

## JUVENILE DELINQUENCY: WHY MINORS TURN INTO MONSTERS?

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### ABSTRACT

*Children are a nation's asset for a better future. The wellbeing of children has been prioritised by the government via numerous strategies and action plans. The government's commitment to child protection encompasses a wide range of issues, including neglect, abuse, and violence, as well as children as young offenders. However, society is concerned about the recent trend and statistics of crime, including young offenders. As a result, this research investigates the key elements influencing children's engagement in different forms of crime. Further, the informants of this study are juvenile offenders who commit various sorts of crimes and serve the Court for Children orders. Hence, the informants of this study represent students from authorised schools, Henry Gurney School and Wira Bakti School. Twenty-eight informants were selected based on their age, which is below 18 years old, and the types of crime they have committed. In-depth interviews were done to obtain their traumatic experiences in dealing with crime at a young age. The findings of this study identified six major elements influencing children's engagement in various crimes, including friends, family, internal, media, society, and school. As a result, the government should make concerted efforts to combat juvenile delinquency by addressing the root causes identified in this study. If this problem persists, the nation will face major societal issues that will influence the country's growth.*

Keywords: Juvenile delinquency; factor; crimes; young offenders; minors

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### INTRODUCTION

Children are an important factor in shaping the country's future. Therefore, there are various protections provided to children under the law, either at the national or international level. The policies, rules, and regulations relevant to child protection in Malaysia have been presented under the National Child Policy 2009, National Child Protection Policy 2009, Child Act 2001, Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017, and others. On the other hand, the worldwide commitment to child protection has been confirmed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Under this convention, all state members agreed to give protection to their children. Protection extends not just to the victim of a crime but also the perpetrator. Malaysia was one of the signatories and ratifiers of this treaty in 1995. The signature of this treaty marks a watershed moment in Malaysia's Child Act 2001 and the founding of the Court for Children.

#### Definition of term

Before delving more into the concerns of crimes involving minors, it is important to comprehend the terms and definitions of minor or child, crime, and crime causes. According to Section 2 of the Child Act 2001, a child is defined as anyone under the age of eighteen and a person who has reached the age of criminal responsibility as defined in Section 82 of the Penal Code. The definition of the age of criminal responsibility in Section 82 of the Penal Code states that nothing done by a child under the age of 10 years constitutes an offence. The depiction on the age of children is further elaborated under Section 83 of the Penal Code, which states that a child aged 10 or under 12 cannot commit an offence. This is true even if the youngster is unaware of the implications of their behaviour. In discussing crime, Rutherford and Bone (1993) defined "crime" as "an act, default, or conduct prejudicial to the community, the commission of which by law renders the person responsible liable to punishment by fine or imprisonment in special proceedings." According to Weatherburn (2001), most people believe that if an event or condition has an effect, that effect will always follow the event or condition. This idea of causality is worthless in dealing with crime. Factors and situations that criminologists believe contribute to criminal behaviour may not always do so. Instead, it raises the probability of criminal activity to a greater or lesser level. The more risk indicators you have, the more likely you are to participate in criminal activity (Weatherburn, 2001).

In many situations, the word "juvenile" is associated with "monster," particularly when reporting on juvenile delinquencies. For example, *The Star* used the term "Monsters Youngsters" when reporting about fire and arson that occurred at the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah Tahfiz, which resulted in the death of 23 people, including 21 children (Azizan, 2017). In addition, Wardle (2007) conducted research titled "Monsters and angels: Visual newspaper coverage of child killings in the United States and the United Kingdom, 1930–2000," that emphasised the conclusions of Jewkes's (2004) study, which argued that children were either "tragic victims" or "evil monsters." However, in circumstances when a minor was the culprit, the epithet "evil monster" was used for this sort of criminal.

### Statistics of crimes involving minors

According to Ministry of Justice statistics under the category of Youth Justice Statistics, 2017/2018 for England and Wales, 26,700 youngsters were cautioned or sentenced in the United Kingdom, with 76 % of them aged 15 to 17 years old. Meanwhile, 84 % of them were men, and 73 % were white. London has the highest rate of children in custody, 3.3 children per 10,000 of the general population aged 10 to 17 years old. There were 70,300 convictions, with aggression against a person accounting for about 20,000 of them. There were 39,200 warnings or penalties issued that year, with 40.9 % of juveniles reoffending within a year, committing 3.92 offences on average. In recent years, the average jail sentence duration for indictable offences has climbed by over one month to 16.7 months. Children in custody grew by 3% between 2016/17 and 2017/18. Following that, 21,700 minors were warned or punished in 2018/19. Meanwhile, 85 % of the young people were males, 77 % were between the ages of 15 and 17, and 73 % were Caucasian. Children who reoffended climbed by 3%, bringing the total to \$4.05. Later, 15,751 minors were warned or punished in the fiscal year ending March 2021. In London, the rate of youngsters warned or sentenced per 1000 children increased to 3.5. 87 % were males. 82 % were between the ages of 15 and 17, and 18 % were between the ages of 10 and 14. In 2018/19, ethnic minority group membership climbed to 30% from 27%. (Ministry of Justice, 2021)

