Narrative review of theories on juveniles deviant behaviour

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Abstract

Recently, Involvement of young people in different criminal activities is evidence of increased deviant behaviour in young people in Malaysia. Over the past decade, the figures for deviant behaviours among young people in Malaysia continue to increase every year. Many theories have been presented over the years to investigate the factors that are linked to the juvenile's deviant behaviour. The current study aims to review the existing theories on the Juveniles deviant behaviour to identify the possible cause of the deviant behaviour among juveniles in Malaysia. The results indicated that there are many factors that lead young generation to the deviant behaviour like, lack of parental attention, lack of education, drug abuse and media influence, membership in gangs and urbanization. The results of the current study provided insights of the factors that lead young generation to the criminal activities in Malaysia. It will be helpful for the government for policy making to avoid these factors that lead young people to deviant behaviour.

Keywords: *Deviant behaviour, Juvenile, Drug Abuse, Urbanization*

Introduction

Researchers and philosophers have attempted to explain the causes of juvenile deviant behaviour since the early Greek and Roman times (refer to Aristotle's Theory of Deviance and Plato's two-model societies in *Republic* and *Laws)*. In the past centuries, for example, philosophers developed subjective explanations based on what they observed first-hand, while in more recent times, researchers have attempted to develop and expand theories based on findings from empirical research (Blummer and Hauser 1933; Becker 1963; Adler and Adler 2000). Most causal theories of juvenile involvement in deviant behaviour have attempted to integrate within one conceptual framework a series of factors or variables that have been identified through research or have been hypothesized based on research data. As a function of integrating this information, theorists provide us with their best guess as to what are the cause(s) of juvenile deviant behaviour. Integration between theoretical perspective and empirical evidences is always missing (Kalaitzaki & Birtchnell, 2014). In this regard, numerous theories shed light on the causes of crime. Most of these apply on the causes of juvenile deviant behaviour. Some of the more important theories pertaining to this are, rational choice theory, social disorganization theory, strain theory, differential association theory, labelling theory, social control theory, Baumrind theory of parenting styles. These theories not only provide the causes of the juvenile's deviant behaviour but also indicate the potential factors that are associated with deviant behaviour among juveniles.

Rational choice theory

The theory of rational choice is based on utilitarian belief that man makes a rational choice by using reason for weighing means and end, cost and benefits. The rational choice method was propounded by Cornish and Clarke (2014) to help thinking on situational crime preventions. It is presumed that crime is a purposive behaviour. It is designed for meeting the common needs of offender such as money, status, sex and excitement. In the realization of such needs man makes decisions and choices. These needs are constrained by certain limits, abilities and availability of relevant information. There are many assumptions related to rational choice. One of these is individualism. In such a condition the offender sees himself or herself as individual. Secondly, the individuals have to maximize their goals. Few points of the rational choice theory are discussed below:

- Human beings are rational actors.
- Rationality is calculated on the basis of end and means.
- On the basis of rational calculation, people make a free choice of their behaviours both conforming and deviant.
- There is cost and benefit involved in calculation on choice. It is based on the principle of pleasure vs. pain or is quite hedonistic calculus.
- The choice is directed and calculated in terms of maximization of individual pleasure.
- The rational choice could be halted on the basis of individual perceptions and understandings of the potential pain that normally follows an act or violation of social good or a social contract.
- Maintenance of order and preservation of common good is the responsibility of state or laws of the system.
- For understanding the ability of certain law for controlling human behaviour can be judged on the basis of finding out how far the punishment was severe, swift and certain.

The rational choice theory has emerged from some old and experiment based hypotheses which have been collected from empirical findings of different research studies on human choice working. The application of these social models to methodologies in

microeconomics in society also shows that a large number of data is collected using the behavioural techniques for ensuring their compatibility with the motivational drives of consumers. This theory draws from economic theories and gives much weight to non-instrumental motives involving crimes and the limited nature of rational processes involved in this process (Cornish, *et al.*, 1986). This freedom of choice also stirs motivation among juveniles for choosing certain behaviours which are usually directed at maximizing the individual pleasure.

Social disorganization theory

Social disorganization theory is one of the famous theories propounded by Chicago School of ecological theories (Krieger, 2001). According to this theory, the crimes directly linked to the neighbouring ecological characteristics. This is considered the foundational principle of social disorganization theory. Actually, this theory argues that the location of residential area of the person shows the likelihood of the involvement of the person in the illegal activity. The theory also explains that residential location is the core determinant of the person's illegal activity as compared to other individual elements such as age, gender and race (Kawachi, Kennedy, and Wilkinson, 1999). For example, the theory suggests that youths from disadvantaged neighbourhoods participate in a subculture which approves of delinquency, and that these youths thus acquire criminality in this social and cultural setting.

