

YOUTH CRIME IN MALAYSIA: BREAKING OUT FROM THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF POVERTY

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ABSTRACT

Past works on youth crime have overly focused on poverty using quantitative evidence. Because of the normative nature of social behaviour, including crime, this study attempted to examine the causes of youth crime inductively using 14 case studies. The results generated complementary evidence to suggest that social behaviour is often conditioned by the social environment. The evidence provides a somewhat similar picture of the main causes of youth crimes, with the exceptions of the two youths convicted of either committing or attempts to commit murder and females being unlikely to lead participation in violent crime. All females engaged in violent crime have only been accomplices of males suggesting that Malaysian youth females are unlikely to orchestrate the planning and execution of violent crimes. The remaining crimes appear to be serial, which demonstrate a pattern of conduct that is driven by entrenched elements of chronic poverty with critical elements that fester criminal behaviour. The persistence of youth crime is largely explained by chronic elements of poverty, which include being exposed to criminal siblings, fathers or peers, large family size, broken families especially single parentage, early marriage to criminal husbands and early exit from schools. Our findings call for research that can identify the locations where such entrenched elements of poverty can be found so that steps can be taken to solve the social problems that fester criminal behaviour.

Keywords: *delinquent, youth crime, intensity of crime, poverty, Malaysia*

1. Introduction

Although poverty is a key variable that influences youth crime (Lee, 2009; Lee & Rasiah, 2014), it does not explain normatively the causes of why particular youths resort to crime. This is especially so when the incidence of youths committing crime is significantly smaller than the percentage of poor youths in particular countries. Also, mainstream accounts of poverty and crime are dominated by Becker's (1968,

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1993) model that assumes humans to be rational beings. It is because humans are social beings, evolutionary economists believe that criminal cases are often unique to individual experiences, which usually involve psychological situations that vary by social setting, time and location. It is therefore imperative to re-examine the causes of youth crime in Malaysia to explore the real motives of individuals for committing crime, which will go a long way to assist both the police force and the public to battle crime more effectively than existing measures. We seek to undertake this study by mapping out the relationships that exist between youth criminals and the other actors they interact with and institutions.

The theoretical underpinning of this paper is grounded strongly in Lewis (1966, 1969, 1998) articulation of the vicious circle of poverty. Using an interdisciplinary methodological framework adapted from the fields of sociology, anthropology and psychology, Lewis (1966) started studying Mexican poor families to understand cultural influences of the embedding setting on the behaviour of the people. His findings from further studies in various parts Latin America show that once the culture of poverty sets in it perpetuates itself. By the time slum children are six or seven they have usually absorbed the basic attitudes and values of their subculture, and hence, they are considered psychologically unready to conform or adjust to changes in the broader national society. We take a leaf out of this argument that juveniles and youths immersed in cultural spaces or families that are characterized by crime are likely to demonstrate such characteristics. Also, once the juveniles and youths age with criminal family and peer members it is that much more difficult to reform them. Hence, efforts to catch them early to prevent exposure to crime is a better solution than simply targeting their confinement in prisons, though the latter is essential to protect society.

Hence, this paper seeks to examine the dynamic causes of youth crime through the use of case studies carried out on youth offenders. This approach is intended to provide an alternative framework that is driven by purpose as it is more rigorous to capture the real causes of youth crime traced from the main perpetrators. Since it is important to draw sufficient offenders of crime by intensity, ethnicity and gender, we structured the respondents by these variables within the purposive sample.

The rest of the paper is divided into the following sections. The first section discusses the methodology and data used. The next section focuses on the analysis and findings. The last section presents the conclusions.

2. Methodology and Data

The methodology used in this paper is largely interpretative and it is drawn purposively from quantitative data and oral-life history interviews. The oral interview technique is applied in order to gain insights into the personal concerns

and convictions of youths, to identify conjunctural events that drove them to commit the criminal offence. Thus, mapping the causes of youths' delinquent conduct will undoubtedly provide indispensable useful evidence to construct a more realistic picture on the root causes of youth crime than what we know now. The most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter in which an interviewer elicits a special kind of information that cannot be directly observed, such as thoughts and intentions from an interviewee (Merriam, 1998). According to Patton (2002, p.341), "the purpose of interviewing is to enable entry into the respondent's perspective.... to find out what is in and on someone else's mind".

Since, the objective of this paper is to find out the reasons that underpin crime committed by youths, this is done by engaging the youth criminals personally through friendly conversations, observations and exploring the unseen aspects of youth criminal conduct. This technique provides an avenue to elicit information or data directly from the offenders though they may choose to lie or may not remember the sequence of events that led to the crime.

2.1 Analytical Framework

This section provides the framework taking into account the qualitative data collected from respondents with the objective of identifying and analysing the real causes of youth crime. The framework helps to establish the relationship between the youth offenders and the factors that engender crime.

Figure 1.1 presents the evolutionary analytic guide to trace the possible causes of youth crime in Malaysia. Youth criminal behaviour is measured by intensity of crime as shown on the right hand side of Figure 1.1. The scoring of the intensity of crime is tabulated according to the seriousness of the offence committed (see Table 1.4.) We did not attach any weights owing to the lack of *a priori* reasons to specify them.

Wickliffe (2009) in '*Why Juveniles Commit Crimes*', urged that being a juvenile in any one's life is part of the stage of development of varying behavioural patterns when a young individual is influenced or remains susceptible in part to what goes on around the environment in which he or she lives. At every stage of a youth's development, family members, schools, friends and peer members influence this transition in a juvenile's life. In other words, Juvenile delinquency is not an inherent human condition, but rather is imbibed through associations, imitation, observations, pressure, needs, wants, influences and desires. To capture a coherent understanding of the causes of crime, this study has categorized the factors into individuals, family, school and peer-related factors, which are shown on the left side of Figure 1.1.

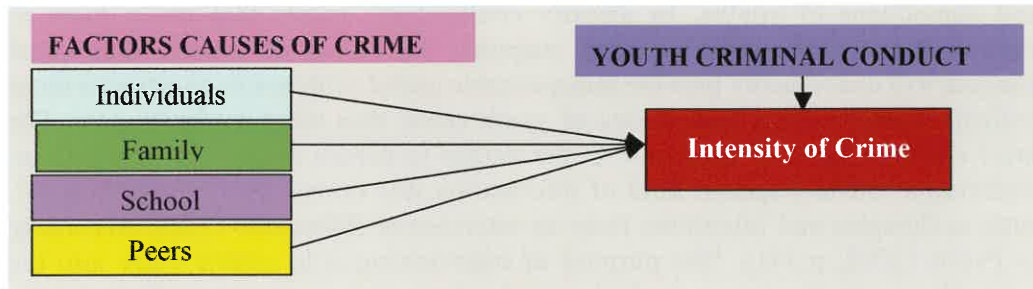


Figure 1.1
Conceptual Framework: Relationship between Youth Criminal Behaviour and Causes of Crime

Source: Authors' Survey (2008)

As stated in Lee's (2009) research, poverty is a significant factor that drives youths to commit crime in Malaysia. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine if there exists a pattern and structure of characteristics that the poor face that reflects the conditions under which they commit crime. Keeping to the contours of evolutionary conditions that call for some amount of openness in the methodology, this inductive study was not limited to the poor. Specifically, the paper seeks to examine if there exists a common set of elements or a pattern of conduct that drive youths to commit crime? Does a vicious circle of poverty influence crime, which in a circular manner reinforces poverty?

