

# THE LIVED EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS: A CASE STUDY IN MALAYSIA

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## Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the school experiences of six juvenile offenders between the ages of 13-17 who were incarcerated in a juvenile school in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The purpose of this study was to examine the school factors, from a causal perspective, that have in some way contributed towards their antisocial behaviour. The purposive sampling strategy was used to select the participants of this study from a population of 99 juvenile offenders in the juvenile school. The data generation methods used in this study were interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data analysis revealed that the school factors that have contributed negatively towards the juvenile offenders' behavioural outcomes include academic incompetence, poor teacher-student relationship, ineffective teaching strategies and neglectful teachers, as well as harsh and irrational disciplinary methods.

**Keywords:** educational experiences, juvenile offenders, delinquency, teachers, school

## Introduction

The school is one of the major socializing institutions during children's most formative years and plays a very crucial role in integrating them into society. It is also the place where the children spend a significant period of their lives. "As one of the most proximal and potentially powerful settings for influencing children and youth" (Pianta, Hamre and Allen, 2012: 366), "our schools are potentially one of our best weapons in the fight against delinquency" (Tunley, 1962: 130). However, given the fact that school occupies a strategic position in the life of our children, the school is also "significantly associated with adolescent delinquent behaviour" (Bao, Li, Zhang and Wang, 2015: 81). As what Negley Teeters (1896-1971), a renowned criminologist and Professor Emeritus of Temple University said, "if you ask me, the crux of our delinquency is not the parents; it's the schools" (as cited in Tunley, 1962:119). Needless to say, school-related factors such as academic failure, negative teacher-student relationship, poor classroom management, undesirable school climate, harsh school discipline, and truancy are all directly associated with juvenile delinquency (Gyansah, Soku and Esilfie 2015; Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold and Cauffman, 2014; Henry, Knight and Thornberry, 2012; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

Caldwell, Sturges, and Silver (2007) are of the opinion that the emotional and affective domains of the students are in some way affected by their school environment. A positive school environment not only enhances the students' social and academic competencies but also protect them against a whole host of environmental risk factors. (Stuhlman and Pianta, 2009). The effects of a positive school environment can be so overwhelming that they can even have a moderating effect on the family risk factors (O'Malley, Voight, Renshaw and Eklund, 2015). On the contrary, a negative

school environment could induce or enhance negative behavioural outcomes amongst the students (Bao, Li, Zhang and Wang, 2015).

Studies have shown that the students' failure at school is directly related to delinquent behaviour (Gyansah, Soku and Esilfie, 2015). Since they spend most of their early years of life at school, "children with low academic performance, low commitment to school, and low educational aspirations during the elementary and middle school grades are at a higher risk for child delinquency than are other children" (Herrenkohl, Hawkins, Chung, Hill and Battin-Pearson, 2001: 223). One cannot deny the fact that:

Offenders do not do well in school. They do not like school. They tend to be truant and to drop out at an early age. As a result every 'school' variable correlates strongly with crime and delinquency. (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990: 162)

Academic incompetence is therefore one of the strongest predictors of juvenile delinquency (Gyansah, Soku and Esilfie, 2015). Failure at school can also lead to aggressive behavior and aggressive students are more likely to experience conflict with the school authorities (Doumen, Verschueren, Buyse, Germeijs, Luyckx and Soenens, 2008) which would eventually enhance their decision to drop out of school (Henry, Knight and Thornberry, 2012).

Attachment to other caregivers such as the teachers in the school microsystem is fundamental to the cognitive, social, and emotional development of the children (B. Bergin, and D. Bergin, 2009; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Since teachers have an essential role to play in the lives of their students throughout their formal schooling years (Baker, Grant and Morlock, 2008), "students' relationships and interactions with teachers either produce or inhibit developmental change" (Pianta, Hamre and Allen, 2012: 366). Studies have indicated that students from low income families who enjoy a positive relationship with their teachers tend to perform better academically and have better social-emotional adjustment compared to those who do not (Murray and Malmgren, 2005). There is evidence that positive teacher-student relationship not only helps to reduce the drop-out rate amongst the students (Henry, Knight and Thornberry, 2012) but is also "an important protective factor of alleviating the negative consequences of parental maltreatment" (Back and Lee, 2015: 51). On the other hand, children who are in conflict with their teachers often find it difficult to integrate themselves into the school environment (Pianta, Hamre and Allen, 2012).

In a way, the teachers' attitude and perceptions towards their students can also have a tremendous impact on their performance at school (Hafen, Ruzek, Gregory, Allen and Mikami, 2015; Murray and Zvoch, 2011). As primary agents of the educational process, "teachers' ability to engage with children in a sensitive, responsive manner and to provide a positive classroom emotional climate are crucial" (Stuhlman and Pianta, 2009: 324). Students who build up a trust relationship with their teachers tend to be better motivated (O'Connor, Dearing, and Collins, 2011), have higher school engagement (Pianta, Hamre and Allen, 2012), and better behavioral outcomes (Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, Cameron and Peugh, 2012). On the contrary, their implicit biases and negative expectations of the students and can have a devastating effect on them and leave a lasting imprint in their lives since the students' performance at school is greatly influenced by their teachers' expectations of them (Sciarra and Ambrosino, 2011; Gregory and Huang, 2013).

