

## **BULLYING AMONGST ORANG ASLI CHILDREN: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY IN AN ORANG ASLI PRIMARY SCHOOL IN THE KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses Indigenous children and bullying based on a study done amongst the Orang Asli children in Bukit Lanjan, Malaysia. In the past, Indigenous children globally were exploited for labour, systemically bullied and racially discriminated in schools, forced into assimilation with mainstream societies, and others which led to mental health issues, intergenerational trauma, substance abuse, death and even high dropout rates in schools. In Malaysia, the dropout rates among Orang Asli children are dramatically higher than the national average even after initiatives by the government are made to improve their literacy and attendance. As it is essential to track the link between bullying and high dropout rates, this paper explores if bullying is experienced by Orang Asli children in SK Bukit Lanjan, Malaysia and if it exists, then how are they manifested, and how do these children react. This is incumbent to see how bullying can be overcome among Orang Asli children so that they can retain in schools. Based on this qualitative case study, Orang Asli children have experienced bullying in various forms namely physical, verbal, social and sexual harassment. As a consequence, the children seek social support like confiding in their parents, teachers or friends and individual agency, where they write in their diary, introspect, read, do arts and crafts and even play sports to cope with bullying. The main recommendation to overcome bullying among others is to recognise through the education system that the Orang Asli have rights over issues that affect them, include them in decision-making processes, develop an Orang Asli-friendly approach in schools, and lastly, evaluate the effectiveness of bullying interventions in Orang Asli schools.

*Keywords: bullying, culture, dropout, education, Indigenous, Orang Asli*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Indigenous communities around the world have endured many hardships in the past, even today. Many challenges they face are related to their land rights, where governments and companies encroach their homes on ancestral lands under the pretext of development (Leonie et al., 2015, Suria Selasih Angit, 2020). However, when their homes are destroyed and so are the forests, what they fail to realize is that the Indigenous lose their cultural practices and sources of food and income, among others (Marsh et al., 2016, Povey and Trudgett, 2019, Suria Selasih Angit, 2020). Besides that, they are unable to climb the social ladder and will be stuck in poverty (Marsh et al., 2016). Even if they try to attain education for their children, their children too may face problems in schools. Where education is concerned, in some cases, this happened not on their accord but colonisers when they ‘offered’ their children education. However, what entailed subsequently were cases of abuse, exploitation, bullying and slavery disguised in manipulation (Marsh et al., 2016, Povey and Trudgett, 2019). Indigenous children were separated from their families and communities, and forced to become labourers in plantations elsewhere instead (Matheson et al., 2016, Povey and Trudgett, 2019). Because of these and how

they have happened for centuries and generations in the past, many Indigenous communities today are affected by a term called intergenerational trauma which leads to many other serious effects (Marsh et al., 2016). For instance, many Indigenous people suffer from mental health issues (Brownlee et al., 2014, Coffin, 2011, Marsh et al., 2016), substance abuse (Marsh et al., 2016) and suicidal ideation (Marsh et al., 2016, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). This shows how the education system and the social actors involved with running such a system such as governments, teachers and missionaries have failed Indigenous children in the past and why there is a need today for the Indigenous people to gain self-determination and choose for themselves the way to live their lives (Matheson et al., 2016, Suria Selasih Angit, 2020).

In addition, the link between Indigenous children, bullying and dropout rates has not been extensively researched. Therefore, it is important to carry out research to fill in this knowledge gap. In Malaysia, although research on the Orang Asli and schooling is still relatively scarce, it is mentioned that some of the pressing issues they continue to face today are related to school retention and literacy (Azie Suzana Ibrahim et al., 2019, Azlin Norhaini Mansor et al., 2013, Fatan Hamamah Yahaya, 2008, Juli Edo et al., 2013, Mohd Roslan Rosnon and Mansor Abu Talib, 2019, Muhammad Zulhelmi Ramli and Fitri Suraya Mohamad, 2013, Sharifah Md Nor et al., 2011, Suria Selasih Angit, 2020, Win and Kiky Kirina Abdillah, 2017). For the former, it is mentioned that many Orang Asli children are dropping out of schools, especially from primary to secondary schools due to a number of reasons. They are related to family socio-economic background, poor infrastructure such as roads to attend schools, location of schools being far from their homes, absence of transportation to send children to schools, insufficient support from teachers and parents, incompatible curriculum, racism and even bullying faced in schools. On the other hand, in terms of literacy, Orang Asli children still fall short and behind the national average (Muhammad Zulhelmi Ramli and Fitri Suraya Mohamad, 2013, Suria Selasih Angit, 2020). When Orang Asli children experience literacy issues in school, they feel disengaged from lessons in school. Eventually, their academic performance will suffer because of that (Azie Suzana Ibrahim et al., 2019). Hence, because children feel like they are unable to cope with lessons due to their literacy problems and do not perform well in school, this is why more and more children drop out of school. However, as the following section will explain, this can lead to poverty. When children drop out of school and find jobs, they would not likely earn a high salary from their jobs because of the absence of a minimum education qualification like the SPM<sup>1</sup> (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*). As Orang Asli children often drop out before age 17, they would not have earned this certificate and without this certificate, they may not even be able to earn a minimum wage or be involved in any permanent employment. Drawing from that, they will fall behind financially as compared to the rest in society. Eventually, this will also be difficult to navigate their lives around especially when the needs of their children and families need to be prioritised alongside the rising cost of living in the country among other adversities.

The findings of this study which will be informed in subsequent sections highlight that intra-ethnic bullying takes place, where bullying happens by and in the community itself. Some of the types of bullying they experience are physical, verbal, social and sexual harassment. The ways in which children are affected can be seen in the feelings they experience and how they react to bullying. For instance, they mostly feel angry and wish to take revenge on their perpetrators in the future but in some cases, they prefer confiding in their parents, teachers or friends. There are also children who keep to themselves and internalise their experiences. This

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<sup>1</sup> This certificate is earned after a student sits for the SPM examinations at age 17, at the end of secondary school in Malaysia.

as such confirms that bullying does take place amongst and against Orang Asli children in Bukit Lanjan and there are effects of bullying on the children.

Furthermore, although the Orang Asli children in Bukit Lanjan have not expressed their thoughts on dropping out of school, this shows that bullying in schools still prevails, often serious and measures should be taken to mitigate this especially for those who are still in primary school. Failure to do so may cause more children to drop out of schools in the future because as referenced earlier, dropout rates among the Orang Asli children are relatively high in Malaysia and bullying is one of the reasons why Orang Asli children especially in secondary schools for instance drop out of schools. Therefore, it is paramount that this study is undertaken so that bullying can be nipped in the bud and dropout rates can be curtailed among the Orang Asli children.