2.2 Youth Offenders

The prison was chosen as the research location. The use of the prison is important owing to the fact that youth criminal offenders between the age range of 18 and 21 years are not considered as juveniles and cannot be sent to juvenile rehabilitation centres. It is also pertinent to note that youth criminals have the potential to or have committed gruesome crimes, and as such, their punishment is regarded to warrant incarceration in prisons where hardcore criminals are kept.

With the exception of Perlis, Malacca and Kuala Lumpur, in the remaining states of Malaysia³ there are prison administrations and prison facilities that accommodate juveniles and youth offenders convicted of serious crimes. There are a total of 26 prisons that house juveniles and youths in Malaysia with 17 located in West Malaysia and the remaining 9 in East Malaysia.

³ In Malaysia, there are fourteen states namely; Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Johor, Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang and Federal States of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya. These 12 states are located in West Malaysia. Another two states are Sabah and Sarawak located in the East and is referred to as East Malaysia.

These centres accommodate two types of juveniles and youths. The first consists of juveniles and youths who have been adjudicated by courts,⁴ and thus, serve sentences in prisons, while the second houses juveniles and youths who are on remand, and are still awaiting the verdict of courts. Of the 26 prisons only 2 are designated for female juvenile and youth offenders, namely, Kajang Female Prison and Kota Kinabalu Female Prison. A total of 2,066 youths aged between 14 to 20 years old were imprisoned or remanded for various criminal offences registered with the Prison Department of Malaysia when the data was obtained on 4 February 2008. From a total of 2,066 youth offenders, 1974 (95.6%) were males and 92 (4.5%) were females.

Both the male and female juvenile and youth prisons in Kajang were chosen for this study. Approval from the Prison Authority of Malaysia was sought and the research was only started after permission was granted. At the time the interviews there were 481 male youths at the Kajang Male Juvenile Prison but only 67 of them were found guilty by the courts. There were 84 female youth offenders (both were adjudicated and remanded, and this number included foreigners). Only 4 of them were local female youths serving sentences at the Kajang Female Juvenile Prison.

2.3 Selection of Respondents

We employed a purposeful sampling procedure to select the respondents for three main reasons. Firstly, the goal of this case study is not to predict from the results of the study. Instead, the focus is on interpretation. Secondly, purposeful sampling is the right method for use in non-probability sampling strategies deployed in qualitative research when the investigator wants to “discover, understand, and gain insight into a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 1998, p.61). Thirdly, studying such a difficult phenomenon that requires the voluntary participation of psychologically disturbed respondents is extremely difficult, and hence, the use of metaphysical sampling procedures tend to yield poor response rates.

From the 26 juvenile prisons purposeful sampling was carried out from the Male and Female Juvenile Prisons in Kajang, Selangor. Because of the difficulty of getting volunteers, a total of 14 offenders were selected for this study. The number of male youth offenders selected was ten 10, while the number of female offenders chosen was 4. Due to tight security in the prisons, respondents were selected based on their availability (see Table 1.1) and the types of crimes they have

4 Courts in this context refer to the Court for Children and Open Court, which also attends to serious juvenile criminal cases.

committed (see Table 1.2). While the objective of this approach was to capture the reasons that explain why crime was committed by the respondents we did not use the approach Lewis (1966, 1998) had deployed, which is to participate with the communities and households so as to map the cultural influences in greater detail. This was not possible only because it would entail significant amount of resources. Nevertheless, we expect a close approximation of the results with the reality as no pressure was applied on the offenders and the interviews were conducted when they were friendly and ready to present their accounts.

Table 1.1
Selection of Respondents from Juvenile Prisons in Kajang

Juvenile Prisons in Kajang	No. of Inmates	No. of Malaysian Youths	Respondents Interviewed
Kajang Male Prison	481	67	10
Kajang Female Prison	84	4	4

Note: 481 male and 84 female inmates were registered at a particular point in time

Source: Jabatan Penjara or Prison Department, Malaysia, 4 February, 2008

The male offenders in the study have been tried and sentenced for serious crimes like murder, rape, robbery, theft, being in possession of stolen good or in possession and trafficking drugs, all of which are punishable under the Penal Code and Dangerous Drug Act. Comparatively, the female offenders have been imprisoned for less serious offences, such as robbery, offence under Passport Act and 'pregnant out of wedlock'. The last is an offence under the Syariah Criminal Offences Act.

Table 1.2 shows the total number of youth offenders interviewed against the types of crimes committed. A total of fourteen youth offenders voluntarily accepted to be interviewed and the breakdown by gender was 10 males and 4 females. The ten types of crimes committed include 'out of wedlock pregnancy', violation of the Passport Act, possession and trafficking of drugs, possession of stolen goods, theft, robbery, voluntarily causing hurt, culpable homicide not amounting to murder, rape and murder.

Table 1.2
Juvenile Offenders Interviewed, Kajang, 2008

Crimes Committed	Male	Female	Total
Pregnant out of Wedlock	-	1	1
Violating an Offence under the Passport Act	-	1	1
In possession and trafficking in drugs	2	-	2
In possession of Stolen goods	1	-	1
Theft	1	-	1
Robbery	1	1	2
Voluntarily causing hurt in the course of robbery	1	1	2
Culpable homicide not amounting to Murder	1	-	1
Rape	2	-	2
Murder	1	-	1
Aggregate Total	10	4	14

Source: Authors' Interviews, 2008

The breakdown of the sample by ethnicity and gender are as follows: 7 Malays, 2 Chinese and 1 Indian among the males, and 2 Malays, 1 Indian and 1 Iban (from Sarawak) among the females. In spite of certain constraints that were encountered, the groups were well represented (see Table 1.3).

Table 1.3
Breakdown of Respondents by Ethnicity and Gender

Ethnicity	Male	Female	Total
Malay	7	2	9
Chinese	2	-	2
Indian	1	1	2
Others -Iban	-	1	1
Total	10	4	14

Source: Authors' Interviews, 2008

2.4 Data Collection

The collection of data was done on site though the respondents were interviewed privately in a special interview room, which was located next to the administrative office of the juvenile prisons in Kajang, Selangor. The 'fieldwork' involved face to face interviews, with a sample checklist of questions using a notepad and a tape recorder. The interviews were carried out in three consecutive days commencing from 13 to 15 February 2008 between 9.00am to 5pm. The interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes depending on the seriousness of the crime committed, communication skills and willingness of the respondents to fully cooperate during the interviews.