Harsh and irrational disciplinary actions carried out by the teachers can also have adverse consequences on the children (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold and Cauffman, 2014). Worse yet, such misapplications of power and control will usually prompt more misbehavior" (Appelstein, 1998: 22). Disciplinary actions such as caning, slapping, running round the field under the hot sun, and throwing the students' bags out of the class (characteristic of some Malaysian teachers) would only make them more rebellious towards their school authorities as clearly exemplified by the participants of this study. Although suspension and/or expulsion are common disciplinary actions taken by the school authorities, these models of discipline can result in serious long-term consequences on the children (Kupchik and Catlaw, 2014). This is because "exclusion from the classroom, for even a few days, disrupts a child's education and may escalate misbehavior by removing the child from a structured environment and giving him or her increased time and opportunity to get into trouble" (Kim, Losen and Hewitt, 2010: 78). Delinquent children do not like school and instead of feeling remorse or shameful of themselves for being suspended or expelled by the school, most of them are only too glad that they can spend time away from school and loiter around with their friends.

## **Research Objective**

The main objective of this study was to determine the school factors, from a causal perspective, that have in some way contributed towards the negative behavioural outcomes of the participants of this study. The resulting findings could

bring forth new suggestions that could help to improve school management and control, as well as develop a more positive school climate.

## Methodology

### *Research Approach*

The qualitative case study approach was chosen as it is the intention of the researchers to “understand a phenomenon, uncover the meaning a situation has for those involved or delineate a process (how things happen)” (Merriam, 2002: 11) through the worldviews of their participants. The search for meaning and understanding has given the researchers a deeper insight into how their participants “make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam 1998: 6). The way they talk about their lives, the language they use, their perceptions of the world and the interactions that they make are all meaningful information in context which cannot be interpreted with the use of statistics. As what Rossman and Rallis (1998:29) say, “there are few truths that constitute universal knowledge, rather, there are multiple perspectives about the world”. The multiple perspectives put forth by our participants have provided us with multiple realities of their world that are richly descriptive by nature.

### *Sampling and Participants' Profiles*

The purpose of sampling in this study was to select participants that could represent the targeted population under study and who are “likely to be information rich because they may reveal major system weaknesses that become targets of opportunity for program or system improvement” (Patton, 2015: 281). To achieve this purpose, purposive (or purposeful) sampling was used for the selection of cases to be studied intensively to discover the school factors that have in some way contributed negatively towards the behavioural outcomes of the juvenile offenders. This method of sampling seems to be a much more reliable sampling procedure as our focus is on a relatively small number of respondents who were chosen purposefully.

The participants of this study include 4 Malay boys, 1 Chinese boy, and 1 Indian boy between the ages of 13-17 from a juvenile school in Kuala Lumpur. All of them grew up in families that are struggling to make ends meet. Two of them come from single-parent families while one of them has been rejected by his family all his life and used to stay with his aunt. All of them lack academic support and have always performed badly in school. The table below provides information about their age, race, religion, the crime they have committed as well as their parents' marital status and occupation.

**Table 1: Participants' Profiles**

	<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race/Religion</i>	<i>Crime Committed</i>	<i>Parents' Marital Status</i>	<i>Parental occupation</i>
1.	Ariffin	M	13	Malay / Islam	Theft	Separated	Mother - hawker / part-time tailor.
2.	Ah Fook	M	15	Chinese / Buddhist	Assault / Wounding	Married	Father - fishmonger; Mother - housewife
3.	Loga	M	15	Indian / Hindu	Theft	Divorced	Mother - cleaner
4.	Irwan	M	17	Malay / Islam	Shop-breaking	Married	Father - cabler Mother - sales assistant
5.	Zulkifli	M	16	Malay / Islam	Theft	Married	Father - taxi driver; Mother - housewife
6.	Syazwan	M	15	Malay / Islam	Shop-breaking / robbery	Married	Father - selling chicken; Mother - hawker

### ***Data Generation Methods***

In this study, the data generation methods include:

- in-depth structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim so as to capture every word (including pauses and repetitions) uttered by the participants. Notes were also taken during the interviews for the purposes of accuracy but these were limited so that the participants could be given absolute attention. Interviews that were conducted in Malay or Chinese were translated into English without losing their originality.
- direct observation on the participants as participant observers. After every observation, field notes were recorded
- document analysis which include analyzing the personal files, school reports, and conduct reports of the participants.

