Exploring Demography and Sociological Factors Underlying Decisions to Join Gangs among Indians

Meneroka Faktor Demografi dan Sosiologi yang Mempengaruhi Penyertaan Kumpulan Kongsi Gelap dalam Kalangan Masyarakat India

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ABSTRACT

In general, gang can be described as a group of friends with identifiable leadership with certain internal organization that engage in various illegal activities such as crimes and drug trafficking. Although voluminous studies have been conducted in the West regarding gangs and gangsterism but very few studies were actually explored this issue in Malaysia. With this in mind, this study sought to provide some evidence for reasons behind decisions to join gangs as there is a lack of local qualitative research on the phenomenon of gangsterism. This lack is largely due to the vulnerability of people coming forward to share their experiences. The specific aim of this study was to explore demography and sociological factors behind gangsterism among Malaysian Indians. This study utilised a qualitative research design (semi-structured interview) based on the inductive approach. Ex-gangsters and police personnel were interviewed individually. Thematic analysis was used to extract main themes and sub-themes. Three demography factors were identified: age, gender, and educational level. Four sociological factors were generated: poor parenting style, family members who were also gangsters, gang culture in the neighborhood, and financial difficulties. Two new factors emerged from the informants: social power and to experience gangster lifestyles. The outcome of this research is useful for proactive crime prevention in the form of evidence-based knowledge about demography and sociological factors behind gangsterism. This paper also briefly discussed intervention, prevention, and suppression strategies that can be used to curb this gangsterism issue effectively.

Keywords: Demography; ex-gangsters; gangsterism; Indian; sociological factors

ABSTRAK

Secara amnya, kongsi gelap boleh diperihalkan sebagai sekumpulan rakan-rakan dengan kepimpinan yang dikenal pasti yang mempunyai organisasi dalaman tertentu yang giat terlibat dalam pelbagai aktiviti yang menyalahi undang-undang seperti jenayah dan pengedaran dadah. Sejak kebelakangan ini, bilangan belia yang mengambil bahagian dalam aktiviti gang adalah pada tahap yang membimbangkan. Walaupun banyak kajian telah dijalankan di Barat mengenai gang dan gangsterisme tetapi sangat sedikit kajian yang benar-benar meneroka isu ini di Malaysia. Dengan itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan bukti untuk punca-punca di sebalik penglibatan dalam kumpulan kongsi gelap kerana kurangnya penyelidikan kualitatif tempatan berkaitan dengan fenomena gangsterisme. Kekurangan ini adalah disebabkan oleh kerentanan sekumpulan masyarakat yang tidak mahu tampil untuk berkongsi pengalaman mereka. Kajian ini bermatlamat untuk meneroka faktor-faktor demografi dan sosiologi di sebalik aktiviti gangsterisme dalam kalangan kaum India di Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan rekabentuk kajian kualitatif (temu bual semi-struktur) berdasarkan pendekatan induktif. Bekas ahli kongsi gelap dan pegawai polis telah ditemubual secara individu. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk mengekstrak tema utama dan sub-tema. Tiga faktor demografi iaitu umur, jantina, dan tahap pendidikan dikenalpasti. Empat faktor sosiologi telah dihasilkan: gaya keibubapaan yang lemah, pengaruh ahli keluarga yang juga merupakan ahli kongsi gelap, budaya gang di kawasan persekitaran dan masalah kewangan. Dua faktor baru muncul dari informan: kuasa sosial dan keinginan merasa gaya hidup gangster. Hasil kajian ini berguna untuk

pencegahan proaktif dalam bentuk pengetahuan berdasarkan bukti mengenai demografi dan faktor-faktor sosiologi disebalik gangsterisme.

Kata kunci: Demografi; bekas gangster; gangsterisme; India; faktor sosiologi

INTRODUCTION

Gangsterism in Malaysia have shown to increase the rate of vandalism, criminal intimidation, drug addiction, drug trafficking and other complex crimes in Malaysia (Azizi, Yusof & Rosnah 2008). This issue is a social ill of particular concern among policy makers, enforcement agencies, and society members because membership characteristics and illegal activities are diverse; and this social ill has potential to catalyse various violent crimes (Muhammad Amin, Mohammad Rahim & Geshina Ayu 2014). For example, the phenomena of gangsterism have been linked to violence in schools (Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya 2014), negative identity formation, and political unrest (Hirschfeld 2015). The rise of gangsterism in this country has raised alarms among members of society, resulting in fear of crime victimisation from gangster-related activities.

