

# Socio-Demographic Analysis of Pupils Involvement in Negative Activities

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## Abstract

This paper presents data from self-declared behaviour of pupils' involvement in negative activities that are often occurred in Malaysian urban secondary schools that are pupils' involvement in skipping classes, smoking cigarette, bullying, cheating in exams and vandalising properties. This study used a survey research design to investigate pupils' involvement in activities. A set of questionnaire was used to collect data from 15 urban schools in Malaysia. Results from this study revealed that cheating and truancy are the often problem behaviour exhibited in schools. Result also found that more boys involved in negative activities compared to girls. Socio-demographic analyses demonstrated that pupils from low-academic families are more likely to involve in negative activities compared to others. Results also found that more Malay reported to involve in negative activities compared to other ethnicities. Overall finding suggests that pupils may not see their involvement in such activities as problematic. It can be argued they may have different perceptions regarding the seriousness level of such activities.

**Keywords:** Negative Behaviour, Socio-Demographic, Pupils, School, Truancy, Smoking

## Introduction

Behavioural problems and involvement of pupils in negative activities pose challenges to many school professionals worldwide. It has been reported that the increasing numbers on behavioural issues are associated in socio-ecological environments including family backgrounds, gender aspects and social networkings. In a school context, challenging behaviour exhibited by pupils is coded to be disciplinary issue (Ehiane, 2014). It poses a challenge in teaching profession in schools. It is important to study pupils' involvement in negative activities as it provides useful data for intervention strategies. One of the ways to know about pupils' involvement in negative activities is to use a self-declared form for pupils.

### **Negative Activities and Behavioural Problems**

Statistical reports show that 10,154 disciplinary issues occurred in Malaysia (Rahim 2019). Of these, truancy was the most frequent problem occurred in schools. It has been reported that a number 20 pupils had been expelled from a school after they were found guilty of being involved in gangster activities. In February 2009, a 16-year-old Malaysian pupil died after he was beaten by a group of pupils (Suffian, 2009). The Social Welfare Department of Malaysia reported that a total number of 5,319 youths were engaged in juvenile cases in 2002 (Yahaya, Geog & Abdul 2004). Teachers from a southern region of Malaysia reported that pupils were often involved in unacceptable activities such as truancy, stealing, and gang fighting (Yahaya et al., 2009). Similar problems also occur in other countries. For instance, Learner (2008) reported that more than 4,000 children in the United Kingdom were suspended from school due to physical assault, verbal abuse, bullying behaviour, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, drug trafficking and alcohol-related problems. In the USA, the 2006 national survey reported that 82% of American youth admitted they lied to their parents, 62% said they lied to a teacher, 60% reported they cheated in a test at school, and 20% stated that they stole something from a store (Lumpkin, 2008).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The current study aims at:

- identifying the levels of pupils' involvement in negative activities in terms-of their involvement in skipping classes, smoking cigarette, bullying, cheating in exams and vandalising properties, and
- analysing the the pupils' involvement in skipping classes, smoking cigarette, bullying, cheating in exams and vandalising propertie based on socio-demographic backgrounds.

### **Methodology**

This study used a survey research design to investigate pupils' involvement in activities. A set of questionnaire was used to collect data from 15 urban schools in Malaysia. The questionnaire contains a fixed-response where the respondents were asked to state his/her involvement in predetermined five negative activities i.e. skip classes, smoking habits, bullying, cheating and vandalism. Missing data was coded as no response. Respondents in this study were randomly selected. They were asked to declare their experiences of those situations. Response options were: 1 = yes; 2 = no; or 3 = choose not to tell. A descriptive analysis was calculated on the pupil data.

### **Results and Discussion**

A total number of 494 multi-ethnic Form 4 (aged 16 years) school pupils were respondents in this study. In this study, more girls (54%, n=269) than boys (46%, n=265) involved, and that the majority were Malay (52%, n=256), followed by Chinese (26%, n=126) and Indian (20%, n=99). As depicted in Table 1, most pupils reported that they did not participate in these negative activities. For instance, 59% of pupils (n=291) reported that they never missed a class without permission. Only 5% (n=22) of pupils reported they have smoked outside of school, but this does not mean that they have never smoked within the school compound. A small percentage of pupils (17%, n=84) reported that they had vandalised school property.

Table 1.

*Pupils' Statement Regarding Their Involvement In Negative Activities*

Negative Activities	Yes	No	Choose not to tell
I have never missed a class without the teacher's or my parent's permission.	59% (n=291)	27% (n=131)	14% (n=67)
I smoke outside of school.	5% (n=22)	91% (n=451)	4% (n=18)
Pupils in this school have bullied me.	14% (n=71)	79% (n=389)	6% (n=31)
I have cheated in a school test.	37% (n=185)	42% (n=209)	19% (n=96)
I have vandalised school property.	17% (n=84)	75% (n=371)	7% (n=36)

One-third of this cohort reported that they had cheated in a school test (37%, n=185). This might have a link with an overemphasis on academic achievements rather than holistic achievement in both academic and non-academic aspects. However, there was insufficient narrative data to provide a further explanation regarding this finding, and thus future research is needed.