### ***Data Analysis Technique***

Qualitative data analysis is the “process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the masses data collected” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012: 135) that requires a lot of creativity and sense making “in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories, and regularities” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007: 461). For the purposes of data analysis, the researchers prepared and organized “the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (Creswell, 2007: 148) through the process of decontextualizing and recontextualizing (Stewart, 1998: 53).

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Consent forms were given to the participants as well as the principal of the juvenile school for signing prior to the data generation process. The data generation procedure was clearly explained to them giving them the option to accept or refuse to participate. Permission for data generation was granted by the Social Welfare Department before the researchers made their first visit to the juvenile school. For the purpose of confidentiality, the researchers would not divulge any information that could be traced to our participants. Only pseudo names were used in the discussions that ensued.

## **Results and Discussion**

This study has indicated that school factors such as academic incompetence, poor teacher-student relationship, ineffective teaching strategies, neglectful teachers, harsh and irrational disciplinary actions have each got an essential role to play in the lives of our participants as these have served to weaken their attachment and commitment to school thus contributing negatively towards their behavioral outcomes. Each of these themes is discussed in detail in the following sections.

### ***Academic Incompetence***

Hirschi (1969:120) emphasizes that “students with little academic competence and students who perform poorly are more likely to commit delinquent acts”. Needless to say, students “who do badly in school reduce their interest in school (they may of course come to hate it) and are thus free to this extent to commit delinquent acts” (Hirschi, 1969: 123).

Loga, for instance, is unable to read or write and his teachers have never had a good word for him. His bad experiences with his teachers coupled with his mother’s lack of emphasis on the importance of education, and inability to pay for his tuition classes (although his father wanted him to attend tuition classes, he did not provide any tuition fees for his son) have killed whatever interest he had in his studies. As he was notoriously known in school, none of

his teachers liked him nor did they do anything to help him, thus rendering his school life meaningless. Given his family's low socioeconomic status, making money seemed to be more important to him:

Since last time I saw people work... if I work hard I can get a lot of money. I see it that way ah. If I don't work hard I don't get money. If I work hard then only I can get money. (Loga/Juv/09/Sch)

Since he was illiterate and was not really learning anything at school, he decided to leave school and find a job but ended up in the juvenile school not long after that.

Ah Fook is in a similar situation to Loga as he had to help support his family by doing part-time work at the age of 13. Since his parents could not afford to send him for tuition classes and his teachers were only too glad to get rid of him, he ended up learning nothing in school. According to him, staying in school was a waste of time because of his low literacy level:

No matter how hard I study, my brain cannot absorb it. It's like forcing a piece of thick wood into a small hole. Impossible, isn't it? Unless they (my parents) put the dictionary inside my brain. What do they think I am? Robot ah? If I don't study, I can still learn a skill and become a boss. Those who study in the university can only earn RM2000-RM3000 per month. (AhFook/Juv/06/Sch)

Taking advantage of his teachers' suggestion that he should stay away from school for some time to reflect on his behavior, he decided to quit school altogether and work full-time. However, dropping out of school only provided him with more opportunities to associate with deviant peers and like Loga, he also ended up in a juvenile school not long after he left school.

The fate of Zulkifli did not differ much from that of Loga or Ah Fook as he also lacked the necessary academic support that could help him to meet the learning standards in school. Being rejected by his parents all his life and brought up by his aunt who placed no emphasis on education, he has developed very little interest in his studies. Since many of his teachers did not like to enter class, he decided not to waste his time in school and look for a job. To quote what his aunt said:

... sometimes even those who studied in the university could not find a job. Those who did not study in the university... who studied in a primary school... could find a job. The only thing is... you must work hard to make money. (Zulkifli/Juv/07/Sch)

Holding on to the advice given by his aunt, the rest is history. Like Loga and Ah Fook, he was also apprehended by the police and sent to the juvenile school.

Syazwan, Ariffin, and Irwan also share a similar fate with Loga, Ah Fook, and Zulkifli as they are poor children who lack academic support from their family and school. Their inability to catch up with their lessons has made it difficult for them to integrate into the school environment. Since there was no one to help them in their studies, their academic performance continued to deteriorate as they drifted further and further into delinquency until they finally ended up in the juvenile school.

### ***Poor Teacher-Student Relationship***

Student-teacher attachment is an aspect of development that should not be taken lightly as studies have indicated that students who have developed a positive relationship with their teachers tend to perform better at school (Hirschi, 1969; O'Connor, Dearing and Collins, 2011). The contrary seems to be true "in the absence of warm, supportive relations between teachers and students (Bartollas, 1990: 299) which clearly explains why "schools tend to have more problems when teachers lack genuine interests in students" (Bartollas, 1990: 299). In general, the students' attachment to their teachers and commitment to the school not only affect their academic performance but also their moral, behavioral and social development (Liljeberg, Eklund, Fritz and Klinteberg, 2010).