In order to understand the nature of gangs, it is really important to define the terms of interest. These terms are 'gangs' and 'gangsters'. The National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations defined the gang as "A group or association of three or more persons who may have a common identifying sign, symbol, or name, and who individually or collectively engage in, or have engaged in, criminal activity which creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation" (as cited in Arciaga et al. 2009). Criminal behavior involving a group of individuals is a key component of this definition. The Malaysian Penal Code (Act 574) mentions the term 'gang' several times which are connected with specific types of crime and punishment. For example, section 375в explains 'gang' as: "Where a woman is raped by one or more in a group of persons acting in furtherance of their common intention, each of the persons shall be deemed to have committed gang rape" (under Section 375в of Malaysian Penal Code). Other than that, section 391 describes 'gang' as: "When two or more persons conjointly commit or attempt to commit a robbery, or where the whole number of persons conjointly committing or attempting to commit a robbery, and of persons present and aiding such commission or attempt, amount to two or more, every person so committing, attempting, or aiding, is said to commit "gang-robbery" (under Section 391 of Malaysian Penal Code). These two explanations outline that the term 'gang' refers to a group of persons who are collectively involved in a criminal act.

Gang membership involves very different levels of commitment and participation on the part of the individual (Arciaga et al. 2009). Before the individual is classified as a member, he or she needs to fulfill certain criterion (Ibid). Therefore, understanding the definition of a gang member is necessary so that criterion can be identified and studied. According to Geshina Ayu (2015), gangsters or gang members can be generally defined in two ways. The first is a wannabe thug (Geshina Ayu 2015). A wannabe thug is usually uneducated and lives in a distressed or bad part of a neighborhood, and who hangs around in gangs (Ibid). Wannabe thugs try to make themselves look like real criminals by involving in drawing graffiti on building surfaces, smoking/ selling drugs and trying to show aggressive behaviors, and/or have bad or nasty attitudes. They like to instill fear in people and cause chaos. The second is the 'real' gangsters (Ibid). These individuals are the main people behind the organised crime and responsible for black market trade, espionage, human trafficking, syndicates that abuse women and children, organised beatings/ assassinations, and etc (Ibid). When a group of like-minded gangsters joins up, they are labeled as an association of different criminals. Organization and resources from this type of gang support many and more serious criminal transactions compared to what an individual criminal could achieve alone (Ibid).

Gangsterism has been identified as a deviant behaviour in society. According to Hirschi's (1969) Social Control Theory may be applicable to explain gangsterism. This theory provided an explanation for how behavior "conforms to that which is generally expected in society". This explains how the significance of a bond, and the strength of the bond inversely connected to gang membership. Participation in gangs is a phenomenon that takes place as a result of people not being tied to or associated with the right peers or organizations. Hirshi (1969) identified attachment, involvement,

commitment, and beliefs as the four elements of the bond to society that shapes conformity of socially sanctioned behaviours. Furthermore, the Interactional Theory (Thornberry 1987) also can explain the involvement of Malaysian Indians in gang activity. Interactional Theory (Thornberry 1987) provides a constructive framework for analysing individual, social, and psychological factors and how they relate to gang membership (Alleyne & Wood 2010). Alleyne and Wood (2010: 424) described that the motivation to join a gang and justification for participating in illegal activities comes from their weakened bonds to society and learned behavior. Their desire to remain in the gang and continue to participate in criminal acts is due to the desire to maintain adequate status within the group (Alleyne and Wood 2010).