## **SCOPING THE TEMUANS IN THE MALAYSIAN ORANG ASLI CONTEXT**

Before delving deeper into the challenges that the Orang Asli experience with regards to schooling and bullying, it is important to know some background information about the Orang Asli in Malaysia. The Orang Asli are the Indigenous people in Peninsular Malaysia. They make up 0.7% of the total population with around 198 000 people according to JAKOA in 2012. There are three major groups that are considered Orang Asli and they are the Senoi, Proto-Malay and Negrito. Altogether there are 19 Orang Asli subgroups. For instance, the Senoi which is the most populous Orang Asli group with 54% consist of the Temiar, Semai, Semoq Beri, Che' Wong, Jahut and Mah Meri. The Proto-Malays on the other hand which are 43% of the Orang Asli population are made up of the Jakuns, Temuans, Semelais, Orang Kanak, Orang Kuala and Orang Seletar. The final group, the Negrito who are the least populated of the Orang Asli at 3% are those who belong to the Kintak, Kensi, Lanoh, Jahai, Mendriq and Bateq sub ethnic groups (Fatan Hamamah Yahaya, 2008, Hema Letchamanan, 2021). These three groups are differentiated by their looks, physical build, languages, and cultural values that they adhere to. Furthermore, each of these groups are distributed and can be found in various locations in Peninsular Malaysia. For instance, the Senois can be found in Kelantan, Terengganu, Selangor, Perak and many of them in Pahang as well. Down south, the Proto-Malays are more prone to live in Pahang as well as in Johor, Melaka and Negeri Sembilan. Different from the Proto-Malays, the Negritos mostly live in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia especially in Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu. However, they also live in Perak and Pahang as well. Majority of the Orang Asli live in the forest and still follow a traditional lifestyle which is heavily influenced by their environment and what was passed down by their ancestors. According to 2011 statistics, Pahang has the greatest number of Orang Asli inhabitants with 67 506 people, followed by Perak with 53 299 people and then Selangor with 17 587 people.

The present research uncovers the bullying phenomenon, where the plights of the Temuan Orang Asli children from the Proto-Malay group will be highlighted. This is because as the contextual background in the later paragraphs will explain, the research site, Bukit Lanjan is mainly a Temuan neighbourhood. Information extracted from various sources reveals that the Temuans are one of the largest Orang Asli groups only behind the Semai and Jakun. For instance, in 2010, there were 19 343 Temuans in Malaysia (2012). Initially, they were forest dwellers but most of the Temuans now live specifically in the countryside or in suburban areas

in Selangor, Pahang, Johor, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka. Some of the more popular villages or areas where they live in are Bukit Lanjan, Broga, Kampung Guntur and Kampung Lubuk Bandung. This came about after the land on which they used to live in the forest was utilized for modernization and development projects spearheaded by the federal and state governments. Because of that, many Temuans were resettled into new settlement areas. Because they were forest dwellers, the way in which the Temuans used to build their houses traditionally was by using materials found from the nearby forest. On the other hand, in remote areas, they built their wooden beams and planks using brick and lime. Basically, their houses are very similar to Malay villages but what differentiates between the two is the visibility of dogs. Apart from having similar house structures with the Malays, it is also known that the Temuans and Malays are indistinguishable in their looks. Moreover, the language they speak, *Bahasa Temuan* which has Austronesian origins, is closely related to *Bahasa Melayu* (2015, Masron et al., 2013).

Where living arrangement is concerned, the Temuans live harmoniously with their community and their nuclear families are very important to them (Masron et al., 2013). In order to maintain harmony in the community, the Temuans have a political structure in which several people in the community assume certain and important roles. These roles include the *Batin*, *Pemangku*, *Jenang* and *Jekerah*, *Penghulu Balai* and *Panglima*. Firstly, the *Batin* is the highest adviser and they have supernatural powers who also give advice and remedies against minor ailments. Next, the *Batin's* assistant, *Pemangku* is usually tasked with dividing animal game obtained from hunting to be given to each family. The *Jenang* and *Jekerah* on the other hand organise and control collective work in the community whereas the *Penghulu Balai* organises joint holidays and celebrations. Lastly, the role of protector is taken up by the *Panglima* who usually is chosen because they were former military leaders or soldiers.

With regards to how the Temuans conduct their economic activities in the community, forest and agriculture are the focus, where rice and rubber among other commodities are prioritised (2015, Masron et al., 2013). It is common to find Temuans keeping gardens in their backyards now, besides growing vegetables and tropical fruits. Furthermore, they collect jungle produce to earn extra income and wood for construction too. As mentioned above, because the Temuans are forest dwellers, their traditional medicinal knowledge comes in handy. They would harvest medical plants and herbs like certain plant species, fungi and even some animal parts for healing and treating purposes within and even outside the community, where others would approach the Temuans for advice. This is because the Temuans know how to treat wounds, joint pains, bone fractures, hypertension, diabetes and others. Unfortunately, nowadays many of them rely on modern medicine. Where hunting is concerned, wild boars, deer, monkeys, monitor lizards and birds are favoured. However, they would also fish in nearby rivers for their protein source. Despite their economic activities and the effort they make to generate income, like other Orang Asli groups in Malaysia, the Temuans, unfortunately live in poverty.

When it comes to their culture and beliefs, the Temuans believe in nature's powers and spirits, which also include taboos, herbal remedies, ritual ceremonies and magic. Where the latter is concerned, the *dukun* and village *bomoh* communicate with nature spirits when they are in a trance. Besides that, the act of communicating with spirits is also practiced on Ancestors Day or also known as *Aik Muyang*. This is where the shaman leads the tribe in the annual *sawang* - a ritual to honour and appease their ancestors. They give thanks to their ancestors for

giving them a good life, and this celebration is celebrated somewhere between December 15 to January 15 in different places. However, it must be noted that today, many Temuans have converted to Islam and Christianity especially where inter-religious and inter-cultural marriages are concerned. Because of this, some of them might not practice these rituals anymore (Masron et al., 2013).

There are also several prominent customs that the Temuans practice to this day. Some of them revolve around respecting elders, staying quiet during thunderstorms, not killing anyone, not praising babies and also staying away from haunted places. Not only that, the Temuans also enjoy their traditional food; which is usually cooked in bamboo. Some of the examples of food cooked this way are catfish (*tempoyak*), *lemang*, and potatoes with squeezed fruit (2015, Masron et al., 2013). While nowadays some Temuans still practice their traditions, there are some differences that they experience; one of them as mentioned earlier is being resettled into new settlements due to development. Unfortunately, because of the effects of modernization and how they have to comply with the social change, there are a number of challenges that they experience (Masron et al., 2013). For instance, they have difficulty attaining jobs, managing their finances and they also get involved with alcoholism and gambling. In many cases as well, children and youths also experience issues of their own, where truancy and dropouts are common.