The medium of communication was mainly Bahasa Malaysia⁵ although Mandarin and English were used intermittently, which was determined by the preference of the interviewees. In the course of the interview, respondents were asked to describe their 'daily activities' simply to obtain a good account of their life experience while undergoing their respective sentences. The tape recordings were used to complement the notes taken by hand. The accuracy and reliability of the data collected were verified with the prison officers-in-charge, who are pretty familiar with the offenders especially the male youth offenders.

The types of criminal offences committed by these youths were then tabulated into intensity of crime by calculating the punishment meted out, such as imprisonment, fine and whipping based on the provisions of the relevant acts of the constitution. The intensity of crime was subsequently used to set up an index as tabulated in Table 1.4. However, such offences like 'out of wedlock pregnancy' and 'violating the Passport Act' as observed in the course of the interview were considered to be of low intensity, and hence, were scored respectively as 1 and 2.

Table 1.4 shows the data description by intensity of crime in an ascending order i.e. 1 for getting pregnant out of wedlock, 2 for wilfully assisting any person to violate Passport Act, 8 for possession and trafficking in drugs, 9 for assisting in the concealment of stolen property', 10 for theft in dwelling houses, 12 for 'robbery', 13 for voluntarily causing hurt when committing robbery, 14 for culpable homicide not amounting to murder, 15 for rape and 16 for murder.

⁵ Bahasa Malaysia is Malaysia's national language.

Table 1.4 Intensity of Crime by Punishment, 2008

Intensity of Crime	Crime	Punishment upon conviction
1	Pregnant out of wedlock	Imprisonment not exceeding 3 years, fine not exceeding RM5,000, whipping not exceeding 6 strokes
2	Willfully assisting person to contravene Passport Act	Imprisonment not exceeding 5 years, or fine not exceeding RM10,000 or both
8	In possession and trafficking in drug	Imprisonment not less than 5 years, and 10 strokes of whipping
9	Assisting in concealment of stolen goods	Imprisonment may extend to 7 years and fine, or both
10	Theft in dwelling houses	Imprisonment may extend to 10 years and fine, or both and for second offence, will include whipping
12	Robbery	Imprisonment may extend to 10 years and fine, plus whipping
13	Voluntary Causing of hurt in committing robbery	Imprisonment may extend to 20 years, fines, whipping
14	Homicide not amounting to murder	Imprisonment may extend to 10 years, or fine, or both
15	Rape	Imprisonment, not less than 5 yrs, not more than 20 years, with whipping
16	Murder	Punishable with death (capital punishment)

Source: Authors' Interviews (2008)

3. Findings

The evidence is analysed under the categories of male and female offenders. The ten male youth offenders interviewed were categorized as Case 1, Case 2, Case 3, Case 4, Case 5, Case 6, Case 7, Case 8, Case 9, and Case 10. The findings of four female youth offenders were recorded as Case 11, Case 12, Case 13 and Case 14. The purpose of categorizing the two sets of findings is to be able to compare and contrast the causes of crime by gender. The individual cases are analysed to capture the direct causes of crime by gender.

3.1 Male Youths

Males were the dominant committers of youth crimes, both by incidence and by the intensity of crime. This is done through a close examination of the ten male case studies.

Case 1

The offender is a Chinese, who committed a capital offence i.e. culpable homicide not amounting to murder, under section 304(b) of Penal Code, which is punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to ten years, or with fine, or both. He committed the offence at the age of seventeen, while he was still in school and was convicted and sentenced to a prison term of ten years. He is expected to be released in 2010.

He was from a good family with both parents being university graduates with good occupations. He is the eldest among five children consisting of four males and a female. The boy shows stunning maturity, very sociable and was very active while he was in school as evident from his excellent grades. It was gathered that he changed schools at intervals (3 schools within 5 years) both public and private schools as a result of frequent family relocation to new surroundings that warranted his enrolment at new proximate schools. From the different schools he made acquaintances with a lot of people, including gangsters. He claimed to have become very temperamental and negatively influenced by the varying gangs he associated with.

It seems that his involvement in crime may have been caused by exposure to delinquent peers who subjected him to negative peer pressures. He committed the offence together with a fellow male friend, who was then 18 years old. He claimed to have committed the offence under the influence of peers and two close young female friends.

Case 2

The offender is a Chinese boy who committed murder - an offence under section 302 of the Penal Code, punishable with death sentence upon conviction. The High Court found the boy guilty of murder and ordered him to be detained at the pleasure of the King. The boy was twelve when he stabbed the deceased victim.

The boy comes from an average family with his father, a mini market operator and mother, a housewife. He has two elder sisters. He completed his primary studies in a private primary school and was in Form one in a private secondary

school when he committed the offence. He scored 4As and 1B in UPSR a public examination for standard six students in Malaysia. According to him, he acted after considerable provocation from the deceased who usually teased and frustrated him.

The cause of his 'unintentional' act may have been as a result of consistent 'provocation' from the deceased. It is obvious that his difficulty to manage his anger, frustration and emotions underpin his action to commit such a grave crime.

Case 3

The offender is a Malay boy who committed a criminal offence under section 394 of the Penal Code, voluntarily causing hurt while committing robbery at the age of seventeen. He was sentenced to five years imprisonment and was to be released in 2009. His father passed away when he was just eight years old, leaving behind a single mother who had to raise ten children. The boy dropped out of school in Form 3 and was staying with a delinquent guardian when he committed the crime.

From the foregoing cases examined, an analogy can be drawn with regard to the causes of crime. Crime could be an outgrowth of multiple factors encompassing single parenthood (mother) and large family size⁶ (10 children), poverty⁷, early school drop-out, poor school performance, influence by delinquent peers.

Case 4

The offender is an Indian boy who committed 'robbery' under section 392 of the Penal Code when he was eighteen years old and was serving a 27 month jail-term. There is another case pending on him under Sec 394 of Penal Code at the time of interview. In other words, he may be jailed again if he is found guilty for the charge of 'voluntarily causing hurt in committing robbery'.

The boy was seven years old when his father passed away, leaving his mother with six children and devoid of a stable job. He was a Form 2 drop-out. He admitted to smoking from the age of twelve and had committed a number of other delinquent acts, which includes having sex with three different girls. His two elder brothers were also involved in criminal activities.

6 Family size refers to the number of children in a family. It is considered a large family when the family has 4 children and above see Hirschi (1969).