According to the Chief Secretary of Ministry of Home Affairs, Datuk Abdul Rahim Mohd Radzi, as of 2013 (The Star Online 2013), there were 40,313 identified gang members in the whole of Malaysia. These individuals were actively engaged in 49 different gangs. 28,926 (71.75%) of identified gang members are Indians, 8,214 (20.38%) are Chinese, 1,923 (4.77%) are Malays, 921 (2.28%) are Sarawakians and 329 (0.82%) are Sabahans. Despite the large number of identified gangsters and gang-related activity in Malaysia, it is surprising that there is a lack of local research on this social problem. This has led to gaps in the knowledge, particularly with regards to information about decision to join gangs and factors that maintain gang membership. What is known of gangsterism in Malaysia is currently limited to physical identification markers based on police press releases and anecdotal media accounts. References regarding murder are often adopted from western countries and fitted into the Malaysian context. This is inappropriate due to differences in culture and social norms. Applying non-localized explanations to a local phenomenon raises validity and reliability concerns. These subsequently, negatively influence and impact any crime prevention initiative.

Reasons for gang involvement varied. Certain incidents such as dysfunctional family, coercive or indifferent parenting, physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect) in early childhood can increase an individual's vulnerability to become involved in gangsterism. According to Sidhu (2005), Social Strategic Foundation (Yayasan Strategik Sosial), a social development network for the Malaysian Indian Community; provided some evidence that manifestations of urban poverty are the main factor

of violent crime and gang-related activities. Azizi, Yusof and Rosnah (2008) revealed that compared to the student's family, friends were the most influential of students' pro-gangster behaviours.

Participation of Indians in gangsterism started in the early 1960s. Initially, many Indians joined Chinese gangs because they were attracted to the Chinese gang's ideology where they wanted to have a good future. However, Chinese gang members misused Indian members by forcing or manipulating them to get involved in street fights and drug trafficking (Sen Chew Daily 2013). Chinese gangs and gang members ignored the rights of Indians and just concentrated on the profits that Indians brought (Ibid). In other words, reaping the violent work done by Indian members and maintaining a semblance of 'clean hands'. This is especially pertinent when a gang member or the gang itself; is apprehended by authorities. The selfishness of the Chinese gangs and the Chinese gang members made the Indian gang members joined or merged with Indian dominant gangs and some created new gangs to continue their gang activities.

Statistics provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs show that the Indian community has the highest rate of gangsterism among the ethnic groups in Malaysia. Recently, 52 teenagers, where 42 of whom are school students, nine school dropouts and a college student aged between 15 and 18, were charged at the magistrate's court because of their participation in unlawful assemblies in front of four schools in the district (Hariz Mohd 2017). They were accused to have disrupted peace in front of schools while they were celebrating an occasion by cutting cake bearing digits '24' and police also suspected they were having affiliation with Gang 24 secret society (Ibid). This is a really worrying problem among the Indian community because many of their youths are choosing the wrong path that can threaten their lives and future. This situation is indicative of a need to study the phenomena of gangsterism among Malaysian Indians. With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to explore demography and sociological predisposing factors for joining gangs among Indians.

It is important to specifically explore gangsterism among Indians focusing on the aspects of demography and sociology despite previous studies in the West as it is inappropriate to adopt findings from the western studies into a Malaysian context due to differences in social and cultural norms. According to Mohammad Rahim et al. (2016), applying a non-localised explanation to

a local scenario may raise concerns regarding the validity of such explanation in a local setting. As such, it is imperative to explore demography and sociological predisposing factors among Malaysian Indians as the findings of this current study would be more culturally and locally valid and useful in understanding the issue of gangsterism in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

The research design that was used in this study was a non-experimental research design. It is a qualitative research (semi-structured interview) that makes use of the inductive approach based on a combination of subjectivism and interpretivist philosophies Informants were interviewed and their experiences of gangsterism became the foundation for understanding the factors underlying decisions to join gangs. Four police personnel and six ex-Indian gangsters were interviewed complying with several inclusion criteria (male, Malaysian citizen, Indian, aged between 19 to 70 years; having experience in handling gangster-related cases OR involvement in gangster-related activities) and exclusion criteria (co-morbidity of mental instability; expectation of compensation or in kind; not able to complete the interview due to job demand OR arrested by the police). Inclusion of research participants stopped after data saturation was met. As such, the sample selection was purposive in nature, reflecting the population of interest.