Sad to say, all our participants are poor and naughty under achievers who have never found favour with their teachers. Syazwan, for instance, has always been treated with prejudice by his teachers who liked to pick on him and made life miserable for him:

Went to school... didn't do anything... got punished... scolded...  
(Syazwan/Juv/05/Sch)

He even called his teacher 'pig' (Syazwan/Juv/07/Sch) because he could not stand his teacher's negative attitude towards him. Knowing very well that he would be punished irrespective of whether he has done anything wrong or not, he did not even try to clear his name when his teachers accused him of doing things that he did not do:

Interviewer: Why don't you like your teachers?

Syazwan: Like... whatever I do is all wrong. Because I've made a mistake once... got suspended from school... they don't like me

Interviewer: What have they done to you?

Syazwan: Very often... although I kept quiet... they punished me. The person next to me made noise, my friends and I got punished (greatly angered).

Interviewer: Did you try to explain to them?

Syazwan: (shook his head)

Interviewer: If the teachers punish you...

Syazwan: Just keep quiet. No use explaining to them because they won't listen. Let it be... (in a hopeless state of disappointment). (Syazwan/Juv/06-07/Sch)

The phrase "let it be" means that he could not be bothered what his teachers think of him anymore. Needless to say, "the less a boy cares about what his teachers think of him, the more likely he is to have committed delinquent acts" (Hirschi, 1969: 121). This is an aspect of student behavior that some teachers fail to see. Syazwan may be a trouble-maker at school but accusing him of doing the things that he did not do and punishing him irrationally did not make him a better person.

Loga is not in a much better position than Syazwan as his teachers also liked to pick on him because he was notoriously known for his mischiefs. To punish him for his misbehavior at school, they purposely made him do extra school work:

... everyone in my class got very little work to do... I got a lot. I finished some, they gave me more. I did some, they added more ahh. (Loga/Juv/07/Sch)

His teachers had probably failed to realize that giving him more school work than other students would not bring about positive behavioural changes in him. They would have done him a better favour if they had taken the trouble to teach him how to read and spell. He ended up doing nothing because he is a slow learner who cannot read or write and it was certainly beyond his ability to do so many exercises within a short period of time particularly when he did not know what he was doing. However, when he ended up not doing anything, he was punished again:

They asked me to lie down... like the prison style. They caned anywhere they liked. After that, I took my bag and walked off. I said to them, you caned anywhere you liked, I go anywhere I like. I walked to the back of the school, jumped over the gate and went to CC. (Loga/Juv/07/Sch)

Loga's teachers were also rude to him and said that he was stupid. Instead of building up a trust relationship with his teachers, Loga considered his teachers to be his enemies and even took revenge on them by scratching their cars:

Interviewer: What do you mean by enemies. Who are they?

Loga: Some are my schoolmates... some of them are my teachers (laughing). I scratched their cars with a stone... after that they called my mother... asked her to pay for the damage caused. (Loga/Juv/09/Sch)

Needless to say, positive teacher-student bonding is impossible under such strained circumstances and the sharing of negative feelings between Loga and his teachers only made him more rebellious towards the school authorities.

Like Loga, Zulkifli was always being insulted by his teachers and he retaliated against their negative remarks by damaging their cars:

Interviewer: How was your relationship with your teachers at school?

Zulkifli: Not ok...

Interviewer: Why not ok?

Zulkifli: Like I always played truant from school... they didn't like me... they insulted me... like stupidlah... not cleverlah.

Interviewer: Did they always insult you?

Zulkifli: Always.

Interviewer: What did you do when they insult you?

Zulkifli: I pretended that I did not bother.

Interviewer: Did you take revenge?

Zulkifli: In a quiet manner... I destroyed their cars (laughed). (Zulkifli/Juv/07/Sch)

Even though Ariffin could take the word 'stupid' or 'pig' uttered by his teachers calmly, these insulting words have destroyed his self-confidence as he dared not ask questions in class even though he did not understand his lessons. As what Hirschi says, "if one desires success and is continually frustrated in his attempts to reach this goal, then he is more likely to turn to crime than is the person who does not care for success" (Hirschi, 1969: 125).

Teachers should therefore learn how to interact with different students based on their unique personality instead of calling them names or insulting them. Their relationship with their students, irrespective of whether it is positively or negatively oriented, would somehow affect their academic, social, and developmental outcomes. The rude and insulting words uttered by the teachers would dwell in the minds of the students for a life time, long after the teachers themselves have forgotten what they said. Needless to say, their career would certainly be more meaningful if they try to help children who are deemed to be at risk for crime and delinquency instead of pushing them towards deviance.