As per the disorganization theory, there are some ecological factors that cause larger crime rates in different communities. These factors have closer link with other issues like school drop outs, lack of employment opportunities, deteriorated infrastructure or single parent home. This theory applies not to all types of crimes but only the street crimes committed in the neighbourhoods. This theory has not been utilized for explaining organized crimes, corporate crimes or deviant crimes taking place outside of the neighbourhoods. The theory aptly applies to juveniles related crimes which have links with group behaviours in common geographic settings.

Strain theory

The strain theory states that social structures within society may pressure citizens to commit crime. Following on the work of Émile Durkheim, Strain Theories have been advanced by Robert King Merton who developed and expounded this idea further (Thompson, 2003). The nature of strain can be in different form as discussed below:

Structural: it is related to the process at society level filtering down and affecting how individuals perceive their needs. For example, if the existing social structure is by nature insufficient or there is an insufficient regulation, it can change the perception of the individual towards the means and the opportunity.

Individual: It is related to pain and friction among individuals in satisfying their needs. For example, if an individual takes the goals of society significant for themselves. The achievement of these goals become important than the means to achieve them. In this situation the end justifies the means.

Individual: this refers to the frictions and pains experienced by an individual as he or she looks for ways to satisfy his or her needs i.e., if the goals of a society become significant to an individual, actually achieving them may become more important than the means adopted. In this regard, Merton has suggested five adaptations to resolve this phenomenon.

1. Innovation: the individuals may accept the social approved goal and may not accept the socially approved means.
2. Retreatism: those who show rejection of socially approved goal and the means to acquire them.
3. Ritualism: those who focus on the socially approved means at the cost of goals. In view of Merton, drug users belong to this category.
4. Conformity: those who show conformity to the systemic means and goals.

5. Rebellion: those who show negation to the socially approved goals and means and create systems of acceptable goal and means.

The limitation of the strain theory is that it does not focus exploring why some children belonging to low socio-income family demonstrate low educational achievements initially. However, the fact is that most of the youth crimes have no economic motives attached to them. Strain theory does not have an explanation for violent crimes, youth crimes that lead to anxiety in the public (Marwah, Sanjay, and Mathieu Deflem, 2006).

Differential association theory

The differential association theory was propounded by Edwin Sutherland. He proposed that interactions among people lead to learning of values, attitudes, techniques and motives for criminal behaviours (Bosiakoh, 2012). This theory is among the most popular learning theories of deviance. Its main focus is on how people learn about crimes. It does not help explain how they become criminal. This learning theory has close relationship with the interactionist perspectives. The main focus of interactionism is also on constructing boundary in the society related to individual's perception of them. This learning theory is believed to have a positivist approach and its main focus is on some specified actions against the most subjectively positioned social impressions of identity and how these are compelled to act. People learn ways of committing crimes on the basis of certain drives, rationalization and attitude. These compel people to commit crimes. The inspiration comes from culture transmissions and constructions. In the theory, Surtherland presented the idea of 'self' as social construct based on the fact when people's self-images are consistently reconstructing themselves while interacting with other people.

On the basis of their experiences people define their lives. Based on this they make generalizations for providing frameworks of references to decide on their future actions. From the point of view of a researcher, subjects will view their worlds in different ways based on their experiences of being in supportive family or abused by parents or those who are close to them. Some people respond to this situation in a different way based on their experiences. The differential association foresees that individuals choose criminal paths when there is less balance between law breaking and law abiding. These tendencies reinforce when the social associations provide new opportunities for people to commit crimes in a people's life.

During the early stages of life, individuals come under the influence of such people who have high status in a group. They follow the footsteps of these people. This association breeds some motivation for practical crimes among them. For example, a hungry person steals something to satiate hunger. However, here the use of need and values is equivocal. More or less, non-criminal or criminal minded people gets motivated towards crime based on their need for money or social gains. This theory also deals with young people in social groupings and how peer pressure and other gangs motivate them towards crimes. The theory further suggests that young people get motivated towards crimes as delinquent peers and learn criminal acts and skills. The theory explains that young people with criminal friends are more prone towards crimes. It may be that some offenders may associate with each other rather than delinquent peers that cause a young person to start offence. The question, however arises that how delinquent peer groups become delinquent in the start (Scarpitti, Nielsen, and Miller, 2009).

