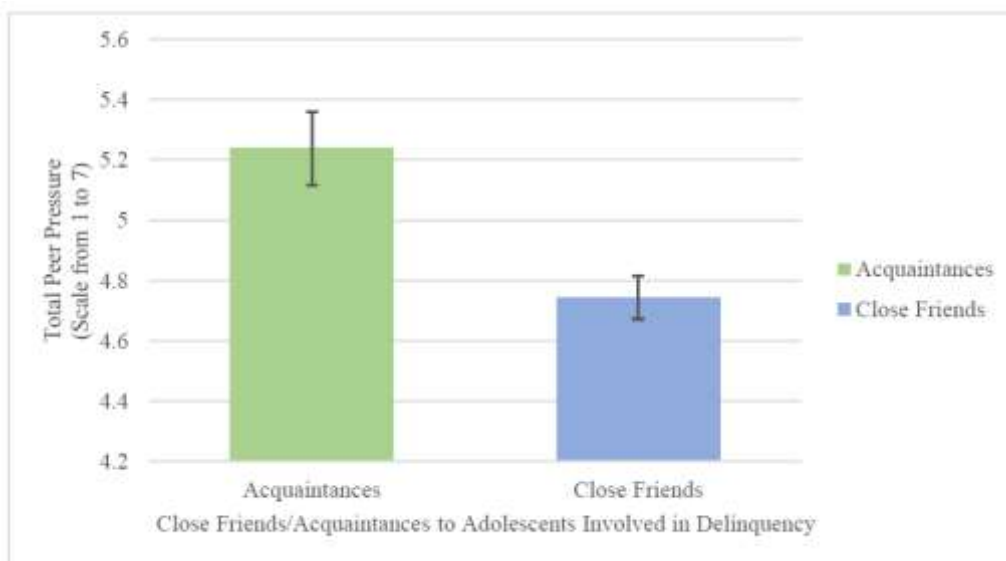
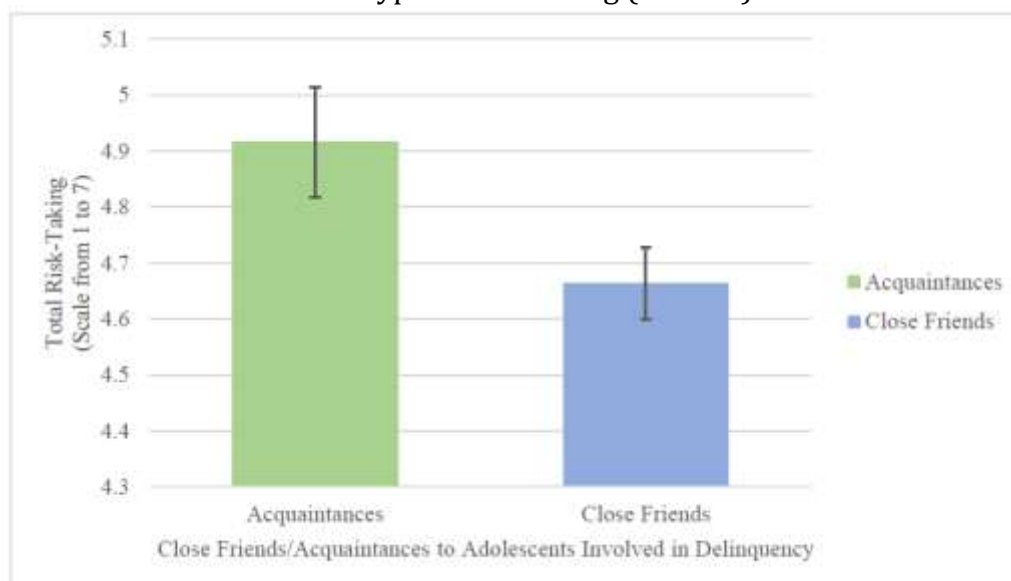


Figure 3: Independent Sample t-test comparing acquaintances and close friends with stereotype as risk-taking ($n = 160$).



5. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to identify the differences in stereotypes based on the factors contributing to delinquent behaviors of adolescents involved in delinquency between close friends versus acquaintances to delinquent adolescents. This study also serves to identify whether parental neglect, peer pressure, low trust in teachers, lack of self-esteem, attention-seeking and risk-taking are backed up with empirical evidence or merely stereotypes to delinquent adolescents. Based on the results, interesting differences in stereotypes based on factors leading to delinquent behaviors in adolescents involved in delinquency were discovered between acquaintances and close friends, resulting in accepting the hypotheses of this study.

5.1. Peer Pressure

Results have shown that there was a significant difference in stereotypes of peer pressure between acquaintances and close friends to delinquent adolescents. This finding is consistent with the past study from [Simon \(1992\)](#) that explains that the effect of out-group homogeneity can have different perspectives about in-group and out-group categorization. [Simon \(1992\)](#) explains that outgroups are perceived as more homogeneous than in-groups. In our study, acquaintances see delinquent adolescents as outgroup based on outgroup homogeneity effect as they perceived adolescents involved in delinquency are more similar, explaining the higher levels of stereotypes due to outgroup homogeneity effect.

The comparison and categorization of delinquent adolescents may be due to differing understanding of friendship reciprocity levels and perspectives on friendship selection, which was aligned with [Cohen's \(1983\)](#) study. Delinquent adolescents' behavior is often misunderstood by acquaintances due to a lack of reciprocity in information exchange ([Kenny & West, 2010](#)). Moreover, peer pressure occurs when the selected direction of influence relies on the main criteria for friendship selection ([Cohen, 1983](#)) based on the out-group homogeneity effect. Therefore, acquaintances needed to rely more on stereotypes to make their judgments about adolescents involved in delinquency, resulting in a more biased judgment towards delinquent adolescents.

This finding can be explained by the cultural influence on individual beliefs or mindsets. Malaysia's low level of individualism, according to Hofstede's cultural dimension ([Hofstede Insights, 2022](#)), contributes to its strong grouping mindset in society. This mindset emphasizes the importance of we-ness, such as group devotion and teamwork. When acquaintances come across adolescents involved in delinquency, peer pressure might be attributed due to the constant practice of togetherness in Malaysian society ([Ahmad, 2016](#)), hence forming a stronger stereotype on delinquent adolescents.

5.2. Risk Taking

Another interesting finding in this study was that acquaintances also have a stronger stereotype on risk-taking towards adolescents involved in delinquency compared to close friends. This can also be explained by the outgroup homogeneity effect based on the perceptions of risk. Acquaintances perceive delinquent adolescents as outgroup because their perception of risk are perceived to be similar among delinquent adolescents, hence stereotypes all of them as more risk-taking in general. In consistency with the past research ([Reniers et al., 2016](#)), acquaintances have a stronger perception

of risk compared to delinquent adolescents due to better education about dangerous acts and risks. Therefore, similar to the first finding, acquaintances tend to have a stronger reliance on stereotypes of risk-taking to judge the adolescents involved in delinquency.

Besides, news reporting in Malaysia may also exaggerate dangerous acts with impactful words, creating negative bias and stereotypes about risk-taking in people not close to delinquent adolescents (Rosenthal & Overstreet, 2016). Words like "*lepak*" are used by news reporters when reporting juvenile cases (Ali, 2012), forming a negative association with delinquent adolescents (Soroka, 2019). This forms their basic understanding of adolescents who are involved in delinquency and thus creates their stereotypes based on these negative biases.

5.3. The Other Four Factors

Apart from the two significant findings, stereotypes based on factors contributing to delinquent behaviors which are parental neglect, low trust in teachers, lack of self-esteem, and attention-seeking are found to be non-significant between close friends and acquaintances. This suggests that Malaysians may have accepted these as factual answers to the development of delinquent adolescents. When empirical evidence such as Buist et al. (2020), Özdemir and Özdemir (2020) that emphasized on parent-child negativity relationship and educational experience respectively as a factor that leads to delinquent adolescents. Hence, it became the legitimate answer for the cause of juvenile delinquency.

5.4. Theoretical Implications

From this study, it has contributed to filling up the research gap from the literature by Abdullah et al. (2015), which is identifying the possible stereotypes on adolescents involved in delinquency based on the factors contributing to delinquent behavior. In our study, we have identified that peer pressure and risk-taking are significant stereotypes on adolescents involved in delinquency among acquaintances to delinquent adolescents. This serves as a foundation for future studies to look further into these two factors as stereotypes in another context in Malaysia.