### *Ineffective Teaching Strategies*

One cannot deny the fact that the students' academic failure may in some way due to the ineffective teaching strategies adopted by the teachers in school. Despite the many efforts by the Malaysian Education Ministry to improve the education system in our country, the chalk-and-talk method is still rampantly used throughout our Malaysian schools today. Teaching aids are only used sparingly during teaching practice when the trainee teachers' supervisors come to observe them and this has always been the tacit norm. Since the chalk-and-talk method has been used for decades and has successfully churned out many high achievers, it is still acceptable to our Malaysian students. Further, it may not be as disastrous as the 'copying' method used by some of our Malaysian teachers. One way of killing the students' interest in learning is to make them copy notes throughout the lesson without any explanations. Copying notes for hours is something which Ah Fook really hates to do:

They shouldn't give us things that we don't like to do like just copying from the whiteboard... not just one but two whiteboards. And they wanted it fast. They started copying at 5.30 and wanted us to finish copying by 6.00 p.m. How could we finish?

They copied direct from the book. Copying a little bit from the whiteboard is ok for us but certainly not so much and so fast too! (AhFook/Juv/07/Sch)

Ah Fook was already on the verge of quitting school and this 'copying' method has clearly proven to him that his decision to quit school might not be wrong. According to him, he was not really learning anything at school. Although Ariffin did not really detest the idea of copying notes, it was still meaningless to make him copy notes without knowing what he was copying:

Interviewer: How did your teachers normally teach?

Ariffin: They gave us lots of notes to copy... I borrowed my friend's book... went home... to copy.

Interviewer: Copying only? Did they explain or not?

Ariffin: No

Interviewer: Did you understand what you copied?

Ariffin: No (Ariffin/Juv/10/Sch)

For the underachievers like Ah Fook and Ariffin, this is one way of killing their interest to learn altogether as they are not very bright and would need more guidance from the teachers instead of just copying notes that they do not understand. Needless to say, when their interest to learn was gone, their commitment to school also diminished. The same applied to Irwan who played truant from school because he did not like to copy so many notes:

Interviewer: In your diary you said that you played truant from school because you did not like your teachers. What kind of teachers you dislike?

Irwan: I don't like teachers who are fierce... after that I don't like teachers who give lots of school work... making me copy so many notes. I prefer simple notes, mind maps, exercises... (Irwan/Juv/08/Sch)

Irwan was already not on good terms with his teachers and the 'copying' method practiced by his teachers only served to destroy his interest in learning even further.

Apart from copying notes, the teaching methods employed by some of the teachers may sometimes be so meaningless that the students feel that they are not learning anything at all:

We did not understand what the teachers were talking about. They forced us to memorize things... we couldn't remember. They asked us to repeat after them. There was this English teacher who couldn't pronounce correctly. She punished us when we couldn't read. We quarreled with her. I like English. I always got the highest marks for English in primary school and secondary school. She asked us to memorize more than 10 pages. How to memorize so many pages? She asked us to read out the words and say the meaning in Malay. I knew the meaning of the words in English but couldn't say them out in Malay. The English and Bahasa teachers asked us to memorize the whole essay and caned us when we couldn't do that. (AhFook/Juv/06/Sch)

The teaching method presented by Ah Fook is a common practice amongst many Malaysian teachers. Instead of teaching the students the proper way to write essays, the teachers make them memorize the essays from the books so that they could write their essays without any mistakes. This kind of essays is also easier to mark because there are fewer mistakes in them compared to the ones written by the students themselves. However, this method of essay writing does have its defects as it inhibits the students' ability to think creatively.

Lastly, having teachers who lack knowledge in the subjects that they teach can have serious repercussions as this not only causes the students to lose interest in their studies but also their respect and confidence in their teachers:



There was this English teacher who was supposed to be teaching English but she spoke in Malay most of the time. We were confused. She couldn't teach or even pronounce the words properly... like shit. The students didn't understand her. We ignored her. She was very fierce. I told her, "Teacher, what are you teaching? Like shit." She said, "Say one more time." I told her, "You teach like shit. We don't understand what you teach. You better go home, fat pig" (laughing). (AhFook/Juv/07/Sch)

Teaching English in Malay, Chinese, or Tamil is something which should be avoided at all costs as it would not help to improve the students' proficiency in the language. Sad to say, there are many English teachers who are teaching this way due to their lack of proficiency in the language. Although the Education Ministry has already sent many of them for courses, much would still depend on the teachers themselves because nothing can be done if they do not want to improve their proficiency in the language.

### *Neglectful Teachers*

Having teachers who try to avoid teaching or carrying out minimal teaching activities in the classroom is even worse than the ineffective teaching strategies discussed above. The fact that some teachers may just spend the whole lesson talking over the phone without teaching anything at all is not an uncommon occurrence:

What do you mean by "I don't like teacher making noise in the class?"

Interviewer: What do you mean by "I don't like teacher making noise in the class?"

Ah Fook: Teacher making noise refers to the teacher talking over the phone in class. She didn't want to teach us, that was why she spent the whole period talking over the phone. She could talk for 3 periods – one period 45 minutes, three periods 135 minutes. The teachers are not really teaching. I think they are very irritating.