7 Poverty denotes not enough money to make a decent living. Majority of the respondents admitted that they are from poor families that lacked the financial wherewithal for a descent livelihood.

The causes of crime identified were of many factors including poverty, single motherhood, and low family income, large family size, drop-out from school, poor school performance, influence from peers and delinquent siblings⁸.

Case 5

The offender is a Malay who committed 'theft in a dwelling house' when he was 19 years old. He dropped out of school at Form five. At the time of committing the offence, he was working as a car mechanic assistant. He stole a handset in order to buy a new shirt for the Muslim New Year celebration. He was sentenced to eight months in jail after the Court found him guilty.

His mother is a divorcee, having separated from his father when he was six (6) years old. His mother toils day and night to make ends meet, and thus, had little time for him. Both the boy and the younger brother were neither interested in studies nor showed good performance in school.

His involvement in crime may be due to a broken home,⁹ single parenthood (mother) and low income.

Case 6

The offender is Malay, who has indulged in stealing (theft) and house breaking since he was twelve years old until he was arrested for possession of stolen goods at the age of nineteen. At the time of interview, he was serving an eighteen month jail sentence.

His early involvement in delinquent acts particularly, theft of a motorcycle, was influenced by his friend who was then studying in a technical school. His friend imparted him with the technical and mechanical skills, which he subsequently used to beat motorcycle security measures. His criminal enterprise subsequently developed so much so that it became a profession owing to the numerous successes he recorded without being caught by the police.

Over the years, he gained confidence and began to steal on bigger scale, until he was arrested. He claimed his accumulated illegal gain amounted to

8 Delinquent sibling denotes a brother or sister who is engaged in delinquent behaviour - an apparent influence among youngsters' which unconsciously drives them to indulge in delinquent acts.

9 Broken home refers a family in which parents are divorced or are no longer living together or both parents are dead, thereby leaving the children to cater for themselves and without any parental guidance.

RM10, 000.00 over seven years of stealing and house-breaking. His parents were still alive. , He has six siblings and his entire family is ravaged by poverty with his brothers having to work very hard for little income.

It is evident that the boy's involvement in criminal activities is attributed to the following: influence from delinquent peers, low family income, large family size, early exit from school and poor school performance.

Case 7

The offender is a Malay boy who committed the sexual offence of rape, which is an offence under section 376 of the Penal Code. It was a gang-rape involving five boys on two under-aged girls. The rest of the four boys are still at large. He stated that he took part in the gang-rape because of insurmountable peer pressure. He was convicted and sentenced to five years imprisonment. He was to be released from prison in 2010.

His father passed away when his mother was pregnant before she gave birth to him. He is the only child in the family. He was raised by his mother with the help of his maternal grandfather. He dropped-out of school at Standard Four. He appeared very reserved and naive in the course of the interview.

Obviously, his involvement in crime can be attributed to poverty, single parenthood, early exit from school and influence from delinquent peers.

Case 8

The offender is a Malay boy who was jailed for eleven years for rape, which is an offence under section 376 of the Penal Code. He participated in the crime along with two others raping an under-aged girl. He was nineteen years old at the time of the incident and was working as a labourer at the time of his arrest. He was to be released from prison in 2014.

Both parents are still alive. He is the youngest of 4 children comprising of three males and a female. He had no interest in studying, and hence, was a frequent truant. He started smoking while he was in Form 3 and finally stopped schooling after Form five.

His involvement in the sexual misconduct could be due to the influence of delinquent peers, poor school performance and big family size.

Case 9

The offender is a Malay boy who was involved in selling and trafficking drugs since he was sixteen years old. He was caught at the age of 19 and was charged under Section 39A (2) of the Dangerous Drugs Act of 1952 (Amendment 1980) for being in possession of dangerous substances suspected to be drugs. He was tried, found guilty and sentenced to seven years imprisonment and 10 strokes of whipping. He will be out of jail in 2011.

He started smoking at the age of 12 and became active with drugs at the age of 14. He dropped out of school at the age of fourteen when he could not take any more pressure from his then school history teacher, whom he claimed always scorned him for reasons unknown to him. He is the second of five children (four males and a female) and his parents were still alive at the time of the interview.

His involvement in crime could be attributed to peer influence, pressure at school, delinquent peers and lack of parental guidance and control.

Case 10

The offender is a Malay, who was arrested and found guilty for an offence under section 39A ca(2) of the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 (Amendment 1980) for possession of drugs at the age of eighteen years. He received a jail sentence of five years and 10 strokes of whip.

He was an orphan whose parents passed away when he was five years old. He has six siblings, all of whom were raised by his grandfather. He could not continue his study due to poverty. As a result of that he dropped out after Standard three at the age of nine. He started to smoke when he was thirteen years old and proceeded to sell drugs at the age of fourteen. Over the period of 4 to 5 years, he claimed his gang managed to collect an illegal gain amounting to between RM40,000- 50,000, which was shared among four gang members.

The boy's engagement in criminal activities at an early age could be attributed to losing his parents at early age, large family size, poverty, early exit from school and delinquent peers.

3.1.1 Male Cases

Table 1.5 presents a background summary with regards to personal, family, school and peer influence on the 10 male cases. The evidence show that there is a strong link between poverty and crime. With the exception of the two Chinese boys involved in murder, poverty appears to be a major influence on male crime.

However, the evidence also shows that the conduct of the youth criminals could have been caused from being socialized in an environment that included criminals from early age.

Among the eight major cases discussed above, there is a significant correlation between youth crime and poor family background. The problems escalates among youths of single parenthood and family size resulting in families losing control of their children who later become irresistibly influenced by their peers to commit assorted kinds of criminal activities. In situations where a parent, sibling or peer indulges in crime, it seems to drive the delinquent child to imbibe the habit faster. The poor academic performance of some youths may be linked to poor family background which forces them to drop out from school and join bad gangs.