According to data from the United States of America, the number of juvenile delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts in 2018 was 737, with 600, or 27 %, of cases involving female offenders, 53 % of cases involving children under the age of 16, while offenders at 44 %, and black offenders at 34 %. However, the number of offenders was reduced in 2019 to 722,600, while the percentage of age for some categories climbed. According to the data, female criminals make up 28% of all offenders. In comparison to 2018, there was a 1% rise. 54 % of offenders were under the age of 16, with 43 % white and 35 % black. The number has dropped over time and has grown in certain areas (Sickmund, Sladky & Kang, 2021).

In Malaysia, the statistics of crimes involving juvenile offenders are alarming. According to the Department of Statistics (2021), the number of offences involving minors under the age of 18 in 2016 was reported to be 4,886. In 2017, that figure increased to 5,443, and in 2018, it declined to 5,294. Later, crime numbers dropped even more to 4,833 in 2019. Surprisingly, by 2020, the figure increased to 5,342 offenders.

Thus, depending on the statistics of these three nations, the criteria for collecting data on juvenile offenders varied from one another. Data collection varies by region, case type, population, sentencing, arrests, and other factors. However, it can be observed that the number rose at some point, depending on the circumstances and economic state of the nation at the time.

In Malaysia, the increase in the number of crimes involving bullying incidents in the nation is causing concern in society. On the 24th of May 2022, *Sinar Harian* reported that bullying instances are reported throughout the nation, particularly in schools. The news "38 kes buli di sekolah dalam tempoh 4 bulan" (38 bullying instances in school within 4 months) claimed that there were 38 incidents of bullying in this country's schools in the first four months of 2022, beginning in the month of January. Datuk Seri Abd Jalil Hassan, Director of the Bukit Aman Criminal Investigation Department (JSJ), stated that eight cases were reported in Pahang, while seven cases were reported in Terengganu. He said that the states of Melaka, Kelantan, and Negeri Sembilan each had four instances. Selangor reported three cases, followed by Johor, Kedah, Kuala Lumpur and Perlis with two cases at each state, respectively. Any information that may be offered to make schools a safe environment for children to study is welcomed by PDRM (Ramli, 2022).

### The trend of crimes

The community is concerned about the pattern and statistics of crimes involving children, either as victims or perpetrators. It is because children are defenceless and are supposedly protected by the law. Hashim (2020) reported on the pattern of crimes involving young criminals with the title "*Trend jenayah remaja dan kanak-kanak membimbangkan*" (The trend of juvenile and child crime is worrying). According to a report in *Utusan Malaysia* on December 2, 2020, the trend and crime statistics involving children as either victims or perpetrators of crime cause concern in the country. Theft, inflicting harm, breaking, rape, and robbery are among the crimes committed by juveniles as reported to the Royal Malaysia Police. Although the frequency of arrests involving minors has been reduced, it remains at an alarming pace. The highest victims are rape, inflicting bodily harm to others, and stealing motorbike. Almost all offenders and victims of crime are secondary school students aged 13 to 18. Furthermore, there is a perception of the impact of crime based on the number of offences or crimes committed (Hashim, 2020).

In addition, Ariffin (2019) reports on the gravity of crimes involving juveniles in his article "*Bermula jenayah kecil, pelajar terlibat kes ekstrem—Penganalisis*" (Starting small, students are involved in extreme cases—Analyst). According to the press, crime expert Datuk Sahul Hamid said that stealing at a young age might lead to more serious crimes later in life. Small crimes like stealing money and commodities from classmates lead to kids being engaged in major crimes in the future. This kind of criminality begins at an early age. They start small and then dare to steal money and other valuables later in life (Ariffin, 2019).

Meanwhile, the number of cases involving minors does not only include the issue of property or products but also the element of crime or crime involving individuals. Bullying at school is an example of a scenario involving individuals. Bullying in school happens not only in elementary schools but also in high schools, particularly boarding schools. Bullying in schools is also a source of worry for society as both the perpetrator and the victim are youngsters. These issues are always highlighted in the media. For example, news regarding bullying headlined "*Siasatan kes buli MRSM Muar dipanjangkan ke Bukit Aman*" (Bullying incidents in MRSM Muar were extended to Bukit Aman) reported in *Utusan Malaysia* on December 31, 2021. According to the report, the investigation files relating to the bullying incident at MARA Muar Junior College of Science are presently in the Prosecution and Law Division (D5) Bukit Aman. The investigation on the incident at MRSM is complete, and the case has been sent to Johor state headquarters before being extended to Bukit Aman, RMP headquarters (Mohd Ali, 2021).