Interviewer: What did you do when your teacher was talking over the phone?

Ah Fook: Play, sleep and chat.

Interviewer: Why didn't you ask them to teach?

Ah Fook: They gave reasons that they are very tired, no mood, sick... Oh, if the teacher told us that she was sick, we were very excited. But wonder why she had the energy to talk so loudly over the phone like thunder. How strange! She scolded and asked us to keep quiet because she wanted to chat over the phone but in less than 10 seconds we started to make noise gain. She went out to talk and we played football in the class when she went out.

Interviewer: How did you play football in class?

Ah Fook: We filled up the mineral water bottle with water and kicked it like a ball. (AhFook/Juv/07/Sch)

Teachers cannot expect the students to sit quietly while they are chatting with friends over the phone. When the students have nothing to do in class, they will resort to some kind of mischief to fill up their time.

It is also not uncommon for the teachers to lose their temper in front of their students when they have family problems:

Interviewer: Do you think that your teachers' teaching methods are ok or not?

Loga: Not ok ahh. They scolded me for everything. When they had family tension, they brought it to school... like they have family problems... they bring to school. They are

tension ahh... I asked them properly... ahh they scolded me back (sounded angry).  
(Loga/Juv/08/Sch)

Some teachers also have the tendency to scold their students irrespective of whether they are right or wrong just because they are more mischievous than the other students. This was what happened to Zulkifli as he was always scolded by his teachers irrespective of whether he finished his school work or not:

Sometimes I didn't do my school work... sometimes I did my school work but they  
(the teachers) scolded me even though I did my school work. (Zulkifi/Juv/07/Sch)

Teachers who lose their temper easily and scold their students irrationally are not only setting a bad example to the students but also tarnishing their own image. In a way, they are also destroying their students' interest in learning and commitment to school as children are easily affected by their teachers' temperament as exemplified by the participants of this study.

To make matters worse, some teachers do not even enter class thus depriving the students of their right to acquire knowledge. This was also one of the reasons why Zulkifli decided to quit school. According to his humorous statement about his teachers:

My father asked me why I wanted to quit school? I told him that my school mates played around like kindergarten kids... teachers acted rough... sometimes they entered class but I did not enter. Sometimes I entered class but they did not enter. Sometimes both of us did not enter class. It is better for me to stop schooling, I said.  
(Zulkifli/Juv/06/Sch)

As for Ah Fook, he was particularly happy when his teachers did not enter class as indicated in the following statement:

Some of them didn't enter class. We were most happy when the teachers didn't enter class. We could make a lot of noise banging on the tables and chairs and throwing things around. We made a ball from mineral water bottle and kicked it around. We pushed all the tables to the middle of the class. (AhFook/Juv/07/Sch)

Some teachers may just enter class for a little while and then disappear for the rest of the lesson:

Interviewer: Can you give one example of how your teachers taught ineffectively?

Syazwan: Like... when teacher was teaching... like... gave work after that left the class.

Interviewer: How long did he/she leave the class?

Syazwan: Sometimes until after the lesson was over. (Syazwan/05/Juv/Sch)

Interviewer: What kind of school experience that you dislike most?

Loga: Don't like kids who played a lot in class

Interviewer: Why did they play a lot in class?

Loga: Because there was no teacher ahh.

Interviewer: You mean the teacher was always not there?

Loga: Sometimes always, sometimes not so always ahh. Teacher came, he/she said wait awhile he/she wanted to go and take some books... just disappeared... the bell rang ahh... until recess. (Loga/Juv/09/Sch)

Students tend to create havoc when there is no teacher in the classroom and may even end up fighting with each other. They may also take this golden opportunity to skip classes and loiter around in the school, and even sneak out of school as what the participants of this study have been doing.

### ***Harsh and Irrational Disciplinary Actions***

The strict disciplinary measures taken by the schools such as caning, slapping, or running round the field under the hot sun would not deter the students from engaging in antisocial behavior. On the contrary, “reacting forcefully to disruptive behavior will often interfere with our ability to get to the heart of the child’s message. “When punishment is inappropriately applied, several negative consequences can occur, such as producing unwanted emotional reactions, aggression, or withdrawal – or an increase in the behavior that is punished” (Gendreau, 1996: 129). Needless to say, a negative school environment where the teachers often punish the students irrationally, inconsistently and unscrupulously may do more harm than good (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold and Cauffman, 2014) as clearly proven in the lives of our participants.

All the participants of this agreed that the harsh disciplinary methods at school are not only ineffective but also made them behave even worse than before:

I am used to being caned... I don't feel anything. (Ariffin/Juv/11/Sch)

Influenced again... even worse... before they caned my buttocks, I skipped classes... after they caned my buttocks, I played truant from school. (Ariffin/Juv/11/Sch)

They caned me I did again... they caned me I did again (Loga/Juv/08/Sch).