Table 1.5: Male Youth Criminal Cases, Major Influences

Case/ Ethnicity	Personal	Family	School	Peer Influence
Case 1 Chinese	- ego and hot temper	- parents intact - good family income - family size: 5	- frequently changing school (3 times) - good academic result	- delinquent peer influence from 'girlfriend'
Case 2 Chinese	- quiet but temperamental	- parents intact - good family income - family size: 3	- study in private school - good academic result	- no bad influence
Case 3 Malay	- normal	- single parent (father dead) - low family income - family size: 10	- poor academic performance - drop out at Form 3(15yrs)	- delinquent peer
Case 4 Indian	- mischievous	- single parent (father dead) - poor family income-family size: 6 - raised by maternal aunty	- poor academic performance - drop out at Form 2(14yrs)	- delinquent siblings(2brothers are criminals) - delinquent peer
Case 5 Malay	- normal and quite person	- single parent (parents divorce) - poor family income - family size: 2	- poor academic performance - drop out at Form 5(17yrs)	-no bad influence

Case/ Ethnicity	Personal	Family	School	Peer Influence
Case 6 Malay	- mischievous and talkative	- parents intact - below average family income - family size: 6	- poor academic performance - drop out at Form 1(13yrs)	- delinquent peer
Case 7 Malay	- low IQ	- single parent (father dead) - very poor family - family size:1	- poor academic performance - drop out at Standard 4 (10yrs)	- delinquent peer - influence from gang (friends moving in a group)
Case 8 Malay	- average	- parents intact - average family income - family size: 4	- poor academic performance - drop out at Form 5(18yrs)	- delinquent peer - influence from gang (friends moving in a group)
Case 9 Malay	- mischievous but intelligent	- parents intact - below average family income - family size: 5	- poor academic performance - drop out at Form 2 (14yrs)	- delinquent peer - influence from gang (friends moving in a group)
Case 10 Malay	- normal	- orphan (both parents dead) - poor - family size: 6 - raised by grandfather	- poor academic performance - drop out at Standard 3 (9yrs)	- delinquent peer - influence from gang (friends moving in a group)

Source: Authors' Interviews (2008)

3.2 Female Youths

Crime data among Malaysian youths shows significantly low involvement in crime, including in the intensity of crime. Nevertheless, it is interesting to find out what causes female youths to commit crimes. Owing to the low incidence of female criminals, only four female youth offenders were interviewed and the findings are as follows.

Case 11

The offender is an Indian girl who willfully assisted a foreigner to commit an offence which contravenes Section 12(1) (h) of the Passport Act. She was therefore sentenced to 1 year and 4 months imprisonment at the age of nineteen.

She revealed that she got married at the age of seventeen and has a two year old son with her husband who is labourer.

She is from a broken family. Her father divorced her mother when she was twelve years old. Her father was an alcoholic as well as a criminal, who used to abuse her mother. Her mother re-married and in total she had ten siblings. She dropped out from school at Form 3 as the mother could not support her family, and hence, she had to work to help her mother.

The obvious causes behind her participation in crime could be attributed to poverty, broken home, large family size, influence of an alcoholic criminal father, early exit from school and teenage marriage.¹⁰

Case 12

The offender is an Iban (Sarawak) Muslim girl who was sentenced to 1 year and 10 months imprisonment for committing two offences under section 380 and section 392 of the Penal Code for theft and robbery respectively. She committed the offence in the company of her husband when she was twenty years old. Her husband was also serving the sentences concurrently with her.

She revealed that at the age of 13, she was impregnated and forced to into early marriage. She lived a poor marriage life driven by her husband with whom they rob and stole together from people. She started as a snatch thief at the age of sixteen. She also added that she was from a very large and divided family. Her father has four wives, with her mother being the first. She had eight siblings from her mother alone.

The causes of her juvenile delinquency can be attributed to broken home, no control from the parents, large family, early school exit and poor academic performance, bad influence from peer, teenage marriage, and influence from her husband who is criminal.

Case 13

The offender is a Malay girl who was charged with voluntarily causing hurt in the course of robbery, which is punishable under section 394 of the Penal Code. She committed the offence together with her husband. She was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment at the Kajang Female Prison.

¹⁰ Teenage marriage refers to a girl or a boy who gets married at a tender age, especially girls still in their teens whom are usually forced or cajoled by parents to an early wedlock.

Her father is a drug addict, a former convict of Kuantan Prison who persistently abused her mother. She is from a family of eight siblings, dropped out of school at Form three and got married at the age of seventeen and had two children at the time of the study.

Factors behind her involvement in criminal activities could be a result of poverty, broken family; criminal father, large family size, early exit from school, delinquent siblings, teenage marriage, and influence from her husband who is also a criminal.

Case 14

The offender is a Malay girl who was charged for being pregnant out of wedlock under Syariah Criminal Offences Act, which is a criminal offence for Muslims in Malaysia. At the time of interview, her husband was also serving a jail sentence in Kelantan for committing theft.

Her parents were divorced when she was only ten years old. She dropped out from school after Standard 6. She has three siblings. She disclosed that she has been sexually active from the age of fourteen but only became pregnant at the age of 18. She was forced by her father to marry a man who is not responsible for her pregnancy. Her pregnancy status was made known to the Muslim Religion Department when she was underwent a medical examination at the hospital.

The factors attributable to her immoral offence could be due to broken family, lack of parental guidance, peer influence, marrying a man who was a criminal.

3.2.1 Female Cases

Table 1.6 summarizes the background of the female youth criminals by personal background, family, school and peer influence. The evidence shows cause of crimes as the male youth offenders, which is very much related to poverty and its related features, such as large family size, broken families, early exit from schools and exposure to criminal family.

All the girls examined are from poor and large family backgrounds. The families were too poor to support their education. This has left them with no other choice but to work or help their families. At the same time, they indulged in delinquent acts committing adultery with males, smoking and coming home late.

All the female offenders got married in their teens. The lives of these women changed from bad to worse when the husbands they married were involved in criminal activities as they were forced to become their accomplices in crime.

Two of the female offenders were arrested together with the husbands in the act of committing crime.

The causes of their criminal involvement turns out to be as a result of poverty. However, they were also entrenched in a vicious circle of poverty associated with large family size, early exit from schools, broken families and criminal husbands. Unlike male youth offenders all female offenders interviewed were accomplices to male led crimes.

Table 1.6
Cases by Personal, Family, School and Peer Influences, Females

Case / Ethnicity	Personal	Family	School	Peer Influence
Case 11 Indian	- teenage marriage at the age of 17 - has a son	- single parent (parents divorce) - poor family income - family size: 10 - father is a criminal and alcoholic - mother remarried - husband is odd labor	- poor academic Performance - drop out at Form 3 (15 yrs old)	-
Case 12 Iban Muslim	- teenage marriage at the age of 13 - has 2 children	- broken home - father has 4 wives - low family income - family size: 8 - criminal husband	- poor academic Performance - drop out at Form 1 (13 yrs old)	criminal husband
Case 13 Malay	- teenage marriage at the age of 17 - has 2 children	- broken home - low family income - family size: 8 - criminal father - criminal husband	- poor academic Performance - drop out at Form 3 (15 yrs old)	Delinquent sibling Criminal husband
Case 14 Malay	- teenage marriage at the age of 18 - has a child	- broken home - low family income - criminal husband	- poor academic Performance - drop out at Standard 6 (12yrs old)	Criminal husband

Source: Authors' Interviews (2008)

3.3 Synthesis

Oral conversations with the respondents have helped in expounding empirically the reasons behind the criminal disposition of youths in Malaysia. In the course of the interviews, the respondents expressed openness and were therefore able to provide all the necessary information pertaining their criminal activities without hesitation. This in a way facilitated the collection of evidence, although the study took cognizance of the fact that some of the information may be not be completely true.