Other incidents involving criminals was published in *Berita Harian* on August 29, 2022, under the headline "*Tiga pelajar dipukul, adu senior hisap vape*" (Three students were beaten, complained about seniors vaping). Three male pupils from a day-boarding national secondary school (SMK) in Kemaman, Terengganu, reported on August 23 that they were tormented and beaten by a gang of seniors. The incident is said to have occurred as a result of older students' discontent after the victim reportedly complained to the instructor about their vaping activity. He said that the three victims, aged 13 to 15, filed a police report. The victim was alleged to have been abused, causing one of the student's right eardrums to break as well as bruises on his body. Another two victims were reported assaulted and there were bruises on their body. The police hope that if there is a bullying event involving school children, the school will quickly report to the police (Ilham, 2022).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Many parties and stakeholders are involved in dealing with crimes involving minors. The concerns vary since they involve various aspects depending on the situation. Committing a crime may occur as a result of an individual's family, friends, or other factors. The literature on crimes affecting children includes difficulties and obstacles that children face daily. These concerns and challenges include issues that young offenders face, such as coming from a broken home, being influenced by peers, the school environment, misusing technological resources, and bullying in school. These are the factors that have produced stress for children and is a matter of concern for the society as crime rates continue to rise year after year. Coverage by media on the issue, as well as scholarly studies prompted the government to take immediate action to tackle this issue effectively.

### Broken family

The difficulties of children in a broken household are not new. There have been researches undertaken on this topic. Farrington (1992) of Cambridge University's Institute of Criminology conducted research that emphasised the familial aspect of young children committing the crime. The research concludes the patterns in documented juvenile delinquencies in England and Wales from 1961 to 1989. In severe criminal instances, juvenile offenders between the ages of 10 and 16 were convicted. The study discovered that the rising number of juvenile cases is due to a lack of parenting and child-rearing techniques, an increase in the number of criminal and intoxicated parents, an increase in the number of children in families who are dependent on welfare institutions, and an increase in the possibility of crime commission and a decrease in deterrence (Farrington, 1992).

Another study conducted by Bobbio, Arbach, and Illescas (2020) explores the juvenile delinquency risk factor in terms of individual, societal, and opportunity in Argentina. According to the study, teenagers who displayed more anti-social behaviour had certain characteristics such as being older, having only one parent, lacking self-control, consuming intoxicant drinks and drugs, having a mother who lacks responsibility in caring for children, having toxic friends, and living in a criminogenic area (Bobbio, Arbach, & Illescas, 2020). Nourollah (2015) researched the same aspect of family in Tehran. The prevalence of adolescent delinquency demonstrates the impact of demographic, societal, and familial factors. The family factor includes educational background, career, and distance from family. This issue must be addressed seriously, and a solution or action must be undertaken. There is a need to discover a strategy to enhance the health of society, particularly in situations of small criminality.

### Influence of friends

Influence of friends is another important element associated with criminal activity among juvenile offenders. According to Ariffin (2019), young criminals are interested in crime because they want to compete with their friends. Starting with smoking cigarettes, the youngsters progress to other forms of misbehaviour such as sniffing glue and consuming narcotics. As a result of this circumstance, it is clear that the influence of friends plays a critical role in children's engagement in many forms of crime.

### School environment

Another problem addressed by the youngsters is the school atmosphere. Prejudicial school rules or punishment is another factor that contributes to young offenders committing crimes. Research conducted by Tan, Jamil Osman and Mahadir (2019) supports this viewpoint. According to the findings of the research, family relationships, school relationships, and devotion to learning had different predictive effects on the likelihood of various degrees of reprobate behaviour. In any event, family structure is not proven to be a major predictor of relapse in this study. The findings of the study suggest that keeping young people in school can serve as a strong defensive figure that serves to keep at-risk understudies from moving in the direction of genuine reprobate practises. Furthermore, the data support the assumption that dropping out of school is a significant risk factor for adolescent criminality. As a result, the Malaysian government should take initiative to implement effective dropout deterrent and retrieval initiatives. At the strategic plan and practice levels, schools should expose students to and provide them with opportunities to apply their many abilities and talents, as well as show the relationship to the future. The school experience might be seen as a shield element that encourages students to stay in school (Tan, Jamil Osman & Mahadir, 2019).