I became worse... the more they beat me, the worse I become (laughing). (Syazwan/Juv/06/Sch)

Got caned on the buttocks and hands. When they caned my hands, I laughed ha, ha, ha (laughing). When I laughed, I didn't feel the pain. The more I laughed, the more they cane. Let them cane until they were satisfied... my hands had no feel...the skin of my hands is very thick. (AhFook/Juv/08/Sch)

If caning can make me a better person, I won't be here. They punished me I did again... they punished me I did again. After some time they got tired of doing it. (Zulkifli/Juv/08/Sch)

Ariffin considered caning to be a painful school experience for him and even intended to beat up his teacher's son in order to take revenge after being caned by the teacher but ended up quarrelling with him because he did not get the chance to lay his hands on him. Like Ariffin, Zulkifli also took revenge on teachers who punished him:

Interviewer: How did your teachers normally punish you at school?

Zulkifli: Caned, stood under the hot sun, sat outside the class, ran round the field... stood on a chair, after that I had to clean up the whole school... all the toilets I had to clean... after that I had to clean up the staffroom. I had to wash my teachers' cars.

Interviewer: How long did you stand under the sun?

Zulkifli: 2 hours... that's normallah.

Interviewer: Did you take revenge?

Zulkifli: I scratched his/her car... and pulled out the tyres. (Zulkifli/Juv/07/Sch)

Making a primary school student stand under the hot sun for two hours and doing so many things as punishment is grossly unreasonable and that was also one of the reasons why Zulkifli hated school. Similarly, Loga

had the habit of scratching his teachers' cars with a stone after being punished even though he did not pull out the tyres particularly when he felt that his teachers had punished him unjustly.

Teachers who abuse the powers given to them in the name of discipline may even cause physical injuries to the students. This was clearly indicated in one of Loga's experiences with his teachers:

Interviewer: How did your teacher punish you when you did not do your homework?

Loga: Caned 30 times. Buttocks 20 times, hands 10.

Interviewer: Were your buttocks and hands swollen?

Loga: Little bit.

Interviewer: How old were you then?

Loga: Std 5. Last time she caned here (showed me his wrist) ... blood clots. She caned. My mother went to school to report. She talked to the teacher. You don't cane him. Not your child, someone else's child. She said I didn't do school work. Everything I said ... everything she petak.

Interviewer: What is petak?

Loga: Answered back. I tried to discipline him... I wanted to teach him. If you want to teach him, you can talk to him... don't cane. How is it now? I want to make a report. No need to report... no need to do anything. (Loga/Juv/07/Sch)

Caning a Year 5 student 30 times on the buttocks and hands until they were swollen with blood clots on the wrists just because he did not do his school work is not only grossly irrational, but also unlawful and the teacher concerned can be prosecuted in court. Loga's teacher is lucky in a sense that his mother did not lodge a police report. However, one cannot deny the fact that this kind of disciplinary action did have a negative impact on him as it caused him to feel unsafe and insecure at school. According to Loga, "I put cloth under my pants... it won't hurt so much" (Loga/Juv/08/Sch). Fearing that he would be injured by his teachers, he had to come out with this idea in order to protect himself.

Needless to say, punitive punishment is ineffective in the treatment of problem behaviour as it could destroy the students' interest in learning and commitment to school thus overriding its deterrent effect. Similarly, suspension and expulsion are not the solution to problem behavior. School suspension and expulsion are often used to handle school fights, bullying, truancy, theft, smoking, and classroom disruptions in many Malaysian schools. However, these forms of punishment tend to have a negative impact on the students as they are not only ineffective but often lead to or encourage more serious offending as the students would have more time to participate in antisocial activities due to lack of supervision (Bilchik, 1999; Kim, Losen and Hewitt, 2010). In the study conducted by Bilchik (1999), it was shown that boys who were suspended from school committed more antisocial acts compared to those who stayed in school. This was what happened to Syazwan who was caught shop-breaking after he was expelled from school. Since the purpose of such punishment is to deter students from engaging in future misbehaviour, it is necessary for the school authorities to reconsider whether this form of punishment is appropriate. The researchers are of the opinion that disciplinary actions should be carried out within the school in a rational manner so as not to provide opportunities that could enhance delinquent behavior.

The limitation of this study is that since it was carried out on a relatively small sample of six participants, obtaining a larger sample could lead to more information pertaining to the school factors that could have negative contribution to the students' behavioural outcomes. Since all the participants in this study are male students, future researchers should look into the lived school experiences of delinquent female students as well as these are likely to differ from what the male students have experienced.