## **ORANG ASLI AND EDUCATION**

Where education and the Orang Asli is concerned, it is stated that Article 12(1) of the Federal Constitution provides that every individual has the right to education without discrimination based on religion, race, descent, or place of birth. Under this notion, the Minister in the Prime Minister's department has asserted that Indigenous peoples have equal rights under the law and should not be denied of their education rights because of their ethnicity (Bernama, 2019 cited in Rohaida Nordin et al., 2020). On that note, education services were and have been provided to the Orang Asli community by the JHEOA from the 1970s to 1980s until 1995. While this took place, there were some challenges that were faced by the Orang Asli community with regards to the teaching and learning. To begin, majority of the Orang Asli children could not and still do not enjoy the benefits of early childhood education because most of them live in poverty and in remote areas (Ee, A. M., 1998 cited in Juli Edo et al., 2013). Apart from that, because the staff from JHEOA were underqualified and who were mostly Malay teachers who taught the Orang Asli children all over the country, this did not bode well with the Orang Asli parents. This posed problems in that these teachers were oblivious and uninformed about the Orang Asli culture and ways of living. Because of that and the difficulty the teachers had in relaying information to Orang Asli children in classes, consequently, the Orang Asli children found it difficult to grasp what was taught to them. While that shows where teachers were lacking in teaching the Orang Asli children, Hema Letchamanan (2021) on the other hand believes that this took place because the school curriculum that was taught to Orang Asli children failed to inculcate meaning-making in the children. This is because the content and syllabus in subjects like *Bahasa Melayu* and English were not related to the environment of the Orang Asli community. This was how they continued to fall behind in their literacy acquisition and academic performance in school because the children could not relate. Not only that, facilities and infrastructure in schools were run down too (Fatan Hamamah Yahaya, 2008). All

of this took a toll on their education. However, from 1995 onwards, there was a change in the education of the Orang Asli community. Rohaida Nordin et al. (2020) reported that as of 1995,

*“There was an aim of providing Orang Asli children with the opportunity of being assimilated into mainstream education. By the end of the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991-1995), the Government had taken the first step towards integrating Indigenous education into mainstream education. This has been achieved as a step towards improving their education delivery system. Henceforth, all Indigenous educational administration and management were taken over by the MOE from JHEOA from January 1, 1995.”*

Despite the change and even when taking into account what took place prior to that, it cannot be denied that there were still some problems that the Orang Asli faced with regards to their education. For instance, high dropout rates from primary to secondary school and literacy-related issues still persisted (Suria Selasih Angit, 2020). While there is a lot to uncover from these two main challenges because they are complex issues with multi factors linked to them, it is important to understand why they drop out from schools. These include but are not limited to personal and family backgrounds, access to schools and school-related factors (Azie Suzana Ibrahim et al., 2019, Muhammad Zulhelmi Ramli and Fitri Suraya Mohamad, 2013, Ramle Abdullah et al., 2013, Suria Selasih Angit, 2020). However, besides these being at the forefront of Orang Asli issues with education, there are other prevalent issues like their well-being and health, and poverty (Norwaliza Abdul Wahab et al., 2019) as well. Where the latter is concerned, this has been the plight of the Orang Asli in Malaysia, which also affects children’s participation in schools. For instance, in Ramle Abdullah et al. (2013) it says that,

*“As at 2010, the poverty rate for household heads (KIR) of the Orang Asli was only around 32% (JAKOA, 2011). The poverty rate is indeed a considerable reduction when compared with the rate in the 1990s, which recorded more than 80% (Lim Hin Fui, 1997; Ramle, 2010).”*

Although this shows a positive change within the Orang Asli community, compared to the national average, this still puts them far behind other communities. Where efforts need to be taken to improve the state of education among the Orang Asli community and to get them out of poverty, the government, through the Ministry of Education and JAKOA had to implement new initiatives. For example, KEMAS was set up in order to eradicate education poverty and improve literacy among people living in rural areas including the Orang Asli. In 2008, (Kamarulzaman, n.d) mentions that KEMAS had set up 179 kindergartens (TABIKA) at new settlements and it has benefited about 1229 Orang Asli children, which is in line with its early childhood education programme. Apart from that, the *Kurikulum Asli Penan* (KAP) was also introduced in 2007 in 6 schools in Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak in the beginning that was beneficial to the Indigenous communities. This was to fulfil the unique needs of the Indigenous children and to bridge the education performance gap between Indigenous children and other mainstream children using a unique curriculum for the Indigenous community.

In addition, to overcome the problem of dropouts among the Orang Asli children, the government also introduced KEDAP (*Kelas Dewasa Asli dan Peribumi*) and K9 Model Schools or in *Bahasa Melayu*, *Sekolah Model Khas Komprehensif 9*. The former is targeted for adults who are mainly parents of Orang Asli children to improve their literacy. This is so that parents are able to guide their children with their homework in hopes that they will continue to retain in school. This was helpful because Orang Asli children perceived advice and supervision from their families as motivation to continue schooling (Azlin Norhaini Mansor et al., 2013). On the

other hand, where the K9 Schools are concerned, these were set up to help overcome rising rates of high school dropouts since students lived in remote areas away from their school grounds (Economic Planning Unit, 2010 cited in Rohaida Nordin et al., 2020). These K9 schools brought many benefits to the Orang Asli community because there are no secondary schools that specifically cater for the Orang Asli students. Since there are no secondary schools like that, Orang Asli students would generally attend schools together with other mainstream students in schools located outside their villages (Sharifah Md Nor et al., 2011) and had to go through the possibility of being racially discriminated or bullied by their peers or teachers. However, with the existence of these hostels or K9 schools, which numbers at 14 in urban areas in the country (Mohd Tap, cited in Fatah Hamamah Yahaya, 2008), these have changed the landscape of education for the Orang Asli children coming from remote areas. This is because children would be placed in these boarding schools for 6 years so that their learning would not be affected by not having transportation to go to school, poor road conditions and even long travel times to go to school. However, it must be noted that according to Win and Kiky Kirina Abdillah (2017), a driver who has transported Orang Asli children to school and interviewed in their research say that it is not because of the transport services or drivers that prevent children from attending schools but their parents. The driver adds that Orang Asli parents apparently do not prioritise their children's education.

Besides that, JAKOA has provided breakfast and lunch to daily school attendees and in remote areas (Norwaliza Abdul Wahab et al., 2019). This meal programme is an addition to the RMT (*Rancangan Makanan Tambahan*) in schools which was implemented by the Ministry of Education to also encourage Orang Asli children to attend school. Moreover, other programs in the name of national education development that were catered to the Orang Asli include the Education Assistance Scheme, 2010 Educational Development Action Plan for the Orang Asli Community, Friendly Teaching Programs, motivational programs, Mini Hostels Program, as well as special awareness programs for the parents of Orang Asli students (JAKOA, 2011).

Even though these initiatives were in place to retain Orang Asli in schools, some Orang Asli parents are still sceptical of the education that is provided to their children. For example, Juli Edo et al. (2013) highlighted that parents in Belum-Temenggor felt pessimistic with their children's early education due a number of reasons like volunteers and teachers not being qualified to teach their children and having negative experiences with providers of the early education program with regards to their lands being exploited. This may also be one of the many reasons why not all Orang Asli children are in schools (Rohaida Nordin et al., 2020) and that dropout rates among the Orang Asli are still relatively high.

