Gender Differences in Risk-Taking Attitudes Among Adolescents

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Abstract

Issues concerning risk taking attitude and behaviors among adolescents in Malaysia has become increasingly complex and challenging. This paper aims to examine the gender differences in risk-taking attitude among adolescents in Malaysia. 426 adolescents consisting of 183 boys (43%) and 243 girls (51.9 %) participated in this study. Data were obtained using a self-administered questionnaire namely the Attitude towards risk questionnaire (Franken, Gibson & Rowland, 1992). The findings suggested that there is a significant difference between male and female with respect to risk taking attitude, t (424) = 3.14, p = .03 (two-tailed). The analysis of mean further revealed that male adolescents (M = 53.85, SD = 11.99) is inclined towards risk attitudes compared to female adolescents (M =50.14, SD =13.39). Apart from verifying the previous findings on the gender differences in risk taking attitudes, the present finding indicates the need for a gender specific approach to the assessment and intervention of risk-taking attitude among adolescents in Malaysia.

Key words: risk-taking attitudes, male and female adolescent, characteristic risk-taking attitude

Introduction

Adolescence is a development stage where transitions from childhood to adulthood occur. This developmental period usually occurs between the ages of 10 to 19 years old. During this developmental transition, the adolescent undergoes several changes in terms of their physical, cognitive and also psychosocial development (Shaban & Mattoo, 2012). Within the adolescence period, they start to crave for privacy and segregated from their parents and become more independent. According to Laser and Nicotera (2011), having greater independence, an adolescent might experience greater physical strength and result in them to believe themselves as invincible. In addition, the limitless process of world modernization creates uneven development between economic, social, political and cultural changes. The uneven development, focusing on the social development leads to various social problems especially involving adolescent.

The increasing number of various behavioral problems shows that the current adolescent behavioral trend is getting riskier and dangerous. Risk-taking attitude, which is defined as an individual’s positive or negative evaluation of controlled behaviors with a perceived uncertain outcome (Lee, Tseng & Jan, 2015) reaches peaks during adolescence. It is a part of the challenges faced by adolescents in their developmental process especially during the transitional period from childhood to adulthood. Adolescents with the risk-taking attitude view certain dangerous situations as beneficial for them without considering the consequences that come after. The risk-taking attitude among adolescents had exposed adolescent to various negative implications such as the infection of sexually transmitted
diseases such HIV or AIDS (Puente, Zabaleta, Rodriguez-Blanco, Cabanas, Monteagudo, Pueyo, & Bolibar, 2011), and vulnerable to the drug addiction as well as repetitive behavior that increase in its intensity as they meet the desired effect that they want (Balogh, Mayes, & Potenza, 2013).

In Malaysia particularly, Nik Farid, Che Rus, Dahlui, Al-Sadat and Abdul Aziz (2014), reported 55.1% of the adolescent practice sexual risk behavior. Mohd Nawi, Abdul Hamid, Azhar Shah, Ahamd, Noor Aizuddin and Hod (2015), reported with 89.7 % of high school students living in the rural area of Klang districts, Selangor showed a high risk-taking behavior. The urban area in Klang district also showed a high percentage of with a total of 89.7 % reported of risk-taking behavior. These added up to some cases involving drugs and juvenile crimes among adolescents as early as 13 years old (National Anti-Drugs Agency, 2016; Department of Social Welfare, 2014).

Different genders displayed a distinct finding in terms of risk-taking attitude. Studies suggested that male and female adolescent respond differently to situations that require them to take the risk. Male adolescents were reported as being riskier as compared to female adolescents (Mohd Nawi, et al., 2015; Boričić, Simić, & Erić, 2015; Reniers, Murphy, Lin, Bartolome, & Wood, 2016). Male adolescents admitted having sexual relationship at least once is higher in number as compared to female adolescents (Puente, et al., 2011). Opposite findings by Nik Farid, et al. (2014) suggested that female adolescents were more likely to be involved in sexual risk attitude compared to male adolescents. However, Oluwatoyin and Modupe (2014) discovered that both male and female adolescent have equal chance engaging in risk taking attitude. Also, considering the psychological and emotional characteristics of each gender, males are likely to practice more life threatening risk-taking activities as compared to female adolescents as males with high risk-taking attitude were less socially anxious and less sensitive to the negative outcomes compared to female adolescents (Reniers, Murphy, Lin, Bartolome and Wood, 2016). Various findings discovered from past studies indicate the need to study the gender difference in risk-taking attitudes.

Generally, many studies have been conducted in relation to risk-taking attitude among adolescents. In Malaysia, however, little is known of the difference in risk-taking attitude scientifically with respect to gender especially among adolescents. Hence, this study attempts to examine the difference in risk-taking attitude between male adolescents and female adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia. Based on literature review, we hypothesized that there is significant difference in risk taking attitude between male adolescents and female adolescents.