### Technological influence

There is no doubt that technological advancements currently make it simpler for individuals to interact quickly and efficiently. Gadget facilities that are diversified, useful, and intriguing have piqued the attention of members of the community, including adults and children. However, there is a problem with youngsters misusing technology, which leads to criminality. There is a news report in *Astro Awani* on December 10, 2021: "*Dakwaan buli: Polis panggil pelajar, pemilik akaun media sosial*" (Bullying allegations: Police call students, owners of social media accounts). To assist in the investigation, the police summoned the pupils involved, as well as the owner of the social media account that shared the footage of the bullying event at a boarding school in Kuala Kangsar, Perak. According to police, the event included seven defendants and one victim, all were 13 years old at the time. He said that the matter was investigated under Section 147 of the Penal Code and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act of 1998 (Mohd Ali, 2021).

Other news was published in *Harian Metro* on July 28th, 2021, with the heading "*6 mangsa jenayah seksual sehari*" (6 victims of sexual crimes a day). According to the research, the internet services that are essential for teaching and learning at home sessions instead lead to many youngsters engaging in immoral behaviours, including sexual activities. Assistant Commissioner Siti Kamsiah Hassan, Chief Assistant Director of the Sexual Crimes, Women and Children Investigation Division (D11), Bukit Aman Criminal Investigation Department, stated that sexual crimes occur because there are opportunities to commit acts involving misuse of technological facilities (Bahaudin, 2021).

The limitation on the usage of handphones among students has been highlighted in *Berita Harian* dated December 14th, 2021. According to the report, "*Lebih baik tidak benarkan pelajar bawa telefon bimbit*" (It is better not to allow students to bring mobile phones), parents have urged boarding school administration to restrict the use of mobile phones among its pupils in order to reduce social difficulties and bullying symptoms among students (Zahari, 2021).

### Bullying in school

Bullying among school students is a problem not just at the college level, but also at the secondary and elementary school levels. The majority of incidents occur in boarding institutions. One of the bullying cases was reported in *Astro Awani*: "*Kes buli: Enam pelajar MRSM digantung serta merta selama dua minggu*" (Bullying case: Six MRSM students suspended for two weeks immediately) on December 11, 2021. Based on the report, six students from Perak's MARA Science College (MRSM) were suspended from school for two weeks after being involved in a bullying episode a few days ago. The College Disciplinary Committee proposed that the six students at issue complete their studies at the institution in question. According to the findings, six students were found to be involved in the victim's beating, while four additional students were at the scene and were found to be complicit and provoked. The pupils involved in this case were from Form 1 to Form 3 (*Astro Awani*, 2021).

According to other sources, the police recorded the testimonies of five people in connection with an alleged incidence of student bullying at a boarding school in Kuantan, Pahang. The police took the evidence of five people, including the person who claimed to have been bullied, the person accused of bullying, the school administrator, and the dormitory warden. The case went viral on social media after the mother claimed that her son, who is also a student at the school, has been a victim of bullying since last June. According to the mother of the victim, her son's and other students' clothing that was hung on the school dormitory hooks were scraped and slashed, and they were threatened when the incident was reported to the school. The mother alleged that the boarding school's administration did not take any action when she filed a police report regarding the event (Bahaudin, 2022).

Another report on *Utusan Malaysia*, titled "*Maut dibelasah senior: Bapa reda pemergian anak*" (Senior beaten to death: Father's resilience in the face of his son's death), stated that the victim, a student at *Sekolah Kebangsaan* (SK) Sungai Soi, was kicked, strangled, and slammed to the floor until he lost consciousness. According to reports, the incident occurred at the orphan and poor children's home complex's *surau* (prayer) complex solely because the child who was beaten was suspected of stealing RM4 in cash. The Assistant Commissioner, Wan Mohd. Tariq Wan Busu, District Police Chief, said that the police had detained a 16-year-old student for seven days for further investigation of the matter under Section 302 of the Penal Code (Zulkifli, 2022).

### METHODOLOGY

The qualitative approach was employed in performing this research in order to gather real-life experience from the juvenile offenders. The in-depth interview was chosen as an appropriate method for this study, and the questions asked for the purpose of this study were based on interview protocol. Because children are sensitive and legally protected, a sample of questions for the purpose of an interview was also provided to be analysed and approved by child specialists in child-related experts. Furthermore, this work was approved by a Research Ethics Committee at the faculty level and the university level. This research includes 28 informants, including 27 children from Henry Gurney School and one from Wira Bakti School. This investigation was carried out in the year 2021 when the nation was plagued by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the interview was the most appropriate method for gathering data at the time, and the interview was divided into two methods, which are in-depth interview via telephone and written interview. The telephone interview was conducted with former students of Henry Gurney School, and the written interview was conducted with current students of Henry Gurney School. The interview procedure was developed to minimise infection and spread of COVID-19, which was contagious and claimed many lives at the time. Before conducting interviews with the youngsters, the researcher obtained permission from the Prison Department and the Henry Gurney School.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study conducted in-depth interviews with child offenders from Henry Gurney School and Wira Bakti School. The informants in this research are child offenders under the age of 18, who have committed various sorts of offences and are subject to a Court for Children order. This research employed 28 informants. The gender of the research comprises both male and female informants, which include 20 male and eight female informants. The backgrounds of the informants are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of informants involved in this study**