Fatan Hamamah Yahaya (2008) on the other hand mentions that 50% of Orang Asli children drop out of school after completing primary school whereas Azlin Norhaini Mansor et al. (2013) reports that "only 6 out of 100 Orang Asli children entering Primary 1 will be expected to reach Form 5 eleven years later. This means that 94 percent of the students would have dropped out before completing their Form 5." Statistics show that these rates are relatively higher than the national average which is at only 1.36% in 2017 according to Berita Harian 2018 (Azie Suzana Ibrahim et al., 2019). In another example, JAKOA reports that from 2010 to 2018, 22.4% of Orang Asli students on average have dropped out of school from Standard 6 to Form 1 (Azie Suzana Ibrahim et al., 2019). These statistics show a far cry from the goal set by the then Education Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin where he aimed to reduce the dropout rates among the Orang Asli by 6% starting from 2013 (Norwaliza Abdul Wahab et al., 2019).

While there may be different views on why dropout rates have been high among the Orang Asli children, Juli Edo et al. (2013) believes that it is because early childhood education was not provided to Orang Asli childhood that caused high dropout rates among them and even severed their performance in schools. However, in other respects, a child may drop out of school due to other commitments in one's family. For example, when additional financial assistance is required by one's family following a loss of a loved one, then it is evident that some children would eventually leave school and join the workforce. Another reason which would warrant a similar predicament is when transport services to send and fetch children to school which are located far from their homes are unavailable. This shows that there are contesting and multi-angled reasons for this ongoing predicament. Not only that, their literacy rates from 2000 is also not too promising where 49.2% of the Orang Asli as compared to 6.4% of the national average are illiterate.

When discussing about enrolment into learning institutions, the number of Orang Asli enrolled into primary school is just 23607 and in secondary school, only 6678 in 2003. Implicatively, the number of Orang Asli in tertiary education is also low with only 436 people who completed their tertiary education in IPTAs (public institutions) in 2004, where most of them attained their diplomas (302 of them) as compared to bachelor degrees, masters and PhDs. In the year before, this number was only 285. This comes even after scholarships and other forms of aid are given to the Orang Asli community such as the RMT, allowances to attend KEDAP classes and other scholarships to further their studies abroad and locally.

From what was discussed above, this calls to question why Orang Asli children are experiencing such predicaments with their education. For instance, why are they experiencing high dropout rates and why is there a lack of interest in continuing education? As mentioned by Azie Suzana Ibrahim et al (2019), Sharifah Md Nor et al (2011) and Suria Selasih Angit (2020), one of the reasons why this happens is due to bullying they experience. Whilst bullying is experienced by the Orang Asli children, in the section that follows, it will be explained how the Indigenous children from around the world also experience bullying and how they are affected by it.

## **INDIGENOUS CHILDREN, SCHOOLING AND BULLYING**

Indigenous children to this day go through various challenges in schools where their education is concerned, and society just for being Indigenous. Some examples include severe abuse in residential schools in the past in Canada which led to their deaths (Engels, 2021), forced assimilation and removal from their communities, loss of culture, exploitation for labour and a wide range of other forms of bullying and racism as well in residential schools. The fundamental principles underlying the establishment of these residential school systems were racist and represented an explicit attempt to eradicate what was perceived as the defining characteristics of the Indigenous peoples (Matheson et al., 2016). In addition, Indigenous children also experienced high school rates of truancy, often used the phone help line, and succumbed to substance abuse and juvenile detention (Coffin, 2011; Marsh et al., 2016). All of this happened because they were trying to cope with severe effects of bullying.

Before looking at how Indigenous children from around the globe dealt with severe bullying in schools and in their neighbourhood, it must first be understood what bullying is.



According to Dan Olweus, "A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself." (Olweus and Limber, 2019).

One way of looking at bullying is to be aware of the roles involved in bullying. They include perpetrator, victim, perpetrator-victim and even bystanders (Becerra et al., 2015, Pister, 2014, Simon, 2017, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). With the involvement of many roles in bullying, this is what makes bullying a complex case and not only that, some problems may also ensue because of how complicated and complex bullying can be. For instance, one of the most pressing problems that can arise out of bullying is inaccurate reporting (Campbell and Smalling, 2013). The reasons why this happens are twofold; victims do not report bullying cases, which is predominant amongst Indigenous communities and a clear definition of bullying ceases to exist (Campbell & Smalling, 2013). Unfortunately, due to these issues, bullying may prolong for Indigenous children.

Besides that, internationally, Indigenous children experience various kinds of bullying and in different ways. For example, most of the time, race is used against them and it is because they are Indigenous that they are racially discriminated against and bullied in schools by peers from other ethnic backgrounds. This is why Campbell and Smalling (2013) suggests that racial bullying or hate crimes exist in the educational system. Many times, this may be challenging because not only are they bullied by peers from different groups but are bullied also by Indigenous groups and in the education system. For instance, Hinton (2020) and Williams (2017) say their histories are misinformed, their language use is not respected and they are ostracised by the larger society just because of their race. While this is frequent, they also experience high levels of personal and intra-ethnic violence. Many Indigenous children are bullied by their own Indigenous communities where children have experienced wider family and community hostilities in their neighbourhood or in some cases like in Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2012), by other Indigenous groups too. This is where systemic bullying in schools through the curriculum comes into play. For example, the Mayagna language used by the Mayagna community was marginalised in school in favour of another Indigenous language, Miskitu although both groups live coherently in the same area. On the one hand, this shows how valuable Indigenous language is to their identity and on the other, how they can also be affected if their language is treated as inferior to other Indigenous languages concurrently. Moreover, where intra-ethnic bullying is concerned, many Indigenous children report that the fact it happens to them hurts them even more. Systemic bullying and racism can also be found in schools in different ways than what was mentioned above. For instance, this can be perpetrated through the school staff at residential schools. In Matheson et al. (2016), Indigenous children experienced abuse by other children in residential schools and even though the staff was aware about this, they were oblivious to resolve the issue. Instead, they encouraged others to continuously bully them.

While it is noted that verbal and cyber bullying is increasing (Brownlee et al., 2014), bullying can also exist through mistreatment where Indigenous children are coerced to be separated from their families and communities. In Matheson et al. (2016), many Indigenous children were instructed to leave their homes and follow colonial leaders to new locations under

the pretext of being provided an education. However, they were exploited only for their labour and in exchange, were not provided with comfortable living arrangements. On that note, as mentioned briefly previously, what was found out in Canada recently in 2021 about the unmarked graves of Indigenous children's bodies is a testament to how they were abused within the education system and denied their rights (Engels, 2021). Moreover, only half-caste Indigenous children were allowed to receive Western education. All of these show that the Indigenous children around the globe have been bullied through a wide spectrum in schools, systemically, by their own and other communities too.