Method

Participants

A total of 426 adolescents consist of 183 boys (43 %) and 243 girls (51.9 %) took part in this study. The participants consisted of adolescents aged between 13 and 17 years old. The adolescent in this study had a mean age of 14.8 (SD = 1.3).

Instruments

20-items of Attitude Towards Risk Questionnaire (Franken, Gibson & Rowland, 1992) was utilized in this study. The questionnaire had been translated into Malay with permission from the original author. The question was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “1= like me to 5= not like me” on the given statement (e.g. “I often think about doing things that are illegal”/ “I like the feeling that comes from entering a new situation”). The reliability score of the instrument reported high with internal reliability alpha coefficient of 0.84. The subscale psychological risk obtains the alpha coefficient of 0.79 and physical subscale with 0.85 (Franken et al., 1992).
Procedure

The students were recruited through multi-stage cluster sampling from nine districts in Selangor. The districts were randomly chosen. Letter of approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Selangor state Education Department. As the study was conducted among students in Selangor, the letter of approval from each of the nine districts of the Selangor district Education Department in Selangor was also obtained. Two schools from each of the districts were chosen randomly. The participants of the study was selected randomly through the list of classes. The study began with providing the consent form to the participants who voluntarily participated in the study as well as the explanation of the instructions in answering the self-administered questionnaires.

Result

The objective of this study is to examine the gender differences in risk taking attitudes. An independent t-test was conducted to examine the hypothesis that there is significant difference in risk taking attitude between male adolescents and female adolescents. The result was significant, \( t(424) = 3.14, p = .03 \), with means scores obtained for male respondents (\( M = 53.85, SD = 11.99 \)) and female adolescents (\( M = 50.14, SD = 13.39 \)) on average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk-taking attitude</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53.85</td>
<td>11.99</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50.14</td>
<td>13.39</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: *\( P < .05 \); **\( P < .01 \)

Discussion

The study focused on examining the differences in risk-taking attitude in terms of the two genders in Malaysia. Sample of this study consisted of adolescents (13-18 years old) studying in secondary schools in Selangor, Malaysia. Descriptive analysis indicated 43% of the total samples were male and 51.9% of them preference for high risk-taking attitude. The findings of the study show the growing concerns on adolescent risk-taking attitude indicating serious action is in need. Programs and intervention with an effective approach on adolescent’s risk-taking attitude that has legal or negative implications should be considered.

Current findings indicate a significant difference in mean score between male and female adolescents. The male adolescent has higher risk-taking attitude compared to female adolescent. Consistent with findings by Mohd Nawi, et al. (2015), male adolescent is more likely to engage in risk-taking attitude as compared to female adolescents. The difference of risk-taking attitude is due to the nature of being a male. The rough characteristics of a male makes them more daring in trying out new things. Thus, males are 4 times more likely to engage in risk taking attitude (Haslinda, Ortega, Nobaya & Syamsyihana, 2015).

The difference in the respond is due to the social environment they live in. Taking into consideration of cultural aspect where the male adolescent perceived as more masculinity and female adolescent perceived being more feminine. The findings found expected based on how genders perceived risk-taking attitude as. The findings found expected based on how the genders perceived as to risk-taking attitude. Male adolescent likely involved in risk-taking due to the nature of the attitude being socially acceptable (Boričić, et al., 2015). As for females, their feminine side leads them to be more cautious in taking risks and tends to avoid them as they know the risks would have adverse effects on themselves.
Several limitations should be considered in the light of the findings. Firstly, this current study faces the possibility that the respondents did not fill in the questionnaire honestly. This might be due to fear or mistrust in answering the questions although respondents were briefed on the confidentiality and their identity kept as anonymous. Other limitation includes the findings could not be generalized beyond the population. This is due to the sample of the study focusing on adolescents studying in secondary school in Selangor. Therefore, the result could not be generalized to entire population of adolescents in Malaysia.

Conclusion

The high percentage occurrences of risk-taking attitude among adolescents in Malaysia is remained for two consecutive years. This indicated that adolescents are vulnerable towards risky situations despite the mixed findings of risk-taking attitude in between genders. Therefore, this study is aimed to examine the differences in risk-taking attitude between male adolescent and female adolescent. This study revealed that there is a difference in adolescent’s risk-taking attitude in respect to gender. Male adolescent is more likely to have high risk-taking attitude as compared to female adolescent. Parents, schools and other authorities should work in hand in assessing adolescent risk-taking attitude at an early age. Identifying and nurturing their level of risk-taking attitude at an early age can protect them from various situations that could expose them to danger. Also, the present finding indicates the need for a gender specific approach to the assessment and intervention of risk-taking attitude among adolescents in Malaysia.

References