Participation was on a voluntary basis. Informants were informed regarding the disposal of the given information at the end of the study. Their identity and responses were portrayed as anonymous and kept secret in order to sustain the honesty and validity of responses. Ethical approval to conduct this study was applied through *Jawatankuasa Etika Penyelidikan Manusia Universiti Sains Malaysia* (JEPeM) so that this study will be conducted ethically where the rights of informants are safeguarded, researcher's safety is considered, and that this study follows USM codes of ethical conduct. The study protocol code for this study is USM/JEPeM 16120580.

The confidentiality of information was maintained throughout the study through the use of codes and restricted access. The identities of informants were undisclosed, protected and,

written agreement was signed by the researcher to state that the researcher promises not to leak the personal identities of the informants to any party. Informants were allowed to withdraw their involvement at any time during the collection of data. The interviews were conducted in a very quiet and conducive room. An audio recorder was used to record the entire interview session and each interview session was ranged between one to two hours.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The research instrument used in this qualitative research was a semi-structured, face-to-face individual interview guide. The interview guides for both groups of informants (ex-gangsters and police personnels) differed slightly in terms of their involvement in gangster-related activities. The interview guide for ex-gangsters was labeled as IG-XG and the interview guide for police personnel was labeled as IG-P. Both interview guides were developed using open-ended questions and all the questions were content validated by the experts (n = 2) from the field of Criminology.

Past researches have indicated a range of possible reasons for people's involvement in gangs. Most studies link sociodemographic factors like being male (Bottcher 1995), of a specific age range (Alleyne & Wood 2010), and living in high-risk areas (Howell 2010); to gang involvement. Other studies provide sociological factors underlying gang membership and gang-related activities (Young, Fitzgibbon, & Silverstone 2013; Marshall & Lombardo 2016). Information gathered from those past studies helped to generate main themes in the current study. Sub-themes under the main themes later emerged from the collected raw transcripts and were not set *a piori* in order to reduce researchers' influence on participants' responses. Table 1 is referred.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In Malaysia, studies and researches related to gangsterism, gangs and gang members are very scarce. Few researches (e.g Azizi, Yusof & Rosnah 2008; Suppiah, Othman & Ismail 2013) have been conducted and highlighted the factors especially the sociological factors behind the gang membership but these researches only focused on the secondary

TABLE 1 Themes and sub-themes generated from the raw data

Main themes	Themes that emerged
Demography	Age
	Gender
	Educational level
Sociological factors and what sustained gang membership	Poor parental style
	Family members who were also gangsters
	Gang culture in the neighborhood
	Financial difficulties
New factors	Social power
	To experience gangster lifestyles

school students. On the other hand, this research was carried out to obtain the factors behind gang membership from the Indian adult ex-gangsters who were actively involved in gang-related activities and crimes which shaded more valuable information regarding causes and reasons of gangsterism among Indians. Further, the insights from the police officers clearly confirmed that law enforcement agencies and officers are aware the seriousness of this issue among Indians and they also address the same factors that influence gang membership of Indians. Findings from this study also can contribute some knowledge to the socio-criminological study of gangsterism in Malaysia. Social Control Theory (Hirshi 1969) and Interactional Theory (Thornberry 1987) were utilised in this study to understand the demography and sociological factors that influence Malaysian Indians' involvement in gang-related activities.

DEMOGRAPHY FACTORS

In the available literature, demography factors have been frequently used to explain gang membership. Demography is used as identifying markers as these factors are easily visible and measured. According to Bennett and Holloway (2004), and Hartung and Samuel (2007); works by economists, psychologists, and criminologists; have shown that demographic factors influences the propensity of an individual to participate in criminal activities such as armed robbery, theft, vehicle theft, drugs related crimes, kidnapping, murder, and smuggling. Gangs and gangsters involved in criminal activities to gain power and money, as well as the more practical aspects of crime commission that requires the involvement of more than one offender. Some of the demography factors that was highlighted by Rasanen et al. (1999) included low education of the mother, being the son of an adolescent mother, son

of a single mother, and son of unwanted pregnancy. Demography factors that emerged directly from the informant themselves were age, gender, and educational level.

DEMOGRAPHY FACTOR: AGE

All the ex-gangsters who were interviewed admitted that the onset of their gang involvement was during early adolescence. The age range of first involvement was 13 to 15 years old. Police personnel also stated that most of the individuals involved in gangs or gang-related activities were at the stage of early adolescence or early adulthood.