Table 1.7 compares the intensity of crime between male and female offenders. There is a heavy skew towards male youths committing serious crimes, which corroborates the quantitative results obtained by Lee (2009) and Lee and Rasiah (2014). The two female offenders who were convicted with serious offences, were involved in robbery and voluntarily causing hurt when committing robbery (see Table 1.2) but were mere accomplices to their husbands. It is obvious that males were the prime culprits committing crime among Malaysian youths.

Table 1.7
Intensity of Crime by Gender

Gender	Intensity Of Crime
Female	1, 2, 12,13
Male	8, 9, 10,12, 13, 14.15 and 16

Source: Authors' Interviews (2008)

Table 1.8 shows evidence of similarity of the factors that influence youngsters to commit crime. The findings show that there are similar factors or causes of crime among male and female juvenile offenders in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the root causes of why juvenile offenders commit delinquent acts or criminal activities can be explained through four main domains - individual, family, school and peer factors.

The relationship between crime and its causes among the youths are summarized as follows (see also Figure 1.2):

- The behavioural factor, which includes rage or impulsive reactions especially in cases of violent crimes like homicide and murder. While poverty did not account for the crimes of murder, the offenders committed it once in their lives respectively.

- By far the biggest influence was poverty, which has a strong link to family related factors, namely, single parenthood or broken homes (as a result of divorce or death of parents), and large family size, father or spouse involved in criminal activity or being abusive at home. Females' likelihood of becoming criminals increase when they marry at young age criminal husbands.
- Early exit from school either due to poor academic performance, truancy or family's inability to finance schooling is a contributor factor.
- Peer factor has also been an influence, especially among males, which encompasses being exposed to delinquent peers, friends and gangs.¹¹

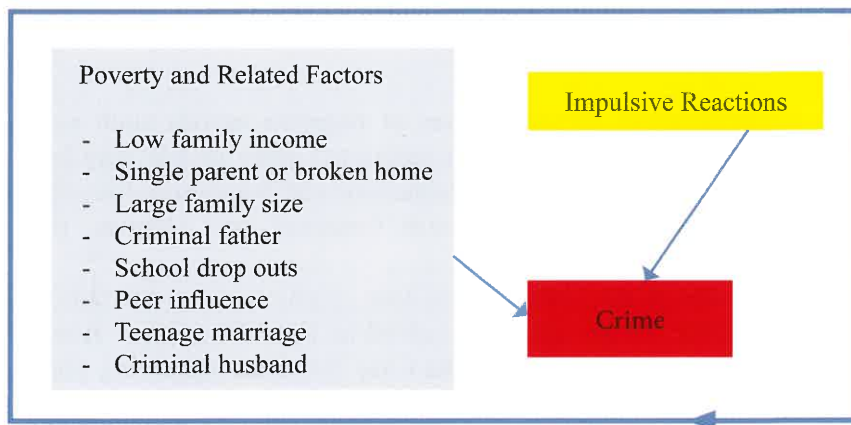


Figure 1.2
Relationship between Crime and Causes of Crime

Source: Authors' Survey (2008)

4. Causes of Crime

It is discernible from the varying but consistent information gathered from the case study examined that there are some basic factors that underpin youth criminal behaviours and offences. These factors uncovered tend to further enhance the empirical findings of this thesis by widening the scope of the factors that causes youth crime in Malaysia. These factors or causes behind youth crime are examined in the subsequent subsections.

¹¹ Gangs refer to a like-minded group of individuals who come together informally to carry out illicit and anti social activities. A good example of a gang is Mat Rempit, who involved in illegal motorcycle racing.

4.1.1 Behavioural Factors

The most serious crimes committed, i.e. murder and culpable homicide, seem to have been generated by impulsive manners. One of the youth offenders was influenced by a delinquent peer with his girlfriend (case 1) and the other one was a reaction to purposeful torment (case 2). Both cases fall under the same category which is a very serious violent offence.

Some of the interviewed youth criminal offenders displayed some temperamental characteristics which according to Goldsmith *et al.* (1987) are individual predispositions for certain behavioural characteristics that can be modified by environmental influences. Such include the unfriendly teasing and continuous provocations from the deceased which led to murdering of one victim as noted in chapter five. Case 2 and the peer-influence on the Case 1 are good examples (see Table 1.8, Table 1.9 (a)).

As noted, temperamental (predominance of negative moods such as anger and difficulty in controlling behaviours and emotions) early in life may be a marker for the early antecedents of anti-social behaviour and behavioural problems (Earls and Jung, 1987; Prior *et al.*, 1993; Guerin, Gottfried, and Thomas, 1997).

Compared to the rest of the group, these two youths come from family who are not poor. The parents of the culprit involved in Case No: 1 are even graduates with good incomes and the parents of the Case No: 2 are operating business with a steady income. The two cases appear exceptional to the rules, as much from 20% of the male group, and only 14% of the overall group studied.

4.1.2 Poverty

Poverty has been found to contribute to a greater likelihood of involvement in crime and violence in Malaysia, and this is in concordance with the work of Sampson and Lauritsen, (1994). Self-reported felony, assault and robbery have been found to be twice as common among youths living in poverty as among middle-class youth (Elliott, Huizinga, and Menard, 1989). From the results obtained, low family income predicted self-reported teen violence and convictions for violent offenses in several studies (see also Hogh and Wolf, 1983; Henry *et al.*, 1996).

The majority of offenders sampled for this study are poor in spite of the fact that a random sampling was used for the study. Out of a total of 14 cases examined, 12 were from families with low socio-economic status. In other words, 86% turn out to be from poor family backgrounds (see Table 1.8 and Table 1.9 (a)). This evidence tends to suggest that the socio-cultural background of the poor with no ability to weigh risks and rewards account for the crimes committed, which quite obviously does not fit into the rational individual advanced by Becker (1968).

Although we did not undertake participation observation the findings suggest strong influence from a wide range of social characteristics associated with poverty. Lewis (1966, 1969, 1998) referred to them as socio-cultural elements of the vicious circle of poverty. The vicious circle of poverty include offenders entrenched in an environment that includes large broken families, early exit from school, and fathers, husbands, siblings or peers with criminal record.

4.1.3 Single Parent

It is logical to ask if a single parent home is a contributory factor that engenders youth delinquency? The evidence suggests that single parenthood is a contributory factor to delinquent behaviour of youths in Malaysia, which supports Wilkinson's (1980) findings based on official statistics showing a strong correlation between single parent home and youth crime.

Nine out of 14 cases analysed were from single-parent homes, which was headed by the mother. 6 were a cause of separation by divorce, and the remaining 3 cases were as a result of the death (of father). Interestingly, 64% of the respondents come from single parents and broken homes (see Tables 1.8 and 1.9 (a)).