Having experienced the different forms of bullying as stated above, Brownlee et al. (2014), Marsh et al. (2016) and Povey and Trudgett (2019) say that the effects of bullying especially in Indigenous children are manifold. Indigenous children are prone to drop out of school (Campbell & Smalling, 2013), commit to lateral violence (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014), experience psychological effects and mental health issues among others (Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2012; Brownlee et al., 2014; Coffin, 2011; Marsh et al., 2016). Firstly, when Indigenous children experience bullying, they have the tendency to drop out of school because not only do they wish to avoid their perpetrators but they also feel disengaged from school. In addition, some Indigenous children who have faced bullying in the past might not be able to channel their frustrations in the manner which will help them solve bullying. Children get involved in lateral violence (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014), where they would become aggressive towards their friends by fighting and harming them instead of reporting their bullying cases to parties who have authoritative power to combat bullying. This may not only be manifested in aggression but in other ways like substance abuse. Brownlee et al. (2014) and Marsh et al. (2016) mentioned that Indigenous children are often engaged with substance abuse because it makes them feel better. According to the children, they feel less angry and are able to regulate and attend to their negative emotions which allow them to cope with bullying. There are also major emotional and psychological effects of bullying that can happen to Indigenous children. Some of these include severe stress, anxiety, depression and even lack of emotion, especially in telling their stories (Coffin, 2011; Marsh et al., 2016). For example, they would not want to recount their experience by reporting their bullying cases. This is how inaccurate reporting may happen. However, Coffin (2011) says that if Indigenous children do choose to inform any of their incidents, their teachers are preferred more than their mothers.

In the Malaysian context, although very little has been written about bullying, Suria Selasih Angit (2020) opines that many Orang Asli children face racism and bullying in schools committed by mainstream students and teachers, which is not only a concern to themselves but many of their parents. This is also indicative of one of the issues they face in schools which may contribute to dropouts. According to their parents, they have been called 'stinky', 'stupid' and made fun of for being poor. Teachers have also remarked that 'teaching monkeys' is better than teaching Orang Asli children and they even wore gloves when coming near them as they "stink and have lice". Not only that, they are made fun of for their eating practices. Even when these are highlighted to JAKOA in hopes that justice would be served, at the end of the investigation, JAKOA would report that there is no bullying involved in school (Suria Selasih Angit, 2020). Authorities do not realize that this leads to more dropout cases in school among children because they feel they are not listened to when they make a report. This shows that social support from social institutions like JAKOA and schools play a prominent role in making sure bullying is addressed in schools and that Orang Asli children are not bullied further. This

is where the conditions of the schooling facilities, curriculum and teacher influence are important (Fatan Hamamah Yahaya, 2008). In other events, Suria Selasih Angit (2020) notes the Orang Asli community also experienced bullying in the form of their language use. They believe that in order to avoid bullying and being cheated by certain individuals from other communities, they are pressured to forego their Orang Asli accent when communication or transactions happen in public. This is because others have teased them and even cheated them when they speak in their Orang Asli languages and accents.

While there are limited resources of bullying reports among Orang Asli children, it is important to report about this because from what has been known, the consequences of bullying among Orang Asli are dire – even to the point where children succumb to their deaths. Hence, because stronger efforts need to be made in order to understand the link between dropout rates among the Orang Asli children and bullying, this paper asks if bullying is experienced by the Orang Asli children. Consequently, if they are, then how is bullying manifested and what do they do in reaction to the bullying. This will provide a more thorough understanding about what the children experience with regards to bullying which will be helpful in informing what interventions can be in place to mitigate bullying in schools and in the community so that dropouts can be reduced.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Empirical data on the bullying experience of Orang Asli children was collected in an Orang Asli primary school called SK Bukit Lanjan located in Damansara Perdana. Because it is a primary school, only students from the ages of 7 to 12 attend it. However, since 2010, the school was allowed by the Ministry of Education to open up special education classes for children undergoing academic challenges. Due to this, students up to 14 are enrolled into the program and thus attend the school as well. Although the school is relatively small in size, it has an adequate number of classrooms which offer the children 21<sup>st</sup> century learning tools, a computer lab, a *surau*, a library and even a decent-sized field just beside the school. Historically, the school was built to cater to the educational needs of the Orang Asli Temuan community in Bukit Lanjan. However, there are also other students from different ethnic backgrounds who attend the school now. Altogether, there are close to 200 students in the school where 71% of the student population is Orang Asli Temuan, 20% is Malay, 5% is Others and 2% each are Indian and Chinese.

There are three main reasons why SK Bukit Lanjan was selected as a research location. These reasons revolve around the fact that bullying begins in the early stages of childhood, interventions to overcome predicaments with children's education are advised to take place in the early stages as well, and lastly because bullying can be perpetuated by anyone regardless of background – even by Indigenous groups as well. To begin, despite claims that bullying happens more frequently in secondary schools, Seeley et al. (2009) mentions that bullying starts as early as in elementary school. With regards to that, since SK Bukit Lanjan is a primary school where students ages 7 to 14 attend the school, it was apt to research if students from SK Bukit Lanjan experienced bullying or not. Moreover, because it is mentioned that bullying starts in elementary school, Sharifah Md Nor et al. (2011) and Rohaida Nordin et al. (2020) also stated that interventions need to be carried out in earlier educational stages in order for any educational conundrums to be nipped in the bud. This is so that Orang Asli children will be better prepared

with the skills necessary for more advanced stages of their educational journey. Therefore, conducting research at a primary school like SK Bukit Lanjan was ideal because if bullying is experienced by the children, then this would also warrant interventions to be made – which was also the goal of this research; that is to come up with interventions to assist children cope with their bullying experiences. Lastly, because there were some reports about how Orang Asli children were bullied by non-Orang Asli children (2016, Azie Suzana Ibrahim et al., 2019, Azlin Norhaini Mansor et al., 2013, Suria Selasih Angit, 2020), it was also important to find a school that had a diverse community. In addition, Brownlee et al. (2014), Coffin (2011) and Hinton (2020) also did say that bullying can also be perpetuated by their own Indigenous community, proving that bullying can happen to and by anyone irrespective of culture or ethnicity. Hence, since SK Bukit Lanjan is made up of 71% Orang Asli and the rest, others, it was useful to see the interaction between both Orang Asli and non-Orang Asli children and to also see to what extent is bullying perpetuated by their own community or others from outside their community.

With regards to the sample group of this research, only Orang Asli children from SK Bukit Lanjan who experienced bullying before were selected to be research participants through purposive sampling. Furthermore, the data collection tools used were in-depth interviews with 32 Orang Asli children, observations and document analysis perused from fieldwork notes, the school, and cultural museum. Thereafter, thematic analysis where relevant themes and categorisation were helpful in presenting the data in the findings. All in all, the data collection process went by smoothly without any hiccups as permission and ethics approval was granted by the school's Headmaster, State Education Department [Reference Number: JPNS.SPO.600-1/1/2 JLO.10 (34)], Ministry of Education Malaysia [Reference Number: KPM.600-3/2/3-eras(9429)] and even University of Malaya Research Ethics Committee [Reference Number: UM.TNC2/UMREC – 815]. In addition, before interviews were conducted, consent by the children's parents and/or guardians was obtained and the rights of children to not answer or participate at any time of the interview were read out to the children. They were also told that their anonymity would be adhered to at any stage of reporting the findings, and the children agreed.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Types of Bullying Experienced by Orang Asli Children in Bukit Lanjan**

Upon analysing the data collected from the children from SK Bukit Lanjan, what was found was that bullying exists in and out of school. Furthermore, bullying is perpetuated by those from the community in Bukit Lanjan itself, thus creating a situation called intra-ethnic bullying or bullying within the community. The children explained that there are different types of bullying that they have experienced before. They are bullying manifested in physical, verbal, social and even sexual ways which will be further elaborated below. When the children shared their bullying experiences, follow-up questions such as what examples of bullying they experienced besides how they felt and how did they react were asked. This was important to understand in detail how each kind of bullying affected them, the severity of it and also what all of this meant to them.