"Most of the individuals who joined the gangs are 13-21 years old…Mostly they can be secondary school students and school dropouts… involvement of individuals who are less than 12 years old in gangs is rare…" (R-P1). Meanwhile, an ex-gangster said *"I started to be involved in gang-related activities such like street fight when I was around 13 years old… and went through the initiation ceremony to become an official gang member at the age of 18" (R-XG 3).*

In general, adolescence is viewed as a crucial time frame where there is a fundamental shift from the importance of the parent-child bond to more general adult and social bonds. This is a point when parental controls are loosened and subsequently gives opportunities for the adolescent to engage in various delinquent acts including joining gang activities. Meanwhile, Wyrick (2006) said that the heightened importance of peer groups, and "egocentrism," causes the adolescents to get involved in gangs. During their adolescence, children focus on gaining social attention and approval from their peers (Wyrick 2006). This makes them egocentric, they observe the world as revolving around them, and they are less likely to accept other people's perspectives (Wyrick 2006).

DEMOGRAPHY FACTOR: GENDER

Next, both the police and ex-gangster groups claimed that all the gang members in known gangs in Malaysia were males. Both group of informants also stated that females did not have any significant roles in gangs. Police personnel pointed out that claimed female involvement in gangs as full-fledged members are still unproven. One of the foreign literature (Bennett & Holloway 2004) revealed that participation in gang activity remains predominantly males.

"My gang did not have any female gang members, and we also never recruited females as members of our gang" (R-XG 1). "There were no statistics to explain the involvement of girls in the gangs… So far I never encountered any female who is a full-fledged member in a gang…" (R-P2).

Gender always acts as a significant socio-demographic factor when identifying the risk factor of any crime. According to Bottcher (1995), males are very much involved in illegal activities compared to females as a response to certain levels of strain or anger, due to differences in coping strategies, social support, social control, opportunities; and trait dispositions. In this current study, the researchers found out that the membership of Indian gangs in Malaysia being strictly for males differs from other research findings, and this makes the phenomenon unique for Malaysia. Studies on gangs elsewhere depict a dominance of male membership and recognise the involvement of females in gangs. According to Pyrooz (2014), 71% of American gang memberships were males. Howell (2012) provided some evidence for recent increases in female membership in American gangs. Senaratna and Wijewardana (2012) found evidence of gang involvement in both male and female street children.

DEMOGRAPHY FACTOR: LOW EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

In this current study, poor educational achievement and drop-out are associated with gang membership. The statistics revealed by the police and the admission of the ex-gangsters indicate that low education level was one of the reasons behind Indian youth's willingness to join a criminal gang. According to Young, Fitzgibbon and Silverstone (2013), poor educational achievement, low educational expectations, truancy, exclusion and 'drop-out' are the variables which are commonly associated with delinquency and gang membership.

Most of the ex-gangsters in this current study faced these difficulties during their school days. They failed to attain any qualifications and were disillusioned with the whole experience of learning in schools. The following are participant responses that support the claim linking low educational level and decision to join gangs.

"Most of the gang members that I encountered were secondary school dropouts and college dropouts… Most of them …mentioned that they never performed well in studies and weren't interested in school and learning … which led them to be involved in the gang" (R-P2). "I did other things when my teacher was teaching… I wasn't interested in school and learning. There were a lot of distractions… like my friends asking me to join them to involve in fights, and… at last, I engaged in the gang… If last time, I focused on my studies maybe… my vision will be different and most probably I would achieve something in my life" (R-XG 2).

SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS

The criminology literature indicates that underlying sociological factors may explain decisions to join gangs and what sustains membership in gangs. In this current study, four themes emerged from the raw transcripts. The emerged themes were poor parenting style, family members who were also gangsters, gang culture in the neighborhood, and financial difficulties. Information in Table 1 is referred.

SOCIOLOGICAL FACTOR: POOR PARENTING STYLE

One of the factors that were explored by the police personnel in this current study was poor parenting style. Parents who were not attentive and who did not discipline children for their wrongdoings were cited as the main reasons behind the involvement of teenagers in gangs. Excerpts from two police personnel provide some evidence of this:

"Nowadays both of the parents are working from morning until night… The parents are not able to spend their time with their children…This directly resulted in less guidance and monitoring towards their children" (R-P2). "Parents are not strict… They always support their children… Even they involved in any deviant activities, their parents will only babble, and they won't do or say anything to stop their children from committing such wrong doings" (R-P4).