Informants	Quantity
Henry Gurney School	23 students
Graduated from Henry Gurney School	4 students
Graduated from Wira Bakti School	1 student
<b>Total</b>	<b>28 students</b>

This research identified 11 categories of crimes based on the interviews. The offences include drug trafficking, rape, housebreaking, and so forth. Table 2 shows the sorts of crimes detected throughout this analysis.

**Table 2: Types of crimes involved by informants**

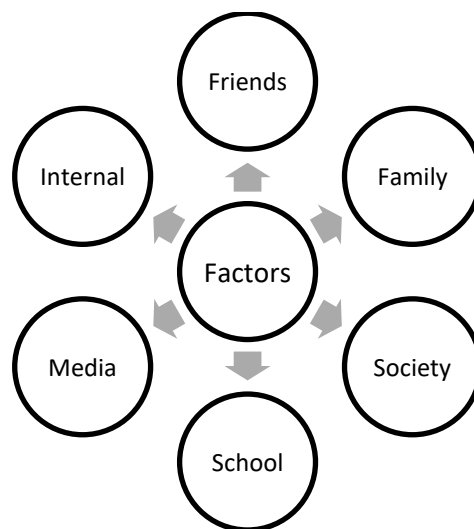
Types of crimes	Quantity
Drug	14
Rape	4
Breaking house	2
Theft	2
Possession of stolen property	2
Armed robbery	2
Breaking building	2
Gang robbery	1
Robbery	1
Outrage Modesty	1
Attempt to Murder	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>32 cases</b>

According to the findings of this study, there are 11 different types of crimes committed by children. The crimes include drug possession, rape, breaking, theft, possession of the stolen property, armed robbery, gang robbery, robbery, outrage modesty, and murder attempt. These are the crimes committed by children under the age of 18. According to the study, drug abuse is the most common among children (14), followed by rape (4) and breaking (3). This is followed by theft (2), possession of stolen property (2), armed robbery (2), gang robbery (1), robbery (1), outrage to modesty (1), and attempt to murder (1).

### **TRIGGERING FACTORS INFLUENCING THE MINOR'S ENGAGEMENT IN CRIMINALITY: WHY DO MINORS TURN INTO MONSTERS?**

The study discovered six triggering elements that influence minors' criminal behaviour. The characteristics were uncovered via in-depth interviews and written interviews with informants who had experiences dealing with criminal cases when they were young. Their perspectives and ideas are based on real-life experiences that are related to the individual's desire to commit crimes, familial factors, peer influence, environmental factors, and others. This study analysed and examined the primary contributors to the involvement in various crimes in more detail. Figure 1 depicts the factors that contribute to children's engagement in criminal activity.

Figure 1: Factors influencing the minor's engagement in criminality



Based on the findings of the study, there are six factors for children's involvement in different types of crimes. The order of triggering factors for children's involvement in crimes is ranked as follows:

**First factor: Friends**

Friends are the most essential people in a child's life after family. Nowadays, the demands of life and the desire to provide a better life for the family have caused parents to work hard and spend more time at work than at home. The absence of parents at home and a lack of adult supervision indirectly causes children to spend the majority of their time with their friends. Children always make the most of their time at school and their leisure time after school with their friends. Because they spend the majority of their time together, whether studying or playing, the youngsters are readily influenced by their companion. This scenario indirectly contributes to young toddlers committing many forms of crimes. According to the findings of this study, 21 of the 28 informants stated that friend was a factor in their involvement with crime. Among the influence of friends include doing worthless activities, watching pornography, being challenged by friends, trying new things, not going home, trying drugs, hanging out together, doing immoral actions, and having the wrong friends. The followings are excerpts from juvenile offenders on the friend factor:

*"Yes. Influence and invitations from peers [...]" (HG 17)*

*"Yes, because I follow the behaviour of my friends and I used to be challenged when I was outside before, so my friends challenged me to take this drug. So I was stuck with drugs until I got in here [...]" (HG 11)*

The excerpts demonstrate the influence of friends in which they follow the character of their peers. When their friends challenge them to take drugs, they will accept the challenge in order to prove to their friends that they dare to accept and can do the same things as their friends. Indirectly, they want to prove to their peers that they can join the group. That is the reason why they used drugs until they were caught and arrested by the police. The friend factor has been listed as one of the factors for children involved with criminality in the study undertaken by Zakaria et al. (2022). The findings of the study demonstrate the factor of family and friends as the imperative factor that increases the chances or opportunity for teenagers to commit crimes. Thus, the study suggests for parents to supervise their children's friends and the people surrounding them. Parents were also suggested to spend more time with their children in order to get to know them better since they are the closest individual to their children.