The evidence also shows that single parent homes are characterized by low socio-economic status. The lack of pocket money seem to drive them into seeking other means of meeting up their needs. This situation therefore exposes them to dangerous gangs, and hence, their likelihood to committing crimes, such as, theft, robbery or peddling drugs. Some researchers maintain that divorce is more likely to predispose a child to delinquency than the death of a parent (see Farrington, 1983).

Is broken home a contributing factor to delinquency? The empirical evidence supports the commonly accepted notion that delinquency also results from broken homes. A broken home is defined as a family in which parents are divorced or are no longer living together. Using a national probability sample of 1,725 adolescent respondents, Rebellion (2002), concluded that separation of parents early in a juvenile's life may herald delinquent behaviour in that child. He also found that parents' remarriage during the juvenile's adolescence may strongly lead to participation in socially offending activities.

In addition, Rebellion (2002) found that association with deviant peers and attitudes favourable to delinquency account for the broken homes-delinquency relationship better than other explanations. Wells and Rankin's (1991) meta-physical analysis of fifty published studies dealing with broken homes and delinquency corroborated these findings, which includes the prevalence of delinquency in broken homes amounting to 10 to 15 per cent higher than in normal homes. The correlation between broken homes and juvenile delinquency is stronger among minor forms of

juvenile misconduct (status offenses) and weaker among serious forms of criminal behaviour (such as theft and violence). Family break-up seems to negatively affect juvenile delinquency because the evidence shows a stronger incidence of delinquency among families broken by divorce or separation than by death of a parent. The evidence also shows no consistent or appreciable differences in the impact of broken homes between girls and boys.

4.1.4 Large Family

Based on the classification of a large family by Hirshi (1969) as one with 4 or more children, this study revealed that 10 out of 14 youth offenders (71%) were from large families. Therefore the evidence suggests that large family size, usually characterized by poverty and many members with unscrupulous attributes could be a major of parameter for youth's indulgence in criminal activities (see Table 1.8 and 1.9(a)).

Research findings on family size generally reveal that large families have more delinquency than small families. Hirschi (1969) explained the higher rate of delinquency among middle children linking it with family size rather than birth position. A recent study by Derson and Lipsey (2000) found that the strongest predictors of early-onset of violence include large family size, poor parenting skills and anti-social parents.

Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1986) suggested that a number of processes may explain why delinquency rates are higher in large than in small families. First, parents in large families tend to have more difficulty disciplining and supervising their children than parents with small families. Second, some parents with large families delegate child rearing to older siblings who may not be equipped to execute this task. Third, large families frequently are more exposed to illegitimacy, poverty, and overcrowding.

4.1.5 Family Criminality

There is evidence to suggest that siblings learn delinquency acts from others in the family. Glueck and Glueck (1950) reported that a much higher proportion of delinquents than non-delinquents had criminal mothers and fathers. In this study, it was found that youths involved in Cases 11 and 13 had criminal fathers. The female offenders, i.e. in Cases 12 and 13 who took part in theft and robbery were influenced by their husbands who are unemployed and poor with a record of delinquent behaviour (see Tables 1.8; 1.9 (a) and (b)).

Joan McCord's (1989) follow-up of the Cambridge-Somerville (Massachusetts) Youth Study revealed that the sons of fathers who had serious criminal records were likely to be raised in poor families badly, which increased their risk of becoming criminals.

4.1.6 Early Exit from School

Low academic achievement, which induces early exit from school, and frequent changes in schools are factors frequently cited as likely to influence delinquency. There were 12 out of 14 youth offenders who were found to be lacking any interest in studying and at the same time also had performed poorly in school, which is an important cause of an early exit from school. Some youths in our study had to drop-out from school due to excessive truancy and academic performance (see Tables 1.8 and 1.9(b)).

Statistically, poor academic achievement has consistently predicted later delinquency (Maguin and Loeber, 1996; Denno, 1990). Academic failure in the elementary grades also increase the risk of participation later in violent behaviour (Farrington, 1989; Maguin *et al.*, 1995). The relationship between poor academic achievement and later violent conduct has been found to be stronger among females than among males. Farrington (1989) found that youths with a high truancy rate at ages 12-14 were more likely to engage in violence than adults. Leaving school before the age of 15 also predicted later violence. Truancy and early school drop-out may be good indicators of low school bonding, but children also may miss school or leave school early for other reasons (Janosz *et al.*, 1996).

Maguin *et al.* (1995) found that youths who had changed schools often in the past at ages 14 till 16 were more violent at age 18 than those who had not. However, conclusions from this finding must be drawn carefully because school transition can be related to other factors that predict violence. In this sample, there was only one case i.e. Case 1, (changed 3 schools within 5 years) during his secondary schooling. It could be one of the reasons as to why the delinquent has too many socially bad friends and with that the chances of succumbing to criminal conduct.

4.1.7 Peer Influence

Glueck and Glueck (1950) reported that a much higher proportion of delinquents than non-delinquents had criminal siblings. There was only one case in our study, i.e. Case 4 that showed delinquent siblings - two elder brothers who were also involved in robbery together with the youth offender. The criminal brothers were a strong cause of Case 4 getting involved in crime (see Table 1.8).

Farrington (1997) also found that the delinquency of siblings is a predictor of delinquency. Furthermore, Lauritsen (1993) found that delinquency is predicted equally well by the offending behaviour of an older sibling, a younger sibling or by the average level of offences among all adolescents in the household. In addition, these studies emphasize that a delinquent sibling can greatly encourage a child to become delinquent, especially when the siblings are close in age and have close relationship (Reiss and Farrington, 1991; Rowe and Gully, 1992).

It is believed that an accelerated path toward child delinquency and subsequently participation in more serious offences may be the result of peer influences or associations with peers who already show deviant behaviour. As children get older, attend school, and become integrated into their community, the array of risk factors among child delinquency expands. Many studies show a relationship between deviant peer associations and juvenile offenders (see Elliott and Menard, 1996). Most Hypotheses suggest that deviant peers can lead some youths with no previous history of delinquent behaviour to initiate delinquent acts and may influence already delinquent youth to increase their delinquency. Youths who associate with deviant peers are likely to be arrested earlier than youth who do not associate with such peers (Coie *et al.*, 1995).

Nine out of 14 cases in our study showed youth involvement in delinquent acts or criminal offences and all of these were a result of peer influence from delinquent peers, especially at the initial stages. It is therefore strongly argued that delinquent peers indeed are a major cause of youth crime in Malaysia (see Tables 1.8 and 1.9 (b)).

Delinquent peers also may have a greater influence on later violence during an individual's adolescence than earlier in their life (Moffitt, 1993). Research has shown that adolescents whose peers disapproved of delinquent behaviour are less likely to indulge in delinquent acts (Elliott, 1994), including sexual assaults (Ageton, 1983).