Appropriate punishment needs to be administered in response to control children's

antisocial behaviours. According to Lösel and Bender (2017), authoritarian parenting style is an important risk factor for violent conviction. Children's behaviour depends on parental rewards and punishments. A classical study by West and Farrington (1977) illustrates how overly harsh, neglectful or erratic parenting styles; can contribute or lead to antisocial behaviour and may contribute to gang membership (Young, Fitzgibbon, & Silverstone 2013).

However, in this current study, none of the ex-gangsters claimed that poor parenting style was one of the factors for their involvement in the gangs. Most of them agreed their parents were not permissive. The ex-gangster responses suggest that there are likely other sociological factors acted strongly to influence them to get involved in gang-related activities. Based on Interactional Theory gang membership of Malaysian Indians results from a reciprocal relationship between the individual and peer groups, and social structures.

SOCIOLOGICAL FACTOR: FAMILY MEMBERS WHO WERE ALSO GANGSTERS

In an effort to identify other sociological factors, informants were asked to identify other influential factors. Most informants mentioned that family members who were also involved in gangs may have influenced an individual's decision to become a gang member. This situation created an environment that reinforces gang-related and delinquent behavior.

The individual can be easily influenced by family members who are gangsters, via: perceiving gangster lifestyles as positive, behaving antisocially, or getting involved in crime. Having a family member who is also a gang member appears to contribute to an individuals' negative, and harmful ways of thinking and acting. Responses from R-P2 and R-XG 6 exemplify this.

"That particular gang… involved family member… usually asked the youngest family members to do a few gang related jobs… Then, that particular person will give an amount of money to them to appreciate their help…This will continue for a long time until that family member is dependent for the money… Later, the person influenced them to involve in the gang so that they can earn more" (R- P2). "I have an uncle who was a member of gang 18… He was the one who asked me to sell the drugs to my friends… After two weeks he asked me to join his gang and gave me a good position in that gang" (R-XG 6).

These responses also evidenced that an extensive amount of time socializing with the gangs and gang members will lead the individuals to adapt to the environment, and perceived gang membership as 'normal' and acceptable. The frame of reference explains that the individual does not think the consequences when they committing a crime because the individuals are taught continuously (word or action), where for them the illegality acts are accepted to achieve the end results such as money and power. If a situation arises in which a need must be met, an individual will pursue the most natural, and taught, a way of meeting that need.

SOCIOLOGICAL FACTOR: GANG CULTURE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Another sociological factor that was identified as influencing the decision to become a gang member and maintain membership in a gang was living in vulnerable areas, that being areas with an existing gang culture or have gang members living within it. Neighbourhoods with existing gangs and gang members provide individuals with a hostile environment that reinforces their gang-related and delinquent behaviors. Works by Naidoo and Naidoo (2016), and Marshall and Lombardo (2016) also depict similar sociological factors that underlie gang membership.

A trend analysis of gangsterism between 1996 and 2009 indicates that gang members who live in crime hot spot neighbourhoods account for most violent offences within that area, and members of that particular community suffered from a fear of gangs and are at high risk of becoming victims of gang-related crime (Howell 2012). This current study shows that previously ex-gangsters had spent an extensive amount of time socializing with gangs and gang members in their neighbourhood. These ex-gangsters were exposed to gangster lifestyles at a young age and within their community. Progressively via sustained exposure and incremental involvement; individuals become acclimatize to the pro-violent environment and perceive gang membership as 'normal' and acceptable. Below are example responses from the informants of this current study.

"Usually teenagers participated in the gangs which are active in their place… They frequently noticed the gang's participation in crime activities, illegal gatherings, and gang members' lifestyle… They also get to know about the specific gang through gang graffiti in their

neighbourhood" (R-P2). "In my housing area, back then most of the people were gang members. I knew it was one of the crime offences and it is against the law… but they made it appear to be normal to me. They openly shared their experience and lived a normal life without having any fear. So, I came to think it… that it was okay to be a gang member" (R-XG 5).