Another research conducted at Central Jail Peshawar, Pakistan by Nisar et al. (2015) supports the friend factor. The research found the issue of juvenile delinquency and its relationship with familial, peer, and economic aspects of juvenile delinquents. The research revealed that youth aged 16 to 18 had a higher propensity to commit crimes. Furthermore, children who live with extended relatives were shown to be less likely to commit crimes than children who live with a typical family. The survey also found that respondents who work are dissatisfied with their pay, economic situation, and educational background, which contributes to adolescent misbehaviour. This research emphasises how friends impact children's attitudes since the majority of respondents spend their leisure time with their friends, which leads to negative behaviour (Nisar et al., 2015).

**Second factor: Family**

Family is the fundamental pillar of society. A good family will form a good society; a poor family will lead to a terrible society. Family is an important part of society since the child will first encounter and interact with the family before dealing with other things. The findings of this study revealed that family plays a role in children's engagement in illegal activities. Fourteen of the 28 informants claimed that family played a role in their criminal participation. The research revealed that family component, which includes divorce, arguing, being confined, too much freedom, and being beaten up are among the factors influencing juvenile delinquency. The research revealed that there are situations when children remain with their grandmother, a lack of love and affection, and sadness. Fighting, on the other hand, occurs because the parents are always at odds with one another. Because the

parents are very strict with their children, they are restrained. However, there are times when parents allow too much independence. There are other occasions when the youngster is constantly beaten by his or her parents. As a result, all of these factors contribute to children's engagement in various forms of crime. The following are excerpts from child offenders on the familial factor:

*"Yes. Divorce between parents and lack of love and affection [...]" (HG 17)*

*"After that, if let's say I sleep in front of the television... I didn't switch off the television. I will be fine... 500 times pumping...or else I will be beaten with rattan. beaten with a cable...wire for electric cable [...]" (WB 28)*

The excerpts from informants demonstrate the family factor which involves the elements of divorce between parents and lack of love and affection. It is undeniable that divorce between parents will affect the emotional and psychological of the children especially when they are at a young age. They might think that they are the reason for the break-up of their parents. Subsequently, the divorce also leads to a lack of love and affection. The loneliness and lack of love and affection resulted in the children finding friends to overcome loneliness. Furthermore, the excerpts also demonstrate that being beaten up by parents is also another contributing factor to criminality among minors. The act of being beaten up by parents indirectly shapes and becomes the foundation of the character of the child to become bullies in school and also dare to stab the teacher in school. The reason for this behaviour is dissatisfaction with the punishment given by the discipline teacher.

There is a study conducted by Chung and Steinberg (2006) that supports the factor of family in relation to young offenders. The findings of the study support the previous study in which the parents and friends as mediators for community traits about the offences committed by juveniles. The research also discovered that although it is important to identify protective factors in order to improve society, family and group of friends. It is also important to find and improve the traits that can worsen the social problem, especially for high-risk adolescents.

There is a study conducted by Zakaria et al. (2022) pertaining to the role of family life and the influence of peers on delinquency in Malaysia. The findings from the study discovered a few factors for children's involvement with criminality under the scope of family life which can be divided into six factors known as lack of affection from family, the family which have problems, dissatisfied with the members of the family, participation in criminal activity by family members, being influenced by friends and the participation with a criminal group. On the other hand, the study by Abdul Jalal (2005) on family functioning and adolescent delinquency in Malaysia discovered that juvenile delinquency in low socio-economic is a common concept. Parenting classes with support from the government in terms of finances may provide more information about juvenile delinquency issues and the way for the family to deal with it.

Weatherburn (2001) stated that the probability of children being involved in crime is substantially connected to the degree of parenting children. Poor parental supervision, lack of discipline, and discordant parenting all contribute to children's development and the chance of committing crimes. Another investigation conducted by Mustapha, Ahmad, and Mohamed Harith (2017) emphasises the role of women in caring for their families. According to the study, the rising number of drug-related crimes reflects a negative image and has a negative impact on women since women play an important part in carrying out the obligation of caring for the family. As a result, parents play an important role in raising the family, particularly the younger children.