Labeling theory

Labeling theory is the theory of how the self-identity and behaviour of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them. This theory was second theory put forward by French sociologist Émile Durkheim in the 1960s. It is associated with the concepts of self-fulfilling prophecy and stereotyping. Labeling theory holds that deviance is not inherent to an act, but instead focuses on the tendency of majorities to

negatively label minorities or those seen as deviant from standard cultural norms (Bernburg, *et al.*, 2006). This theory rose to prominence in 1960s and 1970s. This theory is becoming very popular in the present day too. Some of the unwanted terms and descriptors related to deviance, disability or diagnosis of mental disorders. A stigma on the other hand is defined as powerful a negative label that brings about changes in a person's self-concept and social identity. Thus labeling theory has close relations with social construction and symbolic interaction analysis.

Labeling theory explains that people get labels from others expressions and behaviours about them. Every individual knows they are judged by others as they have attempted through different roles and functions during their social interaction. In this way they become able to gauge the interaction to those who are present. On the basis of this a subjective conception of self is developed. However, when others try to interfere into the reality of the person they needs an objective data requiring re-evaluating the conception depending upon authoritativeness of the judgment of others.

Family members and friends may judge a person in a different way than strangers do. Individuals who are more socially representative like police officers or judges may make more globally respectful judgments. If a group sees some deviant failing to conform to rules, they may react by labeling that person as offender of the social and moral norms of behaviours. In this situation the group power shows itself by designating breaches of rules as deviant and resultantly treat that person in a different way depending upon the seriousness of the breach. It means that the more different the treatment, the more the individuals' self-image gets affected.

The labeling theory is related to normal roles which define life. But these special roles are provided by the society for the people who have deviant behaviour. These are called deviant roles, stigmatized roles or social stigma. Social role is a combination of some expectations about the behaviour of a person. These roles are important for organization and functioning of the society or a group. For example, a post man is expected to follow the roles of the job. On the other hand, for a sociologist, deviance does not mean moral wrong. Rather it means condemnation from the society. Deviant behaviour includes criminal and non-criminal acts. The labeling theory has suggested that during juvenile delinquency, young people are labeled as criminal. This leads to more offence on their part as they also start thinking of themselves as criminals (Bernburg, *et al.*, 2006). Once, if a person is labeled as criminal, then the person will accept that role and may see associations with others who have got similar labels. The labeling theorists argue that male youths coming from poor families are more prone towards labeled deviance. This trend explains why there are younger deviants from the working class.

Social control theory

This theory has proposed that exploitation of socialization process and social learning develops self-control and it leads to reduction of inclinations towards indulging in such behaviours which are regarded as antisocial. This notion is derived from the functionalist theories of crimes propounded by Ivan Nye (1958). He has indicated towards four different types of controls which are discussed below:

Direct control: In this punishment applies for doing a wrong thing or showing a wrong behaviour. The compliance is given rewards by parents, family and some authority.

Internal: In this the young people refrain from delinquency by their conscience and superego.

Indirect: In this the people who influence others behaviours show delinquent act. It may cause pain or disappointment to parent or others with whom the young person may interact or have close relations with. Control through need requires satisfaction, that is, if individual needs are satisfied, the criminal activity would be minimized. The social control theory has explains that the relationship, commitment, values, norms and beliefs shared by people actually encourage them not to breach laws or rules. If the moral codes are internalized by the people and are accepted in the wider community, then people will show respect for it and also voluntarily limit their tendencies towards committing deviant acts. This theory wants to understand the different ways for reducing the possibility of criminal acts on the part of people (Wiatrowski, 1981). There are fewer roles of motivational issues unless individuals are indulged in wider activities which are limited by the process of socialization and social learning. The social control theory proposes that the relationships, commitment, values, norms and beliefs may encourage them to break or respect the law. If the moral codes are understood and followed by individuals they will not commit deviant acts (Black, 2014).

Baumrind theory of parenting styles and explaining delinquency

Diana Baumrind was a psychologist. She propounded the theory of parenting styles. She suggested that there are four types of parenting styles. She argues that differences in the parenting styles lead to how the children will emotionally, socially and cognitively develop (Hoeve, 2008). This theory refers to four dimensions for parent-child interaction such as parental control, maturity demand, clarity of communications and nurturance. Parental control is related to issues of enforcing rules. The maturity demand is related to expectation of parents and their willingness to perform up to their full potential. The clarity of communication refers to the willingness of parents for communicating with children and taking their opinions by using reason to obtain the desired behaviours. Nurturance refers to the expression of love, care and warmth from parental side. This adds to physical and emotional wellbeing of the child. On the basis of these dimensions, Baumrind explored four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive-indulgent and permissive uninvolved.

Authoritarian style is considered to be the ideal style of parenting. Children brought under this style show high self-reliance and self-esteem. They demonstrate social responsibility, independence and achievement oriented approach in life. In view of Darling and Steinberg (1993), the authoritarian parents keep for their children clear goals and high standards. They keep on monitoring their behaviour and also discipline them through reasoning and encourage them in making clear and informed decisions when they make a mistake. Moreover, the parents also show warmth, respect, affection and kindness in their dealing with their children.