These results indicate that two situations require prompt action: cheating in school tests and victimisation in school. A total of 185 pupils reported that they had cheated in exams and 71 pupils reported that they had been bullied. However, the forms of bullying are undefined, and it is unknown whether schools realise the extent of this problem. Cheating is a serious ethical issue in academics, therefore creating positive learning environment to promote positive engagement among learners is really needed (Goss, Sonnemann and Griffiths 2017). These issues should be addressed in future studies. The next subsection presents a detailed analysis of problem behaviour identified in this study.

### **Socio-Demographic Analyses of Pupils' Involvement in Negative Activities**

#### ***Absenteeism***

The response of "no" (see Table 1) was interpreted as "pupils have missed a class without permission" in this analysis. Thus, 27% (n=131) of pupils had missed a class without permission. These 131 pupils, 57% (n=75) were boys and the majority were Malay (59%, n=77). Pupils from families where both parents had certificate level education (42%, n=55) were more likely to skip a class than pupils from other family backgrounds (Table 5.35).

Table 2.

*Pupils Who Reported They Had Missed A Class Without Permission*

<i>Variables</i>		<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>
Gender	Boys	57	75
	Girls	43	56
Parents' academic backgrounds	Both parents had a master's degree or PhD	2	3
	Both parents had a bachelor's degree	2	2
	Both parents had a diploma	5	6
	Both parents had a certificate	42	55
	Both parents had no specific qualifications	2	3
	One parent had a master's degree or PhD	7	9
	One parent had a bachelor's degree	4	5
	One parent had a diploma	5	6
	One parent had a certificate	5	6
	No response	27	36
Total		100	131

**Smoking Habits**

Of 22 pupils who reported they smoked, the majority were boys (73%, n=16) and over half were Malay (68%, n=15). Thirty-two per cent of smokers (n=7) were from families where both parents had certificate level education. This is alarming as it has been reported that over 1.1 billion people smoked cigarettes and the number of smokers increasing globally (World Health Organization 2017). Smoking is proven scientifically dangerous and leading causes of death. World Health Organization (2017) reported that each year, around six million people die as a direct result of smoking. Health problems and illness related to smoking habits are cancer, cardiovascular problems, respiratory problems and stroke. The current finding highlights the importance of preventive measures of smoking habit among pupils (Hasim 2000).

**Bullying**

The findings from this study revealed that of 71 who reported they had been bullied, 15% were boys (n=34) and 14% were girls (n=37). Indian (24%, n=24) were more likely to report being bullied than other ethnic groups (n=2; Malay, 11%, n=29; Chinese, n=16). Bullying behaviour includes teasing, taunting, threatening, physically attacking and isolating other pupils through intentional exclusion (Harel-Fisch, et al., 2011; Pugh and Chitiyo, 2011). The occurrence of bullying in a school context is still existed regardless of anti-bullying efforts internationally.

**Cheating**

A higher percentage of boys (87%, n=47) than girls (53%, n=98) said they had cheated in a school test, and most of these were Malay (57%, n=105). Over half of pupils from families where parents had a certificate level of education said that they had cheated in a school test

(42%, n=77). This informs the importance of behavioural intervention in schools (Sørliie and Ogden 2014)

**Table 5.36**

*Pupils Who Reported Cheating In A School Test*

<i>Variables</i>		<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>
Gender	Boys	47	87
	Girls	53	98
Parental academic backgrounds	Both parents had a master's degree or PhD	3	5
	Both parents had a bachelor's degree	1	2
	Both parents had a diploma	5	9
	Both parents had a certificate	42	77
	Both parents had no specific qualifications	3	6
	One parent had a master's degree or PhD	5	10
	One parent had a bachelor's degree	5	9
	One parent had a diploma	6	11
	One parent had a certificate	5	9
No response	25	47	
Total		100	185

### **Vandalism**

Most pupils who said they had vandalised school property were boys (n=45), and many were from families where both the parents had certificate level education (n=29). In terms of ethnicity, 50 were Malay, followed by Chinese (n=8) and Indian (n=3). Kambuga (2017) reported that a comprehensive strategy is needed to prevent vandalism activities.

### **Conclusion**

Results from the survey of self-declared behaviour in this study demonstrated that boys were more likely to report that they engaged in more challenging behaviour than girls did. Most pupils who said that they had been involved in negative activities were from families with a low level of academic achievement. Self-reporting of involvement in negative behaviour suggests that pupils may not see their involvement in such activities as problematic. Further, it can be argued they may have different perceptions regarding the seriousness level of such activities. The current study implies that investigating pupils behavioural problems can be carried out by using a confession-based survey including the use of self-declared behaviour. It is important consider this technique as pupils who involved in negative activities would like to tell others. Indeed, they may be proud of breaching the school rules. The current study also implies the importance of socio-demographic factors while planning intervention strategies to avoid pupils' involvement in negative activities. The current study also highlights the important of specific strategies by taking into account socio-demographic factors to prevent and intervene pupils' involvement in negative activities.

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