There is a need to improve the family institution in order to curb the social problems and criminality among teenagers. The study by Zaitov and Teshayev (2022) view that the social problems that take place nowadays in society have a relation with family. Therefore, educational work with the intention of the improvement of the family needs to be carried out. Recently, the country has given special attention to the law and the economy of the family with the aim to strengthen the institution of the family and increasing its function in society and the country. In addition, the aim is also to improve the imperative of family in achieving moral and indirectly the moral image of the community.

### **Third factor: Internal**

Another key aspect in influencing youngsters to participate in criminal activity is an internal component. Internal is a personal aspect that leads to youngsters being entangled in a criminal case. The research found that internal elements play a role in children's participation in a crime. Ten of the 28 informants said that internal factors play a role in their criminal activities. The outcomes of this investigation revealed one theme under the internal element known as curiosity. Curiosity may be further subdivided into two sub-themes, which are the desire to try new things and the urge to attempt new things. The study's results revealed that the urge to try new things a factor that pushes youth to commit a crime. The following are excerpts from juvenile offenders on an internal factor:

*"Because...because I like to try new things [...]" (HG 25)*

*"The feeling want to try urge at that time [...]" (HG 27)*

The excerpts demonstrate that the child initially involves in crime because of wanting to try new things and the desire to try which arises at that time. The feeling and desire to try a new thing is the justification for their involvement in criminality.

Weatherburn (2001) explored the biological variables that contribute to criminal behaviour. There is no difference in criminal history between sons and their natural fathers. It supports the notion that a child's biological father influences his or her likelihood of committing a crime. However, it is still up to interpretation, which may or may not include the aspect of genetics. On the other hand, there is a report by New Straits Times dated 9 March 2019 with the title "United against bullies" by Mohamad (2019). The

report stated suggestion to prevent a child from being bullied by another person. The suggestion given to the reader is to shape the confidence and the ability internally. The program which is based on platform such as music and sports will develop the talent of the child and then showcase the talent to the public. This activity will result in the children becoming a confident person and will make the bullies not interested to bully since the target for the bullies is a weak individual with low self-esteem.

#### **Fourth factor: Media**

Media is another important component in children's participation in crimes. Media which serves as a communication, social, and commercial platform not only provides information to users but also entertains them with material that is liveable, fascinating, and up-to-date. However, the results of the study also revealed that media influences young children to commit crimes. Ten of the 28 informants claimed that media played a role in their engagement with crimes. The topic for media is technology, and under technology, there are five sub-themes, which are gadget usage, new products and up to date, video follow, sexual aspects and pornography, and the impact of television and social media. The following are excerpts from child offenders on the media factor:

*"I used a lot of gadgets while I was outside. [...]" (HG 3)*

*"Yes. influence from television and social media about criminal acts [...]" (HG 17)*

The excerpts stated that the excessive use of gadgets and the influence of electronic devices are the reasons for involvement with crimes. The excessive use of media without supervision from parents is a contributing factor to criminality among teenagers.

Anderson et al. (2003) conducted research in the United States revealed that media violence is one of the contributing variables that impact the character of youngsters. The absence of parental supervision, along with the introduction of convulsive media, is essentially inciting youngsters to commit crimes. The research suggests that people should be concerned about media violence and take action to reduce its negative consequences. According to the research, aggressive media has a significant impact on violence in today's society. Another investigation conducted by Abd Hamid et al. (2020) proved the bond between parents and their offspring. The research emphasised the roles and responsibilities of parents in safeguarding their children's safety. The growth of social media, which is available to everybody, including children, is one of the issues that parents face today in safeguarding their children. Subsequently, Arifin (2021) reported that children should not have personal social media accounts because it can expose them to various cyber misdemeanours, including paedophilia crimes.

There is a report by the newspaper New Straits Times dated 22 February 2019 catches the attention of the readers with the title "Government mulls new legislation to curb misuse of social media". The report stated that the government is discussing to formulate a policy pertaining to the abuse of social media. This is due to the reason that the misuse of it will lead to the widespread of extremist ideologies and haters within the country. The policy aims to prevent the abuse of social media by irresponsible individuals.

#### **Fifth factor: Society**

The environment of society is also another triggering factor for children's involvement in criminal activities. A society which involves neighbourhood and surroundings invites much attraction to children. The study discovered that society is also a contributing factor to criminal activities. Out of 28 informants, eight informants stated that society is the factor of their involvement with crimes. Society is divided into five themes known as gossip, scolding by a neighbour, crowded places, low opinion and home area. For gossip, the sub-theme is an illegitimate child and saying wrong things. The sub-theme for crowded places is negative symptoms while for home area is critique of others. The excerpts by child offenders pertaining to society factor are as follows:

*"Yes, because I have a neighbour who likes to gossip about other people [...]" (HG 22)*

*"Yes. My neighbour always scolds me [...]" (HG 4)*

The excerpts demonstrate that the neighbour who likes to gossip about other people and neighbours who always scold the children are among the factors that lead the minor to involve in crime cases. The feelings of intimidation and angry toward the environment are the causal factors for involvement in criminality. The study undertaken by Chung and Steinberg (2006) stated that a weak community will have an effect towards juvenile delinquency. The neighbourhood with the influence of the family and friends will contribute to the involvement of crime by young offenders.