SOCIOLOGICAL FACTOR: FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

Another sociological factor which was identified by the police personnel was financial difficulties. The police personnel who were interviewed stated that initially, the Indian community stayed in estates or plantations. Over time, the Indians migrated from estates to urban squatters or flats. This was largely due to displacement from plantation employment and repurposing agriculture lands.

Indians were poor when they lived on estates but they had jobs and living quarters. After they moved to urban areas, they lost their meagre job and continued to live in poverty; and in many cases lived in worse conditions. This displacement caused the breakdown of social controls and the social support system which resulted in undesirable social consequences including gravitating towards crime and gangsterism (Sidhu 2005).

Further, all the police personnel mentioned that the Indian community is the poorest compared to other ethnicities because they experience fewer job opportunities. It becomes a vicious cycle as due to poverty, many Indians opt to stop schooling at a young age in order to help support family members. This directly impacts the types of jobs and salary levels they obtain. These reasons also caused most of the Indians to rationalize involvement in gangs in order to earn more money and improve living conditions.

EMERGED FACTORS

Other than the above identified factors, several new factors for gang involvement were derived from informant responses (Table 1 is referred). The emerged factors were to obtain social power and to explore and experience gangster lifestyles. These are discussed below.

EMERGED FACTOR: TO OBTAIN SOCIAL POWER

The interviewed police personnel claimed that people became gang members in order to have power over others. The perceived social power is to cause fear, and control others; either in the gang itself or among members of the community. The social power is obtained by violently or aggressively approaching others to secure or maintain a possession or goal. This can be proved through the violent acts that have been carried out by gang members to obtain their own individually-oriented objectives.

"When I interrogated several gangsters especially the leaders, they mentioned they were involved in a particular gang so that they can control others… They told…. they want others to respect them and want others to see them as a very important person (VIP)" (R-P4).

Social power was also linked to a desire to stop becoming a victim of bullies. This is because the police personnel mentioned that some of the gangsters had past experiences of being insulted and bullied prior to their gang membership. Victims of bullying can face very painful physical and psychological health problems which can be used to predict delinquency and antisocial behaviors (Loucks 2017). Such delinquency and antisocial behaviors may be displayed through gang activity and involvement. Turkel (2007, as cited in Loucks 2017: 8) highlighted several similarities between the causes of becoming a victim of bullying and gang membership including "being vulnerable, feeling unsafe or insecure in their environments, experiencing truancy from school, and being a victim in other areas of their life".

"Some of the teenagers were involved in the gangs so that they get protection from them… Most them were victims of bullies… So, they labeled themselves as gang members or involved in the gangs so that they can protect themselves from bullies and insults" (R-P3).

According to Rostami, Leinfelt and Brotherton (2012), gang members especially the leaders; use power and violence to gain respect within the community. Institutional violence, direct violence, and structural violence are the different forms of violence that are frequently used within gangs and among gang members for several reasons. These reasons are as follows: to show their dominance and control within a neighborhood, to promote homogeneity and respect within a neighborhood, and to defend the reputation and respect of the gang (Rostami, Leinfelt, & Brotherton 2012). The important thing is violence implants fear within the community members, and therefore gangs control activities within the community.

EMERGED FACTOR: TO EXPLORE AND EXPERIENCE
GANGSTER LIFESTYLES

In addition, the police personnel also explained that the involvement of youth in gangs are purely explorative. The police who were interviewed mentioned that some youths did not know the consequences of their actions. The teenagers are adventurous as they wanted to try out new things and experience gangster lifestyles.

"Nowadays teenagers are very adventurous… I had encountered a case where several secondary school students were arrested because they formed a new gang (Gang 48). They combined together… formed a new gang because they wanted to… maintain friendship among themselves. They did this without any influence from others" (R-P2). "Gang members are seeing their gang as a family… They want to maintain a good relationship with them…So they don't want to get rid of the gang". (R-XG 4).

Most of the ex-gangsters explained that they want to experience the gangster life so that they can obtain the protection and benefits from the gang. They also stated the gang members receive various benefits from the gangs. These benefits are both tangible (for example money and products) and non-tangible (for example peer acceptance and a sense of belonging). Police personnel confirmed that these benefits are the sustaining factors for continued gang membership among Indians in Malaysia.