To begin, physical bullying was found to be commonly experienced by Orang Asli children. Physical bullying usually emphasizes the size of the perpetrator relative to the victim and includes aggressive behaviours such as kicking, pushing, and spitting (Ando, Asakura, &

Simons-Morton, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Wong et al., 2008, cited in Brownlee et al., 2014). Similarly, these were some of the forms of bullying the Orang Asli children experienced. For example, children were physically bullied and harmed when they rode their bicycles around their neighbourhood in the evening. One of the boys, Roy, explained that when he rode his bicycle, other boys would come close to him with intentions of making him fall down from his bicycle. He added that this incident happened five times which caused his legs to be severely injured. Besides wanting the children to fall off from their bicycles and hurt themselves for the fun of it, this was also done to induce fear in them.

*“Ah, apa ni.. Diorang, kalau saya main basikal... lepas tu dia macam nak langgar orang. Diorang pernah lumba-lumba. Kalau saya main basikal, diorang nak himpit saya.” – Roy*

Not only have they experienced bullying while riding their bicycles but physical fights and harm have also broken out in the community before. This was experienced by Nor, who is just 8 years old. She explained that while walking to a nearby shop, she was stopped by a group of older teenage girls. What happened thereafter was that the group of girls proceeded to fight with her without any rhyme or reason. Nor was physically injured in that, her arms were bruised and consequently, this had affected her psychologically too. From then on, Nor had been traumatised by the event as whenever she goes to the shop to buy things and if she spots the same group of girls from afar, she would quickly hide herself behind a tree until they pass by to protect herself.

*“Ni saya berjalan, lepas tu tiba-tiba gaduh dengan saya. (Saya) tak kenal, tiba-tiba dia hentam saya.” - Nor*

Besides that, verbal bullying is also widespread in the Orang Asli community in Bukit Lanjan. Verbal bullying, by contrast, does not rely on physical dominance, but rather the use of words to hurt, degrade, dehumanize, or intimidate the victim (Swart & Bredekamp, 2009, cited in Brownlee et al., 2014). With regards to this, verbal bullying among the children has manifested in several ways where one of them touches on the theme of sexuality and gender. For example, one of the boys, Zam who is from the special education class in SK Bukit Lanjan, shared that he has been called a ‘*pondan*’ by an adult and her child from his community before. Other children followed suit too. The term, ‘*pondan*’ is derogatory which means effeminate men (Jerome et al., 2021). Unfortunately, this name calling was even extended to Zam’s brothers. Even though he may have been hurt and angry being called such derogatory terms, Zam defended himself and his brothers against his perpetrators. His immediate reaction was to boldly reply to his perpetrators that he did not care about being called such names. Moreover, he even slapped one of the older children who called him that before. He did all of this as a way to defend himself and not allow anyone to take advantage of him and his brothers.

Zam: *Dia ejek saya pondan.*

Researcher: *Siapa? Mak?*

Zam: *Mak dia la. Saya kata, “Saya tak pondan..” Anak dia, anak pun ejek.*

Other examples of verbal bullying that other children have experienced include being called “black”, “fat”, “stupid”, “ugly”, “yellow teeth” and others. From these derogatory names, this shows that behind the name calling, teasing and verbal bullying, nuances related to the

children's physical attributes and intelligence are presented besides sexuality and gender which was mentioned earlier.

This continues to take place even though they are all mostly of the same ethnic group who live in the same community in Bukit Lanjan. Although they come from a similar ethnic group, each individual is created differently. For instance, some may be bigger in size or darker in complexion. Because of these differences, some children feel ostracized and very hurt. This is because according to the children, they are a close-knit community, where even most of them refer to them as family. Hence, this is why children would rather keep to themselves when they are bullied by friends and community members whom they consider as family, as will be elaborated in the upcoming section below.

Moving on, social bullying is another kind of bullying which is prevalent in the Bukit Lanjan community, and experienced by the Orang Asli children. Social bullying is similar to verbal bullying, but what differentiates this from the latter is that social bullying involves exclusion, ostracism, alienating, gossiping, and making others look foolish (Coloroso, 2003, cited in Brownlee et al., 2014). For example, Hadi has experienced social exclusion from his group of friends in his friend's house. This took place when they were playing happily together one day until suddenly, they asked him to leave the house abruptly. Feeling embarrassed and confused about the matter, he left as he felt like his presence was unwanted. He also confided in his older brother because he felt upset about the incident. His brother did try to resolve the matter after that but to no avail as unfortunately, Hadi did not get invited after that again.

Hadi: *Diorang suruh saya balik, yang tu rumah diorang, masa tu saya balik, dia halau.*

Researcher: *Dia halau? Suruh balik?*

Hadi: *Aah (Ya)*

Researcher: *Dia halau bila korang buat apa? Masa tu Hadi buat apa?*

Hadi: *Main.*

Researcher: *Main la? Main dengan diorang, lepas tu tiba-tiba mereka cakap balik, macam tu?*

Hadi: *Aah (Ya)*

Researcher: *Kenapa?*

Hadi: *Saya main sekarang.. tiba-tiba dia main betul-betul*

Researcher: *Tiba-tiba dia buat apa?*

Hadi: *Dia tu.. dia tula.. dia suruh saya balik.*

As mentioned earlier, this ostracism and the feeling of being left out are quite commonly faced by other children too albeit in different ways. This would also happen although some of them may try their best to be friendly and polite with their friends. For instance, when Bell tried talking to her friends, she said that they would not even allow her to talk. In another case, when another girl, Aina, asked her other friends in class politely for their books as she was instructed to do so by her teacher, she too was mistreated by her friends for reasons she was unsure of. They ended up ignoring her and then threw their books rudely in her direction. These are some of the ways that social bullying is manifested in the community – where excluding, leaving people out and ill-treating others in a group are common.