While previous research has only focused on the factors that lead adolescents to involve in delinquent behavior, this study also reveals a difference in stereotypes between acquaintances and close friends. In our study, we have closely identified acquaintances have a stronger stereotype of peer pressure and risk-taking compared to close friends. According to the findings, the direction of influence vary within adolescents itself and their perception of adolescents involved in delinquency due to differences in friendship selection.

Besides, acquaintances have a different view in perception of risk, specifically stronger perception of risk, which is highly aware about danger in risk-taking compared to delinquent adolescents (Reniers et al., 2016). This shows that there is a differentiation in terms of categorizing individuals when stereotyping delinquent adolescents based on social categorization theory. Hence, the findings have contributed to increasing familiarity about in-group and out-group categorization while stereotyping adolescents involved in delinquency.

5.5. Practical Implications

The findings can also be contributed to the school teachers, especially teachers in the disciplinary and counseling department, parents as well as Malaysian society in general. The findings help to identify the social cues of adolescents involved in delinquency in early circumstances and take action when they are identified. Based on the findings, as acquaintances are not close to delinquency adolescents, they are rather biased compared to close friends. Therefore, these findings are able to help them to understand how acquaintances stereotype adolescents involved in delinquency compared to close friends. Besides, the findings are able to increase awareness within the society regarding higher perception of peer pressure and risk-taking from acquaintances in Malaysia. On that point, this contributes to the Malaysian society where they are able to understand more about how people categorize delinquent adolescents and stereotype them based on their selection of peers as well as their perception of risk, which were explained by [Reniers et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Cohen \(1983\)](#).

5.6. Limitations and Recommendation

Despite the interesting findings from the research, there are several limitations in our study. Firstly, it was found that limited in-group participants had contributed in the study. According to the collected data, there were only 10 participants who are close friends with delinquent adolescents. Hence, this might have caused the remaining factors to have a non-significant result. Another reason might be due to the majority of participants were university students which the stereotypes might be generalized to only university students instead of Malaysian society. Hence, future research is recommended to collect more in-group participants which is close friends with previous delinquent experience in order to discover the possibilities of significant difference for stereotypes of peer pressure, low trust in teachers, lack of self-esteem, and attention-seeking between acquaintances and close friends.

Besides, another limitation that was found in this study is that survey items are limited to fully capture the lived experiences of stereotypes towards delinquent adolescents. Hence, future research should conduct qualitative research regarding stereotypes based on factors contributing to delinquent behaviors to find out the in-depth perspectives in the Malaysian context. Besides conducting qualitative research, future research is also recommended to conduct a cross-cultural study to understand the stereotypes as peer pressure and risk-taking to adolescents in delinquency from different cultures or countries. This helps to contribute more empirical evidence about this topic to the literature and are able to reference and replicate the research in their own culture.

6. Conclusion

This study had shown a preview of the different perspectives of stereotypes on adolescents involved in delinquency based on factors contributing to delinquent behaviors between acquaintances and close friends. We found that acquaintances have stronger stereotypes on peer pressure and risk-taking towards adolescents involved in delinquency compared to close friends in Malaysia. On the other side, stereotypes of parental neglect, low trust in teachers, attention-seeking, and low self-esteem could be factual answers on why adolescents develop delinquent behaviors. These findings have resonated with the social categorization theory that explains out-group that had a low assumed similarity level are more biased based on the outgroup homogeneity effect.

Based on these findings, future research can consider to further explore on the stereotypes of adolescents involved in delinquency upon peer pressure and risk-taking using qualitative methods. By understanding these stereotypes and factual answers, the Malaysian society is easier to understand what developed adolescents into delinquency and how these stereotypes and labels can contribute to their offences as well as to take preventive actions as early as possible. Hence, it can slowly reduce the number of percentages of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study was reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Taylor's University. The informed consent form entailed acknowledgement of methodology, possible adverse effect of this study, the rights of participant to withdraw from this study, the dissemination of result of this study, confidentiality and anonymity of participant, and sign-post participant to mental health services if needed.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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