Although, by closer looks the terms authoritarian and authoritative seem similar to each other, however, there is a difference between them. The authoritative parenting keeps rigid rules, asks for obedience and is based on withdrawal of love by forcing the child to comply. Such parents apply hard and fast rules including physical and verbal punishments or insults for compelling the children to comply with the rules. This approach keeps the children under duress and creates aloofness. On the other hand, the authoritarian parents are well-behaved, a bit moody and anxious in their approach towards parenting. They tend to become followers rather than leaders.

The permissive-indulgent parents are overflowing in parental affection (Munyi, 2013). These parents openly show affection and kindness but they also set few limits for the children. This helps them to become secured from many risks. These types of parents also make different demands such as maturity, accountability and performance from their children from their misbehaviour as consequences. Usually, the children of such parents have problems as they cannot control their impulses and sometimes display immaturity and show reluctance for accepting responsibility. This type of parenting styles is also called un-involved parenting style. This style is characterised by some limits or demands in a permissive-indulgent style. On the other hand, the uninvolved parents show little or no warmth at all. This is an extreme approach which often leads to negligence or complete rejection of children. The children of such parents have low level of functioning in different areas of life. Such children show poor performance at school level. Usually such children tend to show delinquent behaviour and at most of the time are depressed (Hay and Carter, 2001).

In summary, it can be realized that there is not one fits all particular theory that can be applied to explain juvenile delinquency and criminal behaviour of teenage motorcycle thieves in Malaysia. It is important to understand that this group is a heterogeneous one and there should be an individualization of theories applied to each different individual accordingly in different settings. New ideas of thought on this matter tend to concur, using different aspects of the various theories in combination. The underlying theory that is most applicable to explaining behaviour of juvenile delinquents seems to be the theory of rational choice, although this theory can only be rendered complete when applied in combination with other theories such as Baumrind Theory of Parenting Styles especially concerning the uninvolved parent. The applicability of the social control theory is somewhat limited when applied to teenagers.

Conclusion

The theory of rational choice is based on utilitarian belief that man makes a rational choice by using reason for weighing means and end, cost and benefits. The rational choice method was propounded by Cornish and Clarke (2014) to help thinking on situational crime preventions. It is presumed that crime is a purposive behaviour. Social disorganization theory is one of the famous theories propounded by Chicago School of ecological theories (Krieger, 2001). According to this theory, the crimes directly linked to the neighbouring ecological characteristics. This is considered the foundational principle of social disorganization theory. The strain theory states that social structures within society may pressure citizens to commit crime. The differential association theory was propounded by Edwin Sutherland in 1939. He proposed that interactions among people lead to learning of values, attitudes, techniques and motives for criminal behaviours (Bosiakoh, 2012). Labeling theory is the theory on how the self-identity and behaviour of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them. Social control theory has proposed that exploitation of socialization process and social learning develops self-control and it leads to reduction of inclinations towards indulging in such behaviours which are regarded as antisocial. Baumrind theory of parenting styles suggested that there are four types of parenting styles. She argues that differences in the parenting styles lead to how the children will develop emotionally, socially and cognitively (Hoeve, 2008).
The researcher believes that these theories provided the conceptualization of the factors that are cause of the deviant behaviour leading to motorcycle theft (DBLMT) among juveniles. All of the aforementioned theories are important in relation with the juvenile involvement in deviant behaviour leading to motorcycle theft (DBLMT). For example, social disorganization is linked with the urbanization process and considers residence location as a potential cause of the deviant behaviour leading to the motorcycle theft (DBLMT) among juveniles in Malaysia. The strain theory highlighted the socio-economic differences as the key factor that causes high levels of deviant behaviour among the juveniles. Meanwhile labeling theory also focused on the socio-economic differences. While social learning theory is focused on how people, especially juveniles learn from their society and act accordingly. And finally, the Baumrind theory of parenting styles discusses the role of parenting in development of deviant behaviour among juveniles. All of these theories are important in their context. However, the research indicated that there is a lack of the studying of the factors namely, media influence, memberships in gangs, urbanization and drug abuse that affect deviant behaviour leading to motorcycle theft among juveniles and how parenting style moderates the relationship of these factors with deviant behaviour among juveniles. For this reason, the study focused on the social disorganization theory which is related to the drug abuse, media influence and urbanization. Differential Association Theory also related to these factors and argues the pattern through which juveniles learn the deviant behaviour. Finally, the Baumrind Theory of Parenting Styles describe that how different parenting styles can be related with deviant behaviour among juveniles.

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