Another important experience that the Orang Asli children have undergone in the community too that needs to be highlighted is sexual harassment. Vega-Gea et al. (2016) defines peer sexual harassment in adolescence as “an unwanted and unwelcome sexual behaviour because sexual harassment causes distress and discomfort to the victims, which can interfere with the normal life of students in schools.” Coming from someone who had experienced this

before, Lisa says that she had been groped inappropriately by her Orang Asli male classmates who were also from Bukit Lanjan. Whenever this happens, she would inform her parents and sometimes talk to her friends about the incident. Surprisingly, Lisa alerted that there are other girls who experienced similar incidents and by mentioning 'every time', this indicates the frequency of this male-perpetuated incident among them. This was also confirmed by a few other girls like Bell and Leha when they said that sexual harassment takes place when the whole class is usually in the middle of conducting an activity. What happens is that groping and inappropriate touching would happen very abruptly without anyone else noticing it. When this happened to Bell for instance, she eventually informed a teacher she trusted about the incident. What was gathered thereafter through the teacher's investigation was that the boys who commonly perpetuate this were experimenting with pornography and copying some acts from there. This speaks volumes because it is evident that exposure to pornography leads to sexual harassment cases in the community in Bukit Lanjan.

Usually when sexual harassment occurs to the girls, they would not inform their teachers or anyone about it. This is because they are mostly in shock, they feel embarrassed and would not know what to do. Even though they are angry at their perpetrators for sexually harassing them, they would still prefer to not report their experience because they are also afraid of their perpetrators – as is the case with other types of bullying too. However, where reporting for sexual harassment is concerned and as stated previously, what has been helpful is having someone whom they trust to refer to. For Bell's case, it was a teacher who helped her cope with her experience with sexual harassment. While it must be noted that Bell had the opportunity to share her experience with a teacher whom she trusted, the rest of the girls who share a similar experience do not usually resort to telling a teacher. Instead, other girls cope alone by keeping all of this to themselves. Because some children often feel mixed feelings such as feeling scared or pressured to bottle all of their feelings after their bullying experiences, there is a need to look into other forms of consequences of bullying that children have faced. This would inform the severity of interventions to be introduced so that children are able to better cope with their bullying experiences – which will be discussed in the concluding section of this paper.

Researcher: *Ok, apa yg berlaku?*

Lisa: *Macam pegang benda-benda.. macam pegang tempat yang saya kurang selesa.*

Researcher: *Bila mereka buat macam tu, Awak buat apa?*

Lisa: *Saya macam marah dia la sebab tak buat benda betul.*

### *Consequences of Bullying*

As mentioned previously, when Orang Asli children experience bullying, they go through mixed feelings and react differently. The Orang Asli children, especially male children from the community in Bukit Lanjan shared that they feel immensely angry about being bullied to the point that they wish to take revenge on their perpetrators. For instance, when Shah was physically assaulted and threatened by a group of boys who are also from the community in Bukit Lanjan and are in secondary school, he vowed to take revenge on them. He said he would do the same thing to them when he is much older, bigger and taller than his perpetrators. He is eager to do this because he did not like being threatened by the group of boys and being forced to do something which he did not want to – which was being scapegoated into following the older boys' orders. Because he was small and younger at that time when it happened, he felt scared and fled the scene to seek protection at home. However, after the incident had taken

place, Shah says he patiently awaits the time when he grows up to teach his perpetrators a lesson not to pick on younger and smaller children.

*“Macam bila mereka dah pergi sekolah menengah, saya kata, takpe, ni peluang diorang je, nanti kalau saya dah besar diorang pendek, saya buat balik dekat diorang, sebab diorang buat dekat saya.”* – Shah

In another example as mentioned above, Zam, too was not afraid to speak up and go against those who called him and his brothers, ‘*pondan*’. He said if people continued doing that, he would have no qualms in slapping them again. Moreover, he is not afraid of the consequences of doing that should it happen. From the examples above, it is clear that the boys are angry at their perpetrators because of how they were treated and bullied, and they also wish to seek justice for what happened to them. Both boys were picked on because of their physicality (size) and how one’s behaviour is measured against a standard in society where gender roles and masculinity are concerned. Even though one may be timid on the one hand, and on the other, not conform to what society normally brands as “masculine”, or how boys are expected to behave, these should not be the basis from which they are to be bullied. This is because they are still children and only hope to do as they please in their neighbourhood with their friends and family– whether it be cycling or even walking to the nearby shop to run errands freely without being bullied.

In other cases, as well, Orang Asli children also confide in different social actors after having experienced bullying. They would first reach out to their parents, and then teachers and friends. However, each social actor would have different reactions upon hearing the children’s bullying experience. For instance, parents often have a mixed response when their children confide in them about their bullying experience. On the one hand, they would react positively by treating their children’s wounds like what took place for Roy and Nor. On the other hand, many parents would ignore their children’s cry for help and reprimand them for getting involved with bullying in the first place which they do not appreciate. This is why the children would then prefer to remain quiet and try to cope with bullying by themselves. This happens because they feel that their parents would not listen, understand or even believe them when they are bullied. Hence, the bottling up or suppression of their feelings.

However, the situation is differently handled in school. For instance, their teachers would assist them when they are bullied. In some cases where the children decide to confide in their teachers, their perpetrators would be reprimanded. However, some children may choose not to divulge any information to their teachers too because they are afraid of their perpetrators and wish to avoid the incident from recurring. Another step they would take is to share their bullying experience with their friends. Where confiding in friends is concerned, Lip shared that when he was threatened to the community field one evening to a fight by his perpetrators, his friends were informed about it. Following that and in order to protect Lip, his friends decided to follow Lip to the field but what happened thereafter was an exchange of blows. This shows that although this threat ended in a physical altercation, children preferred confronting their friends when they are bullied. They resort to this as they trust that their friends would come to their aid even to an extent of getting physically injured. In addition, to the children who experience bullying, if they get hurt, what helps in cushioning the blow at least is if they have their friends by their side – proving how influential their friends are in their lives, in incidents like this, and also where staying in school too is concerned (Azlin Norhaini Mansor et al., 2013).



Researcher: *Jadi rasa macam X dan Y suka kacau orang? Suka kacau Lip juga? Jadi.. ada buat apa-apa tak dengan mereka? Bagitau macam yang lagi besar ke atau cikgu ke, ayah ke ibu ke.. kawan-kawan ke?*

Lip: *Kawan-kawan*

Researcher: *Bila dah Lip bagitau kawan-kawan tu apa yg berlaku?*

Lip: *Kawan-kawan tu hentam diaorang balik.*

There are also times when it is not easy to breeze through traumatic experiences like bullying, especially for children who may feel overwhelmed that they have to bear the burden on their own. As mentioned above, some of the children's parents do not believe what they tell them, and at times the children are unable to confide in anyone else because they fear that they would be bullied again. This is where some children, including Bell find their own ways of coping with bullying. Since she has experienced teasing and social bullying too by a group of girls in the community in Bukit Lanjan, she felt small, less confident and even questioned her intelligence. Up until recently, Bell has been thinking that she is 'stupid' even though she is often praised in school by both her peers and teachers. Teachers have said that she is smart and has a promising future too. However, she, like some other children too may sometimes feel pressured by her bullying experiences, and also feel like she is on her own to cope with bullying. Moreover, this also goes to show that bullying can happen to anyone regardless of how well they may be doing in school as it is mentioned in Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2012), Howard (2006) and Thornberg (2015) that bullying affects everyone regardless of any situation or background.