Another study supported the factor of society is by Weatherburn (2001). The findings from Weatherburn (2001) concluded that an occurrence of crime takes place at the location in which is suitable to commit a crime. When the designated area has the tendency for the occurrence of the crime, the offender will grab this opportunity to commit the crime and it will create other opportunities too. The chance of a group of criminals being established and the criminal organisations making a plan at the said area makes the situation worse.

#### **Sixth factor: School**

A school is a location where students may study and learn. School is meant to be a place where students may study in an enjoyable, fascinating, and innovative environment. School, on the other hand, is another aspect. Four of the 28 informants claimed that school played a role in their engagement with crimes. The school has a single theme, which is rules. The guidelines are further subdivided into two categories: very rigorous and unjust penalties. The following are excerpts from child offenders regarding the school factor:



“Yes. They are too strict [...]” (HG 23)

“They said that they only get whipped but not suspended from school... does not get expelled and is not sent to another school... because I have a bad record in school [...]” (WB 28)

The excerpts from the informant stated that the rules and regulations in school are too strict. In addition, the unfair punishment by the school is also the reason for the involvement with crimes among minors. The minor feels the punishment given by the teacher is unfair because the punishment received by him is heavier compared to his other friends. There is a report by the New Straits Times dated 19 June 2019 with the title “Student Who Stabbed Teacher Remanded” by Arshad (2019). The report stated that the student stabbed the teacher with a knife in the shoulder because of failing the exam. The student’s case was investigated under section 326 of the Penal Code and the offender was remanded for five days. This case shows that the minor has the ability to stab the teacher due to dissatisfaction with the punishment given by the teacher.

According to Weatherburn (2001), low school performance combined with a criminal buddy and the use of an intoxicating drink will only increase the number of crimes committed by minors. Drug use increases the number of youngsters who commit crimes, particularly those who are already criminally engaged.

Furthermore, a parent of a Form Four student at a secondary school in Petaling Jaya requested that the police conduct a thorough inquiry into a bullying incident that reportedly occurred to his son. The father stated that the bullying of his 16-year-old son began in 2019 when his oldest son was in Form One at the school. The child also informed the father that one of the bullies threatened him with a knife and that he had just recently learned about the event when the son spoke up about it (Mokhtar, 2022). This is an example of a school atmosphere that has a significant impact on juvenile criminality.

## CONCLUSION

There are many studies explored about crimes involving minors, especially those below the age of 18 years old as specified under the Child Act 2001. However, there are very few studies that have aimed to gain a detailed examination of the reason for children’s involvement with criminal activities in Malaysia. The study is basically conducted pertaining to triggering factors on children’s involvement in crime with the aim to contribute to the existing knowledge in the literature.

The research investigates the underlying causes of children’s engagement in various sorts of crime in Malaysia. Dealing with youngsters as young offenders, is difficult, particularly in gathering knowledge about the factors influencing them to involve in crime. It is not a question that can be posed directly since it incorporates the child’s feelings from his former life. Nevertheless, it is a difficult issue that must be thoroughly investigated in order to delve deeper into what turns them into monsters. Internal elements such as friends, family, school, society, and the media are aspects that youngsters face on a daily basis, and they do not anticipate being engaged in or caught up in crime. Furthermore, the demands of life, which cause parents to work hard and unable to perform their responsibilities in caring for their children contribute to the element of influence by friends, since children spend the majority of their time with their peers. Thus, if they could turn back the clock, they would undoubtedly choose a better course that would take their lives to a brighter future rather than be behind bars that only leave regrets and terrible wounds. There is an urgent need for all stakeholders to take action in order to effectively address this issue. To successfully deal with this problem, the government and relevant parties must strengthen their policies and regulations. As a result, the family members who are among the closest to the children must perform their duties in preventing their children from being involved in any criminal activity. In other words, family institutions must be accelerated, which will require a concerted effort on the part of the government and all parties.

Since this study explores the triggering factors of the children’s involvement with criminal activities, the study suggested for other studies to focus on the aspect of prevention of crime. The reason for children’s involvement with a crime in combination with the prevention measures may indirectly contribute to the reduced number of cases involving young offenders in Malaysia in the future since currently the trend and number of crimes involving young offenders are at a worrying level.

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