Battin *et al.* (1998) showed that being a gang member contributes more to delinquency than does having delinquent peers. This study also applies well to criminal cases involving groups of people or gang members. Cases 7 and 8, and cases 9 and 10 from our study support this study with the former two engaged in gang-rape offences, and the latter two in drug trafficking offences respectively.

4.1.8 Teenage Marriage and Criminal Husbands

Besides the common causes of youth offenders for both male and female mentioned earlier, such as single parent home, parent criminality, large family size, low socio economic status, school drop-out, delinquent siblings and delinquent peers are all additional causes that influence female youths to commit delinquent acts. The common cause of the four case studies on female offenders i.e. Cases 11, 12, 13 and 14 involved in the delinquent acts or crimes were that they came from broken homes i.e. Case 11 has a criminal father and her mother divorced, Case 12 has a father who has 4 wives, Case 13 has a criminal father and Case 4 has both the parents separated. They had started their delinquent acts while in primary schools and they experienced early sexual misconducts (see Table 1.8.)

Their involvement in crime could be best explained by psychological explanations suggested by Pollak (1950) that there are two factors that influence adolescent female to become juvenile delinquents. First, is that early physical development and sexual maturity allows a female more opportunities to engage in immoral or delinquent behaviour. Secondly, a female’s home life especially if she has criminal parents or grows up in a broken home, which may compel her to seek outside substitutes. She is likely to seek the company of others and they will eventually become involved in petty crimes. The study by Wattenberg and Saunders (1954) found a connection between pattern of broken or disrupted homes and female delinquency.

The situation is worsened when the female youth offenders were forced to marry at an early age either because of out of wedlock pregnancy or other incorrigible characters. Teenage marriage finally turned into an inferior marriage whereby the husbands could not sustain family life thereby resorting to crime in order to make both ends meet. The female offenders were influenced by the husband who was also a delinquent or a criminal, as a result of this they were forced to commit crime. According to our interview, 75% of the females are married to criminal husbands (see Table 1.8 and Table 1.9(b).

It could be seen as a classic example of a vicious cycle of poverty and crime. Sommers *et al.*, (1994) found that quality marriages led women to desist from crime, although with some variations depending on the class and race of women being studied.

Table 1.8
Causes of Crime from the Cases, 2008

Causes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Rage / impulsive	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Poverty	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Single parent or broken home	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Large family size	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Criminal father	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓	-	✓	-
School drop out	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Delinquent peer	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	-
Teenage marriage	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Criminal husband	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓

Source: Authors’ Interviews (2008)

Table 1.9 (a)
Causes of Crime by Gender, 2008

Gender	Rage / impulsive	%	Poverty	%	Single / broken home	%	Large family size	%	Criminal father	%
Male	2/10	20	8/10	80	5/10	50	7/10	70	0/10	0
Female	0/4	0	4/4	100	4/4	100	3/4	75	2/4	50
Overall	2/14	14	12/14	86	9/14	64	10/14	71	2/14	20

Source: Authors' Interviews (2008)

Table 1.9 (b)
Causes of Crime by Gender, 2008

Gender	Drop Out	%	Peer Influence	%	Teenage Marriage	%	Criminal Husband	%
Male	8/18	80%	8/10	80%	0/14	0%	Nil	nil
Female	4/4	100%	1/4	25%	4/4	100%	3/4	75%
Overall	12/14	86%	9/14	64%	4/14	29%	3/14	21%

Source: Authors Survey (2008)

Overall, the evidence from our study corroborates the statistical evidence from other studies. However, while the statistical studies allow us to narrow the influences on crime to particular socioeconomic variables, they do not go beyond explaining the strong correlation between particular socioeconomic variables of youths and their likelihood of committing crimes. Our study using an open set of research lenses fills this gap by tracing all the socioeconomic variables of youth criminals and their relationship with their criminal behaviour. Our study also allowed us to trace the real reasons behind each of their offences by interviewing the offenders directly. Apart from the two youths who committed murder, the deviant characteristics that we identified among the remaining youth criminals has allowed us to classify the socioeconomic elements of poverty as a whole as entrenched into a vicious circle of poverty. As Lewis (1966, 1998) has explained, the vicious circle of poverty, which detaches deviant youths from the mainstream society, must be broken if they are to be rehabilitated.

While penalties, such as jail-terms may be unavoidable to keep them from injuring members of society it will have little impact in changing their criminal conduct. Efforts must be taken to identify localities infested with such criminal conduct (e.g. slums) and pockets locked up in otherwise good neighbourhoods so that initiatives can be taken to break the vicious circle of poverty. The role of

the police force should be extended from just participation in policing crime to allow them to work with researchers to identify these locations and communities to formulate preventive strategies.

5. Conclusion

This study produced useful complementary evidence to suggest that human behaviour is often conditioned by the social environment. The evidence gathered in the paper provides a somewhat similar picture of the main causes of youth crime, with the exceptions of the two youths convicted of either committing or attempting to commit murder, and males dominating participation in violent crimes. The most violent crime, which is murder, from the sample was committed by boys and were driven by impulse, with only one showing peer influence and the other by frequent exposure to bullying. Both boys come from well-endowed families. However, these are random developments that may be genetic or psychologically influenced by individual characteristics. Also, gender appears to be a major predictor of youth crime in Malaysia. All females engaged in violent crime have only been accomplices of males suggesting that Malaysian female youths are unlikely to orchestrate the planning and execution of violent crime. The remaining crimes appear to be serial, which is demonstrated by a pattern of conduct that is driven by entrenched elements of chronic poverty that foster criminal behaviour.

The remaining offences revolve around chronic elements of poverty, which include being exposed to criminal siblings, fathers or peers, large family size, broken families especially single parentage, early marriage to criminal husbands and early exit from schools. The evidence is overwhelming as both the survey and the case evidence strongly support the point that entrenched engagement of youths in criminal activity is driven by their chronic occurrence simultaneously that detaches them from the norm of good societal behaviour. These elements support Lewis (1966, 1998) argument that entraps youth criminals from breaking out from the vicious circle of poverty to reform.

The evidence from this paper suggests that Becker's (1968) theory explaining the causes of crime through observing the gap between the rewards and risk may not be adequate. The two murder cases among the youths are not associated with poverty, while females from the sample show that they are unlikely to orchestrate crime. Although the evidence comes from only 14 respondents, it shows that a range of characteristics that are associated with poverty may better explain as much of the crimes committed by youth. The implications of our findings is to support research that can identify the locations (typically slums) where such

entrenched elements of poverty can be found so that efforts can be taken to solve the social problems that fester criminal behaviour. The focus must be on breaking the vicious circle of poverty that form the root causes of criminal conduct. Such preventive measures are important to check criminal behaviour.

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