## Conclusion

The school experiences of the participants of this study clearly revealed the painful truth that some Malaysian teachers are still treating their students with disrespect (such as saying that they are stupid and calling them names), teaching ineffectively, not entering class, not doing anything to help the slow learners, chatting over the phone in the classroom,

scolding their students without justifiable reasons, and inflicting irrational physical punishment on them as a means of correction. All these occurrences can be very devastating to the social, emotional, and psychological development of children. These would not only destroy their interest to learn but also cause them to perform badly at school, resort to truancy as a means of escape from the painful realities of school life, drop out of school, and participate in antisocial activities. This clearly explains why the participants of this study have ended up as school failures, are truant, and three of them even dropped out of school. Given such undesirable school experiences, it was not surprising for them to resort to deviant behaviour. Although it may seem unfair to say that these school experiences had a major role to play in affecting their behavioural outcomes, one cannot deny the fact that these factors did, in some way, contribute towards their undesirable behavior.

Instead of exacerbating the antisocial behavior amongst at-risk students, schools should shelter them from the adverse effects of their social environment by providing them with the opportunity to learn and develop in a safe and stable environment. However, there are many at-risk children who, apart from being scolded and punished by the teachers, are not doing anything at school. As what Syazwan said:

Went to school... didn't do anything... got punished... scolded...  
(Syazwan/Juv/05/Sch)

In a way, Syazwan's statement also reflects clearly what was happening to Loga, Ah Fook, Zulkifli, Ariffin, and Irwan at school. Since negative school factors can induce or enhance deviant behavior amongst children, the researchers are of the opinion that the Ministry of Education or State Education Department should monitor closely what is going on in the schools and take the necessary steps to improve the present school situation. For instance, frequent 'in-depth' checks and monitoring ought to be carried out in the schools by the relevant authorities so as to ensure that the teachers are teaching effectively. Teachers who are exhibiting bad attitude towards their students, do not like to enter class, punish the students unlawfully and irrationally, and teach in an ineffective and monotonous manner should be sent for retraining during the school holidays so as to enhance their professionalism. Similarly, teachers who lack proficiency in the subjects they are teaching ought to be sent for courses in order to upgrade their proficiency so that they can teach more effectively.

Since academic failure often marks the onset of delinquent behavior and future serious offending, school interventions should focus on ways to improve the student's academic performance. Studies have indicated that programs that emphasize on the academic component not only enhance the students' academic achievement but have been proven to be effective in reducing delinquency (Lauer, Akiba, Wilkerson, Apthorp et al., 2006; Kremer, Maynard, Polanin, Vaughn and Sartesch, 2015). After-school tutoring programs in the form of homework assistance and tutoring programs can help to complement the teaching and learning activities that the students participate during the day by emphasizing on the subjects which they have difficulty in understanding. In giving the students more personal attention through the tutoring programs, teachers can help to improve their academic performance and hence prevent the onset of delinquency.

Apart from tutoring programs, extracurricular activities can also have an essential role to play in promoting the healthy development of children. Studies have indicated that students who participate actively in extracurricular activities are more likely to have better emotional/social/behavioural development, improved academic performance, higher educational aspirations, reduced antisocial behaviour/dropout rate, and future occupational success (Molinuevo, Bonillo, Pardo, Doval and Torrubia, 2010; Ludden, 2011; Camacho and Fuligni, 2015). Extracurricular participation also reduces the likelihood of students dropping out of school (Armstrong, 2014), drug addiction (Borden, Donnermeyer and Scheer, 2001), and teen pregnancy thus giving them better resiliency (Himelfarb, Lac and Baharav, 2014). Apart from reducing stress, participating in extracurricular activities enable the students to explore new roles beyond the classroom setting thus providing them with the opportunity to learn the importance of teamwork and explore their leadership qualities (Ekechukwu, Ateke and Ekenedo, 2014). The positive developmental experiences that they encounter through their participation in extracurricular activities would enable them to develop a more positive self-image and hence a more positive lifestyle (Blomfield and Barber, 2011).

Since teachers often "have little direct contact with the families of their students, with their neighbourhoods, or community traditions" (Lee and Hawkins, 2008: 53), they have very little knowledge about their students' lives outside of school. School-based programs/activities that are being carried out by the teachers themselves enable the teachers to understand more about their students' background and lifestyle and hence play a more important role in their lives. This is also one way of providing the teachers with the opportunities for professional development so that they could

have greater expertise in dealing with their students. Needless to say, students who participate actively in the school programs and activities would have a higher commitment to their education. There is evidence that school commitment, i.e. the students' positive attitude towards school life and active involvement and participation in school activities can help to reduce or prevent their involvement in antisocial activities (Hirschfield and Gasper, 2011; Reingle, Jennings and Maldonado-Molina, 2012; Hart and Mueller, 2013). For the purposes of prevention and control, the school administration in every school should ensure that all students are given proper academic support through tutoring programs as well as participate actively in the extracurricular activities so as to reduce their chances of involvement with antisocial behaviour.

## Endnotes

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