*"Saya selalunya menangis because kalau mereka cakap macam tu, saya rasa macam kenapa hari-hari mereka nak ejek saya? Hari-hari saya kena tu kena ni..And then bila diorang buli saya juga, saya pernah pergi cermin, saya cakap macam saya cakap balik diri saya, saya macam tak yakin, ah macam tu. Saya macam tak yakin, saya kata saya bodoh ke apa tu."* – Bell

Another way introspecting is manifested is through expressing oneself through a diary. A girl, Alfi, shared that this is what she normally does whenever she is bullied because she writes everything that happens in her diary without letting anyone read it. She then keeps it in a safe place away from others, even her family. When asked why she preferred to do this, she responded saying that it was better and easier this way. This is because the longer nobody finds out about what she is dealing with, then the more likely she would not be in trouble too. Hence, this is why she prefers to cope with bullying this way. While this is a way in which Alfi and some other children cope with bullying, that is, take matters into their own hands by themselves, this also calls to question what others, especially adult social actors can do to try and nip bullying in the bud for these Orang Asli children in schools and the community. This is because as children, they are only expected and are supposed to learn about "the importance of relationships and the role of playful interaction, exploration, dialogue and collaborative learning as these will support (the) young children's learning" (Hayes et al., 2017), and are not supposed to be left alone to fend for themselves when they experience bullying.

## CONCLUSION

The Indigenous communities around the globe have had many and different obstacles thrown their way for a long time, especially during colonialism and even after gaining sovereignty. However, what remains the same today is that they still experience challenges in education.

The Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia is also no different. Some of these experiences include poor academic performance and also high dropout rates in schools when compared to the national average. While it has been identified that there may be several poignant reasons why such challenges remain till today, bullying that is experienced by them cannot be disregarded. Instead, it should be investigated even more than what is known prior to this since bullying is often underreported by Orang Asli children due to fear or even swept under the carpet by schools. Even with the little that is known, bullying has led Orang Asli children to their hospitalisation in Malaysia (Hariz Mohd, 2019) and deaths for the Indigenous in Canada (Engels, 2021) for example – and this calls for interventions to eradicate this as soon as possible.

In Bukit Lanjan, bullying was found to exist and is experienced by the Orang Asli children. It was not the case where other ethnic groups bullied the Orang Asli children which was the norm in the literature but bullying perpetuated by their own ethnic group in their community. Furthermore, the children experienced different types of bullying which come in the form of physical, verbal, social and even sexual bullying or sexual harassment. Where physical bullying was concerned, they experienced being physically beaten, objects being thrown at them and even being injured after numerous bicycle-riding incidents. Verbal bullying, on the other hand mostly revolved around targeting the children's looks and intellect in class. They were made fun of by being called a 'pondan', having dark complexion and when they were unable to read or answer a question in class. Where social bullying was concerned, children shared how they were excluded from playing together or how rudely they were treated in a group. Lastly, sexual harassment also was experienced by the children in that they have been groped and inappropriately hit or touched in their private parts in class without their consent.

All of these examples have their own effects on the children but it must be understood that each Orang Asli child in Bukit Lanjan interviewed deals with the incidents differently. For example, many of them have said that they wish to take revenge on their perpetrators because they were enraged. However, other children also resorted to other ways of coping with bullying. Many of them tried to confide in others about their bullying experiences. They most likely trust their friends when this is of concern because their friends have been there for them in times of trouble and when bullying needed to stop. This was different with teachers because they were only helpful in school and for their parents, children said that their parents to a certain extent, do not believe their children's bullying experience, and have even reprimanded them for being bullied in the first place. Because of these, some children would prefer to keep their bullying experiences to themselves by introspecting or writing in their diary as well.

This is where it is important that interventions come in so that children may not have to deal with all of this for a long time. Firstly, in mimicking how Indigenous People is defined under the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), it is imperative that the Indigenous communities all over the world, including Malaysia be acknowledged in different levels in society such as in policy-making, law and even in education as people who have autonomy and rights to issues which affect them. Because there is a lack thereof of this acknowledgement and recognition of the Orang Asli, Rohaida Nordin et al. (2020) mentions that one of the critical gaps identified in the government's discourse is that every government report fails to adequately address the real issues faced by the Indigenous peoples in the education system. This is where the Orang Asli must be recognized and included in the school syllabus and curriculum. They need to be reassured that their accolades, histories and unique culture are recorded with sincerity and without bias to make them feel like they are

part of the larger society in Malaysia and that they matter. Hema Letchamanan (2021) and Rohaida Nordin et al. (2020) agree that this will enable them to feel that education is a big part of their lives and because of this, they may take ownership of it and succeed.

Moreover, the government should also consider incorporating education which is “integrated” that would also help in the “survival” of the Orang Asli community in education (Fatan Hamamah Yahaya, 2008) besides adopting various initiatives that are akin to Indigenous aspects and culture into the education and learning of Orang Asli children (Hema Letchamanan, 2021). Where this is of concern and values like inclusivity and respect are important, this can also be implemented through roles that teachers for instance can initiate in schools. They can be more understanding of the culture of the Orang Asli people and remove any stereotypes or prejudices that may cause further disinterest in education and schooling among the children. Hence, teachers should try to improve their relationships with their Orang Asli students as this is also highlighted in Rohaida Nordin et al. (2020) and Ramle Abdullah et al. (2013) when it is suggested that dedicated, approachable and committed teachers, and a systematic educational syllabus may help with the plight of the Orang Asli and education. When teachers fulfil these criteria and provide social support to Orang Asli children, these will even motivate them to pursue tertiary education (Azlin Norhaini Mansor et al., 2013). Moreover, making sure that schools are built close to the Orang Asli villages with sufficient resources will also help in the children’s learning overall.

It is also important that the Orang Asli are recognised as a stakeholder especially in issues affecting them. This is important to note because they have not been consulted before (Juli Edo et al., 2013) on multiple occasions where land contestation and exploitation was of concern (Leonie et al., 2015). Drawing from that and where education of their children is involved, this is where the community themselves need to be included and allowed to participate in every process of decision making of the national education goals together with other concerned groups as well. Otherwise, they would continue to be left out and as stated previously, this may make it even more difficult for them to choose to retain in schools. For example, one aspect of this and where repercussions of bullying are concerned is to find ways to improve awareness levels among Orang Asli parents and community about reporting such incidents. This is important because bullying can be considered as an offence under Malaysian law if perpetrators are 12 and above, as confirmed by a police officer. Therefore, it is important to listen to children and lodge a police report should it be necessary. Finally, it is equally important that while work on improving the social and economic well-being of Orang Asli communities is made, special emphasis should be given to education, where evaluations to see the overall effectiveness of these interventions need to be in place (Kimber et al., 2019, Norwaliza Abdul Wahab et al., 2019). This also applies to interventions to resolve bullying and reduce the number of dropout cases among Orang Asli children so that the Orang Asli children may experience a more sustainable, beneficial and effective education system in schools in the long run.

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