EVIDENCE-BASED COMMUNITY CRIME
PREVENTION

The outcome of this research is useful for community crime prevention based on evidence-based knowledge. Wyrick (2006) proved that a balance of prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies are important for success in any community prevention. Prevention programmes are for the youths who are at risk of gang involvement and can be used to reduce the number of youth who join gangs (Howell 2010). Next, the aim of intervention programmes and strategies is to provide sanctions and services for youth who are actively engaged in gangs so that they can exit from the gangs.

Law enforcement suppression strategies and intensive services are used to target and rehabilitate the most violent gangs and older, criminally active gang members. In Malaysia, RMP continuously plan and enforce many suppression strategies to control this issue. 'Ops Cantas' and 'Ops Cantas Khas' were the special operations carried out by RMP in several states in the past few years to reduce the crime rate and gang-related activities. Further, new amendments were made to Prevention of Crime Act (POCA) and Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (SOSMA). Special task forces such as Special Task Force For Anti Vice, Gaming, And Gangsterism (STAGG), and Special Task Force On Organised Crime (STAFOC); were established under the command of Criminal Investigation Division (CID) of RMP to control the gang related activities and crimes.

Based on Howell's (2010) study on gang prevention and intervention strategies; the targeted people need to be separated into several groups so that different programmes and strategies can be planned and implemented based on sociological, psychological, or criminogenic risk factors. These risk factors help to identify the pathways that some children and adolescents choose when they engaged in the gangs and juvenile delinquency. Risk factors are act as cumulative fashion where the probability of negative outcomes can be greater if the number of risk factors are larger.

It has been proposed that four group classifications developed by Wyrick (2006) can be further developed to strategise intervention or rehabilitation for use in Malaysia. Group one consists of the serious, chronic, and violent gang and non-gang offenders. Group two consists of a gang involved youth and their associates who involved in significant levels of illegal activities. Next, group three represents high-risk youths who are not involved in the gangs but they have already demonstrated early signs of delinquency and are highly vulnerable for gang membership. The last group consists of all youth living in a community where gangs are present.

There are three stages of crime prevention as follows: primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Based on the literature (Maguire, Morgan & Reiner 2007) the descriptions of the three stages of prevention are explained below. Primary prevention is focussed at ending the problem before it occurs which involve reducing opportunities for crime and establishing community and social structures by concentrating on social factors and situational factors.

Secondary prevention aims to change people who are at risk of engaging in criminal activities. This stage of prevention focuses on rapid and effective early prevention, and high-risk neighbourhoods. Lastly, tertiary prevention concentrates on the

operation of the criminal justice system and targets the known offenders so that recidivism rates can be reduced among them.

Group one members should be targeted for tertiary crime prevention which is enforcement and prosecution because of their active involvement in crimes and violent gangs. This is because the probability of the other strategies to reduce their criminal behaviour is small. Group two members need intensive rehabilitation and supervision. The services include: mentoring, family therapy, group therapy, and cognitive-behavioural therapy. The members of group three are suitable for secondary prevention and intervention. Such intervention should include skill streaming, anger management, empathic skills, school-based anti-gang curriculum, positive and developmental recreational activities, gang awareness education for parents, and counseling for parents and youth. Lastly, primary prevention services such as cognitive-behavioural training, social skills development, refusal skills, and conflict resolution should be received by members of group four.

CONCLUSION

Various factors behind the decision to join gangs among Indians were explored through the perspectives of police personnel and from the experience of ex-gangsters. The reasons were classified into demography, sociological, and emerged factors. Decisions to join gangs include age, gender, and low educational level. Sociological factors underlying gang membership and reasons to remain in gangs include poor parental style, family members who were also gangsters, gang culture in the neighborhood, financial difficulties, social power, and to experience gangster lifestyles. These findings provide localised knowledge which was previously unavailable. The identification of these factors can create a better and reality-based understanding of Indian gangsters in Malaysia. The multi-faceted reasons depict that there is no one single reason for decisions to join gangs. The identified factors may be used to develop a suitable community crime prevention framework to curb this problem among Indians.

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